

OPINION EDITORIAL  
SAN DIEGO BRANCH OF THE NAACP

The NAACP was founded in 1909, has the well earned reputation as the oldest and “baddest” civil rights organization in the Country. The San Diego Branch is a fully functioning, very effective branch of the NAACP. We have approximately 20 standing committees working on a wide variety of issues important to under-served communities ranging from criminal justice to the environment to education and housing. The amount of community engagement of the San Diego Branch is mind-boggling, whether it is suing the San Diego Housing Commission for racist policies, hosting a book drive for inmates or meeting with law enforcement about bias in policing. Our members take pride in being effective advocates for the BIPOC community.

Despite our effectiveness, in the last three years, two of the San Diego Branch’s duly elected presidents have been removed for speaking truth to power. Clovis Honore, our previous president, was removed from office for acting “inimical” to the interests of the NAACP. Clovis Honore’s inimical act was permitting the San Diego Branch to vote in support of a policy change to the NAACP’s opposition to charter schools. Sounds like democracy in action. The National Organization certainly could have denied our request and been done with it. Somehow, such vote turned into grounds for suspension of Clovis Honore’s lifetime membership and removal as President of the San Diego Branch.

The San Diego Branch was fortunate that Francine Maxwell was able to succeed Clovis Honore. For those who do not know Francine, she is a plain spoken Black woman who tells it like it is. She does not mince words. She does not care about titles or honors (yours or hers), but cares about getting the job done. Under her leadership, the Branch greatly expanded its membership, had very active and functioning committees and raised more money than any other Branch president by far. In November 2020, in a close election, she was re-elected. The opposition candidate felt the election was unfair. The opposition candidate absolutely has a right to mount a timely challenge to the election.

The NAACP Bylaws and Constitution provide a timeline and process for such election challenge. Just like a court of law, the Branch is entitled to not only see the allegations and evidence, but to also respond at a fair hearing. Fundamental due process, however, was not afforded to the San Diego Branch. Instead, without an investigation, the National office appointed an “administrator” usurping the power of the executive committee. The Administrator unilaterally decided that the San Diego Branch was going to hold new elections, despite that regularly scheduled elections will be held in November 2022.

Despite objections, those in the San Diego Branch who support President Maxwell went on a voter drive, signing up new members. Then, in an unconstitutional move, the National Organization suspended Francine Maxwell as a member of the NAACP. As a result, President Maxwell cannot run for president in the hastily called new elections or the regularly scheduled elections in November 2022.

In the last three years, the National Organization has suspended two branch presidents, appointed an administrator (without evidence of wrongdoing), and nullified an election without a fair hearing or evidence of fraud. When the NAACP saw a surge in memberships, most likely in support of the embattled president, the National Organization suspended her, thereby depriving members of their right to vote for the candidate of their choosing. This is anathema to an organization dedicated to protecting civil liberties and voting rights?

The San Diego Branch is made up of 100% volunteers and are at a crossroads. Long standing members, who have invaluable experience as attorneys, teachers, doctors, and community activists, are questioning whether they should continue to support our local Branch. We cannot fight injustice within society, if we experiencing injustice within the NAACP.

The following actions are necessary for the San Diego Branch to survive. First, remove the administrator. He has had full access to all books and records of the San Diego Branch and has yet to find irregularities. Second, rescind the suspension of Francine Maxwell. Any elections without her as a candidate is a farce. Third, respect the results of the election results. The National Organization of the NAACP must respect the voting rights of its local members.

Douglas A. Oden, Esq.  
Past President San Diego Branch NAACP

Lei-Chala I. Wilson, Esq.  
Past President San Diego Branch NAACP