

## Yes, we can



**Were you inspired** by the presidential race and the election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States? I certainly was. As the first African American in

the White House, Obama represents a turning point in that country's history. Whatever your political leanings, there's no disputing just how much this milestone means to human dignity and the righting of so many wrongs in America's past.

Throughout the Democratic nomination race and campaign for the White House, Obama and his team ignited an unwavering passion in voters and volunteers from around the world. A record number of Americans – more than 136 million – voted on Nov. 4. The enthusiasm for this charismatic and compelling 47-year-old senator from Illinois was unlike anything election watchers and everyday citizens had seen in decades.

You may be wondering what the election of an American president has to do with nursing in Ontario. The answer is simple. Obama's presidential campaign is the perfect case study to illustrate the power of engagement, and the influence of a passionate and empowered collective. His win demonstrates that everything is possible when people have a common goal and come together to advocate for change. Americans and Canadians alike rallied behind Obama because of his core values and his promise to put an end to Washington-style politics that tends to forget the average citizen. His vision is rich in content, and his character exudes strength and commitment. But, as he said in his acceptance speech, the victory is not his alone. It belongs to all those who mobilized others and then went to the ballot box to support a new vision for the country.

Nurses have been rallying behind RNAO for precisely the same reasons peo-

ple rallied behind Obama – because they believe in the mission. In the case of RNAO, that mission is “to pursue healthy public policy and to promote the full participation of RNs in shaping and delivering health services now and in the future.” Our membership numbers have more than doubled because, like RNAO, RNs believe that: “health is a resource for everyday living and health-care a universal human right.” And members want to be part of a powerful movement to give voice to nurses, patients, and underprivileged communities that need their priorities met.

Since its inception in 1904, RNAO has been mobilizing nurses. Our advocacy for 70 per cent full-time employment for RNs is just one example of this important work. When the association began lobbying on

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this initiative in 1998, only 50 per cent of nurses were working full time. Many told us our goal was unrealistic or too ambitious, and that it would never happen. But that did not deter us. In fact, that kind of scepticism makes success so much sweeter when we see our vision on the horizon.

As Obama addressed millions of hopeful and re-energized Americans for the first time as president-elect, he commended voters who braved the elements on their way to the ballot box “...because they believed that this time must be different, that their voices could be that difference.”

Members' voices are the difference in everything RNAO does. And you – each and every one of you – have most certain-

ly been the difference as we have watched full-time employment rates increase to almost 65 per cent over the past decade. We are well on our way to reaching our target because nurses, in all roles and sectors, are leading positive change by joining as a collective to see this initiative through.

The motto for Obama's campaign – Yes, we can – encapsulates what RNAO is all about. Whether we're joining as a collective to advocate for full-time employment, the new graduate employment guarantee, mid- and late-career strategies, more nurse-led clinics, or investments in education; whether we're meeting with government to articulate nurses' views on the need to strengthen Medicare, end poverty, eliminate dangerous environmental toxins and carcinogens, support better elder health, chronic disease management and mental health care; or whether writing position papers, policy submissions, speaking with the media, or remaining visible in the corridors of power and on the streets of protest – our motto must always be “Yes, we can.”

“This victory alone is not the change we seek; it is only the chance for us to make that change,” Obama reminded supporters when he won. “It (change) cannot happen if we go back to the way things were. It can't happen without you, without a new spirit of service, a new spirit of sacrifice.”

This notion that success is a work-in-progress is particularly profound and directly applicable to us at RNAO. We have seen tremendous success and transformation, but we know we have a lot of work ahead of us. RNAO has helped nurses gain a position of power at decision-making tables and we need to harness this influence to advance the vision of the profession for health, health-care, and nursing even further than anyone expects. And we will do this because we can. **RN**

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