

# Taking a look at the *NALC Constitution*, Part 4



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**L**ast month, I touched on several areas of the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches (CGSFB)*. This month's article will highlight the sections pertaining to branch offices and areas in the *Constitution* related to ceremonials.

Article 4, Section 1 of the *CGSFB* lists the required offices of a branch. They are: president, vice president, recording secretary, financial secretary, treasurer, sergeant-at-arms, health benefits representative, and a board of trustees composed of either three or five members. One of the most common problems the committee finds is branch bylaws 'failing to provide for the election of one or more of the required offices.

Article 4, Section 3 of the *CGSFB* allows branches to consolidate the offices of the branch, with the exception of the office of president. (However, branches with fewer than 10 active members may consolidate the office of the president with other offices.) This is another problem area the committee finds and may actually be a contributing factor to conflicts found with Article 4, Section 1 of the *CGSFB* concerning the list of required offices in branch bylaws.

While it is permissible for a branch to have fewer elected officers than those listed in Article 4, Section 1, the bylaws must guarantee that only elected officers may handle the duties assigned to the officers listed in the *Constitution*. Accordingly, the branch bylaws must explicitly consolidate each office that the branch wishes to forgo with one of the other elected branch offices. For example, let's say that a branch wishes to consolidate the offices of recording secretary and financial secretary. This could be accomplished in several ways: by simply listing the office as recording secretary/financial secretary; by including a sentence in the branch bylaws stating that the office of financial secretary will be consolidated with the office of recording secretary; or by listing the duties of the financial secretary (found under financial secretary in Article 6 of the *CGSFB*) under the duties of the recording secretary in the branch bylaws. Long-standing presidential rulings have held that somewhere in the branch bylaws it should be clear that the offices were combined.

Every branch's bylaws should contain a list of the branch's elected offices. There are a couple of reasons for this requirement. First, it is important that the members of the branch readily know what the branch offices are. Secondly, the *Constitution* provides that a board of trustees of either three or five members be elected. If the offices of

the branch are not listed in the bylaws, then it is unclear whether the branch's board of trustees is composed of three members or five members.

Another part of Article 4, Section 1 of the *CGSFB* also states that a branch may provide for additional elective offices in its bylaws. If a branch wishes to have additional elective offices then, of course, those offices also should be listed in the branch bylaws.

Article 4, Section 2 of the *CGSFB* provides that all officers shall be elected for a term of one, two or three years at the option of the branch. Often the committee encounters branch bylaws that fail to specify what the term of office is for its officers. The branch may choose that the term of office be either one, two or three years—but the bylaws must specify what term of office the branch opted for.

Again, these are just a few of the common problems the Committee of Laws encounters when it comes to proposed language concerning branch offices. To assist branches that may be considering revising their bylaws, the committee recommends referring to the *CGSFB* as a guide. The *CGSFB* begins on page 66 of the *NALC Constitution*.

**Form of ceremonial for initiation of candidates into NALC branches**—I still remember my first union meeting and pledging loyalty to the laws of the NALC now in force. Many branches welcome new members with this ceremonial and make it an important agenda item. I've seen branches present lapel pins to the new members as a small token of appreciation for joining the NALC. This type of gesture helps the new member understand the importance of membership. I still get goosebumps thinking of that moment in my journey as a union member.

**Form of installation ceremony for use of branches, state associations and the national association**—This was adopted at the 19th convention in San Francisco in 1913 and amended at subsequent conventions. All officers should be very familiar with the installation ceremony. The obligation recited by those elected to office reminds every officer of their responsibility and it should never be taken for granted.

**Form of funeral ceremonial (for optional use)**—This is used at times for our dearly departed brothers and sisters.

**Note:** October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Remember, early detection can turn breast cancer into a survivor's story. Look for the story on page 13 for information on the sale of our Breast Cancer Awareness T-shirts.

