

NCSRCC's Gary Hawley on the road to sixth Democratic National Convention

Local 804 member Gary Hawley is packing his bags to attend his sixth consecutive Democratic National Convention, being held July 25-28 in Philadelphia, PA. Gary credits his longstanding union membership as the reason he has been so politically active over the years.

"Everything the union has given me, the fact that I've made enough money to support my family as a middle class person, to send my children to college... I want to keep that standard of living," said Gary. "It's important to get the right people in office so they don't take the unions away."

As a member from Stevens Point, WI, Gary's philosophy is especially poignant.

"Because people have not been involved is why [Governor] Scott Walker is destroying Wisconsin, destroying our way of life, and destroying unions," he added.

Gary admits there is some real work that goes into getting involved to the level of being elected to the Democratic National Convention. Following the April 5 primary in Wisconsin, there were two caucuses. The first was April 17 at the county level, and the next was May 1 on the Congressional District level.

"Twenty-three people get elected at the county caucus, and you hope some of those people are going to vote you forward at the Congressional caucus," said Gary.

Prior to the second caucus, Gary spent his time calling the 100 or so other delegates that were elected to be at that event, introducing himself and asking them to support him to the next level. The second caucus runs similarly to the first, except instead of one county it may be a dozen or more counties, depending on population. In Gary's case, delegates from 18 counties participated in the second caucus.

Because Gary has been Chair of the Portage County Democratic Party in a heavily Democratic area for more than 20 years, being chosen to move on to the next level has gotten a little easier each time. To date he has attended conventions in Chicago, IL (1996); Los Angeles, CA (2000); Boston, MA (2004); Denver, CO (2008); and Charlotte, NC (2012).

Gary said no one convention in the last 20-plus years has been his favorite, because they are all unique in their own ways. However, one moment that stands out for him was at the 2004 convention in Boston when John Kerry was the Presidential nominee and Gary was invited to sit on the stage. It was from that vantage point that he heard then-Senator Barack Obama from Illinois speak for the first time.

"I was 15 feet away," said Gary. "When I heard him speak, I knew there was something about him. I didn't know he would go on to be President, but I knew he'd do something great.

"I was privileged to go ahead and nominate him as President four years later," he added.

Another memorable occasion was at Invesco Field in Denver, Colorado, in 2008, where some 84,000 people listened to Obama as he gave his acceptance speech.

“It was so impressive,” said Hawley. “There were so many people there, all excited about the same thing... it was an amazing experience.”

Having the opportunity to meet President Bill Clinton has also stuck with Gary over time. “It was just great! We stood in line for over 8 hours to have him sign his book. I was standing with [Wisconsin] Representative Amy Sue Vruwink and four different TV stations interviewed us. And then we got to talk to Bill and he signed the book. It was a lot of fun.”

When asked if there is a downside to the convention, he said with 50,000 people converging on Philadelphia in July, “You have to like people. Crowds are everywhere. Every single room in Philadelphia will be taken up. It’s not for everyone.”

On the plus side, he added, “It’s all political people and you don’t know who you’re going to bump into. [In the past] maybe Al Gore, maybe Ted Kennedy. It’s such a fellowship, everybody talks to everybody, you really have a good time and get treated so well as a delegate.”

Beyond the fun, of course, is the real work of the convention. Delegates are there to nominate and confirm the candidates for President and Vice President and to adopt a comprehensive party platform. Gary is attending as a delegate for Hillary Clinton, the candidate who is endorsed by the UBC. The end of the convention marks the start of the general election season, which will culminate with Election Day November 8 this year.

“You learn a lot of information about your candidate while you are there,” said Gary. “The idea is to come back from the Convention energized and ready to work for the nominee.”

If you are interested in getting more involved in politics, Gary suggests attending a meeting of your County party and to simply start talking to people.

“See the good a County party can do, even in the immediate area where you live,” advised Gary. “Aldermen [or City Council members] are just as important on the local level as the President is on the national level.

“I really encourage everybody to get to a County meeting. Find out what the Democratic or Republican platforms are all about, and learn what the differences between the two are,” he added. “As for me, I believe the Democrats are the ones who are helping the Middle Class.”