

SECRETARY-TREASURER'S MESSAGE

What do women have to say about the issues that face all workers and their families? Do working women hold views different from their male counterparts?

At a time when the competing demands of work and family life are under increasing scrutiny, these are important questions. To get answers, the AFL-CIO commissioned a study called *Working Women Say...*, conducted by a professional polling firm. More than five million women are members of AFL-CIO-affiliated unions, making it the largest organization representing working women.

The results of the study were released in conjunction with "Working Women 2000," a conference held by the AFL-CIO Working Women's Department in Chicago in March, at which 5,000 working women from around the United States discussed their priorities.

While most women today feel secure in their jobs, more than one of four, or 28 percent, say that at least part of their working hours are in the evenings or on the weekends. Nearly half of all women who are married or living with a partner say they work different schedules than that of spouse or partner.

More than three-quarters of women say respect on the job is a very high or highest priority for them. More than eight in 10 working women say an organization for working women would help achieve their goals. This confirms an earlier poll that found that women were more likely than men to say they would vote for a union tomorrow if given the chance. That may be because women union members are more likely to have employer-provided pension and health benefits, equal pay, paid sick leave and family leave. According to 1999 Bureau of Labor Statistics data, women union members make 35 percent more than non-union women.

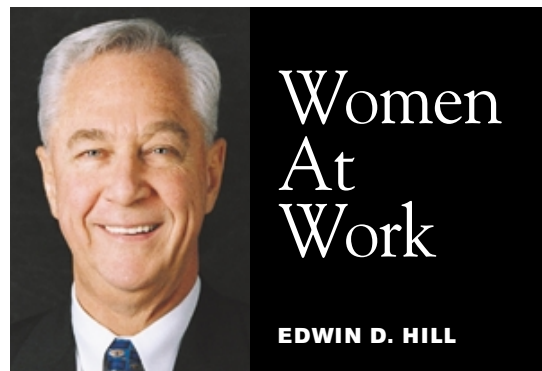
Women support legislative measures that help them meet family obligations while working, like expanding the Family Medical Leave Act and providing paid leave. Many working women support more flexible working hours (34 percent), paid leave to care for a baby or sick family member (54 percent) or child care benefits (74 percent).

The number one priority for 87 percent of working women, however, is stronger equal pay laws. Government statistics show that working women earn only 73 cents to the dollar that men earn, even as corporate profits and productivity soar. Eighty percent of women also said stronger affirmative action laws to provide more opportunities for all women are important.

With more than 44 million Americans uninsured, 84 percent of working women say making quality health care available is important and 72 percent think it's important to strengthen laws to provide for benefits and fair pay for part-time and temporary workers. With 28 percent of all working women not receiving any pension or retirement benefits on the job, most working women (81 percent) say legislation to improve pensions and protect Social Security is another top priority.

The IBEW was well represented at the Chicago conference. More important, we will explore how the issues discussed there apply specifically within the IBEW and the type of work our women members do. That discussion will continue at the second IBEW Women's Conference, to be held July 13-15 in Washington, D.C., and further information will be sent to all local unions shortly.

As we reach out to organize and recruit more women workers in all our branches, these issues are vital to the future of our union. For women—as for men—workplace justice and economic fairness come through union membership.



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