Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the CWA Minority Leadership Institute

CWA has a proud history as a democratic union dedicated to the principle that true democracy requires active participation from all voices among our diverse membership. CWA created the Minority Leadership Institute (MLI) in 1983 to assist in reaching this goal.

When the MLI was created thirty years ago, female workers and people of color constituted a large percentage of our union. However, the top leaders were predominantly white and male. Recognition of this inconsistency within the union—coupled with discriminatory hiring practices by CWA-represented employers—fueled the idea of creating a leadership program for rising leaders of color.

The CWA Minority Caucus led the push for greater education and training opportunities. The Minority Caucus built upon the principles established by the CWA Black Caucus and the National Black Communication Coalition (NBCC) to end racism and sexism.

Early advocates of the MLI pressed for skills training that included six weeks of classes at the former George Meany Center. Participants in the program studied bargaining, writing, public speaking, strategic planning, and other skills supporting their leadership development. Analysis of contemporary political issues rounded out the training.

More recently, the MLI has incorporated an internship component. While the residency portion of the program has been shortened, participants now return to their home districts/sectors/division to complete five days of work in either organizing or politics. Participants now get a combination of classroom learning and field experience.

All levels of our Union need leadership, and many MLI graduates are now local activists, local officers, staff and National Executive Board members. The faces of CWA leadership are no longer predominantly white and male. People of color and women in leadership roles now come much closer to mirroring the demographics of the membership of our great union.

Resolved: On this 30th Anniversary of the CWA Minority Leadership Institute, the 74th CWA convention expresses our deepest gratitude to the pioneers whose foresight and concern led to the development of the CWA Minority Leadership Institute.

Resolved: The CWA Minority Leadership Institute will continue its rich tradition of leadership development so that our Union leaders at all levels are prepared to build a
broader movement for justice and fairness for all, in the workplace and in the larger society.

Resolved: All CWA locals shall offer opportunities for CWA Minority Leadership Institute graduates to share their knowledge and expertise with others.

Resolved: Every CWA local union shall commit to foster diversity at all levels of leadership in order to promote racial and gender equity and economic justice.
Federal Budget Priorities to Invest in Jobs and People

Congress and the President are embroiled in a continuing battle over spending priorities that has already resulted this year in $42 billion in cuts to vital domestic programs. These automatic spending cuts, known as “sequestration,” have slashed funding for job training, education, housing, environmental protection, medical research, air traffic controllers, food safety, public safety, and other essential services. If Congress does not act, these automatic spending cuts are projected to reduce investments in vital public programs by $109 billion every year through 2021.

Already, these federal budget cuts have led to lay-offs and furloughs which translate into pay cuts for federal workers, and threaten state and local government programs and workers whose funding relies on federal support. This comes at a time when the U.S. lost almost half a million public sector jobs in the past year.

Federal budget cuts will reverse our already fragile, jobless recovery. According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, sequestration will reduce U.S. economic output by $7.9 billion in 2013 and result in the loss of one-million jobs throughout the economy over the next two years.

Now President Obama, in a misguided attempt to engage congressional Republicans in a budget deal that would also raise taxes on the wealthy, has proposed cuts in Social Security through a mechanism called the “chained CPI” that lowers future Social Security cost-of-living adjustments. If enacted, an average earner retiring at age 65 would experience a benefit cut of nearly $10,000 over 20 years, even with the so-called protections in the president’s proposal. These cuts are quite significant, given the median annual income of today’s elderly is just under $20,000. The chained CPI would also be used to adjust tax brackets, exemptions, and credits, leading to a hidden tax increase on low- and middle-income earners. Taken together, the chained CPI will slash Social Security benefits and lead to an across-the-board tax increase that disproportionately hits low earners.

President Obama also proposes to increase Medicare co-payments and deductibles that would affect many middle-income retirees. It is unconscionable to ask middle- and low-income seniors to pay more for Medicare and receive less in Social Security at a time in which the costs of medical care (which disproportionately impact seniors) continue to outpace overall inflation, and when the richest Americans have seen their incomes skyrocket and corporate profits are at an all-time high.

The fixation on federal deficit reduction is simply wrong. Our nation is in a jobs crisis, not a debt crisis. There are more than 21 million Americans who are out of work or seeking full-time employment.
The way to economic recovery and job creation requires more, not less, government stimulus in programs that put people to work and build the physical and human infrastructure for a globally competitive economy.

These investments can be paid for through an equitable tax system that requires the wealthy and corporate America to pay their fair share. Even as the income of the top one percent skyrockets, middle-class Americans pay almost the same proportion in taxes as the top one percent, when measured as a percent of income. The U.S. corporate tax rate is the lowest among 32 advanced economies, and many multi-billion dollar corporations, including Verizon, Facebook, General Electric, and Boeing, paid no federal taxes in the 2008-2011 period.

In addition, winding down the war in Afghanistan provides an opportunity to redirect military spending to vital domestic programs. Since 2001, the Pentagon budget has increased by 50 percent, growing nearly twice as fast as domestic spending to $700 billion a year, and accounting for 57 percent of all federal discretionary spending. There remain 68,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, with similar numbers projected through the end of 2014, and an undetermined number (by some estimates up to 15,000) remaining after that. As US Labor Against the War has long advocated, the U.S. government should expedite the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and properly care for them when they return.

U.S. budget priorities must be based on the recognition that true national security derives from a country that invests in people’s health, education, employment, retirement security, food and environment, a modern infrastructure, including universal high-speed broadband networks.

**Resolved:** CWA will educate our members and take action to oppose proposals that would reduce Social Security benefits and raise out-of-pocket Medicare expenses on middle-income recipients.

**Resolved:** CWA will educate our members and join with our allies to support a federal budget that increases tax revenues on the wealthy and large corporations; cuts military spending by the maximum amount consistent with true security for our people; and adequately funds programs that create jobs, invest in people and a 21st century infrastructure, and protect the social safety net on which millions of the elderly, children, disabled and others depend.

**Resolved:** Resolved: CWA will educate our members and join with our allies to support policies that promote jobs not wars. CWA supports repurposing non-essential military spending to fund programs that rebuild America through the development of new sustainable technologies and 21st century manufacturing, construction of affordable housing, modernization of our nation’s physical and social infrastructure, and the deployment of universal high-speed broadband to all Americans.
Resolution 74A-13-3

Fully Functioning Local Unions

In 2006, the 68th annual CWA Convention unanimously agreed on the Ready for the Future plan. In that plan, Step Five - titled “Locals: Fully functioning and effective locals strengthen bargaining power” – affirmed that “…representation [of members] must be effective, and that requires trained stewards, full participation in constitutionally mandated meetings and programs, and resources for membership communication and mobilization, as well as organizing and political action. Our members deserve no less.”

The need for fully functioning locals that effectively represent educated and mobilized members, united in fighting for our union’s goals of justice and equity for all workers, is even more critical today in a period in which collective bargaining coverage in the private sector has declined to less than seven percent of the workforce.

As a result of that decline, fewer and fewer workers have an organized voice through which to bargain for a fair share of the wealth that we produce. As a result, average U.S. workers’ wages, adjusted for inflation, have declined by 6.3 percent since the 1970s even as productivity increased by 57 percent. The economy grows and workers create wealth, which gets siphoned off by those at the top where financial and corporate power is concentrated.

CWA’s history has followed the same path as the rest of the labor movement. Our members in different industries have been buffeted by the winds of technological, regulatory, and financial change. Despite success in organizing new members, our ability to win representation elections and achieve first contracts is severely limited by labor laws that favor anti-union companies.

Our ability to achieve gains at the bargaining table is directly linked to our ability to organize workers in our industries. Where we have collective bargaining, our power is limited because each year we represent fewer of the workers in those industries.

Turning these conditions around will be tough. The challenges are made more difficult by the blocks to democracy brought on by an increasingly dysfunctional political culture dominated by moneyed and corporate interests and their political allies who use anti-democratic Senate rules to block the will of the majority. The Senate filibuster prevented even one minute of debate on the Employee Free Choice Act. Even when those we support are successful at the ballot box, despite corporate and secret money and voter suppression, the road to progressive change is obstructed by unwillingness of our Democratic allies to move forward. After decisive victories in 2012, the Senate leadership blocked efforts to fix the Senate’s broken rules, accepting a weak compromise which has done nothing to eliminate the gridlock of the last several years. Progressives win elections and then choose not to govern.
CWA’s strength comes directly from our capacity to fight to achieve our union’s vision at the local, state and national levels – both politically and at the bargaining table. The national union and CWA locals must work together to communicate with members and move them to action. Members must understand that while our losses have weakened our Union, we can grow stronger if we are united and moving in the same direction. Our members’ union connection is linked to their other roles in the community. Building coalitions with other unions and progressive organizations in a movement for change will benefit everyone.

Article 13, Section 9 of the CWA Constitution sets clear duties and obligations for Local Unions. In addition to the representation of workers in their jurisdiction and many important administrative responsibilities, these duties include the active promotion of union programs, organizing, legislative and political activity, member education, women’s and equity committees, among others. These critical activities will help CWA build a movement for democracy and equity.

In reviewing the now withdrawn proposal establishing a minimum size for local unions, the Constitution Committee noted that Article 13, Section 5 of the CWA Constitution provides for the Executive Board to revoke or suspend the charter of a local union that fails to carry out its obligations as listed in the CWA Constitution.

There may be very effective and fully functioning local unions that represent relatively small numbers of members in all the ways described by the CWA Constitution. There may be large local unions that are not effectively representing their members, as defined by the Constitution. A local with a large number of members cannot guarantee its effectiveness by its size, nor is a small local necessarily incapable of meeting all the requirements of a local union.

The only way to rebuild worker power is to build a movement of tens of millions to pressure every level of our government, our economy, and our society. Union members must unite with immigrant workers, environmentalists, civil rights activists, and other progressive forces that support justice. CWA’s local unions are the foundation of our union where we can have the greatest impact in building a strong and lasting movement for democracy and economic justice.

Resolved: All local unions are expected to meet their responsibilities and obligations to be fully functional organizations, as defined by the CWA Constitution. The size of a local does not guarantee its effectiveness.

Resolved: It is no longer enough for local unions to focus only on the representation of our members. To rebuild worker power in this country, we have no other choice as a labor organization in the United States in 2013 but to work together – at all levels of our organization - with other unions and with other progressive organizations to build the movement for democracy and economic justice.
Resolved: CWA local unions must make it a priority to educate and mobilize members to give them a real opportunity to participate in building the movement for democracy and economic justice.

Resolved: The Secretary-Treasurer and the Executive Board will continue to assess all local unions’ success in meeting the standards set by the CWA Constitution.

Resolved: The Secretary-Treasurer and the Executive Board will work to support local leaders in their efforts to ensure that all local unions are fully functioning local unions, as described by the CWA Constitution.
Resolution 74A-13-4

Building a Movement for Real Democracy

Now, in America, there is no path to workplace justice. On every issue important to working people, from bargaining rights to retirement security, from health care reform to keeping good jobs in the U.S., our path forward is blocked by the barriers to democracy that allow the one percent to control our government, our workplaces, our political process and our democracy.

This is the fight we must take on.

We must break down the influence of corporate money in politics that enable corporations to buy elections and set our nation’s policy. Candidates, parties, and outside groups spent $7 billion in the 2012 elections. In those campaigns, business interests had a 15-1 advantage over union workers’ contributions to political action funds and other labor contributions. Members of Congress spend 30 to 70 percent of their time fundraising and talking to the top one percent, not constituents.

We must fix the broken Senate where legislation that is important to working families do not get even a minute of debate on the Senate floor even with majority support.

We must stop the attack on voting rights in our country, where at least 30 states are looking for ways to make it more difficult for citizens to exercise their right to vote, from eliminating early voting to cutting the hours that polls are open to imposing harsh restrictions on students, the elderly, the poor and others.

We must turn back the attacks on immigrants, who pay Social Security and other taxes, yet cannot speak up against an employer’s abuse.

The key is building a broad movement that will take on this corporate structure and win, a movement that will challenge the Senate “status quo,” a movement of 50 million people working together that will change America.

This work already has begun across our union and across our country. With CWA leading the way, it is happening now:

- In Ohio, Stand Up for Ohio has brought together a broad coalition that successfully fought the attack on public worker bargaining rights and voting rights, and is taking on unfair home foreclosures and other community issues.

- Take Action Minnesota brought together organizations across the state to defend citizens’ right to vote.
• Students from Florida and Tennessee traveled many hours by bus to support Verizon workers at last year’s annual meeting in Alabama.

• With the Sierra Club, Citizens Trade Campaign, the Teamsters and others, we are taking on the secretive Trans Pacific Partnership trade deal.

• A strong coalition in New Jersey, including the NAACP, CWA and other unions, Garden State Equality and many more, is taking on Governor Christie’s privatization campaign and is working to expand voting rights.

• In New Jersey, progressive allies blocked the threat to public worker bargaining rights by electing Democrats to the state legislature who support workers’ rights.

• In New Mexico, progressive allies blocked the threat to public worker bargaining rights by electing Democrats to the state legislature who support workers’ rights.

• In New York, we are poised to win public financing of elections, and in West Virginia, a strong coalition convinced the legislature to become the 12th state supporting a federal constitutional amendment to get money out of politics.

Groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have spent 40 years working to strip workers of bargaining rights and to enshrine the power of the one percent. They have come a long way toward those goals. We must be part of a broader, powerful movement of 50 million people that is demanding real justice. If we do not overcome these barriers to democracy, we will not move forward, not at the bargaining table and not on the issues important to working families.

**Resolved:** CWA will continue to educate members on how the barriers to democracy block progress on our core issues of good jobs, health care, retirement security and bargaining rights.

**Resolved:** CWA, with convening partners NAACP, Greenpeace, Sierra Club and 50 other organizations, will continue to expand the Democracy Initiative that is taking on the one percent and these barriers to democracy.

**Resolved:** CWA members, locals, officers and staff pledge to work in our communities to build effective organizations that will stand up to the one percent and fight for universal voting rights, democratic Senate rules and getting big money out of politics. We will find common ground with our allies and move those issues forward.
Protect Workers Rights, the NLRB, and Reform Senate Rules

Corporate America and anti-worker politicians have been engaged in a 40-year campaign to weaken collective bargaining rights. Their goal is to block our ability to bargain a fair share of the wealth that we produce. Their success has pushed bargaining rights in the private sector below seven percent, making it harder and harder to sustain our standard of living in each round of negotiations. Meanwhile CEO pay soars and the top one percent now own 40 percent of the nation’s wealth, while the 80 percent of us own just seven percent.

This year corporate America and their political allies have made the five-member National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), charged with overseeing private sector organizing for 85 million unorganized workers and for seven million workers covered by collective bargaining, impotent by using antiquated Senate rules to prevent the NLRB members from being confirmed.

First, the Senate minority refused to permit any debate on President Obama’s NLRB nominees from 2008 to 2010, leaving the National Labor Relations Board with just two members. As Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said last year “I will continue to block all nominations to the NLRB…The NLRB as inoperable could be considered progress.”

Then, in June 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that the two-member NLRB did not have the authority to decide cases. In order to keep the Board functioning, a frustrated President Obama made three recess appointments, two Democrats and one Republican. In making these “recess appointments,” President Obama followed longstanding precedent. The Reagan, Clinton, Obama, and both Bush administrations made over 300 such recess appointments.

Now, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that those recess appointments were illegal and threatens to reverse all of the decisions they have made. Already, at least 87 companies – including CNN, Cablevision, Starbucks, and Time Warner – have challenged past NLRB decisions on the basis of the court ruling. The companies are trying to overturn or block union elections, undo penalties awarded to fired workers, and halt subpoenas. An already overwhelmed NLRB faces further backlog and delay.

As a result, 250 CWA-represented technicians illegally terminated by CNN nine years ago will be forced to wait even longer for justice. In 2008, an NLRB Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) ruled that CNN created a phony reorganization solely to get rid of union-represented workers. The ALJ ordered reinstatement, full back pay, and negotiation with NABET-CWA. But implementation of that decision was first delayed by the Supreme Court’s ruling that the Board could not lawfully act with only two Board members. Now these CWA members have been put on hold again.

As the agency responsible for enforcement of our nation’s labor laws, the NLRB’s investigation into the illegal firings of CWA members during the Verizon strike helped CWA
negotiators win their reinstatement. Similarly, regional Board action buttressed the community mobilization that recently won reinstatement for 22 CWA members at Cablevision in Brooklyn NY who were illegally fired for exercising their rights on the job.

Although the current system is seriously flawed and inadequate, Board findings of labor law violations strengthen workers’ ability to counter employers’ campaigns of fear and intimidation in organizing campaigns at T-Mobile and elsewhere. In contract administration and collective bargaining, the NLRB can force employers to provide needed data and engage in serious bargaining.

There is a path to restore an operating NLRB. President Obama has submitted a full package of NLRB nominees to the Senate – three Democrats, two Republicans. The Senate Democratic Majority must move the nominations to the Senate floor. If, as expected, Senate Republicans abuse the Senate rules and filibuster the nominees, Senate Majority Leader Reid must be prepared to confront the filibuster by keeping the Senate in continuous session or use his power as the presiding officer of the Senate to stop obstruction by corporate America and their Republican allies and call the question to a vote.

The NLRB nominees are not the only nominees whose confirmations are blocked by an obstructionist minority. Today there are 26 federal judges awaiting confirmation, including nine judicial emergencies (seats that have been open for a long time with high caseloads) caused by Republican refusal to permit a vote on judges. The Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has never been confirmed as big banks and their Republican allies filibuster his nomination. The list goes on and on.

Resolved: Every CWA local, working with others in the labor movement and our allies, will join in a campaign of mobilization, demonstrations, and direct action to demand that the Senate confirm a full package of NLRB nominees.

Resolved: Every CWA local will urge members to “Text NLRB to 69866” in order to build a large rapid response network as part of this and other campaigns.

Resolved: CWA will join with other partners to restore our democracy and change Senate Rules to permit debate and votes on nominations made by the President and eliminate the hostage-taking which undermines government.
Resolution 74A-13-6

Immigration Reform: The Time is Now

There is no question that the U.S. immigration system is broken. That is why the labor movement has joined with faith and community leaders, civil rights activists, immigration organizations and others, to call for comprehensive immigration reform. The immigrant community is an important part of the movement that we are building to create economic and social justice.

A framework for comprehensive reform must include:

- A roadmap to citizenship for undocumented workers. Immigrants who have proven that they positively contribute to American society should be able to apply for legal residency and eventual citizenship.

- The special circumstances of children brought to the United States by their parents and who have grown up and attended school in this country.

- A continuation of our country’s long-standing tradition to keep families together. This should apply regardless of sexual orientation.

- Establishment of an independent commission to assess and manage future immigration flows, based on actual need for such workers due to labor market shortages.

This framework reflects our shared values of dignity, fairness, opportunity, voice and justice. It is based on the simple idea that working people can only be stronger by making sure that all workers have protection against employer exploitation and are equally covered by the laws of our land.

The United States has always been a nation of immigrants. Our history is that of people who risked everything to come to this country for a better life for themselves and their families. For most immigrants arriving in the late 1800s or the early years of the 20th century, there were no laws restricting their ability to work and earn citizenship in their new homeland. The newest immigrants deserve no less.

If our nation does not adopt a path to citizenship, we are condemning 11 million immigrant workers and their children to exploitation by employers, substandard wages and working conditions.

Last November, voters soundly rejected the pro-corporate and anti-immigrant agenda advanced by those who have stood in the way of comprehensive reform. The time for real reform is now.
**Resolved:** CWA will continue to educate members about the adverse effects the current broken immigration system has on all working people and on the need for real reform that ensures that all workers are protected against exploitation and have full and equal protection under the law.

**Resolved:** CWA will work with allies who agree that comprehensive immigration reform must happen now. We know that a movement of 50 million Americans can bring about real change and restore economic and social democracy. CWA at every level will join forces with other unions, faith groups, civil rights and community organizations, Jobs with Justice, students and others to make our voices heard.

**Resolved:** CWA, working through our Legislative-Political Action Teams and on every level of our union, will make sure that state, local and federal legislators and elected officials know that we demand a path to citizenship for 11 million immigrants, many of whom were brought to the U.S. at a young age by their parents. These 11 million immigrants work hard, love this country, and want to be full participants in this democracy. Together, we will build a movement for change.

**Resolved:** Immigration reform must be combined with a new effort to revise international trade and investment agreements, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, to address the base causes of large-scale immigration.
Equal Access to Healthcare Coverage

CWA opposes all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

Transgender and gender non-conforming people have great difficulty securing affordable, comprehensive healthcare. Many transgender people are denied health insurance when they disclose their transgender status or transition-related medical history to a potential insurer.

Most health insurance policies still specifically exclude transgender-related care and services. Denial or inaccessibility of healthcare has life-long effects on people’s ability to learn, work, and care for themselves mentally and physically.

Currently many private and public sector employers and several International Unions provide transgender-inclusive healthcare coverage. CWA believes that all union members and staff should have access to affordable, comprehensive quality healthcare.

Resolved: CWA supports public and private trans-inclusive health insurance coverage.

Resolved: CWA opposes exclusions of coverage for transgender individuals.

Resolved: CWA endorses and supports efforts to remove health insurance exclusions that prevent transgender people from accessing medically necessary care and to ensure that quality healthcare coverage is available to everyone, including transgender people.