

Communications Workers of America

CWA National Women's Committee Report

Presidents' Meeting
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CWA National Women's Committee

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Introduction

The labor and civil rights movements are inextricably linked in the fight to improve the lives of our members, working families and the broader community. As one of the leading international unions, CWA has played a central role in those movements from the start. We know that when we connect with civil and women's rights groups—with to our communities—on the issues that affect us all, we grow stronger together. As you can see in the report below, our collective efforts have made a difference in everything from working to help more women win elected office and enter traditionally male fields, to fighting to end the insidious problems of domestic violence and sexual harassment.

One way we've pulled all these issues together is through CWA Strong. It's our vehicle to combine member mobilization, participation and activism to fight for the vital issues mentioned above, and to advance our core work of protecting jobs and improving wages, benefits and a secure retirement. It's how we promote economic justice for all. Now is the time for an "all hands on deck" movement. By working together and being CWA Strong, we can build on our successes and move into the future stronger than ever.

WE ARE CWA STRONG!

The *Janus* Supreme Court Decision: A Corporate-Led Attack on Public Sector Unions and All Workers

If the U.S. Supreme Court has not issued a decision in the case of *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* by the time you read this, it will any day now. And it's almost certain that the conservative justices on the court will band together to rule against AFSCME and deal a huge blow to working people's freedom to join strong unions and speak up for themselves and their communities.

The case, which affects unions that represent workers in the public sector, centers around unions' right to collect "fair share" fees from workers who choose not to join the union. These non-members still benefit from the union's collective bargaining efforts—since the union is obligated to represent everyone, whether they're members or not. Workers have the right not to join the union, but they still benefit from the wages, benefits, workplace protections and other policies the union negotiates. Right now, based on decades of legal precedents, unions in the majority of states—aside from those with "right-to-work" (for less) laws—are allowed to collect fair share dues. That fair share fee is sometimes referred to as an agency fee.

But this case is not really about the law. It's an attempt by corporations and billionaires to take away the power of unions—one of the only groups with the organized power to fight their efforts to rig the economy against working families and in favor of the rich and powerful. These attempts to undermine unions and the gains we have won for working families have been going on for years. But the election of Donald Trump and the tainted confirmation of Justice Neil Gorsuch have emboldened these corporate interests to use the Supreme Court to obtain a sweeping ruling that would essentially impose a national right-to-work rule on the entire public

sector workforce nationwide. You can be sure our opponents will want to expand these anti-union policies to every private sector union as well.

It's not hard to see what might result. Fewer resources will diminish unions' ability to fight for the things that all workers need and deserve: a living wage, retirement security, health insurance, safe workplaces and much more.

Union membership is especially important for communities of color and women, historically providing a ladder to the middle class and helping them earn their fair share of the wealth. Belonging to a union leads to higher wages and better benefits: African-American union members earn 14.7 percent more than their non-union peers. The union pay advantage for Latinos is even greater: 21.8 percent. For women, reports shows that union women make more money than their nonunion counterparts across the country.

Martin Luther King Jr. was standing with striking AFSCME sanitation workers in Memphis when he was assassinated in 1968. He knew that economic rights, civil rights and voting rights are intertwined, and he saw the false promise of the so-called right to work. "Wherever these laws have passed," he said, "wages are lower, job opportunities are fewer and there are no civil rights."

Losing the *Janus* decision will be an enormous blow, but it won't mean the end of the labor movement. We've seen what can happen when workers stand together—a determined group of workers fighting strategically can prevail in spite of labor laws stacked against them. We've see hundreds of thousands of workers forming and joining unions. For example, after the Iowa legislature passed a bill gutting public sector collective bargaining rights, we saw CWAers overwhelmingly vote to keep their union. And we've seen young people inspired to fight the status quo by joining the labor movement to gain the rights unions offer.

CWA locals with public sector members have been mobilizing members and working aggressively to turn fee payers in full union members as part of our far-reaching CWA Strong program, particularly in New York, New Jersey, Ohio, New Mexico and California. We are engaging members, signing up non-members, strengthening bargaining, defeating anti-worker legislation and fighting back efforts to destroy our union. Locals with public sector members have taken the lead in engaging members because we know our union's strength comes from the activism of our members. We are CWA Strong!

Seizing This Moment with a Movement: Women Running for Office

In the wake of the 2016 presidential election, many folks were hit with a wave of disbelief and helplessness. As a direct result of the election, women organized the biggest march in U.S. history. The Women's March took place the day after President Trump's inauguration and drew an estimated 5 million participants. Pink knitted hats, representing a woman's right to choose, made their way into the mainstream. The #MeToo movement later opened the floodgates for women to call out perpetrators of sexual harassment who once acted with impunity.

2018 is shaping up to be the year of the woman in American politics. As of the end of April, a record 527 women were running for the U.S. House and Senate, and that number will likely rise, since the deadline to file for office in many states still hasn't passed. That's a 67 percent increase from 2016. And it doesn't include women running for governor and races at the state and local levels.

According to Emily's List, 34,000 women interested in running for office have reached out to the organization, which encourages political activism for women. A Rutgers University study found that there are twice as many women running for office in 2018 than in 2016. These extraordinary numbers show that women are ready to lead. It reinforces that those in power have been working for special interest groups for far too long instead of for the people. Now, women have decided to do something about it.

While this wave of activism and empowerment is incredibly exciting, women still face a myriad of obstacles, such as antiquated beliefs about the roles of women. Phoenix City Council Member Kate Gallego, who is currently running for mayor, said she is constantly asked how she can run for office and be a good parent at the same time. This question is rarely, if ever, asked of men in politics. The stereotype of women as mothers and nothing else runs deep in our culture.

Another barrier is that many women are less likely to feel prepared to run for office. One study found that men who did not think they were qualified to run for office were far more likely to run than women who felt the same way. It seems Trump is far from alone in running confidently for office without worrying about his qualifications. But in 2018, Trump himself is largely responsible for the change in attitude among women, who are galvanized by their disgust at his policies and actions.

Additionally, child care costs raise an obstacle for some women. In order to win an election, you have to be willing to knock on doors, day after day, in order to get your message out to the voters. This costs money, especially if you have children who need to be cared for. A recent ruling should help alleviate this issue for some. The Federal Elections Commission ruled unanimously that federal candidates can use campaign contributions to pay for child care expenses.

CWA must continue to support more diversity in electoral candidates if what we truly want is better representation. Since women make up more than half the population and are increasingly becoming primary breadwinners, it is imperative that they have a voice at the table, as well. It is appalling that in 2018, only 20 percent of Congress is female and no state legislature has ever reached 50 percent female representation. We must do better, and this change ultimately starts within our union. We have to be bold and innovative if we are to take back the power from those who consistently use it to hurt us.

CWA has supported and will continue to support candidates at every level who stand with us, and it's a huge sign of progress that more and more of those candidates are women. In addition, the union will continue to encourage and support our own members, male and female, who seek office. As we've seen with members of our union and other unions in elected office, women are in a unique position to understand what working people need.

CWA, through its Political Bootcamp trainings and development of CWA-member activists, will continue to contribute to more women rising in our union and our political system.

The constant threats against and dismantling of the rights we have fought so hard to win, especially under the current presidential administration, can leave us feeling exasperated. Yet we do not have the luxury of waiting around to see what happens next. We have to take things into our own hands, and that is exactly what the women of CWA are doing.

#MeToo: Revealing and Confronting Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Sexual harassment has no place in our society, much less in our workplaces. The #MeToo movement has brought long-overdue attention to the issue, and while it started with high-profile fields like entertainment and journalism, it has quickly spread well beyond those industries to virtually every profession. The spotlight has also broadened to include the voices and stories of women who work in low-wage industries, such as hotel, restaurant and domestic workers.

Women in many traditionally male—and heavily unionized—occupations, such as construction and other trades, as well as many service occupations, have faced especially tough and often hidden struggles against harassment as a regular part of their work days. But let's be clear: This is an issue that crosses every profession and industry, including every one where CWA members work.

Earlier this spring, for example, a survey by the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA-CWA) found that more than two-thirds of flight attendants have experienced sexual harassment during their careers. In the past year alone, nearly 20 percent say they've experienced physical sexual harassment from passengers. Unfortunately, almost 70 percent of flight attendants say they've seen no efforts by airlines to address the problem.

Sexual harassment in the workplace and the broader society is hardly a new problem. What's changed is the greater focus on the issue, the bravery of women stepping forward to confront their harassers, and the diminished tolerance for those accused of harassment, no matter how prominent they might be.

Sexual harassment can range from sexual assault and unwanted touching to things like sexual comments and inappropriate jokes. According to some reports, more than 25 percent of women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. The result is that too many working people, most of them women but men as well, dread going to work. Shame and fear prevent the vast majority of victims from reporting harassment. And no wonder—one study showed 75 percent of those who did speak up experienced retaliation.

The growing awareness and attention from #MeToo makes this the opportune time to organize and address the problem of sexual harassment directly and aggressively. Unions like CWA are one of the best vehicles we have to address sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Through bargaining and organizing as a voice for workers, union members can use their collective voice to make sure that every workplace is a safe one, marked by dignity and respect. That includes negotiating anti-discrimination language that can be enforced quickly and effectively; working with employers to develop effective training for managers; holding employers accountable for their legal obligation to prevent sexual harassment; and bringing public attention to especially vulnerable groups, such as undocumented workers or workers on guest-worker visas that are tied to employers.

CWA has also addressed this problem head-on. Earlier this year, all International CWA officers and employees completed sexual harassment training that focused on prevention and CWA procedures for reporting and investigating allegations of sexual harassment, demonstrating CWA's commitment that sexual harassment has no place in our union.

In addition, CWA officers participated in an AFL-CIO roundtable titled "Addressing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: There Is Power in a Union," which was held earlier this year.

Domestic Violence: A Silent Epidemic

Unless you see actual evidence of the injuries, domestic violence is an issue that is often hidden behind closed doors. Victims can be any race, age, sexual orientation, economic class, education level, immigration status, religion or gender. It can happen with couples who are married, living together or dating. This is a basic issue of human rights and dignity: Every person should feel safe and secure in his or her own home. For unions, it's also a vital workplace issue because it affects our co-workers and their ability to do their jobs without the constant fear of violence looming over them.

Broadly defined, domestic violence is a pattern of behavior in a relationship that is used to gain power and control over an intimate partner. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States—more than car accidents, assaults and rapes combined. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional and economic, and also can involve psychological threats or actions, such as stalking and cyber-stalking.

Because of its hidden nature, domestic violence is an issue that rarely gets the attention it deserves—at least before some awful tragedy occurs. But consider this horrifying statistic: The number of American troops killed in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2001 and 2012 was 6,488. The number of American women murdered by current or former male partners during that time was 11,766. That's nearly double the number of casualties during an actual war.

It is worth noting the traumatic impact of domestic violence on the children who witness it. One in 10 children in the United States are exposed to domestic violence, and the majority of them are under 6 years old. Witnessing family violence is a traumatic experience; seeing a family member or loved one being threatened or beaten can shatter a young child's sense of safety and security and have long-term consequences on brain development and emotional well-being.

Studies indicate that child witnesses, on an average, are more aggressive and fearful and more often suffer from anxiety, depression and other trauma-related symptoms when compared with children who have not witnessed abuse.

Domestic violence often becomes a workplace issue as well. After a victim leaves an abusive partner, the workplace may become the only place the abuser can locate and harm her. Each year, husbands and boyfriends commit about 13,000 acts of violence against their wives or girlfriends while they are at work. The abuse also causes problems that can make it hard for victims to even do their jobs. For example, 56 percent of them are late for work at least five times a month, 28 percent leave early at least five days a month, and 54 percent miss at least three full days of work a month.

For women of color, issues of domestic violence can be compounded. Nearly 30 percent of African-American women are victimized by intimate-partner violence in their lifetimes, including rape, physical assault and stalking, according to the National Violence Against Women Survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That rate is 35 percent higher than for white females, and about 2.5 times the rate for women of other races. Furthermore, African-American women who are victims of domestic violence are less likely than white women to seek help through social services, battered women's programs or even a trip to the hospital for treatment.

Reaching out to members who are facing violence in their homes, and crafting contract language and policies that help members on the job as well, are part of unions' long tradition of standing up for human rights. CWA stands behind the victims of domestic violence and is committed to helping combat this societal ill. Many of our locals' Women's Committees hold awareness drives and supply drives for women's shelters. Locals should encourage officers and stewards to familiarize themselves with the signs of domestic violence to provide support for victims by listening without judgment; sharing resources, hotline numbers and shelter numbers; asking "how can I help you?"; and believing victims.

Expanding Opportunities for Women in the Trades

Most Americans today work in entirely single-sex peer groups, and gender segregation has barely budged in the past two decades. In the United States, only 6.3 percent of women work in male-dominated occupations. Although the percentage of women working in the trades is small, they are there and their impact is amazing. Women in these professions, including brick masons, steelworkers and carpenters, are constantly breaking through typical gender norms—challenging stereotypes associated with masculinity and femininity. Women in the trades often face discrimination, sexual harassment and the unwillingness of their male counterparts to train them. Yet, through all of their hardships and struggles, they persist.

Think of all the amazing women and their accomplishments we celebrate these days. You know who's often missing? Blue-collar women—the construction workers, electricians, truck drivers and other pioneers in occupations that are still dominated by men. While unfortunate, it's not surprising, because employment patterns have been slow to change, especially in male-dominated professions.

Fifty years ago, the most common job for a woman was secretary. The most common job today? You guessed it—secretary. This is a vital economic issue for women. White women make 20 percent less than their male counterparts, and the gap is even worse for women of color. While there has been steady progress to narrow this gap, at the current pace, it will take more than 40 years for women overall to reach pay parity; for Hispanic women, the target date for pay parity is 2233. That's right, 215 years from now.

This is where unions have played a vital role and will continue to be central to efforts to open up far more opportunities for women to pursue careers in traditionally male fields. Union

apprenticeship programs have provided one of the best vehicles for women to enter these careers because they offer paid training, free education and mentoring. They also offer a great opportunity for women to organize and have a voice on the job through their union.

The economic benefits are clear: The median weekly income of a union construction worker is higher than in 16 of the 20 most common occupations for women. These careers often don't require higher education—paid on-the-job training is common—and that means less college debt, more time to raise a family and opportunities for women who don't want to pursue traditional education pathways.

But more than that, these tradeswomen love their jobs. As the makers of a film called “Hard Hatted Woman” put it, they love working with tools and materials, they love working outside, and they love pointing to a skyscraper or a bridge and being able to say, “I built that.” And yes, they love their paycheck.

In CWA, our ranks include a number of female pioneers. These are women like Shannon Opfer of CWA Local 2107, a cable splicer for Verizon, who routinely climbs 18-foot poles and carries heavy reels of cable. Her advice: “Don't be afraid to try. And don't listen to any of the men who say you can't.”

And they're women like Melanie Fuller, a toolmaker for Lockheed Martin. She says many women don't even know what skilled trades are, much less how to pursue a career in them. “We need to tell them. Skilled trades aren't a man's world anymore. Women need to know and have confidence that their company and union are behind them and that they support them and expect nothing short of equal treatment among their employees.”

Gender gaps in work are symptoms of deeper divides in society and only serve to exacerbate them. If we don't make an effort to change the dynamic, nothing will change. Thankfully, many unions and companies are working toward gender parity. For example, Nontraditional

Employment for Women in New York City helps train women and also offers a support group for women who want to enter the trades or a manufacturing business as a career.

The International Union of Operating Engineers (IUE-CWA) recently created a Women's Program to help train women in manufacturing and other male-dominated jobs. The goal of the program is to create local women's committees; recruit and mentor female workers; and create working connections between our local committees and CWA, external AFL-CIO programs and other organizations that will support, encourage and empower female members.

Like IUE-CWA, many trade unions are shifting their focus to using apprenticeships to attract women to the trades. IUE-CWA has a slogan that reads: "Women and Apprenticeship ... A Winning Partnership!" There has never been a truer statement.