

NAACP elects Brock, 44, as youngest board chairman

Contributed by JESSE WASHINGTON

NEW

YORK (AP) -- The NAACP elected a health care executive as its youngest board chairman Saturday, continuing a movement toward younger leadership for the nation's oldest civil rights organization.

Roslyn

M. Brock, 44, was chosen to succeed Julian Bond. She had been vice chairman since 2001 and a member of the NAACP for 25 years.

Brock

works for Bon Secours Health Systems in Maryland as vice president for advocacy and government relations, and spent 10 years working on health issues for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. She joins Benjamin Todd Jealous, the 37-year-old CEO of the NAACP, as leader of the 500,000-member organization.

Brock

said she plans to focus on pushing for policy changes to eliminate inequality, strengthening the relationship between the national and local NAACP branches and holding people accountable.

"It's

not always what someone is doing to us, but what we are doing for ourselves," Brock said in an interview.

The

departure of Bond, 70, after 10 years as board chairman marks a turning point for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Bond

came of age in the segregated South, helped found the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and was on the front lines of the protests that led to the nation's landmark civil rights laws. He is a symbol and icon of "the movement," which was a defining experience for older generations.

In

recent years, the NAACP has endured criticism that it is old and out of touch. Then Bond brought in Jealous, then 34, as the NAACP's youngest CEO, and endorsed Brock's bid for board chairman.

The

selection of young leaders "is deliberate, but it's also fortuitous," Bond said. "We are lucky to have had this confluence of a young CEO and a young chair. I don't think we plotted and planned that in 2010 the stars would align this way."

Jealous

said he belongs to a generation "whose greatest accomplishments are in front of them ... who are even more hungry for change."

Bond
said the board asked him to run for another one-year term, but he declined.

"Frankly,
this is the most difficult nonpaying job I've ever had," said Bond, who has served in the Georgia state legislature, is a member of several corporate boards and a professor at American University and the University of Virginia.

Brock
was selected in a vote by the 64-person NAACP board. Her opponent was the Rev. Wendell Anthony, leader of the NAACP's Detroit chapter, who withdrew Friday after he was not re-elected to his seat on the board.

Brock
graduated from Virginia Union University and has an MBA from Northwestern, as well as master's degrees in health care administration and divinity.

She
described health care as her passion and said the current reform debate hinges on one fundamental question.

"Am
I my brother's and my sister's keeper?" Brock asked. "That's the question that we've got to ask our legislators. Are we really, really concerned about our neighbors, and about their health, and their children's health?"

While
acknowledging the need to "retool our front line" and develop young civil rights activists, Brock said the wisdom of the older generation is still needed.

"If
it were not for that 'aging' membership, the NAACP would not be who it is and what it is today," she said.

Many
conservatives question the need for an NAACP and say that an association for the advancement of white people would be considered racist.

Brock
said the NAACP has erroneously been classified as a black group: "We are not. We are a multiracial, multiethnic organization. So as we move into our second century, our desire is to cast our net broader."

"People
of color' or 'colored people' really speaks to those who are falling through the cracks ... who feel locked out," she said.

She
said the nation was at a pivotal moment after electing the first black

president.

"I'd be the first to say that at the NAACP we have to acknowledge how far we've come as a nation in terms of race relations, but also in that acknowledgment, understanding that we're not where we ought to be, but we thank God we're not what we used to be.

"We need to draw a line in the sand and say thank you, America ... but also challenge America that we still have much more work to do."

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Pictured above is Roslyn Brock.