

August 18, 2008

Dear AFSCME Brothers and Sisters,

I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for allowing me to serve as an alternate at AFSCME's 38th International Convention in San Francisco from July 28 to August 1, 2008, and share my experience with you.

It was my first time attending an international convention so I received a "First Timer" ribbon when I registered and I was instructed to wear it on my badge. I was a little apprehensive to say the least to wear my "first timer" ribbon; I thought all the jokes would be on me, but Dave Fillman later requested that everyone be nice to "first timers" and indeed they were. I was also told that the ribbon entitled me to free drinks; however, the drinks were free for everybody!

This year was an election year for AFSCME's International Executive Board. Our delegates once again elected Gerald McEntee President. Mr. McEntee has held the position of President since first elected in 1981. William Lucy was elected Secretary-Treasurer. A position he has held since 1972. The delegates also elected 32 International Vice-Presidents. Dave Fillman from Pennsylvania's District Council 13 was among those elected.

This also being a U.S. Presidential election year, we had some very special guests. Senator Hillary Clinton flew in especially to thank AFSCME for support in her Presidential bid and to encourage AFSCME members to help ensure we have a Democratic President taking the oath of office in January.

Former Vice President Al Gore made a personal appearance. His speech focused on the Presidential election and, of course, the environment and our need to end our reliance on carbon-based fuels and create our own renewable energy. He was the inspiration behind AFSCME's decision to go greener, and go greener they did! We received flash drives with most of the convention documents on them, which saved an estimated 3.3 million sheets of paper. The paper that was used was 100% recycled paper with soy based ink. We received reusable water bottles, and the utensils, plates, and cups we used were biodegradable and compostable. I understand they used locally grown food and organic food wherever possible, and that all leftover food was donated to local non-profit organizations.

Democratic Presidential nominee, Senator Barack Obama, gave a speech via satellite. He said he is honored to have AFSCME's endorsement and cannot wait to see our green T-shirts out on the campaign trail all across America. (By the way, I have two "AFSCME for Obama '08 T-shirts up for grabs.) You can view his speech on AFSCME's website at www.afscme.org.

In between the guest speakers it was business as usual. The delegates heard and voted on many policy resolutions and constitutional amendments that will guide our union for the next two years.

In case you didn't hear, there was an earthquake in Los Angeles during our trip. We didn't feel any of the tremors; however, the "Green Machine" (AFSCME's nickname) rocked San Francisco at three different rallies. AFSCME members marched in solidarity with University of California workers who have been working without a contract since last year. Members (yours truly – my sister-in-law works for the state of California) also rallied in protest of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's threat to cut the wages of more than 200,000 state workers to help balance the state's budget. Republican Presidential nominee, John McCain, picked a bad time to visit San Francisco to meet with wealthy fundraisers. He was met by California Democrats and AFSCME members who wanted to tell him what they thought about his anti-worker agenda, including Dean Reynolds who had a few choice words for McCain supporters as he passed by in the safety of a trolley.

And some personal highlights of the trip...

Media magnets, Cheryl and Dean Reynolds, made the San Francisco Chronicle. (I have the article if you would like to read it.)

An AFSCME member fell down the steps and broke both arms! Can you even imagine?

Two custodians from Millersville University (Pennsylvania) got married. A reception was held on the 14th floor of our hotel – we weren't invited!

Muir Woods National Monument – put it on your "must see" list. The redwood and giant sequoia trees are massive and breathtaking! I could have spent the whole day wandering around that canyon, but we were on the brief one-hour tour. Our very entertaining tour guide told us a joke. "*What is the difference between a tourist and a hitchhiker?*" *5 minutes!* (I don't think he was joking.)

I could go on and on, but I won't. If you would like more detailed information on the convention, visit AFSCME's website at www.afscme.org or ask Cheryl Reynolds, Gwen Perrin or me.

In closing, if you plan to visit the City by the Bay remember to pack a jacket, jeans and walking shoes; and remember Mark Twain's words, "The coldest winter I ever saw was the summer I spent in San Francisco." San Francisco is surrounded by water on three sides by the cool waters of the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay. The mornings are overcast with fog with temperatures gradually warming to anywhere between 60 and 70 degrees and relatively windy. I wasn't prepared!

Thanks again for allowing me the opportunity to serve. It was a fantastic experience!

Yours truly and in solidarity,

Cheryl Hartman
Executive Board