

President's Perspective

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November 4, 2008, was a day I will long remember. It was a day of wonder, a day of relief, and ultimately a day of triumph for democracy in America. Like you, I have always been proud of America, and I love my country. Election Day, November 4, 2008, will long be a reminder of why we love our country and why we are blessed to live in this great democracy.

Rarely have we been witness to an electorate so energetic, engaged and passionate as we have seen this election cycle. Although the campaign for president began almost two years ago, Americans followed its every ebb and flow and remained engaged throughout the long campaign. Voters turned out in record numbers and stood in line, sometimes for hours, to cast their ballot in this most historic election. Regardless of which candidate you supported, you have to be impressed with the turnout of voters and their passion for change from the status quo.

And change is exactly what was achieved. We changed from a Republican White House to a Democratic White House. We changed from a lethargic electorate to an energized electorate. And we changed from a nation hampered by a shameful history of racial bias to a more mature and inclusive nation who has finally learned to judge a man not by the color of his skin but by the character of his convictions. November 4, 2008, will be remembered as a defining moment in U.S. history, and I am proud to have seen it and been part of it.

BMWED, the Teamsters, and all of organized labor played a vital role in this historic victory. The National Division activated more than 60 rank and file members who volunteered to help get out the vote. BMWED had members on the ground in the key swing states of Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania Colorado, and Missouri. We also had members activated in Maine, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, and West Virginia. Additionally, hundreds of rank and file members and BMWED officers volunteered their time and talent in every state across this great country to help elect Barack Obama and Joe Biden. All told, nearly 40,000 Teamsters members joined with tens of thousands of other union volunteers to help elect the 44th President of the United States.

I want to personally thank each and every member of the BMWED who volunteered their time and talent to participate in this historic election. There is not enough space in this column to name all who contributed to this effort, but I know beyond a doubt that your efforts really made a difference. That difference, duplicated all across America, brought us to victory in the fight for the White House and helped expand the Democratic majority in the House and Senate. I join with all Americans and the world community in congratulating President-elect Barack Obama and Vice President-elect Joe Biden on their victory. But most of all, I congratulate you and the American people for engaging the political process and choosing the right candidate to lead our nation forward at this critical time.

As the world watched in awe and wonder, Americans embraced a stirring message of hope and made history by electing the first American President of African-American descent.

In the aftermath of the election, Democrats rejoiced in the streets while Republicans licked their wounds and began planning their revival. Regardless of party affiliation, the vast majority of Americans felt a sense of relief, pride, and accomplishment as America turned a painful page in its shameful history of race relations.

History was truly made on November 4, 2008, and we are undoubtedly a better people for it. As Barack Obama said during the closing months of the campaign, "There is no blue America or red America; there is only the United States of America." And now, Americans of every political persuasion must put this election behind us and begin the very difficult work of addressing our nation's problems. Our country is facing one of the most challenging financial calamities of our lifetime. Major industries are still teetering on bankruptcy, unemployment rates are still rising, home foreclosures are still increasing, and the stock market is still in the tank. We are a nation at war on two fronts, and we continue to face an energy crisis that looms large in the future of the U.S. and world economies.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden are inheriting major difficulties that were eight years in the making. With a 53 percent majority, the voters have given the Obama/Biden team a mandate for change, but even the most hopeful among us realize that change will not come easy and that it will take years to get our nation back on its feet. We must be patient, support our newly elected leaders, and put our nation first. We will face many difficult days ahead, and the problems which have manifested over the past eight years will not go away with the passing of this election. However, I am truly hopeful for the future of America and believe we have taken a giant step forward in restoring our nation and her standing in the eyes of the world.

I have never been prouder of this union or the American people. Never have we as a nation come so near to achieving the ideals and dreams of our forefathers: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

May God Bless America and President-elect Obama.