

## Meet Our Member Organizations

CWI's June meeting will present speakers and materials from our 13 organizational members to highlight their good work for women and girls. By joining CWI they show appreciation for our work and our programs. This is a great opportunity for our members and guests to hear them discuss their important missions and goals. Also, members will vote on the Board of Directors slate for 2009-10.

Our organization members include the: American Council on Education Office of Women in Higher Education; Center for Inquiry; ERA Campaign Network; Fairfax County Commission for Women; Federally Employed Women; Feminist Majority Foundation; DC League of Women Voters; Maryland Legislative Agenda for Women; Montgomery County Commission for Women; National Women's Editorial Forum (American Forum); National Women's Law Center; OWL: Older Women's League Montgomery County Chapter; and Wider Opportunities for Women.

The Clearinghouse is a member of the National Council of Women's Organizations, and they also will be represented at our June meeting.

**Date/Time:** **Tuesday, June 23 / 12 noon sharp to 1:30 pm.**

Open to the public, no reservation necessary.

**Place:** **American Council on Education,  
One Dupont Circle, 8th Floor Kellogg Room**

Bring brown bag lunch, soft drinks available from a machine.

### IMPORTANT NOTICE

A photo ID must be shown at the security desk of One Dupont Circle.  
Please allow time to go through the sign-in system.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 22

## Why Women Need Unions and Free Choice in the Workplace

The speakers at the Clearinghouse May meeting were **Deborah Chalfie**, deputy director for policy at Change to Win, and **Rachna Choudhry**, policy advocacy manager at the National Partnership for Women and Families.

**Rachna Choudhry** told why unions are important to women.

*Union membership helps raise workers' pay.* This is especially important to women workers in undervalued professions. As a result, this narrows the income gap between women and men.

In 2007, union women earned 22 percent more in weekly wages than non-union women. The median weekly earnings of African-American union women were 35 percent more than their non-union counterparts. Latinas in unions have median weekly earnings that were more than 51 percent higher than their non-union counterparts.

In many of the industries dominated by women, such as “pink collar” jobs in education and government, the union difference is quite apparent; Choudhry gave a few examples.

- Union preschool and kindergarten teachers earned a massive 130 percent more than other teachers.
- Union librarians earned 33 percent more than other librarians.
- Union social workers and counselors earned about 40 percent more than other social workers.
- Union registered nurses earned 16 percent more than other nurses.

*Unions are important to women workers for reasons beyond wages.* Choudhry explained that



Rachna Choudhry



Deborah Chalfie

the issues that unions are most successful in fighting for—including health insurance, retirement security and work/family policies—are the same issues that resonate most with working women.

Union women are more likely than non-union women to have health and pension benefits. According to the Center for Economic Policy and Research, women union workers are 19 percent more likely to have employer-provided insurance and are about 25 percent more likely to have an employer-provided pension.

Choudhry presented some startling statistics. For the average woman, joining a union has a much larger effect on her probability of having health insurance than finishing a four-year college degree. Similarly, unionization raises the probability of a woman having a pension by 25 percentage points

compared to only 13 percentage points for completing a four-year college degree.

The union difference is equally amazing when we look at work/family policies. She pointed out that the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the only federal law that helps workers meet the dual demands of work and family. Yet, she added, the leave is unpaid which makes it challenging for most workers who need the leave.

Union workers are more likely to receive fully-paid and partially-paid leaves. Among hourly workers, 46 percent of union workers had fully-paid leave (including vacation and sick time) compared with 29 percent of non-union workers.

*Union “back-up” at work can help protect workers who make complaints.* Choudhry said that

## *Program Summary, continued*

non-union employees are often asked to pack up if they complain of unfair treatment by managers. A study of 99 union arbitrations involved employees who were fired or disciplined for missing work due to family care needs; in 98 of the cases, the dismissals were overturned as a result of the grievance. Non-union hourly workers who took leave were twice as likely as union workers to worry about losing their jobs or their seniority.

“In addition to what unions can mean for the economic security of women and their families,” **Deborah Chalfie** said, “unions also matter to economic equity and a healthy economy; workers’ lack of bargaining power means no shared prosperity and great income inequality.”

Chalfie is the deputy director for policy at Change to Win (CTW), a partnership of seven labor unions and six million members founded to represent workers in the industries and occupations of the 21st century economy. She said that CTW aims to organize the jobs of the 21st century, the 50 million workers whose jobs can’t be off-shored.

Using charts, she showed that, from the late 1940s until the late 1970s, worker productivity and workers’ wages grew in tandem. But, beginning around 1980, productivity and wages began to diverge: worker productivity (and corporate profits) began to skyrocket, yet hourly wages flattened. A second chart showed that the number of union members began a steep decline around 1980. Chalfie stated “It is no coincidence that the stagnation in workers’ wages began at the same time that unions were losing density — workers were losing their bargaining power. The early 1980s was also when we witnessed President Reagan busting the air traffic controller strike and the birth of a new industry of union-busting consultants.”

She pointed out that benefits of union representation extend far beyond just members. Studies have demonstrated that high union density in a region or industry raises wages for non-union employees as well. Sixty million non-union workers say they would join a union if

they could, yet only 16 million workers belong to unions in the US.

The problem, Chalfie said, is that employers are allowed to demand that employees choose whether to have a union in an election, and there are long delays between the time a worker signs an authorization card saying they want a union and the time they eventually vote in the election. Employers can use this time and procedural delays to conduct an anti-union campaign and intimidate employees. Employers can fire workers; threaten workers in mandatory one-on-one meetings with their supervisors about support for the union; threaten to cut wages and benefits. Chalfie pointed out that much of this kind of intimidation is completely legal.

She stressed the importance of the proposed Employee Free Choice Act as key to better protecting workers’ rights. It would allow workers to have a union when a majority sign cards saying they want a union. Right now, the law allows workers to use the majority sign-up system but only as long as the employer agrees. Workers would have more privacy to organize by signing cards.

Right now, even if the workers vote to have a union, employers often continue fighting by refusing to agree to a contract. As a result, less than half of newly recognized unions have a first contract one year after a successful election. Two years after an election, 47 percent of newly formed unions still had no collective bargaining agreement.

Under Employee Free Choice, mediation and then arbitration are provided if the employer and union can’t agree on a contract in a reasonable amount of time.

Right now, if there is wrongdoing, all the company has to do is to reinstate a fired worker, provide backpay, and post a notice promising not to violate the law again. The Employee Free Choice Act would impose some real penalties for corporations that break the law and retaliate against union supporters.

American Rights at Work is the coordinating organization for the Employee Free Choice Act. To learn more visit [www.americanrightsatwork.org](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org).

## Memorial Day

From *Womens eNews*

Do you know that women played an important role in the creation of Memorial Day? They did and it is one more example of how women's history has been overlooked. The following story appeared in *Women's eNews*; it was written by Joan Wages, president of the National Women's History Museum, founded in Washington DC in 1956.

"Much of women's history is missing from our public story. One more example; women were almost entirely responsible for the recognition of Memorial Day. Its origin was the Civil War and until recently, the day focused on the terrible War between the States that, at tremendous human cost, ended legalized racial slavery in the United States.

"Just weeks after the Civil War ended in April 1865, Ellen Call Long organized a women's memorial society to reconcile embittered enemies. Usually named some variant of women's relief society, groups sprang up in both the North and South that not only memorialized the dead, but also cared for the war's disabled and its widows and orphans.

"In June 22, 1865, women adopted these profound, forgiving and future-oriented resolutions. The document read in part:

"The object of this meeting is to initiate a Memorial Association . . . that shall perpetuate in an honorable manner the memory of the gallant dead . . .

"In no invidious spirit do we come; the political storm that shook our country to its foundation, we hope, is passed . . . We are done with the [Confederate] cause . . . and are willing to do all that women can do to stem the tide of bitterness . . . and angry feelings . . . We will practice and teach forbearance and patience, which must finally bring peace and justice . . .

"Our society has forgotten that women cleaned up the mess. They took the gruesome reality of approximately a half-million dead men, and by promoting cemeteries, led the way in turning blood and gore into something that encouraged serenity and reflection.

"In our nation's capital filled with museums, there is not one to remind us of the totality of the experience of American women. The National Women's History Museum is urging Congress to pass legislation that will provide a permanent physical home in our nation's capital."

From *Womens eNews Cheers and Jeers*

## Cheers

Ursula Burns has been chosen as the new president of Xerox, the first African American woman to head a Fortune 500 company. She follows Anne Mulcahy, making this the first female-to-female transfer of a top position among large corporations. Burns joined Xerox as a summer intern in 1980 and by 2000 she led the company's manufacturing and supply chain. She came from a very poor single parent home, where her mother expected nothing but the best from her children.

Kuwaiti women won the right to vote and run for office in 2005. Recently, four women were elected to the Kuwait Parliament, despite strict Islamists urging people not to vote for them.

## Jeers

By a 7-2 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that women, who took maternity leaves before Congress outlawed pregnancy discrimination in 1979, would not be able to include the time towards their pension credits. The 1979 Pregnancy Discrimination Act called for companies to treat pregnancy leaves the same as other disability leaves.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that the United Nations is facing a large number of sexual harassment complaints. In addition, women are complaining about the procedures and outcomes of investigations. "Some women who complained about sexual harassment said their contracts weren't renewed. In some cases accused men either retired or resigned before they faced any consequences."

## Harriet's List In Missouri

From the *Feminist Majority Foundation Newsletter*

Harriet's List is a new political action committee established to support progressive women candidates in Missouri. The PAC is named in honor of Harriett Woods, who was the first woman to hold statewide office in that state. The organization will be modeled after the successful Emily's List which raises money and backs women candidates. Woods died in 2007; she was a leader in efforts to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment movement. She came close to beating (then) Sen. John Danforth, and two years later became lieutenant governor, the highest position ever held by a woman in that state.

## Judy Chu Elected

From the *Feminist Majority Foundation Newsletter*

Judy Chu has won a 13-candidate Special Election Primary in California to fill the seat vacated by Hilda Solis who became the secretary of labor. In an overwhelming Democratic district, this almost assures a win and she would become the third Asian Pacific Islander in Congress. A proven feminist leader during her time in the California State Assembly, Chu was also legislative leader against sexual assault on college campuses and in the community. She received support from the Feminist Majority PAC.

## Domestic Abuse Rises

From *Women's eNews*

The economic crisis has brought a rise in domestic abuse. Three-quarters of the domestic violence shelters in the U.S. have experienced an increase in women seeking help since the economic crisis in September; 3 percent of the organizations attribute this to a rise in financial issues.

“There is great national pain reflected in the latest U.S. jobless numbers, according to Rita Smith, executive director of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, based in Denver. “Domestic violence is not only a response to household financial stress; it’s also a major contributor to it. When abuse takes a financial form it can cause more long-term harm than physical or sexual abuse, says Smith...”

Economic abuse in a financial form can cause more long-term harm than physical or sexual abuse, says Smith ... Economic abuse is one of the more effective ways that abusers control their victims. They will either control all the money in the family, making her account for every dime she spends and giving her the allowance he believes she needs. Even if she works, she has to show him the pay stubs and he controls all the money,” she said.

“Another way that economic abuse can play out, is when the abuser puts everything they own in the victim’s name. At first that may seem great, she says, but if the woman leaves he will stop paying all the bills and ruin her financially. He can prevent her from getting credit, a new home and sometimes other work due to problems with all the defaults on her credit history.”

## Frances Perkins

From *Women's eNews*

“The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR’s Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience: The Woman Behind the New Deal,” by Kirstin Downey brings increased recognition to Frances Perkins, whose work made significant progress for women (and men). Perkins had worked closely with FDR in Albany and wanted to be secretary of labor. She gave him a list of projects that she insisted he would support. “It included: a 40-hour work week, a minimum wage, worker’s compensation, unemployment compensation, a federal law banning child labor, direct federal aid for unemployment relief, Social Security, a revitalized public employment service and she had worked with FDR on health insurance.” FDR knew that making her the first female secretary of labor would expose him to strong criticism. But he gave her the job. “Kirstin Downey says we can thank Frances Perkins — the unsung architect of unemployment insurance — for helping us get through these tough times.” We’ve all come a long way.

## President’s Message

We are fortunate to have 13 women’s organizations who participate as members of the Clearinghouse. Our June meeting will feature these groups. Speakers will provide insight into what they do and why. We will better understand the purpose of their missions, and we can benefit from each other’s expertise. Women’s groups work hard to achieve their agendas and hopefully this program will help them. One of CWI’s missions is to cooperate and exchange information with organizations working to improve the status of women.

We are already planning some interesting programs for the Fall. At our May meeting we asked those attending to give us topics of interest and we received many suggestions. If you would like to add to this list, please email us at [cwi-info@womensclearinghouse.org](mailto:cwi-info@womensclearinghouse.org). See you at our June meeting.

— Barbara J. Ratner

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We are looking for someone to maintain our website. If you have experience with websites and are willing to help us, please email Barbara Ratner at [cwi-info@womensclearinghouse.org](mailto:cwi-info@womensclearinghouse.org).



## Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

10401 Grosvenor Place #917  
Rockville, MD 20852

FIRST CLASS MAIL

### COMING EVENTS

**Sunday, June 14**

**Flag Day**

**Monday, June 15**

**National Partnership for Women and Families 2009 Annual Luncheon** at Washington Hilton; keynote speaker, Valerie Jarrett; For further information, call 202- 986-2600 or [www.nationalpartnership.org](http://www.nationalpartnership.org)

**Tuesday, September 22**

**CWI meeting**

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*Photos: D. Anne Martin; Editor: Roslyn Kaiser; May meeting summary draft by Sue Klein, FMF; Production: Letterforms Typography & Graphic Design.*

#### **CWI Board of Directors, July 2008 - June 2009**

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