

Stand up, be strong for a better America



William H. Young

NALC's biennial conventions always lift my spirits and they never fail to inspire me. In Boston in July, I was especially pleased with the huge turnout at our morning and afternoon workshops, despite the lack of food or beverage service as we stood in solidarity with UNITE-HERE's contract struggle with Aramark. It was a reminder to me of what it means to have a great union. Given the challenges that confront us, that is the kind of union we will have to be in the future as well.

One inspiring moment occurred when honorary delegate Hillary Clinton offered the resolution to give NALC's endorsement for president to Sen. Barack Obama. It was a magnanimous gesture, a declaration of unity in the battle to turn our country around, and I was delighted when your delegates approved the resolution overwhelmingly.

So, NALC will do all in its power to help elect Sen. Obama, a charismatic young leader who has demonstrated both vision and the power to inspire by mobilizing millions of Americans to join his campaign for change. Unlike his opponent, Sen. John McCain, Sen. Obama strongly supports NALC on all our major legislative issues, everything from Sen. Harkin's ban on delivery outsourcing and the expansion of vote-by-mail to universal health insurance and the Employee Free Choice Act. At a time when the staggering economy is badly damaging the Postal Service—USPS lost \$1 billion in the third quarter, when mail volume plunged more than 5 percent—America must break free from the disastrous policies of the Bush administration. Obama offers that change and a chance to rebuild the middle class; McCain offers more of the same.

As we gear up for the Labor 2008 campaign and dispatch our Carrier Corps volunteers to help elect Obama, one other moment from the convention comes to mind. Rep. Michael Capuano, who represents Boston in Congress, delivered an amazingly thoughtful speech about our obligation to confront racism and bigotry in this year's

election. "Anybody who raises race as an issue has to be called on it," he said. "You have to rise up and say, 'Those days are gone.'"

I hope all of you will follow Rep. Capuano's admonition and challenge anyone who seeks to poison the race for president with racial prejudice. It won't be easy. After all, we in the labor movement are trying to achieve in the next 90 days something we have been unable to accomplish in more than 100 years—create a society free of racism. But it is the right thing to do, even if it is a co-worker, a friend or a family member who needs to be set straight.

Another thing: I hope each of us will do our part to knock down whispering campaigns about Barack Obama being a "secret" Muslim, not only because it is not true, but because there is absolutely nothing wrong with being Muslim. Freedom of religion is not just for the majority; it is for all Americans. Anyone who doubts that should have heard Imam Taalib Mahdee—a card-carrying member of SEIU—deliver a beautiful, inclusive invocation on the last day of the convention.

We have come too far as a nation to tolerate a dirty campaign that appeals to people's fears or worst instincts. I believe Sen. Obama is the best candidate for letter carriers and he deserves your vote. Of course, every carrier has the absolute right to vote for whomever they wish. Voting for Sen. McCain does not make you a racist or a bigot. But voting for McCain because Barack Obama is black or because his name doesn't sound like yours does make you wrong—and certainly un-American.

As Rich Trumka of the AFL-CIO recently said, "There are a thousand good reasons for voting for Senator Obama and there is one very, very bad reason for voting against him." Let's make sure that none of the members of our union cave in to that bad reason. If we are willing to stand up, speak out and be strong, we can begin to build a better America. ☒