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THE WHITE HOUSE SUMMIT on Working Families

BY CAROL JOYNER

Shirley Young is a certified nurse at Isabella Nursing Home in NYC. She’s also the mother of teenage twins and a member of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. On June 23, Shirley joined other activists, parents, and advocates at the White House Summit on Working Families in Washington, DC. While she was one of more than 1,000 attending the Summit, she was only 1 of 4 who had lunch that day with President Obama!

Overcome with excitement by being selected to join the President for lunch at Chipotle, Shirley regained her composure enough to describe her most difficult work and family situation. It began when her son was diagnosed with scoliosis at the age of 14. The diagnosis and planned surgery filled her with dread. According to Shirley, “if we didn’t do the surgery then, he’d probably be in a wheelchair today.” The good news is that Shirley belonged to a union. She could both be available to her son during the hospitalization and take time off to care for him through recovery. And she had sufficient health care to cover a $60,000 medical expense. These basic rights were available to Shirley because she and her union had secured full family health coverage and time off with pay. Being there when your loved one needs you - this is what a 21st century workplace looks like.

LABOR SPEAKS UP!

On June 22, the Sunday before the White House Summit on Working Families, 250 labor activists gathered at the AFL-CIO for a Labor Speak Up Event, which highlighted all of the ways in which the labor movement fights to support work and family life. In a high-spirited mix of speeches, videos, music and testimony, we covered the range of issues from paid leave and scheduling to equal pay, living wage and job training. This event primed us for the Summit the next day and fortified our belief in the labor movement’s role in fighting for a better future for all workers.

“…The White House Summit was huge. Rarely do you hear from the President, First Lady, Vice-President, Dr. Jill Biden and the Secretary of Labor at a single event.”

AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer both lifting up the plight of workers and the different ways that unions are part of the economic solution in America. We also heard from several union members who, like Shirley, were there to tell their stories.

GOING BEYOND THE SUMMIT

The White House Summit was huge. Rarely do you hear from the President, First Lady, Vice-President, Dr. Jill Biden and the Secretary of Labor at a single event. They made their mark on work and family issues, telling stories about their personal struggles and sharing policy proposals to make it easier for all workers. President Obama announced some proposals that can help: funding to study the paid family leave systems that exist in CA, NJ and RI; getting Congress to pass the budget which includes a State Paid Leave Fund -innovation on FMLI; using the White House as a bully pulpit to motivate local leaders to move paid sick days and paid leave and having the federal government lead the way by modeling flexible work practices. For an overview and highlights of the White House Summit on Working Families, go to www.workingfamiliessummit.org

The opportunity is great – and so is the work we need to do. We’ve got to increase bargaining and organizing on work and family issues. The Labor Project is updating our bargaining database to make sure we’re capturing the most recent benefits negotiated. We’ve also pulled out bargaining examples into a separate document called “Models for Bargaining.” Find these and other resources at www.working-families.org. Unions and worker groups are fighting in every region of the nation for representation on the job, paid sick days, paid family leave, decent wages of $15.00 per hour, scheduling improvements and accommodations for pregnant workers, among many other issues. Join the fight for these struggles by going on our site or www.familvaluesatwork.org.

To win, we’ll have to fight on all fronts, at the bargaining table, in the legislature and in the streets. We may get support from current or future administrations. But in the end, building a 21st workplace that supports all families is up to us.

UNIONS WIN IT!

University of California, Student-Workers Union, UAW Local 2865 and the University of California, Berkeley recently averted a strike when they agreed to a long awaited settlement, which increased professional levels, expanded work and family support and wage increases for adjuncts.

Previously many women adjuncts felt pressured to take a quarter off with no pay or benefits when having a baby. The expansion of leave from 4 to 6 paid weeks for birth parents (4 paid and 2 unpaid for non-birth parents) makes possible a full 3-month maternity leave benefit that aligns with the quarter schedule on campuses. The childcare subsidy was also increased 50%, from $600/quarter (900/semester) to $900/quarter (1350/semester). And nursing mothers will have full access to lactation stations.

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T
day, women make up two-thirds of the low-wage workforce, working as home health aides, child care workers, fast food servers, maids and cashiers. In addition to their responsibilities as breadwinners, women in low-wage jobs are also very likely to have responsibilities as caregivers. But the work scheduling practices in these fast-growing, low-wage jobs often put work and family responsibilities on a collision course.

All too often, workers in low-wage jobs have very little say in their work schedules—many are unable to make even minor adjustments to pick up a child from a child care provider, or get to class or a second part-time job. To qualify for full-time hours, some employers require workers to have no limitations on their availability for work whatsoever—even when the employer is open 24/7. For single moms, this requirement can be nearly impossible to meet. Across a range of shift work industries, workers often report getting their schedules only a week or less in advance, and sometimes just a few days in advance. Some workers are sent home from their shifts early without being paid for the shift, simply because there are fewer customers that day. Call-in shifts, which require workers to call in on the day of a potential shift to find out if they have to work, are a particularly egregious form of unpredictable scheduling. On top of not knowing when they will work, workers often do not know how much work they will get—work hours—and thus wages—frequently fluctuate by week, time of day, and length of shift.

These unpredictable and unstable schedules over which workers have little control are a byproduct of employers’ attempts to shift the risks of doing business from employers onto workers. The cruel irony is that attempts to match labor costs as tightly as possible to consumer demand through “just-in-time” scheduling do not help the bottom line. Instead, they contribute to absenteeism and higher workforce turnover, as workers leave jobs with nightmarish scheduling practices and uncertain incomes searching for a better life for their families. It doesn’t have to be this way. Labor unions have proven that over and over again by bargaining for and implementing sane work schedules. For example, members of Local 3 United Store Workers who work at Bloomingdales receive their schedules 21 days in advance. Employees of Cooperative Home Care Associates, a worker-owned staffing agency in New York City are guaranteed 30 hours of pay each week, even when 30 hours of work are not available. Many union contracts require reporting time pay (a minimum shift pay for employees who report to work and are sent home), curb mandatory over-time, provide for employee input into scheduling, and require advance notice of schedule changes.

In non-unionized workplaces, and particularly in low-wage jobs, abusive scheduling practices are rampant. In a recent research project with the Ms. Foundation and five workers’ centers we asked working parents about the fallout from these often difficult, and sometimes abusive scheduling practices. They told us that these schedules made it nearly impossible to cobble together childcare, hold down a second job, or go to school.

Movement leaders are tackling this problem head on. For example, workers at The Retail Action Project and OUR Walmart are winning campaigns for fair work schedules. State and local policymakers are jumping on board too—San Francisco and Vermont have recently passed laws protecting workers who make scheduling requests from retaliation and local policy efforts to curb unpredictable scheduling are under way in San Francisco and New York City. Eight states and the District of Columbia have enacted reporting time pay laws. D.C. and California have split shift pay laws, which require employers to provide an extra hour of pay when an employee works a nonconsecutive shift with a long break in the middle that is not for a meal or rest period.

“These unpredictable and unstable schedules over which workers have little control are a byproduct of employers’ attempts to shift the risks of doing business from employers onto workers.”

Workers demonstrating for fair scheduling practices with the Retail Action Project, an initiative of the RWDSU.
The Labor Project for Working Families - National Advisory Board (NAB)

We’re pleased to introduce the amazing labor women who comprise the NAB. Their direction and support has carried the LPWF through many years of success!

GOOD LEGISLATION

This past year, seven states and DC have raised the minimum wage. Michigan’s grassroots effort to raise the minimum to $10.10 per hour resulted in a reactive Republican led raise to $9.25 per hour with indexing and a small increase for tipped workers. Thanks to huge grassroots support from Raise Up Massachusetts, an integrated campaign to pass minimum wage and paid sick days, the MA State Legislature just passed an $11.00 minimum wage and earned sick time will be on the November ballot!

For more information on the MA initiatives, go to http://raiseupma.org.

These worker policies are taking the nation by storm – ensuring a decent wage for all and moving the fight for a just economy forward.

RESEARCH

THE UNION ADVANTAGE

The truth is in these numbers. Union women earn on average, 13 percent more than their non-union counterparts - even in traditionally low-wage occupations. Union women are 36 percent more likely than non-union women to receive employer-sponsored health care and 53 percent more likely to participate in an employer-sponsored retirement plan or pension plan. Also faring better with regard to work and family policies, union members are also more likely to use the Family Medical Leave Act, have paid parental leave, access to paid sick days and other supports that all workers need. Read this important report by Center for Economic and Policy Research at http://www.cepr.net/documents/women-union-2014-06.pdf and find out more.

DID YOU KNOW?

Telecommuting has historical roots. Back in 1881, recently freed laundresses, eager both to care for their own families and to earn income as domestic workers, built an industry of taking in laundry. This work accommodation permitted them to wash the clothing of more privileged families in their own home or communities, where they could also care for their family members. These 19th century workers, who were later joined in this practice by garment industry piece workers, are our telecommuting mothers. Read more about women and labor during and post reconstruction in Tera Hunter’s To ‘Joy My Freedom.

Members of Congress have taken note. Representatives Miller and DeLauro will soon introduce legislation that would secure baseline workplace protections from abusive scheduling practices for workers across the country and give workers a say in the timing of their work hours. For workers in certain fast-growing low-wage occupations that are among those most at risk for unpredictable and unstable schedules the legislation will require reporting time pay, split shift pay, and advance notice of work schedules. Unions, worker centers, women’s groups and work-family groups have all gotten involved.

Behind the groundswell of enthusiasm for improving scheduling practices is this simple truth: When workers have a say in their hours and more predictable and stable schedules, they are less likely to miss work due to child care or other conflicts, and are better able to hold onto their jobs. And that’s not only good for workers and the families who depend on them, it’s good for employers’ bottom lines as well.

Summit Snapshots

A broad coalition of unions and worker organizations brought 250 labor activists to the White House Summit and held a Labor SpeakUp! the day before to recognize the role that labor unions play in moving work and family policies both at the bargaining table and in public policy arenas. Union leaders, young workers, activists, national advocates and others were there to make their case. Photo credits go to photographer Bill Burke, AFLCIO. Go to https://www.flickr.com/photos/aflcio/sets/72157645453928862/ for additional photos.

Carmen Berkley, AFT-CIO was MC “par excellence” at the SpeakUp!

Activists speak up!

Silvia Fabela, OUR Walmart lifts up the power of bargaining.

Randi Weingarten, President AFT closing out the SpeakUp!

Activists sharing WF policy solutions on community tree.
The LPWF was there to witness President Obama’s signing of executive orders strengthening equal pay protection for workers employed by federal contractors.

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Visionaries ($20,000+)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Champions (10,000-19,999)
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
California Teachers Association
International Brotherhood of Teamsters
SEIU Local 1000, CSEA
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1167

Leaders ($5,000-9,999)
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
California Teachers Association
International Brotherhood of Teamsters
SEIU Local 1000, CSEA
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1167

Organizers ($1,000-$4,500)
AFGE Women’s/ Fair Practices Departments
Association of Flight Attendants – CWA
Amalgamated Transit Union
California Nurses Association
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

Netsy Firestein and Lawrence Black
SEIU Local 1021
United Food & Commercial Workers International Union
UFCW Local 324
UFCW Women’s Network

Advocates ($250-$599)
1199SEIU Child Care Fund
AFSCME Local 2187/DCC 47
AFSCME New England Organizing Project
AFT-Guild Local 1931
California Federation of Teachers
California Labor Federation
California Faculty Association
California School Employees Association
Carpenters 46Northern California Counties Conference Board

Communications Workers of America
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Coalition of Labor Union Women – East Bay Chapter
Consumer Protection Fund
CWA District 4
CWA District 9
CWA Local 9013
CWA Local 9575
CWA - Southern California Council
Engineers & Scientists of California Local 20, IFPTE
Florida Professional Firefighters
IBEW Local 6
IBEW Local 234
IBEW Local 1245
IBT Local 287
IPPE Local 21
International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers
IUE-CWA
Kerry Newkirk, SEIU and CLUE
Los Angeles County Federation of Labor
Los Rios College Federation of Teachers
Newport-Mesa Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 1794
OPEU Local 3
OPEU Local 29
Professional and Technical Employees Local 17
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
Sacramento Central Labor Council
San Bernardino-Riverside Counties CLC
San Diego & Imperial CLC
San Francisco Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Sign Display & Allied Crafts Local 510
Teamsters Joint Council No. 7
Teamsters Local 70
Teamsters Local 287
Teamsters Local 315
Teamsters Local 350
Teamsters Local 853
UA Local 159
UA Region 5
UFCW Local 270
UFCW Local 1428
UNITE HERE Local 2
United Educators of San Francisco, AFT Local 61
United Steelworkers Union
USW Local 9445
Weinberg, Roger & Rosenfeld

* The fundraising drive is ongoing through August. This list will be updated to reflect contributions that arrived after this printing. Thanks for understanding.

SUPPORT US!
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