

In the face of deep crisis, hope, hard work prevail



William H. Young

Talk to just about anybody from your parents' or grandparents' generation who lived through the Great Depression and you will quickly learn that the greatest thing Franklin Delano Roosevelt brought to the American people was hope. In 1933, at a time of profound crisis, FDR famously admonished his fellow citizens that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." I couldn't help but think of FDR as I watched President-elect Barack Obama address that magnificent crowd in Chicago's Grant Park on election night. His unrelentingly optimistic attitude in the face of the worst economic crisis since the 1930s is just what the country needs.

I believe our new president embodies the hope that has sustained America's democracy at crucial times in the past. It is the hope that ordinary citizens can confront extraordinary problems by working for change through the ballot box. It is the hope that our great nation still has the ability to reinvent itself to meet even the most difficult challenges. It is the hope that allows Americans to rise above their fears to embrace change. And it is the same hope that fueled Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream for a better America, a country that fully lives up to its ideals. We are closer to that dream today, thanks to the election results on November 4. Obama's speech that night was both inspiring and realistic, conscious of the historical moment and the challenges at hand. One section was particularly important because it reminded us that we are all Americans, win or lose on Election Day:

So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other. Let us remember that if this financial crisis taught us anything, it's that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers—in this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people.

Let us resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long. Let us

remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House—a party founded on the values of self-reliance, individual liberty, and national unity. Those are values we all share, and while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress.

Having earlier heard Sen. John McCain's moving and gracious concession speech, I went to bed on election night with hope in my heart and immense pride in our country.

But that pride can't begin to compare to the pride I feel for our union and for its members. Their fierce determination to help our country change course was visible throughout the entire election process. We are blessed in that we have members in every state of the union, and this election established the importance of having a presence in every possible location. Sen. Obama ran a 50-state campaign, ignoring the conventional wisdom that America can be divided into "blue states" and "red states." NALC was perfectly placed to play a role in that strategy.

As a vice president of the AFL-CIO, I was assigned responsibility for leading the federation's Labor 2008 get-out-the-vote campaign in three states. All three were so-called red states: Nevada, Virginia and Kentucky. All had voted Republican in presidential elections for decades. But, having watched our progress in Nevada over the last two election cycles, I knew we could shift that state to the Democratic nominee. Virginia was a possibility, having elected Democrats as governors and U.S. senators in recent years, and we even had an outside chance in Kentucky. Thanks to our released campaign workers and Carrier Corps volunteers, and thanks to our brothers and sisters from other unions who worked side by side with us, the Obama-Biden ticket prevailed in Virginia and Nevada. Now, two out of three ain't bad, and Kentucky is moving in the right

direction, just as I saw Nevada begin to move in 2004.

To the almost 300 letter carriers who participated in the Labor 2008 campaign and the thousands of Carrier Corps volunteers who helped deliver this election for working families across the country, we all owe a huge debt of gratitude—and if you want to say “thank you,” you can find their names in the pages of this special issue. America will be a better place because of their commitment and sacrifice. Our children may grow up

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with health care for all if we take advantage of this victory. Our friends, neighbors and families will work in a more labor-friendly environment—where all workers will have a chance to have a union like letter carriers do—if we can convert our political success into legislative success for the Employee Free Choice Act. And if we all work together with the stronger pro-worker majorities in Congress, we can help rebuild the middle class and once again focus the American economy on producing the best possible goods and services instead of shipping jobs overseas and allowing financial manipulators to hijack America’s wealth. Why should we settle for anything less?

To all our members who campaigned so hard and yet came up short in districts and states won by House or Senate candidates we did not support, we are equally indebted. Their job was the hardest of all. Many of us have been there and we share your dismay, but good things are worth fighting for, and we have just begun. That’s what our members in

Virginia and Nevada learned this year, along with those in Ohio, Florida and other states that shifted from red to blue in 2008.

To the tens of thousands of letter carriers who voted for candidates NALC did not support, I want to reaffirm that our union—your union—is committed to working with both parties to represent you in Washington. I urge our Republican members to channel their disappointment about our endorsements into an effort to make the GOP a more worker-friendly party—urge party candidates to compete for our votes, to fill out our candidate questionnaires and to support legislation that is designed to strengthen unions and help workers in this turbulent economy.

There are severe problems in this country and it will take all of us working together to resolve them. It is very encouraging that, while he captured 52 percent of the vote, more than 75 percent Americans approve of Barack Obama and are willing to help him succeed. Our situation may not be as dire as in 1933, and I recognize that it is unfair to expect President Obama to be another FDR, but I have no doubt that our next president can succeed as Franklin Roosevelt did—if we come together as Americans and seek to build a stronger country through dedication and unity of purpose. I know it is possible, because I witnessed first-hand this election year the power we can generate when our members and other working people join forces and focus on the common good.

In the same inaugural address when FDR warned Americans of “fear itself,” he also said, “These dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto, but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow man.” Our members have the right stuff and we stand ready, willing and able to “minister”—to lead in any effort that President Obama and the new Congress set before us. If NALC has its way, hope and hard work will always prevail. ☒