



# CLUWnews

Jan/Feb 2002, Volume 28, No. 1

Coalition of Labor Union Women

## Contraceptive Coverage in Health Care

WASHINGTON -- When a local union in Alabama was initially rebuffed by a uniform supply company earlier this year for asking for contraceptive coverage for its hundreds of employees, the union members took a closer look at their health care plan. What they realized was that Viagra, the male impotence drug, was covered. However, female contraceptives that help avoid unwanted pregnancies, and other added health care costs, were not.

"If a health plan can pay to crank it up, it better pay for the consequences," the negotiator announced. Subsequently, contraceptive coverage was added to the contract. What this union put into motion is part of a new trend in union health care plans that now provide coverage for contraceptives.

With more and more women entering the US work force, the issue is taking on added meaning because contraceptive costs force women to pay significantly more in out-of-pocket health care costs than men.

"Companies who have not paid attention to this trend better take note," warns Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) President Gloria Johnson. CLUW has been working on this issue since 1997.

"In negotiations we had been saying it was the right thing to do," said Johnson. "In the last year, two legal decisions have given unions additional ammunition."

A federal district court decision this summer and a recent Equal Employment Opportunity Commission decision both ruled that not covering contraception, when other preventive drugs and devices are covered, violates Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Additionally, there are 17 state laws in effect mandating contra-

ceptive coverage, although self-insured plans are exempt from state laws.

Because this coverage helps keep women physically, emotionally and financially healthy, **delegates to the AFL-CIO Biennial Convention on December 6 adopted a resolution supporting this benefit in union negotiated health care plans.** The resolution also spells out what comprehensive coverage means, that is, in plans that cover other preventive prescriptions and devices:

- Covering all FDA-approved prescription methods, including oral contraceptives; injections; implants; intrauterine devices; barrier methods; and emergency contraception.
- Covering annual office visits with an obstetrician or gynecologist for preventive tests, counseling on contraception, and other gynecological issues.
- Requiring the same co-payments or deductibles that apply to other medical services.
- Protecting patient confidentiality.

"Having the federation's support substantially increases women's ability to achieve this important coverage by raising the issue on all levels of the labor movement and providing needed information and tools," Johnson explains.

"For union organizers, this is a great new tool," said CLUW's Contraceptive Equity Project (CEP) Director Carolyn Jacobson. "At a time when women and young workers represent a growing percentage of union members, this is an issue that can both enhance membership benefits for current members and attract new members. With 16 million working Americans getting health insur-

### Don't Forget

January 21, 2002

**Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Observance, January 18 - 21, 2002**  
Fontainebleau Hotel, Miami Beach, Florida. Contact the AFL-CIO Civil and Human Rights Department at (202) 637-5270 for details

February 2002

Black History Month

March 2002

Women's History Month

March 8, 2002

International Women's Day

March 14 - 17, 2002

CLUW NEB and Strategic Planning Conference Riviera Resort and Racquet Club, Palm Springs, CA

ance through the collective bargaining process, the potential for unions to help win this coverage is huge," she added.

But a broader goal than just attracting union members, is to promote good health and prevent other expensive costs related to not using contraception. "It is hard to believe that 50 percent of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, with half of them ending in abortion, and that the ratio of abortions to live births in the U.S. is higher than in most other industrialized countries," Jacobson notes.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees was one of the first unions to step forward on contraceptive equity, developing an

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## Officers Directory 2001-2005

We made an error in the last edition by listing the dates for the new officers from 2001-2003. We apologize and congratulate the new and incumbent officers:

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# Supporting Delta Workers

The last non-union flight attendant work force in this country is the approximately 20,000 attendants at Delta Airlines. Since 1998, the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) has been working to give these workers a voice on the job, and an opportunity to better their careers through the collective bargaining process.

CLUW has supported the efforts of workers at Delta and the AFA who have been fighting a company that is proud of its non-union reputation. According to the AFA, previous organizing drives have experienced harsh, confrontational union-busting efforts from management.

In December, CLUW helped out with a critical phone bank designed to support labor's largest private sector organizing campaign and the largest in aviation history. With the help of concerned women from all unions, Delta workers may soon too have protection and security only a union contract can provide. According to CLUW President Gloria Johnson, "at a time when there is much turmoil in the airline industry, a voice at the table and legally binding agreements with Delta become even more critical. CLUW will continue to support the flight attendants and will always do its part to empower women through the labor movement."



Carolyn Jacobson (CLUW-Contraceptive Equity Project Director), right, receiving phone banking instructions on Dec. 14—CLUW's day for assisting the AFA in their efforts to win representation for Delta Flight attendants.



Some of the officers attending CLUW's first NOC meeting Dec. 1 in Las Vegas after elections which took place at our October convention. Left, rear: Susan Phillips (UFCW), Dee Gorzyca (IFPTE), Bennie Bridges (AFGE), Mary Frances Hills (IBT), Gloria Johnson (IUE-CWA), Judy Beard (APWU), Lorraine Darrington (CWA), Marti Rodriguez-Harris (UWUA) and seated; Elizabeth Bunn (UAW) and Jean Hervey (UNITE!).

## Coalition of Labor Union Women

### Membership Application

I want to help empower women through the labor movement by becoming a member of the Coalition of Labor Union Women.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed are my CLUW dues for one year.

☐ \$30 ☐ \$15 (retiree)

I am a member of a bona fide collective bargaining organization.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### MAIL TO:

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c/o CLUW  
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# Protecting Worker Rights After September 11

**Mary K. O'Melveny, CLUW General Counsel**

Since September 11, a serious threat to civil liberties has been posed by government proposals for increased surveillance of suspected "terrorists," invasion of attorney-client privilege and the creation of military tribunals to adjudicate the guilt or innocence of those accused of wrongdoing.

Job discrimination and other acts of bias against workers of Arab, Eastern Indian and Middle-Eastern backgrounds and of Muslim, Sikh or other religions is another unfortunate consequence of the terrorist attacks.

Pushing aside important Constitutional guarantees and other legal protection in the name of "patriotism" is dangerous and could effect every citizen for years to come.

In the employment arena, consequences of discrimination are already a reality. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently held a hearing on workplace bias that stemmed from the September 11 events. During the past three months, the agency has received nearly 200 charges of discrimination recounting unlawful terminations, demotions or reassignments based on ethnic origin or religious beliefs.

Many workers of Arab or Muslim or Sikh backgrounds have either been threatened, had property vandalized or faced demands to remove clothing or beards required by their religious beliefs. Witnesses at the EEOC hearing testified to repeated statements by job recruiters that people of Middle-Eastern or Arab origin "need not apply." They also recounted stories of good workers with many years of service being dismissed after government agents innocently questioned them.

Such ethnic and religious backlash is clearly against the law. It is often based on ignorance and demonstrates a continuing need to educate employers and workers about the nation's fair employment laws.

Many victims of these acts of discrimination do not know their rights or are fearful of exercising them. These are not new problems, as Hispanic and African-American workers well know. But, the government's announced plans to limit civil liberties protections, together with reports of widespread public support for such actions, create a climate where employers and others can engage in discriminatory behavior without fear of adverse consequences.

Workers who are represented by unions generally have more protection against such discriminatory actions. However, even in unionized workplaces, myths and stereotypes can cause enormous harm.

You can play a critical role at this time by calling for tolerance and understanding at work, and engaging in those efforts to educate fellow workers about the diverse backgrounds and religions that make this nation great.

CLUW members should take charge and insist that employers take action to reduce the likelihood of discrimination at work. Responsible employers must (1) issue or re-issue anti-harassment policies; (2) reaffirm a commitment to racial and ethnic diversity; (3) offer training sessions and/or educational programs designed to promote diversity and encourage dialogue across cultural and religious lines; (4) establish support groups or employee assistance programs for workers who feel or have been the target of discrimination (5) provide information about workers' legal rights to be free of job discrimination and include information about government or organizational web sites where such information can be obtained.

CLUW Chapters can lead educational outreach efforts that will force employers to better handle these problems. If Constitutional and legal protections during times of challenge would become meaningless. CLUW's longstanding commitment to non-discrimination gives it a unique voice as we struggle to provide protection to all.

## Leading The Way

As a credit to their unending commitment to workers, women and minorities, CLUW President **Gloria T. Johnson** (IUE-CWA) and **Elizabeth Bunn** (UAW), one of CLUW's twelve National Vice Presidents were elected to serve on the AFL-CIO Executive Council. These two CLUW leaders will join six other women to help steer the 13-million member labor federation.

With eight women leaders now serving on the AFL-CIO Executive Council, women have a stronger voice than ever before. Johnson, who had the honor of nominating AFL-CIO President John Sweeney also reelected in December said, "In 1962, women accounted for 19 percent of union membership. As of Jan. 2001, 42 percent of all union members were women and women make up 48 percent of the workforce. The reason for growth is clear. Women have helped talk up the many advantages of unions that help women make strides in their careers, earnings, health and security. But to protect our progress and build for the future, we must continue pushing as hard as we can."

## Coverage (cont'd)

action program shortly after CLUW drew awareness to this need in 1997. In recent months, unions including the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, the United Food and Commercial Workers and others have been taking on this issue.

Because contraceptive coverage can save health care plans on the back end, save companies from absenteeism and other added costs and be added to plans for less than \$1.50 per employee each month, companies are receptive to this idea. With added attention by organized labor and great new resources, women are taking charge of their reproductive health.

"Not only is this a fabulous organizing opportunity, it's a challenge women can undertake and win," Jacobson concluded. Those wanting to learn how to win this benefit can contact CLUW for a Contraceptive Equity Kit and additional information or by visiting [www.cluw.org](http://www.cluw.org) or calling the CLUW office.



from left: 3 AFGE CLUW sisters, Joan Flaherty, Marilyn Wiley, and Bennie Bridges participated in the AFL-CIO's Human Rights Conference held Dec. 2-3 in Las Vegas. Many other CLUW officers and members attended. President Gloria Johnson, Vice President Royetta Sanford, Vice President Barbara Van Blake and Karen McMillan (HIV/AIDS Project Director) were also part of the program.

## Strengthening the Labor Movement

In December, CLUW participated in the AFL-CIO Civil and Human Rights Conference "Make Every Voice Count." The Conference, which preceded the AFL-CIO Convention, looked at the current state of civil and human rights, examined election reform and sought ways to make sure every vote counts. CLUW President Gloria Johnson spoke at a town hall meeting that was part of the conference and was moderated by Linda Chavez-Thompson and Richard Trumka. This session was designed to find ways to strengthen the labor movement with panelists from international, state and local labor organizations. When it comes to creating a stronger labor movement Johnson said, "Strength comes not only from organizing new members, but from using the talents and experience of those who already belong."

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