

STARTING FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY PROGRAMS: Two Creative Projects to Help Girls in Africa

CWI members will hear the experiences of two women who have initiated philanthropic projects, **Patricia E. Ortman** and **Wendy Lesko**.

Patricia E. Ortman, a retired women's studies professor is Chair of the Board and Executive Director of the Girls Gotta Run Foundation, a volunteer organization that raises money to help poor Ethiopian girls train as runners.

Wendy Lesko is Executive Director of the Youth Activism Project, and a founder of School Girls Unite (SGU) which helps support collaborations among American and African young people to provide access to education for girls in developing countries. For more information visit www.youthactivism.com and www.girlsgottarun.org

Date/Time: **Tuesday, April 28 / 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, May 26

Why Women Need Unions — and Free Choice in the Workplace

Feminist Concerns About Federal Support of Faith-Based Initiatives

The speakers at CWI's March meeting were **Maggie Garrett**, assistant legislative director, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, and **Frances Kissling**, former president of Catholics for Free Choice.

President Obama established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in February.

Maggie Garrett said that federal support of faith-based organizations is not anything new; there is a long history of religious involvement in government. Previously, federal funds given to religious organizations had to be used for secular activities (soup kitchens, for instance), and there were important safeguards: organizations had to be separately incorporated from a house of worship; no religious activities were allowed; and there could be no discrimination in hiring or serving.

She explained that these safeguards for religious organizations receiving federal funding were compromised by the actions of then-Senator John Ashcroft in the 1990s, when he inserted the concept of *charitable choice* language in social service bills such as TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families); SAMHSA, (anti substance abuse programs), and CSBG (Community Service Block Grants) to states for low income families.

However, even the Republican dominated Congress did not pass the charitable choice language in all social service programs. To get around the will of Congress, President Bush signed executive orders such as the creation of the faith-based council and offices in federal agencies. He used these offices and other activities to change federal regulations to allow religious organizations to



Maggie Garrett



Frances Kissling

receive federal funding exemptions from federal non-discrimination laws and to actively help them obtain federal funds.

Garrett noted that these charitable choice provisions also threaten the autonomy of houses of worship because they can now be held accountable to their government-funders who can even check their accounting books.

She asked, "How do you define a religious organization? This administration does not have a formal definition; there is some definition in Title VII, but it is often interpreted in different ways in each legal case."

Garrett said, "Many are concerned with initial efforts of the Obama administration to retain the Bush faith-based council even though during his campaign Obama had said he was against exemptions allowing discrimination in employment in religious organizations

receiving federal funds. They are also concerned about the selection of council members since many of them are known to be opponents of reproductive rights."

Regulations with weaker religious safeguards are far less clear when it comes to how religious activities occur and how they're funded.

Frances Kissling also spoke of her concerns about the appointments to the council. Of the first 15 appointments, there are five secular members; only one of the religious individuals is publicly pro-choice (Rabbi David Saperstein), several are strongly pro-life, and a few are unknown or do not take a strong stance on the issue. "The President has stacked the council with an agenda on reproduction that ignores the concept of women as moral agents capable of making their own decisions," she noted.

Program Summary, continued

She pointed out that two of the people on the Obama faith-based council are presidents of faith-based organizations that receive upwards of 79 percent of their funding from the government. Since the purpose of the faith-based council is to ensure appropriate allocation of government funds to religious organizations, Kissling emphasized that “This is an obvious conflict of interest.”

During the campaign, Obama made a number of favorable speeches about religion — but vowed he would uphold the Constitution above all. Still, the President issued an executive order to continue the Bush faith-based council and he even expanded its scope to reduce abortion, address teen pregnancy, and attend to men’s responsibilities in the family and reproduction — “In other words, to put a religious spin on women’s issues. And where is the family planning council in the White House to deal with these questions? Do we want religious groups dealing with reproduction?” Kissling asked.

Also, Obama has not followed through on his promise to fix some of the main problems with the faith-based office: he hasn’t ended the federally funded discrimination, or reinstated safeguards to protect beneficiaries against federally funded proselytizing.

Kissling said discrimination by religious organizations is most obvious in the hiring and service-providing to the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender community. But organizations also can refuse to hire single mothers, or women who are divorced.

She called on women’s organizations to help make sure that the remaining ten appointments are pro-women and pro-civil liberties. And she said, we should also be concerned about who gets appointed to other councils, such as bioethics-stem cells, research, etc.

Kissling stated that “Almost all of the world’s religions have had discriminatory policies at some point against women. When religion becomes involved with politics, it is especially dangerous for women. Many of the questions around religion and politics are important to women because of the way some institutions position issues around women: in the family, sexuality and reproduction.”

There has been an enormous rise in interest in religion since 2004. It has been said that Obama’s initial losses were to do with his lack of public religiosity and that as a result, he began a campaign to appear more religious and to court religious officials. Kissling added, “Carter, Clinton and Obama have all courted religious leaders, mostly males who wear religious wardrobes.”

There is an assumption, she said, that women are much better off under the Democrats than the Republicans. However, even with Democrats, when politics are involved religion gets a higher priority and more attention than women do. She noted the high level of visibility of faith-based offices in 11 federal agencies (and even though a White House Council on Women and Girls has been established), as yet, there are no promises to maintain or enhance the agency offices focusing on women issues or gender equality.

During the Q/A period after the presentations, Kissling said that a commission was being established, separate from the faith-based council, to examine government rules regarding separation of church and state.

There was a question and discussion about religion and school vouchers. It was noted that churches don’t need to pay taxes, and the District is the only federally funded school voucher program in the country, supposed to end in 2008. It is said that there is poor accountability and much of the federal money goes to support student attendance at religious schools. Furthermore, under the DC voucher program students can attend private schools that don’t have to follow federal non-discrimination laws.

The Senate Homeland Security and Government Relations Committee, chaired by Senator Lieberman, will be holding hearings on reauthorizing the voucher program in May. Contact your senator if you want to express your opinion on reauthorizing the DC voucher program.

ACTION

If you have concerns about women’s issues and the faith-based council, you might want to share them with Tina Tchen, Director, White House Office of Public Liaison and Executive Director of the White House Council on Women and Girls. public@who.eop.gov

Equal Pay Day: Tuesday, April 28, 2009

From the Business and Professional Women/USA Website

“Equal Pay Day is held annually in April to signify the point into a year that a woman must work to earn what a man made the previous year. Census statistics released in 2008 show that the gap between men’s and women’s earnings changed by less than one percent from 2006 to 2007, narrowing only slightly from 76.9 to 77.8 percent. In 2007, the earnings for African American women was 68.7 percent of men’s earnings, a drop of more than 3 percent; Asian American women’s earnings was 89.5 percent of men’s earnings, a drop of 3.5 percent; and Latina earnings was 59 percent of men’s, a drop of .6 of a percent.”

Women Need to Know Their New Jobless Benefits

From Women’s eNews

“After years of facing discrimination by the nation’s unemployment insurance program, women stand to disproportionately benefit from three new rules in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed by President Barack Obama on Feb. 17. Popularly known as the stimulus package, the law provides the states with substantial financial incentives to “modernize” their unemployment insurance systems by closing major gaps that have denied benefits to more than 500,000 people, including many women.

Here’s how women gain; in addition to a temporary hike in the amount of the jobless benefit for all workers and a new dependent’s allowance:

- Benefits will now be provided to workers who must leave their jobs for compelling family reasons, such as caring for ill or disabled family members, relocating with a spouse whose job has moved to another area, or escaping domestic violence in which the abuser follows the woman to her workplace;
- The earning test now looks at the worker’s

most recent employment, instead of excluding the last three to six months, making it much easier for low-wage workers and new entrants to the work force (read: large numbers of women) to qualify for benefits.

- Benefits are now available to workers seeking part-time work which also includes many women.

These three reforms — among others that are not of special value just to women — are long overdue given that the old rules were written for a work force that lawmakers imagined had very few women.

Today women make up about half of all paid workers and two-thirds of the part-time work force. Wives bring in more than one-third (35 percent) of their families’ total income — 40 percent in African American households — and many women support families on their own.

The National Employment Law Project has reported that under the old, outmoded rules, unemployed men were more likely to receive benefits than unemployed women in 41 states.

This male-female gap dates to the start of the unemployment insurance program, which Congress included in the 1935 Social Security Act, to assist workers who lost jobs during the Great Depression ... At the time, the mostly white male lawmakers assumed that wage-earners looked like them. The truth is that even in the 1930s many women worked to help make ends meet, especially those raising children on their own and women of color. Nonetheless, the joint federal-state unemployment insurance program excluded farm workers and domestic workers, the two main occupations open to women and men of color at the time. Unemployment insurance gradually included domestic and farm workers. Women lost out because these rules reflected and supported male work patterns that by definition penalized women.

This article is a commentary by Mimi Abramovitz, the Bertha Capen Reynolds professor at Hunter College, School of Social Work. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the views of Women’s eNews.

CLARA SCHIFFER

Clara Schiffer, longtime Clearinghouse member, died April 3 at 97.

She was an amazing woman. Speakers at her funeral referred to her as a woman ahead of the times, an activist, a “do-er and a go-er” deeply committed to social justice, with a strong interest in children, women and aging, and women in prison. Clara provided generous support to organizations or activities that she cared about, and was clearly determined to make the world a better place.

Clara attended Radcliffe College on scholarship, graduating *cum laude*, and then went to George Washington University to obtain a master’s degree in economics. She worked on Social Security and then at the Children’s Bureau, which became part of HHS. Last year Clara was part of a Washington Hospital Center video on women’s heart problems. The video may be seen at www.whcenter.org/body.cfm?id=556283

Clara was a faithful attendant at Clearinghouse meetings, served on the board of directors and was always a lively presence. (Her daughter, Lois Schiffer, spoke to CWI in January 2001 on environmental issues).

From Barbara J. Ratner, president

The Clearinghouse is looking for a new board member. We are a highly energized group and willing to hear new ideas; we welcome your input into our programs. CWI bylaws call for an election at the June meeting. If you would like to serve or just want more information, please call Kellye McIntosh, nominating chair, at 202-277-2298 or email kellye@afj.org.

National Women’s History Museum: Making Women Visible

The National Women’s History Museum was established in 1996 to bring “women’s history into the mainstream American culture.” NWHM says it’s the other half of the story: Girls and women... need to “learn of their own unique history and to see themselves reflected with respect to our culture.”

Recently, there has been an exciting development: a site near the Mall for the NWHM building has been identified, but not yet approved. So NWHM seeks financial support — if you can help, visit www.nwhm.org or call Becky Schergens at 703-525-7627.

NWHM says, “The true stories of women’s contributions to the arts and sciences, to politics and economics, and to the religious and social development of our modern world are more fascinating than any fiction. Yet neither the traditional female roles nor the women who pushed the boundaries of those roles have been systematically explored and acknowledged... visibility in the past equals empowerment in the present.”

Last month Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-New York) re-introduced the NWHM Act in the House. (H.R. 1700); Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) will do the same in the Senate in the near future.

In announcing this joint action, Maloney said, “This bill would provide women, comprising 53 percent of our population, a long overdue home to honor their many contributions to building our great country.” Collins stated, “Such a museum would demonstrate the gratitude and respect we owe to the many generations of American women who have helped build, sustain, and advance our society.”

NMWH urges people to contact their representatives and ask them to sign on as co-sponsors to the bills and help pass the Act.



Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

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FIRST CLASS MAIL

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, April 22

15th Anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act Symposium Honoring VP Joe Biden

9am-3pm Georgetown Law Center

Presented by Legal Momentum and Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law. For more information www.legalmomentum.org click on calendar at the top and go to April 22 on the calendar.

Sunday, May 3

Annual Gloria Johnson Awards Luncheon, sponsored by CLUW, (Coalition of Labor Union Women). AFL-CIO Gompers Room. For information, contact Connie Cordovilla ccordovi@aft.org, 202- 879-4490.

Sunday, May 10

Mother's Day Kickoff, 10th Annual National Women's Health Week www.womenshealth.gov/whw/about/ for information on activities.

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