



Report from the AFSCME/UNA 11th National Nurses Congress



For four days in early May, AFSCME nurses from around the country heard inspiring speakers, attended educational workshops, visited their Congressional representatives and networked with each other at the AFSCME/UNA 11th National Nurses Congress.

Seventeen workshops were offered at the Congress and there was something for everyone. Topics included workplace violence, the Magnet Recognition Program, talking to patients about end-of-life issues, the Joint Commission's National Patient Safety Goals, collective bargaining in the health care industry and the recent National Labor Relations Board "Kentucky River" decision on supervisory status, that affects some nurses' right to organize.

A highlight was noted author Suzanne Gordon, who urged nurses to speak up about how crucial they are to good patient care – to shed their image as "angels" and start presenting themselves as highly trained, competent health care professionals. She believes that too often nurses are not given credit for their role in healing and saving lives because they are not very good at talking about how they contribute to the delivery of care.

Researchers Helen Moss and Jean Ann Seago discussed the role of LP/VNs on the health care team. Ms. Moss is the primary author of the AFSCME report, *The LPN: A Practical Way to Alleviate the Nursing Shortage*. The report is available at <http://www.afscme.org/publications/14100.cfm>.

Steve Robinson, Veterans for America, spoke passionately about the dire need to improve healthcare services for our vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. While all services are stretched beyond their limit, they are particularly inadequate for vets with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries. The system simply is unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with the quantity and severity of these injuries.





AFSCME/UNA Town Hall Meeting

The Congress concluded with a town hall meeting, complete with key pad polling, table discussions and theme teams. Nurses were asked some questions about themselves and their workplace. Most of the nurses (57.4%) at the town hall meeting have been AFSCME members for more than ten years. The majority are female (88.8%) and most (81%) work full-time. Reflecting the national “graying” of the nurse workforce, 65 percent of the nurses are over the age of 50. Only 7 percent of were under 40. The national average age of working nurses is 43 years.



How long have you been an AFSCME member?

	<u>Nurse Congress</u>	<u>Information from AFSCME 2006 Convention</u>
Less than 1 year	1.9%	1%
1 – 5 years	17.8%	9%
6 – 10 years	22.9%	17%
11 – 20 years	34.4%	37%
21 – 30 years	20.4%	27%
More than 30 years	2.6%	8%

What is Your Age?

20 – 30	1.2%
31 – 40	6.2%
41 – 50	27.3%
51 – 60	55.3%
61 – 70	8.7%
70 and better	1.2%



Not only were the majority of nurses over age 50, but they have incredible longevity. Over 70 percent have worked in nursing for over 20 years.

How long have you been practicing as a nurse?

Less than 1 year	0.0%
1 – 5 years	2.5%
6 – 10 years	5.7%
11 – 15 years	7.6%
16 – 20 years	13.3%
21 – 30 years	34.2%
More than 30 years	36.7%

A majority of the nurses (51.3%) at the town hall meeting work in hospitals and acute care. Other represented settings included nursing homes/residential care facilities (17.3%), community/public health care (9.6%), ambulatory care (7.7%) and correctional health (3.9%).

Not surprisingly, most nurses identified staffing as the biggest problem in their workplace. What is alarming, however, is that almost all the nurses (94.5%) said short staffing is so serious it places their patients at risk. They also cited paperwork and devaluation of their skills as issues. In what must be a testament to having a union, mandatory overtime was the least problematic of the choices in this question. Seventy percent said that in the last year they had never been required to work overtime. And 52 percent of the nurses reported that their facility has a plan to deal with pandemic influenza and slightly over 60 percent said that their employer has policies designed to reduce medical and medication errors.

My biggest problem in the workplace is:

Staffing	40.0%
Mandatory overtime	0.8%
Balancing work and personal life	6.4%
Profits more important than patients	9.6%
Paperwork takes time away from patient care	18.4%
My skills are not valued	18.4%
Other	6.4%

I worry that insufficient staffing in my workplace regularly puts patients at risk.

Strongly agree	77.0%
Agree	17.5%
Disagree	3.2%
Strongly disagree	1.6%
Don't know	0.8%



Most nurses see the need for fundamental change in our health care system. Ninety-six percent strongly agree or agree that the government should guarantee that everyone has access to quality, affordable care and 62.9 percent favor it even if it means raising their taxes. Table discussions generated a “top ten list” of reasons to become active on health care reform. They also offered ideas on actions we can take to pass health care reform and the RESPECT Act, which would undo the harm done by the “Kentucky River” decision. Suggestions included member education using a variety of venues, lobbying representatives in their home districts, organizing rallies, and building coalitions with other unions and other organizations.

Top Ten Reasons to Become Active on Healthcare Reform

10. Patients without insurance wait longer and are sicker by the time they seek care, so it is more costly.
9. Preventive care is more efficient, so we should advocate for it.
8. We need to protect our profession and ensure that people continue to choose to become nurses.
7. Take the profiteers out of healthcare.
7. For our children and grandchildren.
5. Nurses have the social responsibility to educate others on this issue.
4. Those who have insurance end up paying for those who don't via higher premium costs. “Everyone pays for the uninsured.”
3. The high cost of healthcare is squeezing our wage increases.
2. Nurses are the caregivers of the community: we must speak out.
1. It's a moral issue – everyone should have access to quality healthcare.





Nurses gave the Town Hall meeting and the National Nurses Congress very good reviews. And they committed to continue to be a strong voice for nurses day in and day out.

Nurses Commit to Take the Next Step

“Will you.....”

Become active in AFSCME’s national campaign to reform our health care system?

Yes 96%
No 4%

Become a member of PEOPLE and ask one other person to join PEOPLE?

Yes 85%
No 15%

Volunteer to organize new members?

Yes 77%
No 23%

Become and/or recruit more union delegates/stewards in your workplace?

Yes 96%
No 4%

Volunteer on AFCSME’s 2008 election campaign efforts?

Yes 72%
No 28%

Generate 10 letters on healthcare reform to elected leaders?

Yes 81%
No 19%