Written by Joi C. Ridley Friday, 25 February 2011 15:23



The nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization, the NAACP, has experienced a remarkable revitalization in membership and motivation in recent years under new leadership. Membership has grown nearly three percent and the organization has been in the black two years in a row.

"While our nation continues to endure the worst economic downturn in decades, and while our administration continues to fight to get our nation back on track with more adversaries than ever, the NAACP has grown," said Roslyn M. Brock, Chairman of the NAACP's Board of Directors during the Association's 2011 Annual Meeting. "In addition to stabilizing the budget, President Jealous and his talented staff have helped strengthen our infrastructure, and allowed us to hire new staff and create – or re-create – programs in education, health, criminal justice, environmental justice and financial empowerment."

Two years ago, as the NAACP celebrated its 100th year of activism, the organization was in the red: membership was down, staff was at "skeleton crew" status and prospects for revival were bleak. However, signs of the NAACP's renaissance are apparent as the Association blazes forward under the helm of its' youngest-ever President and CEO, Benjamin Todd Jealous, as well as Chairman Brock, the youngest chairman in NAACP history.

Membership has reached three years of consistent growth, staff has been added to all departments, and every major national program has been re-opened. At the organization's annual meeting, attended by representatives from around the nation, constituents were reminded that the NAACP is especially relevant in today's society.

"Turbulent times like these call for a strong, stable and growing NAACP that is capable of both defending our communities and leading our allies in advancing the cause of social, economic, political, and racial justice," said Jealous.

In 2010, the Association's 1200 chapters and branches (units) supported census and voter empowerment efforts and rallied more than 200,000 people and 400 groups for the One Nation Working Together Rally on the National Mall to call for jobs, education and justice.

## NAACP annual board meeting highlights resurgence

Written by Joi C. Ridley Friday, 25 February 2011 15:23

The organization helped pass the landmark health care reform legislation and initiated community empowerment seminars to raise awareness of the forgotten HIV and AIDS epidemics that disproportionately impact millions of African Americans. Its activists led a forceful fight against re segregation of schools in North Carolina and around the nation.

The NAACP helped push the governors of New York and Mississippi to use their clemency powers to address cases of racial injustice by freeing unjustly incarcerated individuals like Gladys and Jamie Scott and John White. The Scott Sisters were sentenced to double life sentences after alleged involvement in an \$11 robbery and White was incarcerated after defending his home from a mob of racist youth threatening to kill his son.

After years of advocacy, the Association was able to advance legislation reducing the crack—cocaine disparity that has resulted in hundreds of thousands of African Americans being imprisoned for non-violent drug offenses.

The Association also spearheaded international efforts as local units gathered more than \$200,000 to support the rebuilding of Haiti after the devastating earthquake in January of 2010.

Just two short years after the historic election of the nation's first Black president, the nation finds itself in the midst of a seismic political shift. The country faces aggressive efforts to re-segregate schools, cut valuable programs that assist the poor and end workers' rights to collectively organize.

"These threats are not in a silo or a vacuum," said Jealous. "They are part of a greater strategy to weaken our collective power, divide our communities, and peel back our successes."

During the Annual Meeting, the organization outlined key priorities for 2011, including campaigns to fight the school-to-prison pipeline, limit mass incarceration, and increase democracy through voter empowerment while ensuring a fair redistricting process that will determine congressional representation for the next 10 years, and promote education.

"If we achieve nothing else in our second century, we must finish what we started in our first century: We must complete the mission of Brown v. Board, and ensure that every child in America gets a great education," said Jealous. He seeks to achieve this goal by creating a national strategy to implement educational best practices, fighting to ensure education has top billing in state budgets and resisting efforts from those who hope to "turn back the clock" on educational advancements of years past.

"As we register voters and move them to the polls, we will hold all those elected accountable to the values and mission that we have fought for since 1909," added Jealous. "We will continue to build large and diverse coalitions committed to building an America where everyone can get a good job, obtain a quality education, and live in communities with clean air and water...an America where opportunities are afforded to all, and most importantly, where no matter a person's race or creed, she or he can live in a country free of racial discrimination."

The organization has also increased its efforts to welcome young members, the fastest growing

## NAACP annual board meeting highlights resurgence

Written by Joi C. Ridley Friday, 25 February 2011 15:23

demographic in the Association. Greater use of social networking and online campaigns has resulted in an unprecedented growth in online membership and activism.

"The Millennial generation – young adults born between 1976 and 1996 – will be the new guard in activism," said Brock. "There are 80 million of them, making them the largest and most ethnically diverse generation in history. Imagine an ally that is 80 million strong."

Brock closed her meeting remarks with a quote from the NAACP's tenth executive director, the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Lawson Hooks. "The civil rights movement is not dead. If anyone thinks that we are going to stop agitating, they had better think again. If anyone thinks that we are going to stop litigating, they had better close the courts. If anyone thinks that we are not going to demonstrate and protest, they had better roll up the sidewalks."

"The future is calling," said Brock. "And the NAACP will answer."