

Taking THE Lead

SEIU LOCAL 721's NEWSLETTER BY AND FOR UNION ACTIVISTS

AUGUST '07 ISSUE

Manifesting Our Vision for a Healthier Community

A. Philip Randolph Institute
38th Annual Conference
August 1-5, 2007
Oakland Marriott City Center

A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin envisioned building a labor movement that reflects the needs of all workers; a nation built on racial equality, economic justice and opportunity for all of its citizens. The 38th Annual Conference honored that vision by focusing on our health care needs and raised awareness to the glaring health disparities in the African American and other minority communities.

The conference opened with the special screening of "Sicko" by Michael Moore with group discussion facilitated by Tony Hill, Florida State Senator. In case you haven't seen it, "Sicko" exposes the profit motive behind the health care industry and documents the HMO horror stories of insured Americans. Many viewers, myself included, were shocked by the realization of our health care system's failure, and upset at the health care industry's deliberate deceit of the American public. Watch it!

Day two was highlighted by three presentations. In "Culturally Competent Care", Dr. Deborah Gould emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity in health care settings. Dr. B Wayne Kong, CEO of the Association of Black Cardiologists, illustrated the risk of heart disease from unchecked sodium intake. William Hoffman's presentation, "Chronic Diseases", highlighted many of the disparities in the African American community. We learned that infant mortality rates, for example, are twice as high for African Americans than Whites, and that African Americans are three times less likely to receive prenatal care. Other disparities included higher rates of cancer, diabetes, asthma, and AIDS.

Friday, day three, honorable Willie L. Brown, Jr., former Mayor of San Francisco provided us with a stimulating discussion on the nation's health care system. Specifically he argues that our prison health care system is the "best model for the entire nation". You get the health care you need while the government foots the

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"The message of the conference was something that is helpful for everyone. As a group of people we have to eat more healthy - salt is a demon and we need to exercise more. Even just a simple walk - not trying to win anyone's race - will get us off our buns and make us healthier!"

Cynthia Molette



Want to contribute to this newsletter? We need a few dedicated activists to **take the lead** in the areas of writing, editing, distribution, reporting, photography and logistics. You will work closely with a team of SEIU Local 721 member communicators to deliver vital news and views to thousands of public service workers throughout Southern California. If you're interested, contact Burt Vera Cruz, Communications Specialist at (213) 368-8603 or email burt.veracruz@seiu721.org.

bill. The only problem is “getting people to qualify for coverage”. Our luncheon speaker, Dr. Joycelyn Edders, former Surgeon General appointed by President Clinton, assured the audience that she was a devout Christian but stressed the importance of safe sex over the Bush administration’s endorsement of simple abstinence. “Teens are going to have sex no matter what, so I say cover it up!”

Day Four featured the screening of an HBO special, “Life Support” starring Queen Latifah and Wendell Pierce. Driving the audience to tears, the film chronicles the true-life story of a mother living with AIDS, who overcame an addiction to crack and became a positive role model and an AIDS activist in the black community. A showing of the film for an L.A. audience is in the works.

Altogether, the conference was inspiring but left me to wonder, “Where do we go from here?” In my opinion, we can begin by talking to labor leaders and stewards. We can discuss the principles for eliminating health disparities within the African American and other minority communities and designate labor leaders in our organization who will lead our efforts. We can review what is being done in our area around health disparities and make a plan on how our union will address health inequalities in the coming year. We can also address our health inequities through our political representatives, religious leaders, and popular media and community organizations.



**Article by Harold Sterker,
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