

NALC, we have a problem



Chief of Staff
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The NALC membership is as diverse as the communities we serve. It's a point of great pride I take in working for this union. Every race, creed, age and political belief system is represented in this second-largest bargaining unit in the country. At the very core of this union is a commitment to working in solidarity to protect one another. We do so by ensuring that we have a healthy employer and network in order to provide good jobs to all of our members,

no matter what they look like, whom they love or what they believe. Full stop.

Currently, there are more than 100,000 female members of our union. In the Postal Service, women make up nearly 40 percent of the overall workforce. This number continues to grow, which is encouraging. However, general attitudes toward, treatment of and behaviors toward women by some are still stuck in the past.

In my 20-plus years working with elected members of Congress, I've seen and experienced some things that are deeply offensive and without question were sexist, misogynistic, harassing and ageist (see Merriam-Webster definitions below). In my early non-NALC days working with the "old boys club," I actually had a member of Congress from Texas ask me to fetch him a cup of coffee at a fundraiser, despite my being there as a guest representing the union I worked for at the time. While a seemingly small, but significant, slight, I did not get that guy a cup of coffee. While this is probably the least offensive interaction of this type I have experienced as a woman in Washington, it has stayed with me. These types of behaviors take many forms, all of which are absolutely unacceptable, especially now at this pivotal and contentious time for our union.

These days, as I engage more NALC members than members of Congress, I've been shocked by how many members of this union (of all genders) have experienced similar behaviors by fellow members, many in positions of authority. It is equally hard to hear about women pulling up the ladder behind them to the detriment of other women trying to grow and rise together. It is easy to see how this results in talented potential leaders deciding that limiting their involvement in the union is better.

With this in mind, silence is not an option when a vocal minority seeks to undermine the very rights this union vows to protect. As the first female chief of staff of NALC, it is my duty to call out the assumptions, insinuations, comments and general disrespect I've witnessed and experienced directly, as distasteful as it is. This tells me we have a major problem, even in 2024, that must be brought to light and resolved.

There is a necessary evolution that can only begin with the leadership of this union. Assumptions based on race, gender, appearance, personal preferences, age and weight have no place here. To be clear, if you are reading this and are in a position of authority, you must be cognizant of your words and actions to create space free of inappropriate behavior. Do not ask someone who reports to you for coffee, a date, or anything that creates an unbalanced power dynamic. Imbalance creates discomfort, violates boundaries, and poisons a healthy work environment.

I never viewed NALC as a union divided until I witnessed and experienced the worst among us since April 2023, when supporting President Renfroe's recovery from alcoholism. I never fathomed the malicious actions, accusations and derogatory comments I would endure just by virtue of my gender and my role as a professional for this union. We have to put into practice what we preach.

Sexism: "prejudice or discrimination based on sex, especially: discrimination against women: behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex"

Misogyny: "hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women"

Harassment: "aggressive pressure or intimidation"

Ageism: "prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group"

Racism: "a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race; the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another"

No member should ever be targeted for putting their health first, particularly not by their own union. It takes courage and strength to stand where our president stands. Yet some of our members find it appropriate not only to disparage him, but to ridicule his recovery by sending a "care package" with sugar purporting to be drugs, a bottle of alcohol, and a note. It left me wondering where our humanity has gone. This is not who we are. We can and will do better.

This year, President Renfroe launched NALC's Emergency Response Team (ERT), which will train our members to support other members in distress or crisis. The ERT is at the core of who we are. I am excited and encouraged to see the replication of this support via development of a long-overdue women's committee and a diversity, equity and inclusion program. We have so much to learn together as a union, and I intend to use my time here to ensure that we are a union free of discrimination, harassment, sexism, ageism and misogyny. It's beyond time.