

## **Report of the CWA National Women's Committee to the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention**

The CWA National Women's Committee met in Washington, D.C., June 14 and 15, 2004. Over the two days, we met with representatives of various CWA departments including organizing and legislative/political. Also, we met with a representative of the AFL-CIO Working Women's Department who shared results of the 2004 "Ask A Working Woman Survey," including those of the nearly one thousand CWA women who responded to the survey. This was one of the highest response rates for any union. Thanks to each of you who went on line to fill out this useful survey.

In addition, we reviewed and discussed a recent report commissioned by the AFL-CIO Executive Council Committee on Women Workers – "Overcoming Barriers to Women in Organizing and Leadership." We are pleased to report that while we must always strive for better representation of women in certain areas of our union, our efforts over the last 20 years have paid off. Today, we have good representation of women at most levels within our union and women and issues of concern to them are represented well on all sides of the CWA triangle.

The Committee also began preliminary planning for our 2005 National Women's Conference, which will be held April 14 through April 16, 2005, in Seattle, Washington. We are looking forward to a terrific conference and ask that you mark your calendars now.

The Committee would like to recognize and thank Arlene Jefferson, Secretary-Treasurer, Local 3406; Terri Newman, President, Local 7214; and Kathy Kinchius, Vice President, Local 9415, for their service and welcome Debra Brown, President, Local 3706; Susie McAllister, Secretary-Treasurer, Local 7704; and Rosa Bernal, Secretary-Treasurer, Local 9588, to the Committee.

This year, while we will highlight issues of specific importance to women, we believe firmly there is one overriding priority — a change in the leadership of this nation. This above all else will protect the gains we have made and help secure our futures.

### **Election 2004**

Women have made considerable progress over the last one hundred years, such as gaining the right to vote, the right to own property and the right to make

our own decisions. But, we have a long way to go before we see true equity. The many issues that women face have not changed. Year after year, the CWA Women's Committee has brought attention to these issues — work life balance, family care and pay equity — but very little, if any, progress is being made legislatively. Changes that have been proposed and passed by the Bush administration have become quite alarming. The needs of working people, especially women, definitely are not on this administration's agenda. In fact, many of our gains are in jeopardy of being reduced or lost entirely.

The issue of greatest concern for women, union and non-union, is finding and keeping a good job with basic benefits. Even though the labor market has expanded recently, recovery and job growth are the slowest since World War II. In addition, the jobs being created today are lower paying than the jobs we have lost. Outsourcing has contributed greatly to unemployment woes and the Bush administration claims, "outsourcing American jobs overseas is a good thing." It is a good thing for corporate bottom lines, but not for the American working person's paycheck.

Women are also greatly concerned over retirement benefits. Women rely on Social Security more than men. For many women, Social Security is their sole means of support. The Bush administration 2001 - 2003 tax cuts are paid for out of the federal surplus — which in large part is made up of funds from the Social Security Trust Fund. In addition, overtime pay is in jeopardy of being taken away from many workers. Since women continue to be paid less for similar work than men, women will be adversely affected by this change. This is especially so since many women are the sole support for their families and rely on overtime pay to make ends meet.

The primary caretakers of children and elderly parents are women. Balancing the needs of family with work is of great concern to working women. Even though FMLA enables women to take time off for family care, many cannot afford to do so since the time off is unpaid. Laws are desperately needed to provide for paid time off for family care as had been recommended by President Clinton.

Explosive health care costs are battering working families. Currently 44 million Americans do not have medical coverage and many of those are women and children. Due to the increases in health care and prescription drug costs, employers who provide coverage are shifting costs to employees. Millions are forced to forego necessary care because they cannot afford the cost. Yet President

Bush has put forward no plan to remedy this crisis. Legislation is clearly needed to solve the health care crisis we now face.

Our biggest gains occur under a Presidency and a Congress that support our issues. None of this can happen if we don't take back the House and the Senate in addition to the Presidency. We need an administration that will work together with Congress on these issues that affect all working people, especially working women. The time is now. We need to focus our efforts on the election process to bring about the changes that are long overdue. We all need to educate our friends and family on the issues at stake, get involved in voter registration drives, and most of all *GET OUT AND VOTE!*

### **Ask a Working Woman Survey**

Lake Snell Perry & Associates conducted the 2004 Ask a Working Woman Survey, for the AFL-CIO. This survey is the fourth in a series designed to examine the challenges working women face in today's economy.

Nearly half (forty-eight percent) of working women have been out of work in the past year. This experience with joblessness is even greater for women of color. Sixty-one percent of African-American women, 56 percent of Latinas, and 52 percent of Asian Pacific Americans have been out of work in the past year.

One-quarter of working women lack basic benefits, which include secure and affordable health insurance, prescription drug coverage, and pension or retirement benefits. Among working women earning less than \$40,000 a year, one half are without basic benefits.

Rising health care costs are the largest worry for working women, therefore, making health care more affordable is our highest legislative priority. Nearly 95 percent say secure, affordable health care is an important benefit. In the past four years, the number of working women ranking legislation to make health care more affordable grew by 24 percentage points — the strongest increase of any issue.

Working women say it is important to have stronger laws to challenge discrimination and unfair treatment on the job. Women want stronger equal pay and affirmative action laws to provide more opportunities for all women.

We should all be engaged in changing policy to improve the lives of working women. Let your congressional representatives know your opinion on legislation affecting women.

### **Family Paid Leave**

On February 5, 1993, President Bill Clinton's first bill signed into law was the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that took effect 6 months later. President George H. Bush twice vetoed it. This provided up to 12 weeks per year for an employee to take unpaid time to care for medical issues for themselves or an immediate family member. However, 10 years later we find that this does not adequately address the needs of working women or their families.

Though FMLA was a critical first step, advocates say they are mobilizing to take more action to help workers balance work and family needs. While a U.S. Department of Labor report shows that more than 35 million workers took leave under FMLA between 1993 and 2000, some 3.5 million additional workers needed leave but were not able to take it. Of these workers, 78 percent said they could not afford to take unpaid time off.

California has adopted the nation's first ever paid family leave law allowing most workers to get partial pay when they take time off from work to care for family members. Signed in September 2002, the law allows workers to collect up to 55 percent of their salary — up to a maximum of \$728 a week — when they take time away from their jobs to care for a new baby, foster or adopted child; or a seriously ill parent, spouse, child or domestic partner. The benefit is funded by employee contributions to the state's disability insurance fund.

Moreover, only three in five U.S. workers are eligible to take leave allowed under the current federal law (FMLA) because it doesn't apply to all employers or workers. The federal law only covers employers with more than 50 employees who have been employed there at least a year.

The California law addresses these shortcomings by providing workers some income when they take family leave and covering nearly all workers in the state — no matter how long they have worked for their employer or how many workers are at their work site.

Activists say the paid leave law in California, home to nearly 10 percent of the U.S. workforce, has the potential to pave the way for family-friendly policies

across the country. Legislators in at least 27 other states have introduced family leave bills.

However, a better solution would be to modify or improve the current FMLA with a federal law to cover all U.S. workers. Senator Ted Kennedy and Representative Rosa DeLauro have introduced such a law entitled the “Healthy Families Act.” This new law would require employers with 15 or more employees to provide 7 days of paid sick leave annually for full-time employees (working at least 30 hours per week or 1500 hours per year) and a pro-rated amount of leave for part-time employees working at least 20 hours per week or 100 hours per year. This leave can be used to meet the employee’s own medical needs or to allow the employee to care for medical needs of a family member.

Almost half (47 percent) of full-time, private sector workers have no paid sick days. The problem is particularly acute for working women, who are still predominantly responsible for meeting family care needs. Almost half (49 percent) of working mothers report that they must miss work when a child is sick. And of these mothers, 49 percent do not get paid when they miss work to care for a sick child.

A recent document titled “Work/Family Conflict, Union Style,” from the Program on WorkLife Law at the Washington College of Law, American University, reviewed 67 arbitrations with key words related to work/family conflict. The report cites 31 cases in which unionized employees were fired or otherwise disciplined for making choices one would expect of a responsible parent or family member. The authors made the following recommendation: unions must bargain with employers for family-friendly concessions in contracts, including creating child care consortiums and referral, creating child care centers, allowing workers to use sick leave for children and ill family members, developing flexible schedules, making overtime less burdensome, and rethinking personal leave.

Union women should be actively setting the bar higher and leading the fight to ensure all working women are protected in the workplace as they try to balance responsibility to their employer with responsibility to their families.

### **Social Security**

Social Security continues to be an important issue for women. We reported in 2002 that women rely more heavily on Social Security than their male counterparts, in part due to longer lives. In addition, they more often have lower

pension benefits and their Social Security benefits are generally lower than those of their male counterparts. For women over the age of 65, Social Security comprises a larger percentage of overall income. The poverty rate for women over the age of 85 is significantly higher than that of men.

The Alliance for Retired Americans, citing the increasing shift away from defined benefit pension plans, calls for strengthening the current Social Security system. In addition, they decry the move to privatize the system, saying this would create unacceptable Enron-like risks for all Americans. Further, they recognize the significant transitional costs associated with privatization, stating it would “recklessly drain funds from the Social Security Trust Funds.” And the sad reality is many of us already know all too well and have suffered the effects of the volatility of the markets with our existing 401(k) plans.

The Bush administration wants to make those tax cuts permanent, which went disproportionately to the wealthiest. According to Alan Greenspan, this would require cuts in Social Security benefits. This is simply not acceptable to women and our families. We are not willing to risk our future security on the stock market.

We must work to be sure we elect those officials who understand the great legacy of the Social Security system and not those who would try to sell us and our children some scheme that would shift future security to private investment systems.

## **Health Care**

Rising health care costs are the biggest worry for working women. Making health care more affordable is the highest legislative priority, according to the AFL-CIO’s Working Woman Survey of 2004.

More than 44 million U.S. residents have no health insurance, and the numbers keep growing. Between 2001 and 2002, the number of uninsured under age 65 increased by 2.4 million, the largest real increase since 1987, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Of the more than 43 million Americans without health insurance, nearly one-quarter or more than ten million are children. Eight out of ten uninsured Americans hold jobs or share households with someone who is employed.

Working families are experiencing double-digit increases in the costs of health insurance; with more out-of-pocket costs for doctor visits and skyrocketing prices for prescriptions, forcing many to delay getting needed medical care or worsen — to decline coverage for themselves or their families because of cost. Health care costs are rising at five times the rate of inflation. As employers refuse to pay their fair share, this trend may result in millions of workers losing their employer-based coverage.

What can we do? Vote in the 2004 elections. There are meaningful proposals to help with this issue ranging from legislation expanding children's coverage to comprehensive health care coverage. One proposed plan would extend health care coverage to 96 percent of all people living in the United States by creating incentives for employers to offer job-based coverage, expanding public child health insurance programs, and making it easier for small employers to provide workers with health coverage through a new insurance plan modeled after the health plan for Members of Congress.

Other proposals would create a strong Patients' Bill of Rights — one that allows doctors to make medical decisions and patients to have access to the specialists they need. And, we need to overhaul the misguided Medicare prescription drug law and replace it with policies that discourage employers from dropping retiree coverage and allow the United States to negotiate lower drug prices. CWA members must demand that their representatives at every level of government address the health care crisis facing our nation.

## **Outsourcing**

Outsourcing of American jobs is a key issue and CWA must remain firmly committed to it within the political process. Outsourcing means another American job has been lost and yet another American worker has been added to the nearly three million whose jobs have been lost under the current administration since January 2001.

Recent studies predict we will lose an additional 830,000 jobs to India, Russia and other low-wage paying nations by the end of 2005. The same study also predicts we will lose 3.4 million jobs representing \$136 billion in U.S. wages within the next 10 years.

There are over 50,000 call centers in the United States employing more than 6 million people. CWA estimates that more than 70 percent of these employees are

women. The AFL-CIO's Working Woman Survey found that 48 percent of working women have been out of work or have a family member or close friend who has been unemployed in the past year.

There are more than 880 corporations or companies sending American jobs overseas, thereby choosing to employ cheap overseas workers instead of American workers. CWA estimates that Verizon has offshored at least 2,000 jobs. More than 40 state governments have also contracted with companies in low-wage paying countries to administer the American food stamp and other taxpayer-funded programs.

Companies that are involved in outsourcing are plainly and simply economic traitors that care about one thing only — their profits. Corporate profits have soared 57.5 percent, up from \$635 billion in 2001 to \$1 trillion in 2003. During the same time frame, private wage and salary income decreased by 1.7 percent.

While corporate CEOs continue to make millions, we, the workers, worry if we will have a job next year or if our children will be able to find good jobs that pay decent wages and have good benefits. What opportunities will be available to our children?

Several legislators have introduced legislation to help curb the off shoring of our jobs. Sen. John Kerry and Rep. Ted Strickland introduced the Consumers Right to Know Act, which would allow consumers to know where they are calling, who they are talking to and what company the employees actually work for. Armed with this knowledge, consumers could choose not to do business with a company that does not provide jobs in the communities where they sell their products. Rep. Rosa DeLauro recently authored legislation that would prevent government contracts from being awarded to foreign companies. Thirty-five states have introduced similar legislation to try to curb the outsourcing of American jobs. Tennessee is the only state that has enacted such a measure, however, several governors have issued executive orders protecting jobs in their states. These orders range from reviewing state contracts to determine which ones are shipping work offshore to committing that all future state contracts will be executed in the United States.

CWA must work hard to elect legislators who are willing to work for their constituents, their communities and their country to stop tax breaks for companies that have moved offshore. These companies need to be recognized as part of the reason for the economic failure of our country.

CWA must work hard to reelect those legislators who stood by our sisters and brothers at SBC during their strike by signing a petition asking the profitable SBC not to exploit offshore opportunities but instead provide good paying jobs for America.

We have watched as our sisters and brothers jobs have left the country; seen the damage the lack of good jobs has done to our families and our communities; watched labor laws weaken; and watched as the economy weakened while a select few continue to rake in millions as our jobs leave America by the millions. It is time for us to stop watching and begin working to elect leaders who don't believe outsourcing is the American way of doing business.

We must continue to educate our members, families, friends, and ourselves about the political process and the negative impact on our lives when we fail to elect legislators who will support America's working families.

We must work hard to GET OUT THE VOTE to ensure we elect those who believe we need to preserve American jobs and not ship them off to low - wage countries, where the exploitation of the workers only benefits the pocketbooks of the economic traitors.

## **Organizing**

Over the last 25 years, women have far exceeded men in becoming new union members and active in organizing campaigns where women are a majority of the workforce. Working women make up 43 percent of union members but 55 percent of newly organized workers. In CWA more than 700,000 men and women are represented in both public and private sectors.

Women are sometimes reluctant to become involved in organizing for many different reasons. Despite the growth of women as union members, they are still the most under-represented as leaders throughout the union movement.

Women's positive views toward unions have declined since 1999, in part due to their perception that unions tell members what to do as opposed to having members make decisions. Also, more women now view unions as ineffective. We must focus on the issues of priority to working women and integrate their concerns into the union agenda. The issues that women will respond to are equal pay, work and family, and control over work hours.

Most unions are perceived as being made up largely of men so the need to appoint, recruit and elect more women to leadership positions at all levels should be a priority. Support or mentoring to help them rise and maintain their positions must go along with that. Women in those leadership positions should then commit and participate in all union events not just those specific to women.

We have before the Senate and the House the EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT. As of July 26, 2004, 207 Representatives and 32 Senators have signed on as co-sponsors. This Act would allow workers to freely choose whether to form unions by signing cards authorizing union representation, provide mediation and arbitration for their first contract disputes and establish stronger penalties for violation of employee rights when workers seek to form a union.

Many would join a union if they had the chance but few are able to exercise this freedom because employers create barriers to their employees' opportunity to choose.

The Free Choice Act would help reduce many of the current barriers to organizing and create a real voice at work for both men and women. But since many of the key industries in which women work – customer care, insurance, banking and retail — remain largely unorganized, unionization would be of special benefit to women workers.

As previously stated, the most important thing we can do to help women as individuals, workers and family members is elect leaders who understand our needs. Don't wait until November 2. If you are a woman, do it for yourself. If you aren't a woman, do it for the women in your life: your mother, sister, daughter, wife, or partner. Now is the time, and as the Working Women's Vote Project states, "Do something for yourself. Vote November 2!"

Respectfully Submitted,

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