

# Midterm results provide hope for letter carriers...and America



**Fredric V. Rolando**

**T**hanks to the hard work of the dozens of letter carriers, NALC officers and staff who worked on the AFL-CIO Labor 2018 campaign, as well as to the hundreds of members who volunteered in the campaign's get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts—and to the tens of thousands of NALC contributors to the Letter Carrier Political Fund (LCPF) whose resources made it all possible—letter carriers can celebrate a huge victory in the 2018 midterm elections. In all, 219 of the 229 candidates we supported with LCPF contributions won election last month. These pro-letter carrier candidates, regardless of political affiliation, earned our support

by backing our interests on legislative and regulatory matters—and we showed our appreciation by working to get them elected. That is just the way democracy is supposed to work.

Two years ago, after the 2016 election, I warned about the changed circumstances in Washington and the challenges posed by one-party government, particularly when much of the ruling party was openly hostile to labor unions and federal employees. We handled those challenges by working with our many Republican allies in Congress and maintaining the overwhelming support of congressional Democrats. This helped us defeat budget attacks on our pensions and health benefits and rebuff efforts to weaken the Postal Service through service cuts and restrictions on its activities.

**Today, we once again face changed, but much better, circumstances.** The return of a balanced Congress, with Democrats controlling the House and Republicans controlling the Senate, offers real hope for advancing a positive agenda in Congress. That's because we have allies in both parties, and now both sides have an equal seat at the table as we negotiate the terms of new legislation. Our goal is to achieve the kind of postal reform we've been fighting to promote for more than 10 years—reform that strengthens the Postal Service without attacking postal employees or USPS's vital networks. Enacting non-partisan postal legislation with bipartisan majorities is now within our reach.

In May 2018, I wrote in this space that it was time to consider alternative approaches to postal reform—ones that did not involve mandatory Medicare integration, an idea fraught with policy and political complications. The results of the

midterm election do not change that assessment. Medicare policy and politics are likely to remain prohibitively difficult. But there are plenty of good ideas for achieving successful postal reform and we will pursue them vigorously.

No matter what policies we advocate, our goals remain the same: to protect the interests of our active and retired letter carriers while advancing the general public's interest in a thriving Postal Service. Our hope is that the White House will drop its flirtation with privatization and work in a bipartisan way to help us achieve these goals.

**The conventional wisdom has it that our country is hopelessly divided.** The partisan fights over voter suppression in Georgia during the midterm election and the messy politics of recounts in Florida certainly point in that direction. But I think the 2018 midterms offer another kind of hope for America—and a kind of hope of which letter carriers can be proud. That is the hope for a revival of our nation's democracy.

Voter turnout in the 2018 election increased dramatically. An estimated 116 million Americans voted on or before Election Day. Approximately 50 percent of eligible voters cast ballots, the highest midterm participation rate since 1914. The total number of votes jumped by 33 million from the last midterm election in 2014, when voter turnout was just 37 percent. Voters from both parties, as well as independents (which make up the largest bloc of voters in the United States), turned out in record numbers. That is progress and a cause for hope for our democracy.

What makes it even better is that letter carriers and the Postal Service contributed to this encouraging trend. Voting by mail is exploding in popularity. According to the Vote at Home Institute, more than 40 million Americans received their ballots in the mail this year. We know from experience that citizens who receive their ballots by mail are much more likely to vote than those voting at traditional polling sites. Indeed, voter turnout rates in pure Vote at Home states, where 100 percent of voters receive their ballots in the mail (Colorado, Oregon and Washington), recorded turnout in excess of 60 percent last month. Other states that rely heavily on mail ballots, such as Arizona, California and Montana (where 75 percent voted by mail), also led the way on higher turnout. This is good for our democracy and good for our country.

**Like the rest of you, I'm glad to see the election season end and the holiday season begin.** It's time to leave the partisan bickering behind. It's also time to focus on what unites us as Americans, most notably our commitment to democracy. If progress requires hope, then we have what we need to start making progress in the new year. Happy holidays, brothers and sisters.