Women’s Voices Must Be Heard and Respected

The CWA National Women’s Committee and the CWA Civil Rights and Equity Committee are at the forefront of movement building in our union. Many of the battles for equity that we thought we had won have resurfaced with a vengeance. Women’s rights are on the front lines of the battlefield. We must put our energy into retaining and expanding the rights of women on every front.

The current gender makeup at all levels of government and industry do not reflect the population. The United States Congress is made up of 80 percent men and 20 percent women. Yet, the overall population in the United States is 51 percent women and 49 percent men.

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), first adopted in 1979, has yet to pass the United State Senate—making the U.S. one of the few countries in the world that have failed to do so. CEDAW plays a key role in strengthening the promotion and protection of women’s rights throughout the world by addressing these issues: sex trafficking (at least four million women and girls are sold into sexual slavery each year), pornography (which degrades women and promotes a climate of sexual hostility), education (two-thirds of the world’s 857 million illiterate adults are women), maternal mortality (510,000 women die annually from pregnancy-related complications and millions more suffer from serious injury), HIV/AIDS (women are four times more vulnerable than men), violence (25 percent to 30 percent of women around the world experience domestic violence), war crimes (gender-based violence during war is often hidden but is being increasingly exposed), sexual harassment (as illustrated by recent campus and military experiences reported by women), and female genital mutilation (130 million women are victims).

Women are responsible not only for their own health, but traditionally they are also responsible for their entire family’s health, which makes maintaining their own good health even more critical. Prior to the adoption of the Affordable Care Act, women had been charged up to 150 percent more for individual health care coverage than men. Although more women die from heart disease than from cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Alzheimer’s, and accidents combined, many women underestimate the threat that coronary artery disease (CAD) poses to their health. Symptoms of a heart blockage can be harder to identify and more difficult to diagnose in women. Also many women do not know what they can do to help prevent heart disease. Fortunately, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) recently received a grant to promote the “Spread the Word (STW)” campaign – a patient advocacy campaign to educate women about the overlooked symptoms of coronary artery disease and the various testing options available, and to partner with their healthcare provider on deciding the right test for them.

The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) poses a special threat to women. It could undermine wage and hour provisions that are protected in the United States by the 1938 Fair Labor
Standards Act, and it could further diminish the rights and living standards of women and children worldwide. The TPP will accelerate the offshoring of call center jobs, a majority female sector, further eroding the economic status of women.

The CWA National Women’s Committee reports some limited progress in some states and cities on Paid Sick Leave legislation, in building support for the federal Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act which would require paid leave to care for oneself or family members with a serious illness, state endeavors for a renewed Equal Rights Amendment Act (ERA), coalition building to pass the CEDAW, equal pay provisions, and opposition to the anti-worker Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement.

Despite progress in our own union, the number of women in leadership positions still does not reflect the proportion of female membership in CWA. There is still much work to be done to encourage, support, and promote women leadership in our union.

We must join together to oppose all policies and actions designed to diminish women’s rights. We must upgrade skills to empower women to address inequalities and to oppose all attempts to reduce the rights of women. The fight for justice is greatly enhanced when women are heard and respected. Achieving gender equality in our lifetime is an important mission for all of us.

Resolved: CWA must make women’s critical issues -- including Paid Sick Leave, Equal Pay, the FAMILY Act providing paid leave to care for one’s own or a close family member’s serious illness, the Equal Rights Amendment, and passage of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – CWA legislative priorities in the same manner we fight for other democracy issues, thereby enhancing women’s basic human rights in society.

Resolved: CWA will collaborate with the Coalition of Labor Union Women in promoting the Spread the Word campaign at all levels of our Union with the goal that all union women are aware of coronary artery disease (CAD) symptoms and the available heart test options, thereby ensuring that they receive proper care.

Resolved: CWA encourages greater constituency group movement building by promoting and expanding the current CWA sponsorship program targeting greater female participation, thereby creating the capacity for a more balanced workforce, society, and union in which a woman’s voice cannot be silenced and women’s rights can be respected.

Resolved: The CWA National Women’s Committee, in conjunction with the Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee, shall conduct a comprehensive study to explore options for leadership development for women designed to maximize the number of women involved in leadership roles throughout CWA. Options to be explored, which would include a funding recommendation, could include Summer Schools for Union Women, training with the Wellstone Group, AFL-CIO training opportunities, the Harvard Trade Union Program and other university programs.