



NALC convention diversity— the real America

As the officer responsible for the planning and day-to-day operations of the 68th Biennial National Convention in Minneapolis, I am extremely pleased that so many delegates have characterized the convention as first-rate and Minneapolis as a great convention city. The comments I received personally as well as those seen in the September Branch Items have been extremely positive.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the other national officers as well as Kim Akoto, NALC's meeting planner, my assistant Maria LiCalzi and the rest of the NALC staff for their herculean efforts. In addition, the hardworking members of Minneapolis Branch 9—who stuffed the convention bags, served as sergeants-at-arms and drivers, and did sundry other tasks—roundly deserved the applause they received on the convention's final day.

As many delegates have said, the business sessions were lively and informative. The numerous training sessions were well attended with delegates asking sharp and useful questions, as my own experience running two workshops and attending others attests. But what impressed me the most as I sat on the stage or looked out from the podium were the more than 6,000 delegates from every state in the union and three territories.

From the stage, I could see the crazy quilt pattern of delegates young and old and in between, men and women of every possible skin color and ethnicity, from small towns and big cities alike. They had traveled to Minneapolis from far-flung places like Alaska and Hawaii, and from nearby Midwestern states such as Iowa and Wisconsin. When at the microphones, some delegates spoke in New Yawkish accents or Southern drawls. They wore flip-flops and motorcycle boots, jeans and pressed slacks, and under their distinctive branch vests, T-shirts and button-down shirts. Men's hair, for those who still had some, was close-cropped in some cases and halfway down their backs in others.

Did it look like a hodgepodge? Certainly; it also looked like America in all its diversity. And although you couldn't tell from the stage, I'm sure the delegates represented a hodgepodge of political opinions on a host of issues.

I never asked anyone, but I'm pretty sure that on the convention floor, right-to-life delegates and pro-choicers were sitting next to one another, as were delegates who support same-sex marriage and some not so inclined, even vehemently so. Second Amendment absolutists talked to gun-control supporters. Advocates of more aggressive, inter-

ventionist foreign policy were rubbing shoulders with those who felt we never should have invaded Iraq and believe we should withdraw from Afghanistan tomorrow.

America was sitting on the convention floor. The real America, not Sarah Palin's white-bread, small-town America, and not the "1 percent" on Wall Street and elsewhere intent on running the country at the expense of the rest of us. No, the *real* America, working-class and middle-class America: diverse, vibrant, churning. And becoming more so by the minute.

Some people—OK, the political party that convened in Tampa in late August—want to turn back the clock, air-brush out of the picture our diversity, deny the vast economic disparities that imperil this nation's future and the security of all Americans.

And they want to further divide us, ensuring that for the foreseeable future, different *kinds* of Americans fight other *kinds* of Americans.

We can't allow that to happen this November. We must embrace leaders and policies that unite, not divide; that embrace and protect *all* Americans, regardless of gender, color, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference—and economic status.

Leaders committed to tearing down the barrier between the 1 percenters and the rest of us.

Who care for the downtrodden as much as for the wealthy. For the old and the young, gays and straights, blacks and whites, the Spanish speakers and the English speakers, those who pray in mosques as well as those who pray in churches and synagogues.

Leaders who reflect the values of the NALC and its members—men and women who care for one another.

Through thick and thin.

In solidarity.

The union way.

The American way. ✉

The Membership Department has received a number of calls asking if dues for active members will be increased effective the pay period closest to Jan. 1, 2013, pursuant to Article 7 of the *NALC Constitution*. Since the 2006-2011 NALC-USPS National Agreement expired on Nov. 20, 2011, and the arbitration hearings for a new contract that are just beginning are unlikely to result in a decision prior to the end of the year, no dues increase is expected effective the beginning of 2013. Branches should plan accordingly.