

**Report of the  
CWA National Women's Committee  
to the  
70th Annual Convention**



**Communications Workers of America  
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Las Vegas, Nevada**

## **REPORT OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE TO THE 70TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CWA CONVENTION**

The CWA National Women's Committee met in Washington, D.C., May 1-2, 2008, at the International Headquarters.

At this meeting, the Committee elected District 1 Women's Representative Kathy Hernandez as their chairperson. Kathy commits to do everything she can to help the committee carry out the goals according to the mission statement.

The committee met with President Larry Cohen and Secretary Barbara Easterling. Discussions were held regarding the directions and work of the National Women's Committee, and the 2009 National Women's Conference location and dates. No decisions were finalized at this meeting.

The committee discussed the content of their report and worked on finalizing it for this convention. The meeting agenda issues included the CWA Labor 2008 Program and the need for the national and local women's committees to be involved in this process. The Employee Free Choice Act was discussed as well as the Million Member Mobilization Program.

The committee recognizes the need to help educate our members on the CWA Labor 2008 Program.

Districts 4 and 6 reported that they held their 2008 Women's Conference in Columbus, Ohio, April 24–27, 2008. The theme was "Celebrating Our Past, Building Our Future."

The committee would like to recognize and thank Mary Lou Schaffer, whose term is up, for her hard work and service on this committee. Mary Lou served on the Diversity Committee and helped with the process of adding the diversity seats to the National Executive Board. Mary Lou, we thank you and we appreciate all of your hard work.

This year's report highlights issues of importance to women in the areas of financially empowering women, health care, domestic violence, legislation, 2008 elections, research, sick leave, leadership, education, and mobilization.

### **Creating a Will – Empowering Women**

Financial planning can be scary. Whether saving for college, retirement, investing in a 401(k) plan, stocks, bonds, real estate, buying life insurance or creating a will, we are forced to think about the future. This can be overwhelming for anyone, but women more

then men fail to make the necessary arrangements to protect themselves and loved ones. Women are often the caregivers of children, and sick or elderly relatives. One way to care for others is to plan.

Creating a will is important for many reasons. Without a will, the state law will determine who gets your property and a judge may decide who raises your children. A will directs any financial resources and items you may have to your named beneficiaries. Today many people marry more than once, and if you do not create a will, your spouse may be the sole beneficiary and your children may not receive anything. CWA members are entitled to a half-hour free consultation to speak with an attorney through the Union Plus Program.

There are many books about wills for women. There are Internet sites on how to create a will and lawyers who specialize in tax law, estate planning, and creating trusts. Here are some basics:

1. A twenty-one page guide entitled "Planning for the Future: A Guide to Wills and Trusts" can be downloaded from <http://www.giftlegacy.com>.
2. Filling out this information is the first step.
  - Designate an executor. An executor is the person responsible for ensuring your will is followed. You do not need a lawyer or banker in charge of your estate; they may charge excessive fees and cause delays.
  - Decide on what property to include.
  - Decide who will inherit your property.
  - Choose a guardian for your children if they are under the age of 18.
  - Choose someone to manage your children's property.
3. Sign your will in front of witnesses. Get your will notarized.
4. Store your will safely.

**Action:** The CWA National Women's Committee encourages all CWA working women to take charge of their financial futures. We ask our locals to help provide education and basic training to our members on the importance of creating a will. Provide information to our members on the Union Plus Program and encourage them to use this program where it is possible. The Committee is working to empower our women.

Creating a will is empowering, empower your members!

## **Support of Microbicides Research**

### **What are Microbicides?**

Microbicides are vaginal products that can prevent the transmission of HIV and other STDs. Microbicides can come in a variety of forms, including gels, creams, sponges, suppositories, intra-vaginal rings, and films. Some microbicides also contain contraceptives.

The demographics of AIDS changes so rapidly and it is astounding how AIDS has managed to reach epidemic levels in the Hispanic and African American female population in this country, in spite of preventative resources and education.

The creation of microbicides will give women more control over their health. Statistics show that:

- 17.5 million women are living with HIV/AIDS around the globe.
- Approximately 13.2 million women who are infected with HIV reside in sub-Saharan Africa.
- It is estimated that 900 women are infected every year in the United States.
- AIDS is the number one cause of death of African American women between 24–34 and the third leading cause of death for African American women aged 34–44.
- Recently, women between the ages of 15–39 have shown the largest number of new HIV/AIDS diagnoses.

### **Why are Microbicides Important?**

Microbicides would allow women to have control over their sexual health. Microbicides could empower women who aren't always able to abstain from sex or insist on monogamy. They would also empower women whose partner refuses to use condoms. Women would not have to rely on a partner when making decisions about their sexual health. They would not have to negotiate condom use or fear violence from their partners for discussing condoms. Condoms are still considered the most effective way to protect against HIV and other STDs. Microbicides could be another effective option for protection.

### **Why are Microbicides Important for HIV-Positive Women?**

Microbicides may be able to protect HIV-positive women from becoming co-infected with

a different strain of the virus. The product could enhance the sexual life of women who are HIV-positive and give them the chance to conceive children naturally. It would also protect HIV-positive women from vaginal infections and other sexually transmitted infections, both of which could potentially damage an already weakened immune system.

### **Why are Microbicides Important Right Now?**

Statistics indicate that the AIDS virus has reached epidemic levels in this country and Africa.

- Over 76% of women who are receiving some kind of care for HIV/AIDS are mothers. It is estimated that if microbicides were to work only 60% of the time, they could prevent 2.5 million HIV infections in three years for women and men around the world.
- Today, for each dollar that is invested in AIDS research, approximately .03 cents is invested in microbicides research.

### **What is the Status of Microbicides Today?**

As of today, microbicides are not available and are still in the developmental stage. Any development of microbicides needs to be done with an awareness of how gender, health, development policies, and culture all play into the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Hopefully, with the proper funding, research, and testing, microbicides will be available in the near future.

### **What Can You Do About Microbicides?**

Because microbicides are in the developmental stage, there is a lot to learn. Educate yourself; you need to understand why they are important. Search the Internet about microbicides. The Women's Collective has a wealth of information available online at <http://www.womenscollective.org>.

Talk to your friends about microbicides, have them generate discussions, learn from each other, and spread the word about microbicides.

We urge members to actively support the Microbicide Development Act (MDA), designated as H.R. 1420 in the House and S. 823 in the Senate. The goals of the bill are to:

- Create a unit within the National Institute of Health's (NIH), National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) that is dedicated to developing and researching microbicides.

- Increase the funding for the development and research of microbicides at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NIH, and The United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
- Require the NIH and other federal agencies to work together in the development and research of microbicides.

**Action:** We urge our CWA delegates to call and visit their Legislative Representatives and encourage them to support the bill MDA (H.R. 1420).

We ask our CWA local and local women's committees to bring concerned women together in order to educate and advocate for the development and research of microbicides, and further ensure that the communities' opinions and ideas surrounding microbicides are heard in local, national, and international development.

### **Domestic Violence 2008**

Domestic violence is still on the rise; you will be shocked by how often it actually happens. Every nine seconds, someone is a victim of domestic violence. Abuse happens in every culture, every country, and within every age group. It affects people from all socioeconomic, educational, and religious backgrounds. Out of the 5.5 million partner victimizations, 15.4 percent are gay men, 11.4 percent are lesbians, and 7.7 percent are heterosexual men.

As many as 324,000 women each year experience intimate partner violence during their pregnancy. Homicide is the leading cause of death overall for pregnant women. Children that are exposed to domestic violence are at risk for developmental problems, psychiatric disorders, school difficulties, aggressive behavior, and low self-esteem. Many survivors do not need mental health treatment and many symptoms resolve once they and their children are safe and have support.

Annually in the United States, reports show one million women and 371,000 men are stalked by an intimate partner. Women are significantly more likely than men to be stalked by intimate partners. In fact, it is 60 percent to 30 percent, respectively. While 80 percent of women who are stalked by former husbands are physically assaulted by that partner, 30 percent are sexually assaulted. Rapes and sexual assaults committed by strangers are more likely to be reported to the police than rapes committed by "non-strangers," including intimate partners, other relatives, friends or acquaintances. Reports show that 18 percent of women have experienced a completed or attempted rape at some point in their lives, much higher than the reported three percent of men.

Health-related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide committed by intimate partners exceed \$5.8 billion each year. Of that amount, nearly \$4.1 billion are for direct medical and mental health care services and \$1.8 billion are for the direct costs of lost productivity or wages. Treatment in the emergency rooms account for 37 percent of violence-related crimes by a current or former spouse (male or female intimate partners).

Committee member Vonda Hardy tells the following story which highlights this issue: “On January 3, 2008, I was informed of a US Airways employee who had been terminated for coming to work inebriated. While preparing for her hearing, she confided in me that on the night of January 2nd her husband had mentally and physically abused her so badly that she did indeed have a few drinks that night to calm down and went to work the next morning. While her level was well below the legal limit, they fired her. Her husband made sure the bruises were always under her clothing, invisible to all, but this time she had pictures. The pictures of her abuse are in her file locked away at the union hall for safekeeping. For several years, she had been a victim of domestic violence and that night was the worst she had endured. We had her hearing and we won her job back. I am happy to say she is back at work and she and her daughter are safe. This one has a happy ending, many times they do not.”

Here are some early signs of abuse:

- Quick whirlwind romance.
- Wanting to be with you all the time; tracking what you are doing and who you are with.
- Jealousy concerning any attention to or from others.
- Attempts to isolate you with a loving behavior just to keep you all to themselves.
- Criticizing your friends and family and convincing you that they don't really care about you.

Just ask yourself:

- Have you ever been afraid of your partner?
- Does your partner try to control where you go, what you do, and who you talk to?
- Does your partner accuse you of having affairs?
- Does your partner control your finances?
- Do you worry about your partner's moods to the point you walk on egg shells for

- fear of making him/her angry?

If you said yes to any of these questions, you could be suffering abuse. It is important to remember, this is not your fault and you do not have to live in fear. Do not feel you have to face domestic violence alone.

There are many domestic violence bills that are currently pending in Congress. Many bills and resolutions have been proposed by members of Congress, but may not have had any action taken on them on their path to becoming law. In fact, the vast majority of proposed legislation never becomes law.

**Action:** CWA Women's Committee will work to help build social intolerance toward domestic violence. The best solution is to prevent violence before it starts. Start today; assist us in educating and empowering women to live free of domestic violence and abuse. As a resident of your state, you are unique to your senators. We need to continue to push for additional cosponsors of the legislation and ask our supporters to work to get the bill passed and signed into law quickly.

## Health Care

There is absolutely no excuse as to why every man, woman, and child is not covered with health insurance. It is shameful that we are one of the richest countries in the world, and we can't provide a health care system affordable for everyone.

The uninsured come from every race and ethnic group, every age group, and every income level. Compared to the general population, people who lack health insurance are younger, have lower incomes, and are more likely to be a member of a minority group. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the largest percentages of uninsured can be found in Texas (30 percent), and Florida (27 percent) – two of the 20 states in which at least 20 percent of the population between the ages of 19 and 64 are uninsured. An estimated 18,000 to 22,000 Americans die each year because they don't have health coverage, according to studies conducted by the nonpartisan Institute of Medicine and the Urban Institute.

We desperately need health care reform. We are the people and it's time we make the government and politicians listen to us. Universal health care is a must for all.

**Action:** We encourage the delegates attending this convention to take the time and responsibility to educate our members back home. We must support and hold accountable legislators who will make health care a priority for our families here in the United States of America.

Join in to help make CWA's Labor 2008 Program a success and we will have health care for all.

## **2008 Election**

This year's presidential election will be like none we have experienced before. For the first time in the history of our nation, the Democrat Party has the opportunity to elect an African American or female President. We may differ on which of these two candidates best represents our own ideals, but the obvious commonality is the profound need for change.

Women have the opportunity to be the driving force in this election based on sheer numbers. It is important for us to educate ourselves on how the candidates we support vote on the issues that matter to us. The issues are to be given careful consideration. One of these two candidates will inherit a war that has outlasted World War II with no end in sight; a country that is trillions of dollars in debt; millions without proper health care; a credit crisis that leaves millions of Americans facing foreclosure; increasing energy prices; a country on the edge of a recession; and increasing job losses. We desperately need a president who will safeguard our nation without sacrificing our liberties.

The economic and social policies of the Bush administration have taken a disastrous toll on middle class working families, and the recovery process will not be instant. In previous elections, the more gender specific issues of affordable childcare, domestic violence, women's health, and equal pay have traditionally been a focus for Democrats and they deserve equal consideration in this election.

A strong display of support and a genuine interest in the nation's political process by women of all backgrounds and generations will see its reward in November. It is imperative that we try to increase the number of women participating in American democracy as voters and future candidates.

**Action:** The CWA Women's Committee recommends that all members participate by donating time and/or money and making sure they VOTE. We must encourage our family and friends to register and VOTE.

## **Breast Cancer Research Stamp**

The Breast Cancer Research stamp was the first in our nation's history dedicated to raising funds for a special cause. The research stamp was issued on July 29, 1998.

Congress has reauthorized the stamp three times, most recently in 2007, extending the sale through 2011.

The stamp was designed by Ethel Kessler of Bethesda, Maryland, and illustrated by Whitney Sherman of Baltimore, Maryland. The stamp depicts Diana, the huntress and goddess of fertility, reaching behind her head to pull an arrow from her quiver to fend off an enemy; in this case, breast cancer. The image reflects the same position that a woman assumes for a breast self-exam and mammography.

The stamp currently costs .55 cents and is deemed valid as a first-class stamp. The additional .13 cents charged for each stamp is directed to research programs at the National Institute for Health, which receives 70% of the proceeds; and the Department of Defense Breast Cancer Research Program (BCRP), which receives the remaining 30% of the proceeds. Since going on sale, over 806 million stamps have been sold, and more than \$60.1 million dollars has been raised for breast cancer research nationally.

About three million women in the United States are living with breast cancer; one million who have yet to be diagnosed. One out of eight women will get breast cancer at some point in her lifetime, just as one out of every six men will have prostate cancer. The Committee recognizes that more and more men are being diagnosed with breast cancer and we strongly recommend that they follow the procedure for prevention as recommended for women.

The disease claims another woman's life every 13 minutes in the United States. Breast cancer is considered the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in every major ethnic group in the United States, other than skin cancer. Though much less common, the American Cancer Society estimates that about 2,030 American men will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year.

The information was collected from both Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and the United States Postal Service websites: <http://feinstein.senate.gov/public/> and <http://www.usps.gov>, respectively.

**Action:** Help support breast cancer awareness and funding of a cure by purchasing the Breast Cancer Research stamp when buying stamps.

### **The Breast Cancer Site**

The Breast Cancer Site was founded to help offer free mammograms to women in need—women for whom early detection would not otherwise be possible. Since its launch in October 2000, the site has established itself as a leader in online activism and

in the fight to prevent breast cancer deaths.

The Breast Cancer Site provides a feel-good way to help promote awareness and prevent breast cancer deaths every day—through easy online activities.

With a simple, daily click of the pink button at The Breast Cancer Site, visitors help provide mammograms to those in need. Visitors pay nothing. Mammograms are paid for by the site's sponsors and distributed by the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.

**Action:** Go to <http://www.thebreastcancersite.com> daily and click on the pink box that says "Click Here to Give, It's FREE!"

## **Paid Sick Leave**

Millions of Americans are being forced to choose between taking care of a sick child or family member and losing a day's pay—or even losing a job. In a nation that values families, no worker should have to make this impossible choice.

Americans want to be responsible workers and be able to take care of their families. In 78 percent of today's homes, both parents work for pay, and a typical couple in America now works close to 90 hours per week. But our policies lag desperately—and families are struggling as a result. We can and must do better. And we will if we truly value families.

The City of San Francisco passed the Paid Sick Leave Ordinance February 5, 2007. The legislative findings that led to the passage of this ordinance were that: "without paid sick leave, employees come to work sick and may worsen their condition; and that an employee who works when sick may expose customers and other employees to infectious diseases." The same legislative findings found that: "without paid sick leave, employees face difficulty caring for sick children or other family members; and without paid sick leave, employees may send their sick children to school or a childcare center, thereby exposing other children to infectious diseases."

This ordinance applies to any person who performs work for an employer within San Francisco, including on a part-time or temporary basis, as long as they work at least 56 hours a year. For every 30 hours worked in the City and County of San Francisco, an employee accrues one hour of paid sick leave. Also, for an employer with fewer than 10 persons who work for compensation during a given week, there is a cap of 40 hours of accrued paid sick leave; or for employees of other employers, there is a cap of 72 hours of accrued paid sick leave. Accrued paid sick leave does not expire, but carries over from year to year.

State lawmakers took the first step toward making California the only state to require employers to provide paid sick days to workers through AB 2716. The bill is sponsored by the California Labor Federation, which released a new study conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Among its findings: newly-covered workers would use an average of 1.7 sick days per year; the program would cost employers \$1.3 billion a year; and employers would save \$2.3 billion annually, mainly from reduced turnover costs.

Although opponents of this bill feared that mandated paid sick time would create the potential for abuse, employees calling in sick when they are not, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that half of workers who now have paid sick days do not take any days off for illness in a given year.

Besides California, the District of Columbia passed a similar statute to the San Francisco Ordinance earlier this year; and the legislatures in Massachusetts and Ohio are also considering bills this year.

**Action:** The CWA Women's Committee urges our union at all levels to support legislative activities to encourage communities and states to support paid sick leave legislation. Having paid sick leave will help working families care for their sick family members in time of injury and illness.

### **Union Members, Union Leaders – Union Women**

Women are an increasing proportion of our CWA union membership. Although women make up a large part of union memberships, they are not well represented within union leadership. Unions shape policy in both economic and political life. Women are an important part of the equation and can promote their well-being and workers' rights.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), a nonpartisan research group, recently issued a report that can help local unions promote women's voices and leadership. CWA locals should emphasize and reflect women's values and in turn this can inspire more women to get involved in leadership roles. Formalizing a mentoring program is an important part of the process in engaging women. Having women as powerful and effective union leaders can benefit women as a whole.

Promoting women more visibly within unions can benefit everyone by ensuring that workers' issues are prioritized, from contract negotiations to representing individual workers in lobbying and other political work.

The report outlines seven strategies to promote women's leadership in unions. Locals'

strategies should include the support and involvement in groups such as the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), 9to5 National Association of Working Women, Chicago Women in the Trades (CWIT), and Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc.

These groups provide resources and support for women's union work through conferences, research, and other activities. Encouraging or even financially supporting women's involvement in them could be an effective way to promote women's leadership and solidarity with one another.

**Action:** The CWA National Women's Committee encourages all locals to establish a mentoring program as part of the process in engaging and empowering women to become union leaders in their union.

The Committee encourages all CWA working women to promote membership in CLUW, 9to5, CWIT, and Oregon Tradeswomen; and to download a copy of "I Knew I Could Do This Work, Seven Strategies that Promote Women's Activism and Leadership in Unions" at <http://www.iwpr.org>. Locals should use this training as a guide to educate their members on the power of the involvement of women in CWA.

### **2008 Ask a Working Woman Survey**

The AFL-CIO and Working America are conducting The 2008 Ask a Working Woman Survey. There was a survey in 2004 and 2006.

Real action will be taken by the AFL-CIO and Working America on the results of these surveys.

Through the last surveys, they learned that so many women were not guaranteed overtime pay, and they fought to stop the Bush administration from making overtime regulations worse.

Because it was clear through the survey that there are so many women and families that did not have health care, they lead the fight to expand the State's Children Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

There were so many issues that were identified through this survey.

**ACTION:** The CWA Women's Committee is asking all of our CWA women to participate in the survey through the link provided on the CWA website <http://www.cwa-union.org>.

We are also asking all CWA locals and delegates to publicize and promote the Ask a

Working Woman's survey in your newsletters, on your websites, in your meetings, on the bulletins boards, and through all communications with our CWA women members.

### **Support for the CWA Executive Board Diversity Committee**

The primary mission of CWA's National Women's Committee is to raise issues of special concern to women and to develop programs and strategies to make these issues useful and a priority in the workplace, the community and, most importantly, our union.

The CWA National Women's Committee has identified various issues in past years, which represent the difficulties women are up against in society and the workplace. The Women's Committee feels that it is time to bridge the gap and raise awareness to allow women the same opportunities as our union brothers. We look forward to the Executive Board Diversity Committee putting these issues on their agenda.

The National Women's Committee thanks the Executive Board Diversity Committee for the issues they have addressed to date.

### **Million Member Mobilization**

The National Women's Committee supports the CWA Million Member Mobilization to restore workers' rights and encourages all of our CWA women to get involved. This program gives you an opportunity to learn about the issues that we are faced with and how to communicate our involvement to more of our members in the locals.

### **Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA)**

We find that few of our members in the field today know what the Employee Free Choice Act is or that it is the highest legislative priority for CWA and the labor movement today.

The Employee Free Choice Act will strengthen penalties for companies that coerce or intimidate employees who are trying to form unions and bargain. It will establish mediation and binding arbitration when the employer and workers cannot agree on a first contract and enable employees to form unions when a majority signs authorization cards.

The Employee Free Choice Act is the focus of our Million Member Mobilization Program. President Larry Cohen has asked that CWA make a commitment of signing up support for the Employee Free Choice Act of 15%. This is 5% above the 10% commitment made by other AFL-CIO unions. The signatures will help to urge the new president and Con

gress to enact the Employee Free Choice Act.

The Employee Free Choice Act will help CWA and the labor movement to become stronger and more effective at delivering at the bargaining table for our members. The Employee Free Choice Act will help to organize, which will increase our numbers and increase our power to negotiate at the bargaining table. There is strength in numbers!

**Action:** The CWA National Women's Committee strongly recommends that all delegates commit individually and collectively to engage in the support that will educate and motivate our members back home to become active and help apply the pressure on their legislators to pass the Employee Free Choice Act.

We believe educating our members will cause them to have a deeper commitment and participate in this campaign.

Respectively submitted,

Kathleen Hernandez, Vice President  
CWA Local 1031

Judy Dowdy, Member  
CWA Local 6222

Claudia Cole, Vice President  
CWA Local 2336

Susan McAllister, Secretary-Treasurer  
CWA Local 7704

Vonda Hardy, President  
CWA Local 3640

Gayle Crawley, Vice President  
CWA Local 9410

Karen Aply, East Area Representative  
CWA Local 4671

Mary Lou Schaffer, President  
CWA Local 13550