The Women’s Economic Summit

The Women’s Economic Summit, coordinated by CWE and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC) and held at the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York on October 11th and 12th, was a huge success. The conference attracted over 200 participants and more than 30 inspiring speakers from a variety of organizations, businesses and geographic locations. The event had a two-fold agenda: first, to evaluate the present economic situation of women in America and, second, to plan effective action to improve the economic status of women in the Jewish community and in American society at large.

The program included general sessions and nine concurrent forums. The general session speakers presented an abundance of information and practical suggestions on topics including the economic challenges facing women, women in the workplace, women’s legal equality, women in the Jewish communal world, and how to work in the future for the empowerment of women. Each session was followed by a question and answer period that audience members used to express opinions and gather more specific information from the speakers. The forums each brought together two speakers, one who spoke specifically from a Jewish perspective, and the other from a general perspective, and 10 to 20 conference participants. Brief presentations served to stimulate discussion and suggestions of action from the group participants. The workshop groups explored issues such as women and health care, education and poverty in Jewish and non-Jewish contexts.

Speakers Call for More Women in Top Positions in Business and Jewish Communal Worlds

On Monday night, one of the two keynote speakers, Shoshana S. Cardin, Chair of the Center for Learning and Leadership, and former Chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, began the Summit by emphasizing the need for women to obtain seats on the nominating and budget committees of organizations to gain power and influence. As many of the speakers pointed out, including Sheila W. Wellington, President of Catalyst, Inc., statistics reveal that only 6.2% of corporate board members of Fortune 500 companies are women. Diana Aviv, Associate Executive Vice Chair of NJCRAC discussed her study of 24 Jewish organizations and their patterns concerning board membership. She found that women are as invisible on the boards of Jewish organizations as they are in secular organizations.

When a conference participant pointed out that few women have the financial resources to give to organizations in order to gain a seat on a powerful committee, Ms. Cardin claimed that time and talent were as good as money. Many disagreed with Ms. Cardin. (continued on page 4)

The National Breast Cancer Coalition Presentation at the White House

Throughout the summer, the National Breast Cancer Coalition collected petitions calling for more money for breast cancer research. CWE members across the country gathered over 4,000 signatures as part of the drive. Judith Tuller, co-chair of the CWE Health Issues Task Force and member of the NBCC Board, went to Washington, DC for the presentation at the White House. These are her impressions of the day.

The mood was upbeat on October 18th as 200 breast cancer activists crowded into the East Room of the White House, along with numerous celebrities and dignitaries, to meet with President Bill Clinton, First Lady (continued on page 2)

SAVE THE DATE!

CWE Meeting

Sunday, January 23rd 2 PM

A Response to the Clinton Health Care Reform: Planning Jewish Women’s Lobbying Efforts

An update on CWE activities will follow the program.

More information to follow.
NBCC

(continued from page 1)

Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala. Our mission: to present to the President petitions bearing the signatures of 2.8 million people from across the country, petitions asking that the President "bring together leaders from his administration, the Congress, the scientific community, private industry, and women with breast cancer and other breast cancer advocates, to put in place a comprehensive plan to end the breast cancer epidemic."

We marvelled at how far our advocacy movement had come. The National Breast Cancer Coalition was founded in May 1991. The Coalition's President, Fran Visco, reminded us that "in October 1991 we brought 600,000 letters to Washington demanding more money for breast cancer research. We stood outside (the White House) and lifted the boxes ourselves while guards watched, onto a conveyor system, and we laughed, picturing them going out the other end into the incinerator. Those letters were never acknowledged. But here we are today, two years later, in the White House with the President."

The petitions sat in hundreds of boxes on the platform as President and Mrs. Clinton spoke to us. We cheered when Mrs. Clinton told us that her first meeting about health care reform was with the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues. And we were moved when she spoke to us of a young breast cancer activist whom she had met during the 1992 election campaign and who had since died; her husband and young son were with us in the East Room.

President Clinton told us what we came to hear. He said that when it comes to health care research and delivery, "women can no longer be treated as second-class citizens," and he made a commitment to develop a national action plan on breast cancer.

As I sat there, I was thinking proudly of the energetic participation of the Commission for Women's Equality in the petition campaign, of the women in our regions across the country who carried these petitions to their friends and colleagues, to the other groups to which they belong, and to their synagogues, gathering many thousands of signatures and bringing the message home to others in the Jewish community. So I was especially pleased to shake hands with Mrs. Clinton and tell her that I was representing the Commission for Women's Equality of the American Jewish Congress. She looked startled for a second, as almost all of the other women were speaking of their breast cancer groups. Then she said, "I'm so pleased to meet you. Thank you and the American Jewish Congress very much for being here."

And thank you, President and Mrs. Clinton, for hearing our voices.
November 25, 1993

Dear CWE Members:

Since last spring the plans for the Second International Jewish Feminist Conference have changed drastically. This letter will update you on the status of the conference and hopefully answer any questions that you may have.

Most importantly, I have been told that the Israelis and the Europeans cannot participate equally with us in fundraising for the conference. Adequate money is not available to support the type of conference that we had envisioned, nor is staff time available to do the fundraising necessary. The conference is impossible without this international coalition.

After meeting with Alice Shalvi and speaking with other AJCongress staff people, we have proposed that the AJCongress U.S./Israel Dialogue for the Summer of 1994 or the Summer of 1995 examine what has happened to the status of women since the first Dialogue in 1984 and expand the usual format to include feminists from other Jewish communities. I feel that the Dialogue will provide many of the benefits of an international conference but avoid the problems which made the conference unfeasible. However, many possible topics are being considered for the Dialogues and this is only one of the proposals.

One of the major agenda items for the conference was preparation for the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing. This will continue to be a priority of CWE, and we will both be involved in the United States activities and stay in touch with the people involved in Israel. A number of Jewish organizations and individuals are working on it here, and it is our understanding that the Prime Minister's Office in Israel has established a working group to prepare for the meeting.

I know that many of you have thought about this conference and worked on the preliminary planning, and I'm sorry that for various reasons this is not the right time to hold a full scale international conference.

If you have any questions, please call Jennifer Cowan at (212)360-1561.

Sincerely,

Ann F. Lewis
economic summit  
(continued from page 1)
Cardin's assumption that money was not a requirement for committee membership.

The compelling statistics presented by Ms. Wellington and Ms. Aviv and other speakers underscored remarks made by Joyce D. Miller, Executive Director for the Commission on the Glass Ceiling of the US Department of Labor and former National President of the Coalition of Labor Union Women.

Ms. Miller specifically addressed the problems women and minorities face in reaching high-level positions, effectively placing a cap on their mobility. Though the Commission on the Glass Ceiling has not come to any conclusions yet, Ms. Miller said that she does not necessarily see the need to implement further legislation in order to bring about equality in the workplace. She also mentioned that the Commission plans to use research grants to continue studies of women in the workplace.

Sheila Wellington cleverly summed up the sentiments of many of the meeting's participants about the glass ceiling when she ended her comments with the reflection that, "Those of us who started our married lives hearing the sound of broken glass at our feet would like to one day hear the same sound of broken glass above our heads."

Many of the speakers expressed the need for women to exploit the laws already in place rather than work for new legislation. The second keynote speaker on Monday night, Congresswoman Nita Lowey of New York, spoke about taking initiative by contacting Senators and Representatives on specific issues. Judith L. Lichtman, President of the Women's Legal Defense Fund expressed a similar message Tuesday morning on the "Women's Equality, Legislation, and the Courts" panel. When an audience member expressed some concern over the effectiveness of writing such letters to politicians, Ms. Lichtman suggested that one could take a different approach and write letters to the editor of a local paper. As Muriel Seibert, President of Muriel Seibert and Company, Inc. and the first woman to hold a seat on the American Stock Exchange bluntly stated: "if one way doesn't work, try another."

One speaker mentioned how important it is for women to elect more women and "female friendly men" to political office. Women must also be smart about their political contributions. Many speakers and audience members emphasized that persistency and commitment on the part of constituents is needed in order to keep politicians accountable. The idea of accountability was mentioned repeatedly throughout the conference.

Another recurrent message expressed by many of the Summit participants was that organizations and women must work not only on national concerns, but on local and internal ones as well. For example, the Jewish community should look inward and begin to examine the policies and the status of women in our organizations.

When Rabbi Lynne F. Landsberg, Associate Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, summarized the speeches and comments made during the Summit in the final general session, she found that most of the suggested actions to improve the economic status of women fell into one of three categories: women need to become self-empowered, women must take communal action, and women must become advocates for issues.

Ann F. Lewis, CWE Chair, concluded the conference with words of hopefulness. She discussed how women's issues are now part of the national agenda and encouraged the participants to continue working on these issues on all levels.

The official proceedings of the Summit will be published early next year. For information on follow-up activities to the Summit, please contact Jennifer Cowan at (212) 360-1561.

update on the international coalition for agunah rights

by Janet Goller, Metropolitan Region CWE Chair and ICAR Treasurer

ICAR, of which AJCongress is a member, is committed to changing the atmosphere in which the disposition of cases involving Jewish divorce is handled.

At the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations held last month in Montreal presentations on the agunah issue were made by both Norma Joseph on behalf of ICAR and Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress.

Plans are underway for the spring meeting of ICAR to be held in Israel, to culminate the Year of the Agunah.

It appears that the religious authorities in Israel are taking this issue seriously and have proposed the establishment of an ad-hoc committee of ICAR members and representatives of the Rabbinical Council to collaborate on finding methods of implementing reform.

The support of non-religious institutions, such as the American Jewish Congress, is very important, not only to ICAR, but also to the women whom it serves.
CWE Woman of Achievement Awards

On Tuesday, October 19th the Commission proudly honored the Honorable Colette Avital and Ms. Marcy Syms for their professional accomplishments and their significant contributions to Jewish life. Over 60 guests came to the evening awards presentation and reception at the Stephen Wise Congress House.

The Honorable Colette Avital, as Consul-General of Israel in New York, is the highest ranking female diplomat in the Israeli government. She has held a variety of key Foreign Ministry positions including Deputy Director of Information, Director of the training Division, and Deputy Director-General in charge of Information and Media Communication. In 1986 she was appointed to lead the Ministry’s efforts to upgrade the status of women in the diplomatic service.

Through their professional accomplishments and personal achievements, Colette Avital and Marcy Syms embody the beliefs and values to which the Commission for Women’s Equality is dedicated.

Congratulations to both of them.

Marcy Syms is President and Chief Operating Officer of Syms Corp. which operates off-price apparel stores under the Syms name. She is equally known in the field of public affairs and philanthropy and frequently speaks about the dynamics of family businesses. She is Vice President of the AJCongress and a member of its Executive Committee. She also sits on the Advisory Board of the National Association for Female Executives and on the Boards of both Stern College and Sy Syms School of Business at Yeshiva University. Ms. Syms is a member of the Young Presidents’ Organization, the Women’s Forum, and the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund.

HAPPY CHANUKAH
from the Commission for Women’s Equality of the American Jewish Congress

Regional News

The Long Island Region reports that a Commission for Women’s Equality has been inaugurated for Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Sharon Pikus and Elaine Bass are co-chairs and the first meeting took place on November 3rd.

A program about agunot is scheduled for January 12th.

The National Capital Region held both a "Golda Meir" fundraiser and roundtable discussion on issues of community and spirituality this past month.

The Midwest Region held a two part program on child care for working women and a program on Women’s Health Issues. Also, the office hosted two Bosnian Muslim women who came to speak out about the rapes and sexual assaults in Bosnia Herzegovina.

On November 21 the Pacific Southwest Region held a comedy benefit fundraiser for women of Bosnia Herzegovina. The office is also planning fundraising and consciousness raising events about WAVE "Women Against Violence Everywhere." The Pacific Southwest regional office is receiving a humanitarian award from the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women for their work with the Muslim Women’s League and the Sisters of Charity in the Women’s Coalition Against Ethnic Cleansing. Congratulations to them!

The Pacific Southwest Region received much media attention here and in Israel for their petition campaign against the removal of women from the painting "Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur," at the Beit Hatefutsot, the Museum of the Diaspora, in Tel Aviv. The CWE is also considering an interfaith project on Bosnia.
Update on Legislation

Violence Against Women Act

On Friday morning, November 19th, the Senate passed the crime bill by a vote of 94-5. Since the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was attached as an amendment to the crime bill, VAWA passed the Senate!

On Saturday, November 20th, the crime bill, including VAWA, passed the House by the overwhelming majority of 420-0. The civil rights provision which extends "civil rights" protection to all gender-motivated crimes passed as part of the Senate bill but was not part of the House version. VAWA is now awaiting conference committee action.

Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act

On November 16th, the Senate overwhelmingly voted 69 to 30 in support of the FACE bill. A less restrictive version of the FACE bill passed the House on November 18th. The bill will be brought before the Conference Committee in January.

FACE would impose jail terms and fines on anyone convicted of using threats and acts of force, and physical obstruction that injures, intimidates, or interferes with an individual seeking access to or providing abortion services. Lawful picketing and protest unaccompanied by force, threats of force or physical obstruction would not be prohibited and would be explicitly and fully protected by the Act. FACE also imposes penalties on those found guilty of intentionally damaging or destroying clinic property. In the Senate bill, those convicted would be sentenced to a maximum of one year in jail and a $15,000 fine for a first offense and three years and a $25,000 fine for subsequent offenses, with lesser penalties if the obstruction is "non-violent." The sentence could be increased to 10 years if injury results or to life in prison if someone is killed.

Children’s Initiative

According to the Children's Defense Fund, the four pieces of the Children's Initiative were included in the Budget Reconciliation bill. These included $585 million for childhood immunization, $1 billion for child welfare and family preservation and support, $2.5 billion for the Leland Childhood Hunger Relief Act and $20.8 billion for the expansion of the Earned Income Credit. In addition, the bill included $3.5 billion to establish "empowerment zones," and $1 billion of which will be used to provide social services to these "zones".

Summary of the Health Security Act

The CDF also outlined the key components of the Clinton health care plan. They may change as it wends it way through Congress.

A National Health Board sets national standards and budgets and oversees state implementation of reform. States will have the flexibility of establishing Regional Health Alliances, or implementing a single payor system. The Health Alliances will be responsible for enrolling individuals, and contracting health plans and designated community providers. Firms with over 5,000 employees can run their own Corporate Alliances, but they must also offer standard benefits.

Employers will be required to pay 80% of weighed average premium within an Alliance and employees will pay the rest depending on the plan they choose. There is a cap on the employers' total contributions but no similar cap on premium payments, co-

payments, and deductibles. Also, premiums will no longer grow at current rates.

Consumers can choose a low cost sharing (i.e. HMO), high cost sharing (i.e. fee-for-service) or combination cost sharing (i.e. PPOs) plan.

The plan hopes to contain health care costs by emphasizing managed care, administrative simplification, consumer choice and competition among plans, imposing limits on premium rate increases and on Medicare and Medicaid, and requiring a national health budget.

The bulk of the coverage will be paid for by employer and employee premiums. Other revenues for funding will come from Medicare cuts and offsets, Medicaid cuts and offsets, cuts in other federal programs, and new cigarette tax revenues. It is also expected that lower health care costs will generate higher wages and, subsequently, increased income taxes.

This issue inaugurates Proudly Jewish, Actively Feminist, the newsletter of the Commission for Women's Equality of the American Jewish Congress. Through it, we plan to disseminate CWE meeting and event information, legislative updates, and other relevant news affecting women and the Jewish community. If you have any suggestions for future issues or would like to write an article, call Jennifer Friedman at (212) 360-1561.