

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

March 12, 2011 9:00 a.m.

Sisters and Brothers, it is my honor to speak to you today at our 18th Women's Education Conference ... and the 24th celebration of Women's History Month.

Last night's Charity Auction for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention was a huge success! I want to thank Carla Insinga, the committee --Sister Helen Turner Local 2329 who has been personally involved with this important charity -- and all of you who participated. Over the years, this committee has raised a lot of money for charitable organizations. And when tragedy touches one of our own in such a real and painful way, a part of that pain touches us all.

There's a lot of economic and cultural turmoil going on in our country – and in our world. Friends and family remain in harm's way in Iraq and Afghanistan. They continue to return to us physically and mentally wounded. And many of them suffer beyond what they can endure....

... Last night you raised a lot of money, and without a doubt, last night you saved some lives.

The theme of this year's conference is "Move it or Lose It – Putting the 'Move' Back into the Labor Movement". And if there's any group of union sisters who can put the 'move' back in the labor movement, it's YOU!

I'd like to acknowledge your Committee Officers: Co-Chairs, Cheryl Reynolds Local 2360 and Anita Lahr Local 2326. And your secretary Barb Chandler Local 2578.

I'd also like to acknowledge 3 sisters taking classes at the National Labor College; and all 3 have been awarded the Nadra Floyd Scholarship. Tina Davis Local 1270; Beth Cooper, Local 2345, and Casey Karns, Local 1050. Beth and Tina are here today – please stand - congratulations!

Also here today are members who attended the 35th Annual Northeast Regional Summer School for Union Women last year. Helen Elliott Local 2527; Terry Bair Local 2596; Elly McNelis Local 1598; Gwen Perrin Local 2360; and your committee co-chair Cheryl Reynolds Local 2360.

Council 13 continues empowering women to take on leadership roles in their workplace, in politics, and throughout the labor movement. A perfect example of this is the leader who put this event together. A sister who started out as an AFSCME member like all of you. She worked her way up the ranks – and today she teaches, leads, and empowers all members of this labor movement as Council 13's Education Director. Carla Insinga!

Nationally, union women continue to take on executive leadership roles. 2 years ago AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler took her place alongside AFL-CIO Executive Vice-President, Arlene Holt-Baker. Liz is the first female to take on this role, and she's the youngest leader to hold such a high position with the largest federation of unions in the U.S.

And last year we lost a sister who helped blaze the trail for all of you. Germaine Moran started at President McEntee's side some 40 years ago when labor history was made in Pennsylvania and this great Council was born. She was tough. She was smart. And she went on to serve this union from our national office in Washington. ...

She came from that same ‘Wanda Weaver’ stock. In the 70’s labor women had to fight harder than any man to move up in this organization – just as they had to fight harder in the private sector. That’s the way it was. That’s what it took. And that’s what they did.

And last year we lost a labor icon you may not know by name. Geraldine Doyle worked in a metal factory. One day a photographer took her picture. It was later used to create the most recognizable World War II poster in American history: Rosie the Riveter. “We Can Do It” became the homeland battle cry. More than 6 million female workers helped build weapons, planes, bombs, and tanks that helped win the 2nd World War. They were proud. They were patriotic. And they were paid only 60% of male wages.

Last November the Paycheck Fairness Act suffered defeat. This amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act would have closed loopholes, reduced pay discrimination, and would have stopped retaliation against workers who confront employers about wages. Passed by the House in 2009, every Senate Republican voted against moving the bill to a vote.

The 2010 Census reports that women STILL earn just 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. That's more than \$10,000 in lost wages per year!

But the labor movement narrows that pay gap. The national gap between pay for men and women stands at 32% - but between all UNION men and women, that gap is 5% - and we won't stop until it's ZERO!

The National Committee on Pay Equity started an Equal Pay Day in 1996. This year Equal Pay Day falls on April 12. On that day, supporters are asked to wear red – to symbolize how much women's wages are “in the red”. And, sisters and brothers, I know you can wear some RED!

It was 24 days ago that Wisconsin workers started their protests against the union-bashing bill of Governor Walker. 24 days ago 14 brave Wisconsin Democratic Senators left the state not only to stop the bill – but to show the world what he was trying to do. Workers were threatened with layoffs – Senators were threatened with fines, citizens were denied entry to the capitol, protesters were called ‘slobs’ by their elected officials – and through it all they persevered. ..

...On Wednesday night Senate Republicans rammed through a bill stripping away 50 years of collective bargaining rights. They won this battle, but the war is far from over. Wisconsinites have started a massive, grassroots campaign to recall Republican lawmakers who gamed the system. And the people of Wisconsin may have been ignored by their governor – but the rest of us? We're paying attention.

I'd like all of you to stand right now. Let's take a minute to applaud our brothers and sisters in red – **and I want them to hear you in Wisconsin!!**

We continue to share stories, pictures, tweets, posts, texts and blogs about this historical labor event. The true anti-worker motives of Governor Scott Walker have had a global impact. His corporate loyalty has been exposed. And the public has come to our side like never before.

Polls everywhere show overwhelming support for Wisconsin workers. USA Today - 61%. New York Times - 60%. And 74% of Wisconsinites oppose Walker's budget repair bill. ...

In Wisconsin, not all University faculty are unionized. The University of Wisconsin at La Crosse was one of those campuses where teachers were not unionized. The American Federation of Teachers had been trying for years to convince that faculty to join the union. And on February 24 La Crosse faculty voted 249-37 to organize as part of the American Federation of Teachers! ...

Sisters and brothers, it may have been hard to convince some folks to join a union before, but Governor Walker has made that decision a whole lot easier now.

Today Council 13 troops are in Ohio fighting the war against collective bargaining there. VMO Mike Milner Local 2247 is returning today after 10 days in Youngstown, Ohio. I have staff remaining for 30 days – they're in Canton, Akron, Columbus, Youngstown – and they tell me people are fired up!

They were there with other Council 13 staff and members for the big rally on March 2. 20,000 supporters showed up to protest. They're not going to stand by while Governor Kasich pushes through an anti-worker bill. ..

... Unions are busy getting signatures for a budget resolution to get this on a ballot and it WILL get shot down by Ohio voters!

When radical Republicans picked this war, they didn't do their homework. They didn't count on solidarity. They didn't count on determination. They didn't count on a nationwide revolution to save a basic civil right – the right to collectively bargain!

But there's not just a radical Republican war on workers – they've declared war on women. Everything from redefining rape, to proposing a bill that would let hospitals allow a woman to die rather than perform an abortion necessary to save her life.

The first course of action taken by the Republican-led House was an attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act. An Act that helps all Americans get health coverage rather than keeping control in the hands of insurance industries. Reform ensures coverage of prevention and basic health services, including maternity benefits. And health reform would ensure additional coverage for children.

And just last month, the U.S. House voted to end federal funding for Planned Parenthood clinics. Then it also voted to stop all funding for family planning health services under Title X of the Public Health Act.

There are an estimated 3 million women nationally who receive family planning services. In Pennsylvania, Planned Parenthood clinics saw over 120,000 clients in 2009 — nearly the population of Lebanon County. It not only provided birth control to nearly 100,000 women, but performed thousands of tests – everything from STD testing to cervical cancer screening. An average of 1 in 7 cervical tests came back abnormal, meaning a woman could be in some stage of cervical cancer. Nearly half the patients who receive family planning services in our state go to Planned Parenthood.

Ironically, reducing family planning money is a really bad idea if the goal is to cut down on abortions. Family planning services prevent 1.9 million unintended pregnancies each year. And without Title X and birth control paid for through Medicaid, the abortion rate will climb.

And because Title X funding helps women avoid getting pregnant, Pennsylvania saved \$184 million in public funds in one year alone because of family planning.

Like 44 other states in this country Pennsylvania is facing a serious budget crisis. But, unlike other states Pennsylvania has an answer right under our feet: Marcellus Shale. We remain the one and only state that does not have a tax on natural gas extraction.

Pennsylvania is also the only state with no excise tax on smokeless tobacco. And Pennsylvania and Florida remain the only 2 states with no tax on cigars.

We also have an easy, logical way to raise millions in revenues with no added tax on ANYBODY. Once and for all we need to close tax loopholes for Pennsylvania corporations with fake Delaware addresses! They're polluting our land, water and air; they're shipping our jobs overseas; they're giving themselves fat bonuses; and they're LYING to avoid paying taxes!

This week Governor Corbett gave his first budget address. He echoed the right-wing mantra 'share the sacrifice' – but the sacrifice wasn't shared. ..

... Cuts in education, hikes in tuition, freezing wages, layoffs, rollbacks, cuts in mortgage assistance and cuts to medical benefits for seniors ... yet he refused to ask for a drilling tax on Marcellus Shale. He refused to close corporate tax loopholes. And he actually gave big business millions of dollars more in additional tax credits.

He's also moving forward with attempts to privatize. Selling wine and spirits stores would put a stop to over \$513 million dollars a year in revenues...and it would take away wages for 5,000 Pennsylvania families - 400 AFSCME members.

A tax-based tuition voucher program would take away more Pennsylvania jobs – and take away more resources for public schools.

Next week I'll be debating the President of Pennsylvanians for Right to Work on 'PCN Call-In'. Here in Pennsylvania our collective bargaining rights are not in jeopardy, but, 'right to work' legislation is a real threat under this administration. Right to Work states have lower wages, higher on-the-job accidents, higher poverty, less insurance and pension coverage and lower education scores...

...And Right to Work legislation would give non-members a free ride. Free-riders would enjoy the benefits we gain - and the representation we provide – without paying any fair share whatsoever.

So we must continue. We continue to do the work of the people. We continue to fight for fairness and equality for all Americans. We stay in this fight, because it's the RIGHT fight.

There's nobody in this room who turns away from a challenge. There's nobody in this room who gives up. And, sisters and brothers, there's nobody in this room who stands alone. *Ain't it good to be part of a family?!*

Thanks for being here, and enjoy your weekend!

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