

Report of the CWA National Women's Committee
to the
65th Annual Convention

The CWA National Women's Committee met in Atlanta Georgia, April 1st and 2nd prior to the CWA National Women's Conference. The conference, held on April 3 – 6, themed "Here's To Good Union Women", was attended by approximately 250 CWA activists, local officers, staff and National Executive Board Members. In addition to workshops, this year's conference had an international flair as well as historical perspective with the inclusion of union sisters from Senegal and South Africa and a Mother Jones presentation from an oral historian. Approximately half the participants had never attended a Women's Conference. The conference gave them an opportunity to network with other union activists, expand their skills and recharge their batteries for the important work they do in their locals.

The Committee would like to recognize and thank Nancy Brady, Member Local 2222 and Kim Gallardo, Vice President Local 4013 for their service on the Committee and welcome Paula Terveer, Executive Vice President Local 2202 and Janet Rich, President Local 4107 to the Committee.

As stated in the Mission Statement of the CWA National Women's Committee, our primary mission is "to raise issues of special concern to women and to develop programs and strategies to make these issues a priority in the work place, in the community and most importantly in the union". In this report we will continue to do that and we will highlight recent successes in addressing these issues.

Equal Pay

Equal pay remains one of labors' priority issues. Equal pay has been law since 1963, but women continue to be paid less than men for similar work. Today women are paid 75 cents for every dollar men receive and for minority women the discrepancy is greater.

The leading national advocate for Pay Equity is the National Committee on Pay Equity (NCPE). Through their leadership, Pay Equity gets local and national attention. They educate the public about pay inequities between the sexes and races. Each year, the NCPE determines Equal Pay Day; the day into the next year women must work to earn wages paid to men in the previous year. Equal Pay Day in 2004 will be April 20th. Unions again will join with civil rights and women's organizations, religious groups, and others in highlighting the day with press releases, rallies, round table discussions and other activities.

There are two bills in Congress aimed at curbing wage discrimination, which work on different aspects of wage discrimination. Both are needed to fully close the wage gap. While we continue to press for new federal legislation, many states are addressing the issue. The most recent example is the Illinois Equal Pay Act recently signed into law expanding the federal Equal Pay Act of 1963 to give about 330,000 more women in the state protection from gender-based discrimination in pay. It applies to public employees and private companies with four or more employees and prohibits paying men more than women for the same or similar work, except when the difference is based on seniority, merit or factors other than gender. Employers found guilty under the law will be required to pay the wage difference for employees, legal costs and face a fine of up to \$2,500 per violation.

New Mexico created an equal pay task force. Utah recently passed a law, requiring a study of state workers' wages to determine if there is a difference based on gender.

Under our collective bargaining agreements, CWA members have pay equity; but this continues to be an issue for working women. Pay Equity is a key advantage of unionization, and should be highlighted in organizing of women. We encourage locals to participate with the NCPE annual Equal Payday campaign.

Organizing

In our 2002 report we noted women's representation in the work force had been growing steadily creating the need for unions to adopt new organizing and internal practices to attract and retain women members. Women should be assigned formal leadership roles and there should be more more organizing campaigns geared specifically toward women or labor sectors where women are found.

In previous reports we discussed that, while more women are working, they remain less organized than their male counterparts, despite that on average women workers are more likely than men to want to join a union. The Committee recommended Locals aggressively seek out and pursue organizing opportunities for women to join CWA. We also recommended women be provided education and training such as the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute and CWA District Organizing Retreats to assist their movement into leadership and organizer roles. We congratulate Vice President Linda Foley and The Newspaper Guild Sector for sponsoring the first CWA Women's Organizing Institute earlier this year. We hope other Districts and Sectors will be inspired to follow their example.

This year we are not going to provide a lot of statistics about women in the labor movement. Recommendations from previous years remain unchanged. Currently 7 of the 16 full time organizers on CWA staff are women. Of the 254 local organizers, 118 are women. We still have work to do.

We recognize we are in tough financial times, but without organizing, times are only going to get worse. Organizing women workers into CWA is our hope for the future. We know it is easier to get a person to join an organization they can relate to - one that consists of people with whom they can identify. Recruiting women into leadership and organizing roles is a necessity. Locals must stop looking to others for a quick fix. They must reach within their ranks and find those young members (especially women) who are looking for a cause and make the union their cause.

Women in Politics

As we move closer to the 2004 elections, it is extremely important we all are involved in these crucial elections. In the last national elections, labor increased its share of the vote to 26% of all votes cast. It is imperative we do no less, and hopefully more in 2004. Much is at stake. In past elections, the women's vote made the difference between a win and a loss. Every local must make sure its members are registered and they vote.

Over the past 2 years more than 1.5 million union voters were added in voter registration drives. There has to be more than registration. We must focus on mobilization, education, worksite visits, member-to-member contacts, mailings, etc. CWA locals must ensure all their members know the issues and the positions of the candidates on the issues. We can make a difference.

There should be more women in public office. And with role models like Rep. Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader, women and young girls clearly understand the possibilities.

Although there has been an increase, it is minimal. Women are 52% of the population, yet our representation in government is markedly disproportionate. Of the 535 seats in the 108th U. S. Congress, women hold 73 or 13.6% - an increase of eight since the 107th Congress. Women hold fourteen or 14% of the 100 seats in the Senate and 59 or 13.6% of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives. Three women serve as Delegates to the House from Guam, the Virgin Islands, and Washington, D.C. There are 80 women in statewide elective executive posts, while women make up only at 22.3 % in state legislatures. The disparity is greater for women of color. Of the 73 women in the 108th U. S. Congress, 18 are women of color. Of the 80 women in statewide elective offices, 5 are women of color. Nationwide of the 1,648 women state legislators, 299 are women of color.

Women have been elected to statewide executive office in 48 of the nation's 50 states, with the exception of Maine and West Virginia. We must encourage women to run for political office at national, state and local levels. Many organizations offer assistance and training for women interested in leadership roles in government.

We should all be engaged in changing policy to improve the lives of women and working families. Let your congressional representative know your opinion on legislation affecting women. Find out what legislation is scheduled for vote in Congress and contact your representatives.

Women's Health

In our 2002 report, we provided extensive information on women's major health issues. We addressed the three major causes of death among women in the United States: heart disease (the leading cause of death), lung cancer (the leading cause of cancer related deaths in women), and strokes (the third leading cause of death). Nothing has changed since last year's report - these remain the top three killers of women in the U.S.

The 2002 convention adopted a comprehensive health resolution, which included support for contraceptive equity coverage in all CWA negotiated health plans. Since then, CWA has provided extensive information on this issue in two publications. In addition, the issue along with other women's health concerns was highlighted at the 2003 Women's Conference. Much attention has been focused on new information about cervical cancer and recent development to address this cancer, which kills over 4,100 each year. When detected early, this cancer can be easily cured. The primary cause of cervical cancer is Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the recognized primary cause of. DNA testing accurately detects HPV and is playing a growing role in screening. Guidelines from the American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (ASCCP) recommend HPV DNA testing as the preferred approach for managing the millions of women each year with inconclusive Pap test results.

The National HPV and Cervical Cancer Campaign, a cooperative effort of women's advocacy and provider organizations, informs women about the importance of regular cervical cancer screening, the link between HPV and cervical cancer, existing and new methods to detect cervical cancer, and encourages women to discuss the disease with their healthcare provider.

We encourage union negotiated health plans to cover all FDA approved HPV DNA testing and educate our members about HPV and its link to cervical cancer.