

**Report of the  
CWA National Committee on Equity  
to the  
71<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention**



**Communications Workers of America  
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Washington, D.C.**

## REPORT OF THE CWA NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON EQUITY TO THE 71<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION

Commitment, awareness, tolerance, vigilance, organizing, and solidarity... These are but a few of the cornerstones that served as the foundation for the work done by CWA and the CWA Committee on Equity this past year. In particular, our recognition of the importance of the work done by CWA minority leaders in the past along with the work done by our Members today, helped create a vision for our community, a vision of a brighter future for our great union.

American labor pioneer A. Philip Randolph, stated, *“A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess.”* As CWA and America reached for **Change** in 2008, this particular vision offered by one of the most dynamic labor leaders of our time became the framework upon which working men and women of our movement organized to fight the tireless battle that marked the end of eight years of political and legislative discontent. Eight years of an Administration that did very little for the least of us became too much for this nation to bear. Americans finally felt the pain of a nation when they witnessed suffering in New Orleans that was met with public indifference by the “most powerful” of our nation. This cruelty became the final straw.

With history as our teacher, the American Labor movement recommitted itself to break the bonds that divided us as a nation. Each year, the Committee on Equity made Convention delegates aware of issues that needed our union’s undivided attention. In response, the union honored Committee on Equity findings and supported its platform. Moving forward, CWA leadership made members aware of the fact that the battle for equality, justice, and economic freedom could indeed be won. The union’s collective journey toward **Change**, required each and every member to understand that we must move beyond *tolerance* of one another’s differences and become a single force for good. Vigilance allowed us to keep our eye on the prize even when the momentum seemed to move in an adverse direction. But more importantly, our adaptability to workplace political organizing helped seize the day, when on November 4, 2008 this nation overwhelmingly turned the corner and embraced a new kind of democracy.

This is the work of the Committee on Equity. Examples of this work can be found time and time again in every CWA District, at every Committee on Equity meeting across the country. As defined this year at the CWA District 3 Equity Conference, “Equity means fairness. It means that management and the union treat workers fairly and equally regardless of their race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, handicap, or veteran status”. Conference organizers promoted those examples through education, teaching respect for the lives and opinions of others.

The Committee is committed to linking the important work of our union, bargaining, health care, retirement security, expanded broadband and internet access, and worker rights to its mission. With new opportunities to build a better future, the Committee on Equity will continue to provide enlightenment through vigilance and respect for the rights

of others. We thank the Convention for its continued support and participation in this important work.

## **MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN IN CWA 2009 REPORT ON DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR UNION**

At the 2007 convention CWA delegates made an historic decision to expand the CWA Executive Board with the addition of four at-large diversity seats. In 2008 the election of the four at-large diversity board members became a reality and the Executive Board Diversity Committee was established.

It has been the duty of the four at-large members and the Executive Board Diversity Committee to work with the National Executive Board, the Civil Rights and Human Rights and Women's departments. The goal is to look within our union and seek change within our own ranks: *a leadership that reflects the membership*. The parties involved requested demographic information from the National union so that we would all better understand who we are and who we represent. Subsequently, a national review committee also reviewed the structure of the Civil Rights Department and the Women's Committee to determine what we are doing well and what changes need to be made so we can do better.

The Executive Board Diversity Committee along with the at-large diversity members asked the Civil Rights Department and the Women's Committee to make a report on established Local Equity and Women's Committees. This was to ascertain the number of Locals in each district that had active committees and to see what programs they had listed on their agendas.

On April 16-17, 2009, the CWA Human and Civil Rights Review Committee met in Washington, DC. to discuss our findings and begin to determine where we go from here. Chaired by Executive Vice President Annie Hill, the meeting included members of the Executive Board Diversity Committee, representatives from the Committee on Equity, the Women's Committee, the CWA Minority Caucus, and the Minority Leadership Institute. Headquarters Human and Civil Rights staff along with additional staff from the President's Office were also in attendance. CWA President Larry Cohen addressed the group. He commended the review committee for taking this progressive step toward improving our programs and urged them to include current CWA initiatives such as the Employee Free Choice Act, health care, and Speed Matters in their deliberations.

The Review team looked at the history of Civil Rights and Women's programs while reviewing previous convention reports. A vigorous discussion ensued about what we wanted these departments to focus on in the future.

A key finding revealed current CWA demographics:

### **CWA DEMOGRAPHICS**

	<b><u>2005</u></b> (+/-4%)	<b><u>2008</u></b> (+/-3.7%)
<b>MALE</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>WHITE</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>BLACK</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>HISPANIC</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>ASIAN</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>OTHER</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>REFUSED</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>18-39</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>40-49</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>50-54</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>55 &amp; OVER</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>REFUSED</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>8%</b>

\* Source: Independent Polling for CWA

Outside guest presenters included Foster Stringer, Director Human Rights Department of the American Federation of Teachers and Connie Cordovilla, Associate Director of the Human Rights Department at AFT. Each guest outlined the structure of their respective union's civil and human rights department discussing programmatic practices they institute to get their Locals on board with their Human Rights programs.

Ester Lopez, International Director Civil Rights and Community Action also attended from the UFCW to tell us about her Union's involvement with various immigrant groups, focusing on organizing the next generation and making it understand what unionism is all about.

Present on a telephone conference line was Gloria Brimm, Director of the Women's Program from the United Auto Workers. Gloria spoke about the union's organizing efforts with women around voter registration and the 2008 Obama presidential campaign.

Later, the review committee held further discussions on the findings of the Local Equity and Local Women's Committees. A common thread was found among the groups. The groups' work generally involved community services, which is not a bad thing, rather than taking on political issues surrounding civil rights, human rights, and women's rights.

After two days of deliberations in large and small group settings, the following preliminary goals were set:

- Establish a true line of communication between the National Executive Board, the Diversity Committee, the District Coordinators, the Civil Rights and Human Rights Departments, the National Committee on Equity and the Women's Committee.
- Encourage the National and Local Committees on Equity to focus agendas on the CWA Triangle: Politics, Organizing and Community.
- Implement a program that will bring Officers of Locals and Committee Chairs together to educate them on having more member involvement as well as how to form committees.
- Continue to look within CWA from the Local level to the National level on diversity appointments.

The Committee on Equity during its meeting also reviewed diversity at the national and district levels, starting with the Executive Board. The results here reflect Vice Presidents, and assistants to Vice Presidents. Our findings reveal the following:

Executive Committee	2 white males 1 white female
District Vice Presidents	6 white males 1 gay male 2 white females
Sector/Division Vice Presidents	6 white males 1 African-American male 1 white female

At-Large-Seats  
1 African-American female  
1 African-American male  
1 white lesbian  
1 Latino male

*Assistant to Vice Presidents:*

District Level  
5 white males  
2 African-American females  
1 Latina female

Sector/Division Level  
3 white males  
1 African-American male  
1 gay male  
3 white females

CWA has made great strides improving the diversity of Officers and assistants at the national level. This has occurred with the prevailing efforts of the CWA Minority Caucus, the Committees on Equity, the Women's Committees, the Civil Rights and Human Rights Departments as well as the Leadership of our great union working together toward one vision. For those accomplishments, the union should be proud of itself. More importantly, CWA is recognized throughout the labor movement for its efforts and its commitment to promote strong, diverse leadership.

However brothers and sisters, there is still much more work to be done especially at the Local level. We must see more inclusion of all minorities in the leadership ranks of the Locals. We need to embrace the formation of more Local Equity and Women's Committees. We have to drive our national programs deeper into the Locals. We must continue to monitor our leadership at the National and District levels to ensure that our diversity becomes even more inclusive. CWA must be the example for Labor leaders everywhere to show how inclusion works and only makes the union stronger.

### **A Piece of the Dream... This Historic Moment**

Our great country and some other countries around the world were in awe on Tuesday, November 4, 2008 when Barack Obama became the first African American to be elected to the highest office in our nation as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

November 4th, 2008 was the imminent, illustrative day the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. envisioned when he delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. I quote, "This will be the day...when all God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning: My Country Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty of Thee I Sing. When we allow freedom to ring, when

we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city we will be able to speed up the day when all God's Children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestant and Catholic will be able to join hands. One day little children will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." President Obama was only a toddler at that time.

His story begins with a union between a young man from Kenya and a young woman from Kansas who met when they were both students at the University of Hawaii. They were married in 1960. The couple believed that in America, their son could achieve whatever he put his mind to.

People from around the globe recognize that in this country, hard work and sacrifice set us apart. Each of us, especially our children and our grand children, can pursue individual dreams and still come together as an American family.

President Obama is a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School. He served as the first African-American president of the Harvard Law Review. He worked as a Community Organizer. He joined the Davis, Miner, Barnhill & Galland Chicago law firm specializing in civil rights, where he represented Community organizers, discrimination victims and black voters who were trying to force a redrawing of city ward boundaries. He served three terms in the Illinois Senate from 1992 to 2004. He also taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School. In 2000, he lost his bid for the U.S. House of Representatives to Representative Bobby Rush. He ran for the U.S. Senate and was victorious in the primary in March, 2004. He was elected to the United States Senate in November 2004 with 70% of the vote. He announced his candidacy for President of the United States on February 10, 2007. He said, "I know I haven't spent a lot of time learning the ways of Washington, but I have been there long enough to know that the ways of Washington must change."

He was formally nominated as the Democratic nominee at the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado on August 28, 2008. That nomination occurred the same day 45 years earlier when Dr. King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. Barack Obama was sworn in on January 20, 2009 on the historic West Steps of the U.S. Capitol Building, in Washington, DC as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Most impressively, District of Columbia city government officials along with federal government officials reported that 1.8 million visitors from around the country and around the world came to the Nation's Capital, and stood for hours in the bitter cold to witness this global, historic moment. Reid Epstein and Vern Gay of Newsday.com reported that billions watched around the world. Voice of America, America's official government global broadcast network reported the inaugural proceedings to 134 million people around the world in 45 languages. And finally, the Nielsen Wire, sponsored by the nation's foremost media and entertainment polling company reported that 37.8 million Americans watched the inauguration and inauguration events at home. NABET-CWA and TNG-CWA members played an important role broadcasting and reporting this historic event and the CWA Committee on Equity would like to congratulate these

members for using their talents to bring this historic occasion into our homes like no one else could.

The CWA Committee on Equity reported to the 69<sup>th</sup> CWA Convention on the need for diverse leadership. The question was asked "Will America in 2008 elect yet another male President of northern European descent?" The question was also asked, "If we as a Union are ready to change the pattern."

CWA is proud that we as a Union got involved in the political process, encouraging our neighbors, our families and our friends to register to vote, work phone banks, and give donations in any amount, small or large. But most importantly, we voted! Yes CWA, we helped change old electoral patterns and made a piece of The Dream come alive.

The election of an African-American as President of the United States was a long time coming. It was a defining moment for America, but change had come. Senator Ted Kennedy while delivering his support of Barack Obama for President, reminded us that in 1960, Harry Truman stated publicly, when debating the wisdom of electing a young president versus a more elderly statesman, that we (America) needed "someone with greater experience"--and added: "May I urge you to be patient." John F. Kennedy whom at that time was running for president replied: "The world is changing. The old ways will not do...It is time for a new generation of leadership."

CWA, the change begins with each of us. From here, we must embrace that change and support our President and his administration. The Obama Administration's principal forum on policy and political matters can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov>. As we support this President's goal of improving conditions for the American middle class, we must realize that this is only the beginning and there is still much to be done. We must encourage this administration to promote passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (<http://freechoiceact.org>) and sign it into law once it comes to President Obama's desk. We must strive to make health care (<https://www.cwahealthcare.org>) affordable to everyone. And we must provide quality education for all children. And finally, each member of our union must continue to work diligently to improve civil and human rights within our great union and across America.

Congratulations to every member of our union for the solidarity you showed to promote **Change**. The Committee on Equity, as would Dr. King, encourages you to make a daily visit to each of these websites to use the wealth of information each provides to encourage member participation in every CWA Local.

### **The Employee Free Choice Act and Civil Rights: The Indistinguishable Challenge**

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'" In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words rang out over a crowd of thousands of people as they listened intently to the possibilities of a more hopeful future devoid of the

inequalities and discrimination of their current state. Dr. King helped lead one of the most historic movements for civil rights in American history. His words spoke not only of the struggle of African Americans in the United States, but of all those who fought the endless battle for equal opportunity and basic human rights. It was everyday people such as Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and A. Phillip Randolph who took a stand against the majority in the 1950's and 60's and reminded us of basic tenets upon which this nation was originally founded: democracy, freedom, and equality.

The rights of U.S. citizens were first defined by the U.S. Constitution in the late 1700's. Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, due process of law, and numerous other rights established by the Bill of Rights were considered basic civil liberties that the government could not violate. However, misinterpretation of laws, poor enforcement by leaders, and skewed opinions of who's "worthy" or not worthy of citizenship and basic rights under the law have left opposing groups in an endless battle over civil rights.

For African Americans it has been a steady struggle against discrimination, segregation, and unfair treatment since the 1800s. For women, the 1920s marked a fight for the right to vote and the beginnings of a struggle for fair treatment and equal opportunity. Although improvements have been made in our nation's governing power and societal views, unequal protection under the law continues to infringe upon the civil rights of many minority groups.

Today, labor unions continue the fight for the rights of workers with the Employee Free Choice Act. Our own CWA president Larry Cohen remains labor's chief strategist working directly with affiliates from the AFL-CIO and Change to Win. His ongoing work with American Rights at Work under the leadership of the Honorable David Bonior has helped spawn a strong national movement in support of passage and in support of a promise from President Obama to sign the bill once it gets to his desk.

As for the civil rights community, support for our effort could not be greater and more profound. Wade Henderson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, one of America's foremost civil rights advocacy groups, in a national conference call on the bill April 8, 2009 made it clear that, *"The Leadership Conference has long known that workers' rights are civil rights, and that the right to organize is a civil and human rights issue of the first magnitude. That's why the Employee Free Choice Act is one of our highest legislative priorities."* Dr. Henderson was joined on that call by other nationally recognized civil rights and labor advocates including Arlene Holt-Baker, Executive Vice President of the AFL-CIO, Hilary Shelton, Washington Bureau Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP), Melanie Campbell, Executive Director of the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation (NCBCP), Dr. Steven Pitts, labor policy specialist at the University of California at Berkeley Labor Center, and William "Bill" Lucy, President & Founder of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) and Secretary-Treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

Misconceptions, employer intimidation, and lack of labor law enforcement have made it increasingly more difficult to organize the U.S. workforce. Seizing this moment will give

labor the opportunity to give workers back their rightful voice and restore equality between employers and their employees.

The future of the Employee Free Choice Act, whether viewed as a labor right, civil right, or both, depends on the full support of CWA. It is up to us to educate our members and elected officials on the Employee Free Choice Act and to address any misguided opinions. The struggle for labor unions and the right to organize began long before our time, but the obstacles we have overcome and the battles we have won are a clear indication that if we work together, and stand as one, we will prevail and, once again, restore the civil rights of our nation's workers.

Join us at:

<http://www.freechoiceact.org/cwa/>

<http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/>

### **Civil Rights-Gay Rights: The Same Struggle**

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness...”

“All Men” does not include us, ladies, or people of color, the disabled, or our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters. In this modern age, federal civil rights policy has expanded to become more inclusive of all Americans. Civil rights have no color, no gender, no ability or disability, and no particular sexual preference.

The election of President Obama did not erase all of the injustices in this country regarding racial inequality, but it did show that a state in the heartland, Iowa, with an over 90% white population could overwhelmingly support an African-American man for President and start him on his way to victory.

However, while the state of California was electing President Obama, voters there also passed Proposition 8, which bans gay marriage in that state. Initially, there was much finger pointing from the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community toward the African-American community. Several exhaustive studies have shown that the overwhelming support for this initiative comes from the religious right. If they cannot drive a wedge between us with race or abortion, then why not try homophobia.

Why should this matter to members of CWA and the minority community as a whole? News flash! We, as union members, in spite of our gender, race, religion, national origin or sexual preference are part of a minority and opportunities for union membership are shrinking at an alarming rate. The faster we realize that we must all unite, the faster we can increase our representation in government and obtain equal protection under the law for each and every one of us.

According to the Leadership Council on Civil Rights, in a report dated March 2009, the LGBT community has no national laws protecting them against employment, housing, or education discrimination. Further, there is not enough research, fact-finding and focus on these issues by the Federal government.

In June of 1969, a police raid on the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village New York sparked riots for two days. This event became the symbolic beginning of the gay rights movement in this country. Each year there are Gay Pride parades across the nation commemorating this incident. On December 15, 1973, the Board of American Psychiatric Association voted unanimously to strike homosexuality as a mental illness from the diagnostic manual. In 1975, the American Medical Association called for the repeal of all state laws barring homosexual acts between consenting adults. In 1979, the first gay and lesbian civil rights march on Washington drew more than 100,000 people; however, in 1984, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that individual states had the right to outlaw sexual relations between same-sex adults. In 2003, the Court reversed that decision in *Lawrence vs. Texas* and struck down all existing sodomy laws between consenting adults.

More recently, in 1998, we had two brutal hate crimes in the United States. One was the brutal dragging death of James Byrd in Texas and the other, the murder of Matthew Sheppard in Wyoming, a young gay man. As I reported last year, in 2000 in Roanoke, Virginia, we lost one of our own, Danny Lee Overstreet, because some thug went into a gay restaurant and decided to "waste some faggots". There has been little progress made in adding gays and lesbians to the existing hate crime legislation already in place in this country.

There are currently 43 states that have laws forbidding same sex marriage, 29 of which have constitutional amendments. Maine and New Hampshire have laws allowing same sex civil unions and four states have same sex marriage laws, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, and last but not least...are you ready...Iowa! "We've shown that truth and fairness and justice and love are more powerful than one man's veto pen," same sex marriage advocate Beth Robinson said to cheers from supporters in the state capitol of Montpelier after Vermont's House of Representatives passed the law by a margin of 100-49. I tend to agree with Harvey Fierstein who quipped, "Why is it my sister can have three failed marriages and I can't even have one successful one?". A marriage license is a civil, legal document, not a religious one. In certain states, interracial marriages were illegal until 1967.

The Committee on Equity formally encourages CWA members to familiarize themselves with our civil rights platform. One does not have to be black to march in the MLK parade, nor gay in order to march in a Gay Pride parade. While we are contacting our elected representatives regarding the Employee Free Choice Act, Health Care Reform, and other important issues, remember our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and those "unalienable rights" I mentioned in the beginning! As members of a COE Committee, we must educate our individual locals regarding civil rights, equal rights, and equal protection under the law for everyone.

Harvey Bernard Milk (b. May 22, 1930 and assassinated November 27, 1978) was an American politician and the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California. He was assassinated in San Francisco's City Hall by a former co-worker. He worked with the Teamsters on the Coors boycott, and gathered a coalition of all of us to fight for civil rights for all. I will close with a quote from him.

*"I ask this—that if there be an assassination, I would want five, ten, a hundred, a thousand to rise. If a bullet should enter my brain let it destroy every closet door. I ask for the [gay] movement to continue because it's not about personal gain and it's not about ego and it's not about power, it's about the Uses out there. Not just the gays, but the black and the Asians, the seniors and the disabled-- The Uses. Without hope, the Uses give up and I know you can't live on hope alone but without hope life is not worth living so you and you and you... You gotta give them hope." -Harvey Milk.*

## **Reducing the Digital Divide**

To many Americans broadband access is a common everyday tool of our lives. We use the internet to educate ourselves, search for jobs, keep posted on current events, and much more. However, there are still Americans that don't have that convenience. They live in un-served urban areas or in rural areas that do not have broadband access. Customers in un-served areas are defined as communities or neighborhoods in which a significant portion of the population has no terrestrial non-dial up internet access. Underserved areas are areas in which broadband is delivered at less than 3 mbps downstream and 1 mbps upstream.

The Communications Workers of America Speed Matters program reports that the United States is the country that invented the internet. We have fallen from 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> in the high speed internet penetration. Denmark is now ranked at No. 1. Until recently, the United States was the only industrialized country without a national policy to promote high speed internet access. Other countries have moved ahead of us. It's time for the United States to take action.

CWA recognizes the importance of creating a broadband infrastructure that will bring all Americans into the technical reality of 21st century communications improving this country's economic well being. Two years ago CWA launched its Speed Matters campaign to bring affordable high speed broadband to every American household, business and community. In a brief filed with the U.S. Department of Commerce by Debbie Goldman, CWA Telecommunications Policy staff, it was determined that an estimated 10-12 million households do not have access to broadband and internet technology. Our Speed Matters program was designed to address this problem technically and legislatively.

As reported by speedmatters.org, high speed internet goes far beyond entertainment. The internet allows people to connect, create, and educate themselves in a way that no other resource can.

In public safety, high speed networks quicken the response time of first responders, and in education, video conferencing enables teachers to expand their classroom walls beyond the traditional school setting. High speed innovation, job growth, telemedicine, distance learning, rural development, public safety, and e-government require truly high speed, universal network. Additionally, for the physically and mentally challenged, broadband allows them to break through the limits of their physical disabilities.

A recent study by the telecommunications group Connected Nation reveals, '*American minorities continue to be among the nation's digitally disconnected.*' Surveys conducted in 3 states reveal that computer ownership and broadband adoption among minority residents lags behind non-minorities. The report goes on to say, '*The technology gap for minorities is most evident in both urban- inner city and rural areas.*' The infrastructure required to connect all Americans is less reliable and inaccessible in these communities. In affluent urban areas where broadband is nearly ubiquitous, broadband adoption among minorities in the far reaches of the same cities remains low. This is in contrast to non-minorities who have the means to subscribe to broadband. For those with means, broadband allows those in rural communities the ability to attract businesses and tech-savvy residents that otherwise would not be able to thrive.

The Alliance for Digital Equality found that significant numbers of Americans say they do not see the value of broadband and have no interest in subscribing to high speed internet. For this group, digital literacy and IT skill programs can promote adoption. In the case of the urban poor, service may be readily available, but many families can't afford the \$30 to \$50 it cost each month to get broadband. Many also lack computers at home.

One of the major challenges of this technology is the speed of internet access. The speed of the internet connection is a very important component in the effective execution of commerce and education. High speed internet is essential; for economic growth and global competitiveness. Testimony given by Emily Sheketoffk of the American Library Association at the NTIA/RUS Broadband Roundtable on March 16, 2009 reveals that sixty percent of libraries report that their broadband connections are too slow forcing 80 percent of patrons to wait in line to use public computers. This is a particular problem for younger Americans who depend on the internet to complete homework assignments at the neighborhood library.

All of the aforementioned problems form the basis of the digital divide. However, the United States is making progress closing that divide. The United States is now investing in broadband projects that create and preserve good jobs, jumpstart the economy, and promote long term competitiveness within this country and within the global market. In February 2009, the United States Congress approved a massive \$838 billion economic stimulus package. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, signed into law by President Barack Obama, included \$7 billion in funds to promote broadband deployment. Funding is targeted at projects that upgrade networks serving state and local government agencies, public safety organizations, and

community anchor institutions such as schools, and medical and health care providers. Funding also prioritizes projects that provide broadband education, awareness, training, equipment access, and support services to facilitate greater use of broadband service by underserved low income, unemployed, aged and otherwise vulnerable populations.

This incredibly positive shift in public policy promoted by CWA is aimed at achieving universal internet access for every American. Implementation of this policy will improve this country's ability to close the digital divide.

CWA remains active and in the forefront of the broadband challenge and is committed when it comes to broadband deployment and internet accessibility. Our recent partnership with The Alliance for Digital Equality and Connected Nation has opened opportunities to effectively put broadband, quality equipment, and internet accessibility into underserved inner city communities and rural areas. CWA's participation in the Congressional Black Caucus Institute 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council involves us directly in federal broadband policy making with members of Congress and the White House. The Committee on Equity recommends that all CWA locals and staff adopt and support the efforts of all our broadband partnerships ([www.speedmatters.com](http://www.speedmatters.com)) and congressional activities (<http://cbcinstitute.org>)

## **Health Care Disparities In the Minority Community**

Despite the steady improvements in the overall health of many in the United States, racial and ethnic minorities continue to receive lower quality health care services. They are less likely to get routine medical procedures and have higher rates of mortality than non-minorities. Many factors contribute to this condition such as, insurance coverage, access and quality of care.

One in three residents of the United States self identifies as African American, Native American, Alaska native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, or multiracial. By 2050 this number is expected to increase to one in two. Even with significant advances in civil rights, race still remains a factor in receiving health care.

In a landmark report by the Institute of Medicine compelling evidence provides that racial/ethnic disparities persist in medical care. Despite the many efforts to reduce or eliminate the disparities, gaps are getting larger rather than smaller.

Although attention to racial/ethnic disparities in care has increased among policy makers there is little consensus on what should or can be done. The U.S. Congress has provided early leadership on the issues by mandating an Institute of Medicine study on health care disparities, creating the National Center on Minority Health, and requiring the Department of Health and Human Services to produce the National Healthcare Disparities Report. This report examines four policy areas for addressing racial and ethnic health care disparities:

- Raising public and provider awareness of disparities in care
- Expanding health insurance coverage
- Improving the capacity and number of providers in underserved communities
- Increasing the knowledge base on causes and interventions to reduce disparities

Perceptions of a problem often influence the actions taken or not taken to change policy and practices. Efforts to raise public awareness of racial/ethnic health care disparities have achieved modest success. In 2006 nearly 6 in 10 people surveyed believed African Americans received the same quality of care as whites, 5 in 10 believed Latinos received the same quality of care as whites. These estimates are similar to a study done in 1999. In contrast to the public's lack of awareness, the level of awareness among physicians has risen sharply. In 2002, 69 % of physicians said the health care system "rarely or never" treated people unfairly based on a person's racial/ethnic background. In 2005, less than 24% disagreed with the statement that minority patients generally receive lower quality care than white patients.

Health insurance matters and determines whether and when people get medical care, where they receive care and how healthy they are. However, racial/ethnic minority populations (who constitute one third of the U.S. population) are disproportionately represented among those without any health care coverage. Compared to the insured the uninsured are less likely to have a regular doctor or get timely and routine care and are more likely to be hospitalized for preventable conditions. So expansions to health insurance coverage are of particular importance to minority groups. Minority Americans are much less likely to have health insurance offered through their employers. Medicaid is an important safety net for coverage for many of our nations' poor and disabled. Efforts are needed to assure that existing sources of coverage such as Medicaid are maintained while also working to expand other sources of coverage for the uninsured.

Despite efforts since 1970 to increase the number of health care professionals in medically underserved areas, members of racial/ethnic minority groups are still underrepresented in the health care workforce and are more likely than whites to live in neighborhoods that lack adequate health resources. For example, 28 % of Latinos and 22% of African Americans report having little or no choice in where to seek care, while only 15% of whites report this problem. Latinos and African Americans are also twice as likely as whites to rely upon a hospital outpatient department as their regular source of care rather than a doctor's office.

Even when health care resources are geographically accessible, language and cultural barriers are sometimes a problem. Since minority health professionals are more likely than whites to practice in minority and medically underserved areas, a more diverse health workforce could help to improve access and adherence to treatment.

Evidence of racial and ethnic health care disparities is substantial; the evidence-base for developing interventions to eliminate these disparities remains limited. For example, efforts are currently underway to examine how training health care providers to offer culturally and linguistically appropriate services, and increasing the use of financial incentives to promote high quality care may reduce racial and ethnic health disparities. Increasing the knowledge base will require investing in collecting and analyzing data on health care across racial /ethnic groups. Data from national surveys, health insurers and providers are needed to better understand the problems and impact of interventions. Because we have not collected the data or have insufficient sample sizes we know little about patterns of health care use for many racial/ethnic groups.

The nation faces shortages of hospitals, doctors and nurses in the communities that need them the most. Our nation's health care infrastructure requires profound change in order to match the resources to the vision of quality and effective care for all. The United States is facing a shortage of 400,000 nurses and will face a shortfall of 55,100 doctors by the year 2020. The shortages will only increase since many doctors are baby boomers and will retire soon.

In these tough economic times the United States cannot spend its way to better health. We spend 16.5% of our economy on health care, which equates to twice as much per capita as other industrialized nations. Yet we sadly rank at the bottom compared to our peers in terms of measures of quality and outcomes. Our nation needs a human and physical infrastructure that maximizes each health care dollar spent.

A comprehensive, interoperable national health information system can dramatically improve and reduce costs. Electronic medical records (EMR) have the potential of reducing medical errors, improving collaboration between health care providers and reducing the cost of health care. Personal health records (PHR) can empower patients to improve their health through better prevention, management of disease and coordination of care. Linking PHRS and EMRS through a National Health Information Infrastructure will enable a coordinated care "delivery system" vital to improving health.

Home and personal bio-monitoring devices can relieve shortages of providers and care centers by allowing more care to take place in the home. Bio-monitoring technologies are already available for home use enabling patients and doctors to track indicators from sleep patterns to eating habits. An interpretable health information system would allow this information to be collected remotely and fed into the patient's electronic medical record. However, security and privacy safeguards will be required. Without good privacy and security safeguards many patients will not share their medical information.

By 2019, a National Health Information Infrastructure (NHII) system will connect the nation's EMRS and PHRS. This infrastructure runs on open source software standards which allow a high level of interoperability between vendor systems. A patient's PHR is automatically updated with relevant health information after visiting a doctor. The

doctor's EMR is updated automatically from bio-monitors located in the home. Powerful technologies allow both providers and patients to review their data, identify trends and develop programs for healthy living.

The federal government takes a leading role in creating the NHII by setting standards for interoperability, altering payment systems to promote technology adoption and providing funding and training to providers. Federal and state governments can increase spending to increase the number of hospitals and community health centers in underserved communities. The increase in health care spending should focus on prevention. The prevention focus alleviates overcrowding at emergency rooms, but drives demand for more primary care physicians and nurses.

The health of our economy is suffering from the poor health of the U.S. health care system. If we fail to change, our poor, rural and minority communities will continue to suffer from shortages in our health care system.

## **Immigration**

Immigration is important to CWA, our nation, our jobs, and our standard of living. However, until Congress and the White House are able to resolve the issue of citizenship relating to illegal immigrants already in the country, it will be difficult to properly assimilate new arrivals into the nation's workforce and protect all workers' rights. The Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics in a published report states, *Employment in the telecommunications industry is expected to increase by 5 percent over the 2006-16 period, compared with 11 percent growth for all industries combined.* CWA like the majority of organized labor has found it difficult to organize successfully in many parts of the country unless we begin to incorporate immigrant workers as part of our overall organizing strategy. For years management has successfully driven a wedge between domestic workers and immigrant workers. However, the strategies management uses to mine for profit at historic proportions has over the past eight years in particular, encouraged exploitation of both domestic and foreign born workers in equal proportions. This exploitation is now more transparent as the present job market has staggered and spiraled downward.

Organized labor has come under severe attack from management. As more and more workers are laid off, companies are using an economy in disarray as the excuse not to provide a living wage, health care and pensions. However, with a new government that now demands greater corporate transparency and accountability, it is becoming clearer to the average citizen that poor fiscal management and outright corporate greed is the true reason for the failure within our economy. If working people are to assist this new President with re-organizing this country's priorities and holding management accountable, "all" working people must come together to support that message. Just as our environment is deteriorating so is our quality of life. The only resolution is for workers to come together in Solidarity!

The historic inauguration of our new president in January, 2009, along with sweeping democratic majorities in the United States House and Senate have given working families in all communities hope that we can address the issue of immigration from a less punitive point of view. But the work of turning this country around cannot be left solely to the new Administration. It is imperative that workers fight together to help turn this country into the inclusive society that we know it can be, where everyone can work and live in peace, harmony and under the protection provided for us by the Constitution. Immigration Reform along with the implementation of other progressive labor laws like the Employee Free Choice Act can only strengthen our ability to organize all workers, relieving them of the fear of management reprisal or punishment.

There will always be those who are determined to fan the flames of racism and negativity, in an increasingly futile effort to continue promoting agendas that will divide us. But the mood within organized labor continues to stand as the model our country should advance. This positive movement forward is underscored as the leadership of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win continue to promote and agree on a single immigration policy that will benefit organized labor, unorganized workers, and immigrants from every cultural background living and working in this country. Labor's agreement on policy is an expression of solidarity that will continue to anchor our movement as we fight for the "Change We Can All Believe In".

Our country and our labor movement have seen some major changes in demographic density within our communities, in union membership, and in industry make up. We have seen jobs exported with no regard for the ability and needs of unemployed workers in this country qualified to do that work. Since the early "70's", labor has witnessed top executives amass great wealth while worker wages and benefits have plummeted. This has happened, even as worker productivity has increased and improved. We have seen our numbers under collective bargaining agreements severely depleted, again while worker productivity has increased. Real wages have become stagnant and in many cases have fallen since the 1970's. For workers confronted with management greed, an effort to ramp up progress in terms of gaining more job security has seen a "race to the bottom".

These losses in job security and benefit security have not been accidental. In many cases, management's vehement promotion of a cottage industry designed to bust the union movement has divided and separated workers for too long. The crisis we presently face will only add to our demise unless we act to protect our own interests. Passage of the Employee Free Choice Act along with health care reform will allow us to move forward aggressively to organize the unorganized immigrant worker, giving them the dignity and job stability they need to become even more integral and productive members of our society.

The approach to immigration reform has five major interconnected components; (1) formation of an independent commission to assess and manage future flows, based on labor markets shortages that are determined on the basis of actual need. (2) a secure and effective worker authorization mechanism; (3) rational operational control of the

border; (4) adjustment of status for the current undocumented population; (5) improvement, not expansion, of temporary workers programs, limited to temporary seasonal, not permanent jobs.

The CWA Committee on Equity wants to play a major role in demystifying the problems surrounding immigration policy so that all workers can clearly recognize our commonalities and from there, build on our strengths. We can also continue the work already begun within our union to empower workers of color, women, LGBT members, and young workers who will become leaders in tomorrow's labor movement, and are organized labor's future. Organizing more Equity Committee's in our locals will allow the union to truly accomplish our common goal of unity. There are different celebrations of culture and religion that we can learn more about and should promote within our local activities. This will help our members better understand one another. It will foster greater appreciation among us regardless from where we hail. The ultimate goal is to strengthen our relationships with one another.

As we organize for the future we have to create an environment in our work places and union halls where union brothers and sisters can work together to ensure **Change** for working families. We cannot win labor's struggle unless all of our union brothers and sisters are at the table working in unity. The Committee on Equity encourages all of our delegates to return with the message that CWA remains determined to promote a movement that reflects the words, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Immigration and integration remains our goal. One of the most important messages you can take home if you have not already done so, is to build a CWA Equity Committee within your Local. With unity comes strength.

Respectfully Submitted:

Gloria Middleton, Chair  
Secretary-Treasurer  
CWA Local 1180  
District 1

Daisy Brown, President  
CWA Local 2300  
District 2

Esther Pond, Department Representative  
CWA Local 3806  
District 3

Pam Wynn  
CWA Local 4309  
District 4

Michele Luce  
CWA Local 6215  
District 6

Michael Lynch, President  
CWA Local 7800  
District 7

Liz Sorenson, Executive Vice President  
CWA Local 9413  
District 9

Michael Biddle, Representative-At-Large  
CWA Local 13100  
District 13