DNC Packs Denver

It has been a hectic but interesting week in Denver with the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in town. Some 6,000 delegates, 15,000 members of the media, 14,000 party members plus many others, a total of 50,000, have packed hotels, filled convention halls, and clogged the streets for four days of speeches, events, and parties.

This convention was particularly noteworthy because it is the first major political party convention where the majority of delegates were women. That is quite a contrast to the Democratic convention held in Denver 100 years ago where women served as delegates for the first time. Only five women were delegates then, but it was a milestone on the road to this year’s convention where women were in the majority.

Mayor John Hickenlooper and the City of Denver should be congratulated for the planning and organization that kept all services operating very smoothly. Months of advance work and a strong police presence kept disruption from protesters to a minimum.

There was a particularly tense moment when some 3,000 veterans and anti-war protesters without a parade permit marched through the streets to the perimeter of the Pepsi Center where the convention was taking place. The police set up a defense line. According to the Denver Post, the tension seemed to escalate until a few veterans stepped forward and saluted the police saying, “We are your brothers and sisters in arms. We don’t want to hurt you.” A representative of the Obama campaign stepped forward to receive the protest against the war in Iraq and the crowd dispersed peacefully.

Hotel workers did an outstanding job in handling the rush and providing excellent banquet service, particularly in the downtown hotels near the convention center.

My daughter Anne Marie got right into the thick of the action by working as a volunteer at the Pepsi Center and Invesco Field at Mile High Stadium. She was interviewed about her experience by MTV Networks.

Many industry organizations used the occasion to network with politicians and business leaders. The American Hotel & Lodging Association joined with Carlson, Marriott, Starwood, and others to host a joint reception for delegates and others in the Ritz-Carlton Denver.

Hollywood celebrities were everywhere. Willie Nelson, Spike Lee, Ben Affleck, Oprah Winfrey, Charlize Theron, Annette Bening, Susan Sarandon, Stevie Wonder, and Matt Damon are just a few of those reported to be in town.

My wife Linda and I had an opportunity to meet the Hawaii delegation and renew friendships with so many with whom we have worked over the years to make Hawaii a better place to live and work.

The photos accompanying this article will give you a flavor of the various events we attended during the week.

The only negative was the fact that the room blocks in downtown hotels did not fill up as expected. As a result, at the last minute delegates and media members headed downtown, cancelling their reservations at airport and suburban hotels, leaving those properties with vacancies they could not fill. The Hilton Garden Inn Denver Airport, operated by Outrigger Lodging Services, was among those hit by these last-minute changes.

Overall, the convention was an exciting event that went off without a major hitch. Even the weather cooperated. My congratulations to all who contributed to its success.