

The supreme body



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Recently during a visit to Headquarters, a member said something that made me laugh, but at the same time it reminded me of a time when I thought the same way. They said, “You know, you national officers are kind of like celebrities to us. So, to actually meet you all is pretty cool.” I smiled and said, “You know, we are really just letter carriers like you. In fact, if you ever come to Chicago through Midway, my routes are around the airport. I’m a T-6.”

The irony was that I viewed our national officers the same way at my first convention (and maybe a few conventions after that). But

it was that first convention that really pulled me into the NALC, and I am sure there are some of you who will have that same experience this summer in Boston. Although I can’t recall everything that happened during that convention, I do remember how it made me feel.

The sheer humanity of seeing thousands of city letter carriers from all over the country was mesmerizing for me. The debate on the convention floor and the many shared experiences gave me a sense of belonging because I could relate. Young, old, male, female, and every ethnicity I knew of was on the convention floor. I even saw men walking around in kilts (although I didn’t know they were “kilts” at the time), but none of that mattered, because we were all just letter carriers. We had a common bond and we understood each other. That’s all that mattered. It took a few more conventions, along with my involvement with my local branch, and my experience at the Leadership Academy, for me to begin to get a sense of what actually happens at the convention. In short, pretty much everything.

Every decision that our union makes is funneled through or comes directly from the convention floor. Article 1, Section 4 of the *NALC Constitution* refers to our biennial gathering and the delegates in attendance as the “supreme body.” Each delegate there in attendance represents 20 members from the workroom floor and our local branches. Together we chart the course for our union, present and future. The delegates decide which issues are important to us for collective

bargaining and our legislative priorities. They decide what goes into the *Constitution* or what comes out. And as for the *Constitution* itself, it tells us how, when and where to have the convention, elect our officers and delegates, and what we can have in our bylaws.

I teach this all the time to the classes at the Leadership Academy; in particular, the importance of the *Constitution* and the need to become familiar with its content. Most everything that happens at the convention, down to the day that it happens, is spelled out in our *Constitution*. From the resolutions to the nomination of officers, every element of our organization is in the *Constitution*. So, to really value what we are doing at the convention, I would suggest that you download a copy from our website to prepare yourself for Boston.

The other good thing about the convention, aside from meeting other members and friends you haven’t met, is the training classes. They are worth your time! If you invest in attending some of the training, you will go back to your branch feeling empowered. I have always believed that our stewards and officers should not be alone on the workroom floor, informing and educating our members.

So, for those who are attending for the very first time, I am confident that you will be impressed with your union. You will find that it is truly democratic,



because the gathering of delegates is the supreme body of our union. And of course, you will get a chance to see and meet your national officers. I did at my first national convention in Hawaii, when I took this picture with Gary Mullins, the director of city delivery at that time. His articles resonated with

me because they were so anti-management, and as a national officer of our union, that made him like a celebrity to meet.

Now, having attended many more conventions as a delegate, a branch officer and a national officer, it is even more important for me to never forget that I am just a letter carrier and a small part of our great union!