

## NAACP unanimously elects youngest chair

Written by Herb Boyd, NNPA Special Correspondent  
Friday, 26 February 2010 15:08

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NEW YORK (NNPA) - Hours before the NAACP officially announced that Roslyn M. Brock was the new chair of the National Board of Directors, she sat down with the NNPA in her suite at the Hilton Hotel in midtown Manhattan for an exclusive interview.

Brock, 44, a vice-president at Bon Secours Health Care, has been affiliated with the NAACP for 25 years, beginning in youth leadership and currently the vice-chair of the organization's board, the youngest person and the first Black woman to hold the post. She is set to replace the venerable Julian Bond, who announced his retirement several months ago.

**Herb Boyd:** How do you feel about the new position?

**Roslyn M. Brock:** I am very excited.

**HB:** Is there a youth movement going on inside the NAACP? You're in your early forties and Ben Jealous, the president and CEO came aboard at 35.

**RB:** I think the NAACP understood that if it's to remain relevant, that it really needed to look toward the future to ensure the legacy of the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Eighteen months ago we recruited a 35-year-old who would become the youngest president and CEO in the organization's history. Ben is a Rhodes Scholar, energetic, and very interested in bringing new technology. And, now as we enter the first year of our second century, to have the fourth woman to chair the board is an historic occasion; a generational shift and I am honored and humbled by the opportunity to have the Honorable Julian Bond and Myrlie Evers Williams to pass that mantle of leadership from one generation to the next.

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**HB:** Passing the baton, that orderly transition of leadership is something that should be emulated, don't you think?

**RB:** Yes, I do. Unfortunately in our community, in our organizations the only way the transition of power happens...is through death, scandal or abdication. So this is really an orderly transfer of leadership and the entrusting of a legacy...to a new generation. You used the adage of passing the baton, and for me having that baton is to have a connection to those activists who marched in the fifties, sixties and to hold it at the same time they hold it. And once they feel we have a firm grasp of it they are able to let go.

**HB:** Any concern about assuming such an awesome responsibility?

**RB:** There is some fear, some trepidation that I'm sure most leaders experience at times when you are given an opportunity to make a huge difference; not only on a small scale but on a national scale. Because from the vantage point of sitting at the helm an organization that has made so many significant contributions not only for Black Americans but for all Americans, and to have an impact internationally...even to have the song "We Shall Overcome" sang in Russian is to indicate how far we've come, but we still have a long way to go.

**HB:** One look at your bio is to see a woman rushing from one organizational meeting to another, sitting on numerous boards. How do you reduce all this activity to one primary mission, how do you focus on the new job with such a busy schedule?

**RB:** What we have to do here at the NAACP is to strategically focus on what our agenda will be in the years to come. We have to recognize and acknowledge that we can't be all things to all people because there are other partners who have come into the public space that possess better expertise than we have, who are better financed than we are. And we have to reach out and build broad partnerships, extend our membership base, and then convene meetings of all like-minded partners to find out what part of the social and economic problem they are willing to own. No one organization can handle all of the problems. It takes all people coming together to deal with the many problems we have.

**HB:** To be brutally frank, there are rumors that the NAACP 64-member board can be a crucible of contending positions, and sometimes unruly, are you ready for this?

**RB:** (Laughter) My campaign motto was: "I'm ready." I've been brought up and trained in the NAACP for a quarter of a century. People always make reference to the number 64, but they never ask the question who is on the board. Julian Bond is on the board; Ms. Williams is on the board. We have presiding bishops of every major denomination, labor leaders, judges, academicians, and educators, and many of them are from across the country and under the age of 25. There is so much diversity in gender, geography, and occupations on our board and we

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have to harness all of this wisdom to ensure affordable health care for all Americans; that all our children have an opportunity at the best education; that we have a livable wage and that economic opportunities are provided for reinvestment in small businesses and entrepreneurship, and that we do something about the stemming the tide of incarceration of young Black men, and increasingly of young Black women.

**HB:** You have an extensive background in health care and related issues. What's your opinion of the Obama administration and its handling of health care reform?

**RB:** I think many of us are disappointed that our leaders in Washington have failed to find some common ground on this issue. A fundamental question we must ask ourselves is: Am I my brother and my sister's keeper? If America is to be competitive we must ensure that all of our citizenry is healthy, that they are educated. That they have access to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and here at the NAACP when it comes to health care, jobs, education...we have to be proactive, not reactive.

**HB:** What's your general assessment of the Obama administration?

**RB:** I think he's doing a very good job given the challenging situations he faces. He inherited a myriad of problems that were not his own. But he has done a tremendous job of trying to do a delicate balancing act and address those issues. Do we want him to do more? Absolutely. Sure, African Americans would like for him to do more for them, but they have to remember that he's the president of all Americans. We at the NAACP are honored to have him in the White House but he's not too big that we can't challenge him and ask him to be accountable for those individuals who voted for him.

**HB:** What's been the response of the NAACP to the current crisis in Haiti?

**RB:** Under the leadership of President Jealous and our International Affairs Committee, each of our local units has been asked to raise resources, and at the moment the board is working on a strategy of how to best utilize those resources.

On this matter, we're taking a page from the Obama administration, that is, we're not in it for the short term. Haiti is going to need long term support; it can't just be a blip on the screen. We don't want Haiti to be like the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina where five years later people are still trying to put their lives back together.

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**HB:** And a few final words.

**RB:** Well, I am so fortunate to be in this wonderful place at this time in history. For me, my motto in life is, care more than others think is wise, risk more than others think is safe, dream more than others think is practical, and expect more than others think is possible.