

# Union sisters claim their power



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**“SNAP FEAR—Sisters Not Afraid of Power Face Everything and Run!”** Those are the words of Sister Elise Bryant, president of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) in her address at the group’s national executive board meeting and conference last November in Phoenix, AZ. Bryant’s impassioned words urging women to run for office embodied the spirit of the conference, aptly titled “SNAP: Building for the Future.” The conference brought together nearly 100 union women (and a few union men) from around the country to analyze the 2018 election results, develop leadership and organizing skills, and plan for a better future for working women and their families.

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## CLUW’s goals

**CLUW is the country’s largest national organization for union women.** It has four goals: to encourage women’s activism and leadership at all levels of the labor movement; to organize those who are not yet organized; to educate and involve women in the legislative and political process; and to promote fairness, equality of opportunity and upward mobility for women in the workplace. CLUW also acts nationally on such issues as women’s health and wellness, child and elder care benefits, fair and equitable pay, fair trade, job security, national health care and the expansion of family and medical leave.

At the meetings, we learned that in the last year, CLUW has worked on attaining equal pay for equal work, getting out the women’s vote and supporting candidates who support working women. It also took on sexual harassment and assault, concentrating on opposing the nomination of Justice Brent Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. CLUW also has supported the unions in its coalition, including participating in “U.S. Mail: Not for Sale” rallies. A number of CLUW members also ran for office for the first time, empowered by the support of their CLUW sisters.

## SNAP conference takeaways

**The one-day SNAP conference began with a panel of five Arizona women who have fought to improve the lives of women and their families in the state, including a 29-year-old state representative and a mother who successfully fought off attempts to privatize the state’s public schools.** The rest of the day was devoted to workshops meant to give attendees practical skills and knowledge they could take back to their chapters and communities. Workshop topics included managing chapter finances, building strong chap-

ters, and the union’s role in addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and harassment. CLUW executive board members and outside experts ran the workshops; CLUW members contributed their own experiences and knowledge.

## Inspiration strikes

**Interestingly, though the conference was held in Phoenix,** there is no CLUW chapter in Arizona. Inspired by what they heard, NALC members Cynthia Staley, vice president of Phoenix Branch 576; Terry Valdez, financial secretary of the branch and legislative liaison for the Arizona State Association of Letter Carriers; and Mary Halford, director of retirees for Arizona SALC, decided to start a CLUW chapter in Phoenix themselves. They are hard at work organizing the 25 union members from at least five different unions necessary for establishing a chapter.

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—Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 Vice President Cynthia Staley

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“When you see other sisters from unions all over the country banding together to make a difference, it is truly exciting. I think Phoenix needs to be a leader in the positive empowerment of women and unions. Together with our sisters we can continue to make positive change for the next generation to be leaders within their unions and the communities they serve,” she added.

Indeed, outside of all the meetings and workshops, one of the best parts of the conference was connecting with our union sisters over meals, chants and even some labor songs. No matter what union we belong to or where we come from, we all understand the particular struggles we face as working women. CLUW’s power is in this sisterhood.

If you’d like to get involved in your local CLUW chapter, or start one of your own, check out the CLUW website at [cluw.org](http://cluw.org). Any union member can join.