

Women in Prison: A Challenge for Equity and Justice

Women comprise more than ten percent of the nation's prison population. A recent Justice Department report highlights serious problems of rape, extortion and other egregious issues of misconduct in U.S. prisons. Are women prisoners entitled to protections against sex and race discrimination at the federal and state level? To what extent do they receive these rights while in prison? What about before and after prison? What should feminists be doing to help incarcerated women receive just and equitable treatment that will help them and society? Our speakers will discuss the range of problems faced by women in prison and suggest necessary reforms.

The speakers are **Deborah Golden**, Staff Attorney, DC Prisoner's Project, Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs; **Dr. Fran Buntman**, Assistant Professor of Sociology at George Washington University, who teaches and researches criminal justice, especially imprisonment, including from the perspective of gender; and **Dr. Nancy G. La Vigne**, Director of the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, who has researched crime and justice issues and worked on prisoner reentry, crime prevention and the evaluation of criminal justice technologies.

This meeting topic was selected in honor of our long-time member, the late Clara Schiffer, who recommended that women become more knowledgeable about this issue.

Date/Time: Tuesday, October 27, 2009 / 12 noon sharp to 1:30 pm.

Open to the public, no reservation necessary.

Place: American Council on Education,
One Dupont Circle, CONFERENCE ROOM A, FLOOR 1B

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, November 24, 2009

How the White House Council on Women and Girls is Empowering Women

Why Women Need Unions and Free Choice in the Workplace

CI's September meeting was on the topic of health care reform. The two speakers were **Judy Waxman**, Vice President for Health and Reproductive Rights at the National Women's Law Center and **Deanna Okrent**, Senior Health Policy Associate at The Alliance for Health Reform.

Judy Waxman began her presentation by detailing some of the inequalities that women face in the current health care system: Women are less likely to have health insurance than men; health insurance companies in most states are allowed to consider gender when setting the premium rate, a practice known as "gender rating." As a result, individual women, as well as with businesses with a mostly female staff, are often charged more for health coverage.

With this information in mind, it is not surprising that most American women want health care reform. Waxman briefly explained that there are several versions of the health care reform bill before the House and Senate. But first, she talked about a few of the issues that are under debate and some questions that policymakers are addressing.

In each version of the health care reform bill every insurance plan will have to offer four tiers of insurance at different costs in order to make sure that every American is covered. Waxman said that this has caused debate about how much of a subsidy should be allowed for individuals of low socioeconomic status. Each version of the bill also includes a benefit package which covers doctor visits and maternity leave, but the details will be worked out later.

All of the bills will have a limit on how much the insured will have to pay out of pocket, and



Judy Waxman



Deanna Okrent

all of them will eliminate the current rules about pre-existing conditions.

At the same time, she explained, there are many issues that are still unresolved. For example, it is not clear if there will be a public option, or employers will be required to provide coverage. Other concerns include whether or not these changes will save money (to which Waxman said "yes, in the long term") and how it will all be paid for.

Deanna Okrent began with some background information about the state of health insurance coverage in the United States. According to the last Census, 15% of Americans are uninsured, which is 36 million adults and 9 million children. Of those who do have insurance, 27% are covered by Medicare and Medicaid. She pointed out that Medicare is a key element of financial security for women after retirement.

The number of people who do not have health insurance varies by state, and the state's economic status. Those Americans who work in small businesses or in the manufacturing industry, for example, have lost their insurance in greater numbers than others due to loss of jobs or unaffordability of coverage. Okrent explained that these differences result in political challenges for health care reform; they affect the elements that representatives include in a health care bill, as well as the ultimate passage of a final reform bill.

Okrent recommended the Kaiser Family Foundation website (www.kff.org) as resource for information about the different versions of the health care bills. She said the site provides a good side-by-side comparison of the different

Program Summary, continued

versions of the proposed House and Senate bills.

To illustrate how the three versions of the proposed health care bills are different, Okrent explained that the version of the bill from the Senate Finance Committee, for example, includes the use of a flexible spending account, or FSA for long-term care insurance premiums.

Okrent said the issues being debated in both the House and Senate versions of the bills are about having a public plan, and what it would look like; whether or not to include a mandate for employers to participate; and whether insurance exchanges should be state-based, regional or national.

As these debates continue, Okrent said that women should be aware of those provisions regarding Medicaid expansion, Medicare, individuals, small business employers, and long-term care. For women, expressly, long-term care is a major part of health care expenditures.

Discussion

Will health care reform address the current shortage of nurses and doctors? Waxman said yes, that several of the bills include sections on the delivery and quality of care, as well as keeping electronic records.

Do any of the bills address Medicare? Okrent said that there were tweaks made to Medicare, especially with regard to payments to Medicare Advantage plans, but that none of the bills had changes to or reductions in benefits. One bill reforms doctor payments and encourages the training of primary care physicians.

Will abortions be included in any of the bills? Waxman said that the version of the bill by the Energy, Commerce and Finance Committee allows for insurance companies to decide if abortion will be covered and allows for exchanges

to provide two different plans, one of which includes abortion coverage.

Waxman voiced concern over “Perfect being enemy of the good.” She mentioned that in DC, in particular, we are trained to criticize legislation from specific perspectives. But in the end, non-profit and consumer advocate groups will need to come together to consider the final bill in terms of how it will help society as a whole.

Okrent said that, in the past, insurance companies have made high profits on Medicare Advantage plans. There had been aggressive marketing for enrollment in this plan because it was profitable for insurance companies. Proposed payment formulas would even the playing field between traditional fee-for-service Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans.

Will gender rating end? Waxman said that the National Women’s Law Center report, *Nowhere To Turn*, looks at the disparity in health care costs for men and women. Their report found that women at the age of 25 are charged more than men for health care, even if they don’t have maternity benefits. Starting at age 55, there was less of a disparity between the genders, and starting at 65 — when Medicare is available — the premiums are the same for men and women. She said that gender rating will likely end with health care reform, but that none of the versions of the bill eliminate age rating.

Waxman also pointed out that right now it is legal in eight states and the District of Columbia for an insurance company to reject a woman’s application for coverage if she has been a victim of domestic violence. Waxman said that the other factors that are in the bills are family size, geographic area, possibly an individual’s use of tobacco and some restriction on age variations. But these could all be eliminated with health care reform.

Sunday, January 31, 2010: Women’s Legislative Briefing

University of Maryland, Shady Grove Campus, 9630 Gudelsky Drive, Rockville, MD 20850

Keynote speaker will be pay equity heroine Lilly Ledbetter. General admission \$10; students \$5.

Online registration required. Registration opens November 2009. The Women’s Legislative Briefing will conclude with a reception providing guests the opportunity to meet with County and State elected officials, and to network with advocates and representatives of other women’s organizations. For more information, call 240-777-8330 or visit www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cfw

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month Violence Against Women in the United States: Statistics

From NOW's website

Despite the fact that advocacy groups like NOW have worked for two decades to halt the epidemic of gender-based violence and sexual assault, the numbers are still shocking. It is time to renew our national pledge, from the President and Congress on down to City Councils all across the nation to END violence against women and men, girls and boys. This effort must also be carried on in workplaces, schools, churches, locker rooms, the military, and in courtrooms, law enforcement, entertainment and the media. NOW pledges to continue our work to end this violence and we hope you will join us in our work. For violence against women statistics visit: www.now.org/issues/violence/stats.html

Gender Gap in Schooling Measures Pendulum's Motion

By Bijoyeta Das, a freelance writer based in Boston
From Womens eNews Sunday, October 4, 2009

Young U.S. women are finishing high school, attending college and earning degrees at higher rates than men. A boys' educational crisis (of arguable extent), two-income families and rising divorce rates help explain the widening gaps, onlookers say.

She is excited to leave the nest.

"College is a must. No questions," said Taylyse Wornum, 18. She entered the University of Massachusetts at Amherst this fall as a freshman to study communications.

Young women like Wornum are increasingly outpacing men in the successful completion of high school and college enrollment. Among Boston public high school 2007 graduates, 153 young women attended college for every 100 men, according to a July study by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, which prepared the report for the Boston Private Industry Council. Among those attending four-year colleges, the gap was even wider: 166 women for every 100 men. Across the country, in every race-gender group, more women get degrees than men, said Andrew Sum, lead author of the study and director of the Center for Labor Market Studies. "That's true for every degree level: associate,

bachelor's and master's." When it comes to Ph.D.s, there is almost parity.

Jennifer Millien, 21, a public relations student at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams, said she is proud of the inroads women are making in education and is happy to be entering a work force that seems to be in favor of women. "But, despite all the statistics showing so many women pursuing careers, women continue to earn less than men. It is kind of weird..."

(We are experiencing) "a structural change we have never experienced before," said economist Mark Perry with the University of Michigan-Flint. When women earn higher degrees, they have better professional opportunities, which has a direct impact on work force numbers, he said.

"Along with higher pay and more job market stability, women are less likely to be unemployed during a recession or a slowdown," said Perry. "This ties in with what has been called a 'mancession'."

Since the recession began in December 2007, men have lost 4.75 million jobs overall, whereas women have lost 1.66 million jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The unemployment rate continues to be much higher for men than women and women are on the verge of outnumbering men in the work force. The recession took a greater toll on male-dominated job sectors, such as construction and manufacturing. Female-dominated professions, including health care, education and government, continue to expand, Perry said.

Cheryl Rivers, a professor of journalism at Boston University, a frequent commentator for Women's eNews and author of *Selling Anxiety: How the News Media Scare Women*, said that while single male professionals earn more than single female professionals, the wage gap between the two groups was not "too huge." But when women in the paid work force start having children they often wind up as primary caregivers, and that's when they start to earn less than men.

Men's wages have been stagnant or declining for 20 years, Rivers said. "In today's economy, the dual earning couple is becoming the normative couple. This will continue."

Rivers also said that divorce fuels women's interest in education and the paid work force. "With a fairly high divorce rate, women are more and more not seeing that their economic future will be provided by men," she said.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month Sister Study Exceeds Recruitment Goal: Now the Real Work Begins

From NIH's website

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), part of the National Institutes of Health, has many reasons to celebrate this October as it recognizes Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The NIEHS Sister Study began recruiting women for this landmark study during Breast Cancer Awareness month in October 2004 and this October has reached a milestone. It has recruited nearly 51,000 women from all walks of life, whose sisters had breast cancer, to participate in this long-term study that is focusing on uncovering environmental and genetic factors that influence breast cancer risk. These sisters and researchers have joined together in a long-term commitment to help prevent breast cancer. To read the entire article go to: www.niehs.nih.gov/news/releases/2009/sister-recruitment.cfm

Health Reform: Implications for Women's Access to Coverage and Care

From the Kaiser Family Foundation website

This issue brief highlights key issues for women that arise in the context of health reform, including access to health insurance coverage, health care affordability, scope of benefits, reproductive health and long-term care. The brief examines the current situation for women as well as relevant provisions in the major reform legislation now under consideration in the House and Senate...

The current health reform debate offers many opportunities to improve women's access to care and coverage, ranging from insurance system reforms, to lowering out-of-pocket costs, to securing comprehensive benefits packages that address women's health needs across the course of their lives. These issues are essential in women's ability to obtain timely, appropriate care. Balancing these priorities with many other issues will be challenging, and as the process moves forward, it will be critical to keep an eye on the impact of the reform debates on women's access and coverage. Read the entire brief at: www.kff.org/womenshealth/7987.cfm

Employee Free Choice: Let's Do It for 'Norma Rae'

By Linda Meric, a nationally-known speaker on family-friendly workplace policy, is executive director of 9to5, National Association of Working Women, a diverse, grassroots, membership-based nonprofit that helps strengthen women's ability to win economic justice.

Women's eNews Monday, September 28, 2009

Crystal Lee Sutton, the real Norma Rae, just died after struggling with her insurer to pay for medical coverage. Linda Meric says health care reform responds to Sutton's death and passing the Employee Free Choice Act will honor her life's work.

Crystal Lee Sutton, the woman whose life inspired the 1979 film *Norma Rae*, about a brave union organizer, died of cancer on Sept. 11 after struggling in 2008 with her health insurance company. Her insurer delayed her treatment by two months, initially by denying coverage of her medications, according to an article published last year in North Carolina's *Burlington Times News*. Her untimely passing at age 68 speaks powerfully to the continuing debate over health care reform.

But it is the union movement that claims Sutton as a sheroe.

To honor her legacy, and to pay tribute to other courageous union organizers—famous and less so—we must push for the Employee Free Choice Act, which is pending in Congress. Introduced in March by California Democratic Rep. George Miller, the act has been referred to the Committee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions. It has 227 co-sponsors, but the act must still move from committee discussion to general debate. This makes it critical that members of Congress hear their constituents' support for the Employee Free Choice Act now.

To read the entire article go to: www.womensenews.org/story/health/090928/employee-free-choice-lets-do-it-norma-rae

Dues are payable in September for the 2009-10 year. If you have not received a renewal letter or you would like to join, please see our website to download a membership form at www.womensclearinghouse.org or call 301-493-0002.



Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

10401 Grosvenor Place #917
Rockville, MD 20852

FIRST CLASS MAIL

COMING EVENTS

Saturday, Oct. 24

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland's 20th Anniversary Evening of Chocolate Gala, 8 pm, VisArts at Rockville Town Center, 155 Gibbs Street, Rockville, MD. Keynote Speaker: Linda Greenhouse, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and lecturer in law, Yale Law School. Also honoring the Washington Area Clinic Defense Task Force. Black Tie optional. Tickets \$90 mbr/\$70 nonmbr/\$105 with membership. RSVP via www.prochoicemd.org or email Erin Schurmann erin@prochoicemd.org, or call 301-565-4154.

Wednesday, Nov. 18

HIV/AIDS and the DC Community

Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington's Brown Bag Lunch series. Bring your lunch: from 12-1 pm. 1110 Vermont Avenue, NW, Ste. 300, Washington, DC 20005. To RSVP call 202-347-8500 x6300 or e-mail events@ppmw.org

*Photos: Sue Klein; Editors: Roslyn Kaiser and Jessica Lazar;
Production: Letterforms Typography & Graphic Design.*

CWI Board of Directors, July 2009 - June 2010

OFFICERS: *President*, Barbara J. Ratner; *VP Program*, Sue Klein; *VP Membership Co-chairs*, Kellye McIntosh and D. Anne Martin; *Treasurer*, Linda Fihelly; *Secretary*, Harriett M. Stonehill.

DIRECTORS: Alvin Golub, Sarah Gotbaum, Roslyn Kaiser, Jessica Lazar, Ruth G. Nadel, Ellen S. Overton, *ex officio*.