

Gender Equality: United Nations and US Federal Support

Progress in gender equality continues to be a major concern. The Clearinghouse January meeting will discuss the following issues: Is the US federal support for global gender equality improving? What are the changes in UN offices with responsibility for gender equality? What is the US planning to contribute to the upcoming Beijing+15 Meetings?

Our speakers will be **June Zeitlin**, attorney, Director of the CEDAW Education Project, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Education Fund and **Karen Richardson**, Senior Advisor on International Organizations to Melanne Verveer, Ambassador for the Global Women's Issues Bureau at the State Department.

Date/Time: **Tuesday, January 26, 2010 / 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.

In case of bad weather and closing of government offices, the CWI meeting will be cancelled.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 23, 2010

The White House Council on Women and Girls: Empowering Women

The speakers at the November meeting were, **Terry O'Neill**, president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), chair of the NOW Foundation and the NOW Action committee, and **Tina Tchen**, executive director of the White House Council on Women and Girls and director of the White House Office of Public Engagement.

O'Neill said that eight years of the Bush administration had pushed women's issues back quite a bit, "We need to make up a lot of lost ground, particularly in terms of economic justice for women."

She said that in the US women's participation in politics has fallen behind the rest of the world, because the US Senate has never ratified CEDAW (Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women). She noted that only 16 percent of the U.S. Congress is female; less than 15 percent of state governorships are held by women, which should be 50 percent. Money is a major reason that keeps women from participating in politics, because women earn 77 cents on the dollar, compared to men and they are less willing to take the economic risk of running for office.

O'Neill asked, "Do we realize how much women bear the brunt of national health care reform?" She said that we are charged more for insurance premiums, up to 50 percent more, and then denied care when it is needed, justified by insurance companies because women need pregnancy care, prenatal care and childcare — care that is essential for women and newborns to survive. Mothers and their babies have a much higher death rate without prenatal care.

In the health care debate, she explained, the right wing has decided to attack women's reproductive health care needs. She said the health care bill that is currently on the Senate side



Terry O'Neill



Tina Tchen

includes a strong anti-abortion provision. One of the troubling things, according to O'Neill, is to hear elected officials and public leaders say that abortion is always a tragedy, always a bad thing. But an unplanned pregnancy is an unplanned pregnancy. She quoted an Episcopal priest, Catherine Ragsdale who said, "For the woman who freely chooses it and needs it, abortion is a blessing."

Abortion is healthcare, she emphasized. It's an ordinary part of a women's reproductive health care needs. O'Neill asked the audience to think of a woman who has cancer, and is undergoing treatment, and experiences an unplanned pregnancy. Under the Hyde amendment (which restricts federal money for abortions), if she's a woman in need and low-income, she cannot use federal dollars to terminate the

pregnancy unless it is bringing her to death; if this woman has cancer, she cannot terminate her pregnancy in order to get well.

However, O'Neill said, the area where we can make real headway is in implementing family-friendly policies so women can earn more money.

She wrapped up by saying that it is her understanding that President Obama is very open-minded and eager to work with the women's community to advance women's issues.

When Tina Tchen was asked to lead what is now the White House Office of Public Engagement, she said she would only be interested if she could also take a leadership position on helping women and girls. This led to her role in establishing the White House Council on Women and Girls. She said that she wanted to have special responsibility for liaison with the women's community as part of her public engagement responsibilities. (Valerie Jarrett is the chair of

Program Summary, continued

this Council and Tchen is its executive director). In an effort to help with grassroots outreach, her office is working with organizations that have state chapters; they are trying to work with new media; and they are starting to work with offices of public liaison/public engagement across the country in the various agencies, such as Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, and Agriculture, in order to get the community involved.

Tchen said that they wanted to try to push forward the work that had already been done. They also wanted to make sure that women's issues were embedded in the ongoing work of the federal government, so that it could not be taken away by political change.

President Obama decided that, rather than having one White House cabinet-level office on women, that every part of the government needed to have responsibilities related to women's issues because women's issues need to be the responsibility of everyone. The Council asked each agency secretary to appoint a representative to the White House Council on Women and Girls to work with her and her staff on an ongoing basis.

The agencies were asked to consider what they were doing externally for women and girls, as well as to look internally at what they were doing to promote their female employees. This information was compiled into reports that will eventually be released to the public. Tchen said that she expects each agency will have a spot on their website for their work with women and girls. Tchen said that they want to continue to move forward. The Council is supporting the work of each agency.

There have been several inter-agency efforts for which the Council is providing coordination, issues that are of particular interest to the President, First Lady Michelle Obama and Vice President Biden. These include violence against women, financial security and financial literacy that empowers women and girls at all stages of life; growing women's jobs, with a focus on helping women in small businesses both domestically and internationally; the experience of women in the American workforce, and, in particular, how women are disproportionately affected because

they have to maintain a balance of life and work. Health care and its importance to women is a critical concern of the White House offices. Tchen said, "No one should have to choose between a roof over their family's head and their own medical treatment."

During the Question and Answer session, Tchen was asked what the Council does internationally. She said that she has been working with Melanie Verveer, the Ambassador for global women's issues at the state department, talking about global business development and how it affects women around the world. They are also very concerned about the vulnerability of young girls, and Valerie Jarrett attended two meetings in Singapore on the subject of trafficking and is also working on getting the United States involved in the Beijing+15 meeting, which will take place in 2010.

Tchen was asked what the Council is doing in connection with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) programs for girls. She said that they have been leading an effort to highlight the work that is being done around the country on STEM, and calling attention to the work of the Department of Education on this project. This includes the "Race To The Top" initiative, which gives priority funding to STEM projects that include outreach programs to minorities and women.

Tchen was asked how she plans to include the legislative and judicial branches of the federal government. Tchen said that she and Valerie Jarrett sat down with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the co-chairs of the House Women's Caucus on those agencies. Unfortunately, she said, her office cannot interact in the same way with the judicial branch. She pointed out that there is a significant problem of under representation of women on the federal bench.

A leader of an organization focusing on needs of mothers pointed out to Tchen that they will be limiting women and girls if they don't bring in and show the value of care work. She said that women are paid less because they are assumed to be providing care. She also said that care work should be included in the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as it is in some other countries.

Tchen said that emailing her is the best way

Program Summary, continued

to reach her and her staff and suggested that members of the audience ask to be put on the Council's email list. public@who.eop.gov.

O'Neill was asked if the public option is the only way for health care costs to be controlled. She answered that the women's movement needs to readjust after battling the past eight years. We now have more friendly people in leadership and congress but neither the White House nor the congress will do what is best for us unless we keep pressuring. For example, having an anti-abortion measure in the health care bill is a disaster.

She pointed out that the health care reform bill will get rid of gender rating, but does not eliminate age rating. Older people can be charged three times more than younger people. Who does this affect most: middle-aged women.

O'Neill suggested that, to the extent that we may have to retain restrictions on public funding for abortion, the language should be modified so that federal funding of abortion will be allowed to preserve the health of the mother and will

consider fetal problems.

A questioner asked about Catholic Charities which she said are getting 65 percent of their money from the federal government and still violating civil rights protection, which may be a violation of the IRS codes. O'Neill said, "Good question. I think the IRS needs to investigate."

Another question: Do you think more women will get elected in 2010? "If progressive women think someone is not out working for them they turn their attention to what is more amenable to their needs and their immediate problems. They drop out of political participation. Instead of voting for conservatives they just will not vote."

For more information go to www.now.org. Also see the recent article by Frances Kissling, "Reclaiming Legal Abortion as a fundamental right." Kissling was formerly president of Catholics for Choice and spoke to CWI in March 2009 on *Feminist Concerns About Federal Support of Faith-based Activities*. www.womensmediacenter.com/ex/010410.html.

Margaret Feldman and Mary Gardiner Jones

We acknowledge the recent passing of two active feminists and CWI members, Margaret Feldman, 93, and Mary Gardiner Jones, 89.

Dr. Feldman was a former professor of social work at Ithaca College in New York and past president of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly in DC. She received a master's degree in social work from Case Western Reserve University, and later received a doctorate in educational psychology from Cornell. After retiring in 1981, she and her husband came back to Washington, and she served as representative for the Council on Family Relations. Dr. Feldman and her husband attended the International Women's Conferences in Beijing and Kenya in the 1990s. Donations in her memory may be sent to the Clearinghouse on Women's Issues, Att: Linda Fihelly, Treasurer, 5618 North Marwood Blvd., Upper Marlboro, MD 20772.

Jones, an anti-trust lawyer, was the first woman Federal Trade Commissioner and a nationally recognized feminist according to *The Washington Post* obituary notice. She graduated from Wellesley and then enrolled in Yale Law School. "After the war, she found that a female lawyer, even one who was managing editor and a board member of the Yale Law School, couldn't get a job at the top law firms." She became an ardent consumer advocate who was concerned about consumers' rights. Jones had a long-standing interest in race relations and endowed a scholarship at Howard University for students who work toward improving Black/White relations. Jones Beach in New York is named after her family.

January is Cervical Awareness Month www.cluw.org/cervcancer.html

President's Message

We tried something new with the websites in the November newsletter. All you had to do was click on the words that were underlined and they would get you directly to the website. This worked fine for the electronic version of the newsletter, but did not work for the printed version. Therefore, I have listed the sites that were used with their full addresses. Sorry if anyone was inconvenienced, baffled or frustrated (or all of the above).

Page one: www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/cwg; Sue Klein sklein@feminist.org;

Page two: Fran Buntman at www.gwu.edu/~soc/; Deborah Golden at www.washlaw.org

Nancy La Vigne at www.urbaninstitute.org

Page three: The 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act www.acslaw.org/files/Golden-%20Prison%20Litigation%20Reform%20Act%20-%20June%202006%20-%20Advance%20Vol%201.pdf

Second Chance Act www.opensocietypolicycenter.org/resources/publication.php?docId=64

National Reentry Resource Center www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/

AAUW blog www.blog-aauw.org/2009/10/30/women-in-prison-what-rights

Page four: Ms www.nytimes.com/2009/10/25/magazine/25FOB-onlanguage-t.html?_r=4&scp=3&sq=ben+zimmer&st=cse

Page five: The Shriver Report and A Woman's Nation www.awomansnation.com/

Barbara J Ratner

New Mexico Gov. Richardson Calls for Pay Equity

Last month New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson took steps to ensure gender equity goals by ordering agencies “under his control to report annually and remedy any gender pay gaps among their workers, and (he) established a firm schedule and process for private contractors with the state to do the same.”

The Governor's directives come from recommendations by his Task Force on Fair and Equal Pay, created in 2008 to examine gender and racial pay equity and job segregation within the state government. Dr. Martha Burk, former president of the National Council of Women's Organizations of which CWI is a member, chaired the Task Force, which was composed of members from the private and public sectors.

Women's Media Center

The WMC has launched a new website www.notunderthebus.com/ with Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin, intended to strengthen the voices of women and organizations devoted to a health care reform that is fair to women. Their press release says, “We won't let Congress run over women's health... We are furious that our reproductive rights and our health have been compromised by politicians in Congress, who for political gains oppose national health reform to the detriment of more than 16 million women.”

Books

From former CWI Member Sonia Fuentes

Fuentes was interviewed by Lee Ann Banaszak for her book, *The Women's Movement Inside and Outside the State*, recently published by Cambridge University Press. Prof. Banaszak wanted to document the role feminists in the federal government played in the legal revolution that took place in this country starting in the early 1960s, a subject that was generally hidden from, and unknown to, the general public. Banaszak is an associate professor of political science and women's studies at Pennsylvania State University.

The book's cover shows Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter and two other feminists behind a podium that says, “ERAmerica,” taken in 1977 at an ERA rally. (That was 32 years ago and we're still waiting for ratification of the ERA says Fuentes.)

When Every Thing Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women From 1960 to the Present

Gail Collins, the first woman editorial page editor for *The New York Times*, looks into the changes in the lives of American women over the past fifty years in her recently published book (Little, Brown and Company). She covers what didn't happen as well as what did happen.



Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

10401 Grosvenor Place #917
Rockville, MD 20852

FIRST CLASS MAIL

COMING EVENTS

**Sunday,
Jan. 31**

Women's Legislative Briefing. University of Maryland, Shady Grove Campus, 9630 Gudelsky Drive, Rockville, MD. 12:30 - 5:30p. Keynote speaker will be pay equity heroine Lilly Ledbetter. General admission \$10; students \$5. Online registration required. The Briefing will conclude with a reception providing 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

**Tuesday,
March 2**

Business and Professional Women's Policy and Action Day, designed to improve the working place for women. AARP Brickfield Center 601 E Street, NW, in DC. 8:00a - 8:00p. Issues impacting women and families that will be covered: healthcare, employment, environment, paid sick days, equal pay, and the Family and Medical Leave Act. Information at policy@bpwfoundation.org

Photos: D. Anne Martin; Editors: Roslyn Kaiser and Jessica Lazar; November meeting summary draft by Cori Fordham, FMF intern. 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*.