

Resolution #79A-23-01

Honoring the Leadership and Determination of Christopher M. Shelton to Fight and Win for CWA Members and All Working People

For the last eight years, Chris Shelton has led CWA with his passion, energy and determination to fight for all CWA members in our collective struggles during tumultuous and difficult times, always driven by keeping us CWA STRONG.

During his entire life, Chris has exemplified the values of the labor movement—values taught by his parents who were both union activists and leaders in their own rights. There is no doubt that they would be proud of the work Chris has done to build and strengthen not just CWA but the labor movement in the U.S. and globally.

From his first days as a CWA member, Chris has been devoted to fighting and winning for CWA members.

Upon leaving high school in 1968, Chris was hired as an installer and repairman for New York Telephone and became a shop steward before even completing his probation period. His commitment to the members was recognized as he rose from shop steward to chief steward in Local 1101. Later he was hired as a Staff Representative, became Area Director in District 1, and in 2005 he became District 1 Vice President.

During those years, Chris learned that in order to win, we must be prepared for every fight. He saw and experienced first hand the importance of solidarity and the power of the strike when he and his brothers and sisters went on strike against AT&T for 218 days in 1971 through 1972. Those lessons have driven his commitment to ensure that before going on a strike, we mobilize and demonstrate that we are ready to go “one day longer, one day stronger” in order to win. Chris knows that you can overcome the power and resources of the largest corporations in the world with the solidarity of working people.

After forty seven years fighting and winning for CWA members at his local and District, in 2015, Chris was elected by acclamation at the 75th CWA Convention as President of CWA, becoming just the fifth person to hold that position since the founding of our union.

CWA members have appreciated his unwavering commitment. From his first day as President he made sure that our union was taking all the necessary steps at every level to be strong enough to win every fight we take on.

One of those first fights was our contract fight at Verizon. Chris led the union's efforts to secure a contract which culminated in a seven week strike. Chris used every tool available to CWA in that seven week strike at Verizon and called in the support of U.S. Secretary of Labor, Tom Perez. Those negotiations led to significant improvements for our members. The strike was so

effective at demonstrating our members' strength and resolve that the company has opted to not demand concessions in any of the rounds of bargaining since then.

As we've faced job cuts by major telecom employers, the attack on public sector members through the Supreme Court's union-busting Janus decision, difficult economic times in the country, and a global pandemic, he had a relentless focus on ensuring that CWA had sufficient, stable financial resources to represent our members, negotiate strong contracts, and grow our union.

Chris has pushed our entire union to sign up members in states with "right to work for less" laws to build strength in numbers at our represented employers. He launched his signature program, CWA STRONG, at his first full convention as CWA President in 2017 as a challenge to every member to make our locals stronger by actively engaging on all three sides of the CWA Triangle and encouraging non-members to join. In a message to members encouraging them to take the CWA STRONG pledge, he said, "We are living in dangerous times. But it also could be a time of extraordinary accomplishment by CWA members." He was right. Because of the CWA STRONG program and Chris's careful stewardship of our resources and strategic vision, our union not only laid the groundwork for the surge in organizing and collective action we are seeing today, we were ready to make the most of it.

From his very first work assignment for the national union as an organizer paid on blue voucher, Chris has understood that organizing not-yet-union workers into CWA is essential to grow our power. Under Chris's direction as President, CWA has redoubled efforts to organize new workers across all our CWA-represented industries and break into new industries. His leadership has led to groundbreaking worker organizing in the tech and games industries including an historic organizing neutrality agreement with tech giant Microsoft. In the last eight years, more than 47,000 workers have joined CWA through new organizing campaigns. He has fought for these workers who are organizing for a voice on the job and he has brought home wins for them.

Immediately after being sworn in as President, Chris took up the leadership of the effort to fight the job-killing, corporate-drafted Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. He rallied CWA members, the public, and Members of Congress in a successful effort to stop it.

During the Trump Administration, Chris made sure CWA was at the forefront fighting back against union busting and attacks on CWA members, and he led a successful fight to block the appointment of notorious union buster Andy Puzder as Secretary of Labor. He then led one of the strongest political programs that CWA has ever run to defeat Trump and elect a strongly pro-labor president in Joe Biden.

Because of Chris's leadership and his determination to hold elected officials accountable, CWA was able to turn our political victories into policy victories that will make life better for CWA members for years and decades to come. He led our successful fight to secure relief during the pandemic to keep tens of thousands of CWA members employed even as revenues dried up.

Chris also helped pass policies that CWA has spent decades fighting for, including lowering prescription drug costs, investments in American manufacturing, shoring up the pension funds of tens of thousands of workers whose retirements were at risk, a crackdown on stock buybacks that executives use to enrich themselves at our expense, and a major investment in building out broadband across the country, with crucial labor protections to ensure that those funds go to support good jobs.

Our fight to secure pro-worker laws and policies is not over, but Chris has helped put us on a strong path to fight for and win even more victories than we've already achieved. Because of the way that Chris united not just CWA, but also the entire labor movement and the entire progressive movement, behind labor law reform, candidates across the country know that they need to support the Protecting the Right to Organize Act and the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act if they want to be in good standing with labor—no ifs, ands or buts.

As our country has continued to deal with the legacy of deeply entrenched racism in our society, workplaces, and institutions, Chris has pushed all of CWA to tackle those biases in our union, the labor movement, all institutions and society. He has always been quick to put the support of CWA behind those fighting against any injustice driven by racism, sexism, and homophobia.

All CWA members appreciate that behind his gruff candor and directness, Chris has a huge heart driving him to stand up for anyone facing injustice. We know that he will call out bullshit when he sees it. CWA has often been called “The Fighting Union.” No one has exemplified that better than Chris Shelton.

Resolved: The 79th Convention of the Communications Workers of America expresses our deep appreciation to President Christopher M. Shelton for his lifelong dedication to fighting and winning for CWA members and all working people. We recognize the legacy of strategic and thoughtful preparation to ensure that our union is able to win every fight we undertake on behalf of our members.

Resolved: The 79th Convention of the Communications Workers of America bestows upon Christopher M. Shelton the title of President Emeritus. The Convention further calls upon the CWA Executive Board to make use of all of Chris's experience and talents as CWA moves forward.