

# UNIONS

BY TERRY DANIELE

We have just finished an election many people considered the election of their lifetime. At the same time most of us are happy our social media accounts and televisions are now free of election ads. One thing candidates emphasized in those ads was any endorsement received from a union.

*Rochester Woman Online* decided to investigate the thinking behind the endorsement of candidates by unions. To do this, we approached five (5) incredible women who are members of different unions.

They were Candace Rubin, Kendall Bell, Montina Scott, Christine Kinsman and Maria Fisher. The women hold different positions in their unions, but they all agreed that the most important items for selecting and promoting a candidate are the candidate's ethics and platform. Once the union decides to help a candidate's run for office, these women work with the union members to provide that support.

The members can help the candidates introduce themselves to the voters he or she hopes to serve by bringing campaign literature to the homes of district voters. Sometimes a financial contribution is made to the candidate's campaign fund and there is the promise of the union member votes. It is easy to see why a candidate would hope to be endorsed by a union. But

what is in it for the union? Certainly, they hope for an elected official with a friendly attitude toward labor unions and labor in general. It turns out though, that somewhat cynical view is unfair to these union women.

As we spoke with these union reps, we realized that while their obligation



was to their union members, they also had a strong commitment to their communities. As so often happens, as we spoke with them, their stories and their union work were more compelling than their political activism. Kendall Bell is a Union Staff Representative for IUECWA, and second vice Chair for Coalition of Black Trade Unionists

-CBTU. A second-generation union member, her involvement in her union extends to making sure the marginalized communities within her union are as well represented as other interests.

"This is the every day fight that guides my work" Bell says. Bell works against the scourge of institutional racism and inequality. In an organization that claims equality for all, this is the cause she wants to champion. She is very proud of the work and knows that whatever she can do to help inside her union will eventually work its way to the community. Bell has assisted in community food drives and fund raising. As we spoke, she talked about the pride she has in her family. Kendall mentioned her daughter and her face lit up. "My daughter can advocate for herself and knows what is right and wrong in her work place". That is from being raised in a home that practices what it preaches.

Candace Rubin is a teacher in the Rochester City School District, a member of a New York State United Teachers – NYSUT and The Rochester Teacher Association - RTA, a Political Action Coordinator for NYSUT and the chair of the Rochester Labor Council's Committee of Political Education (COPE). Rubin has strong convictions about education and the betterment of education in the Rochester City School District. She believes selecting education friendly politicians is of the utmost importance



VOTE **WFP**



VOTE ON THE **WORKING FAMILIES PARTY LINE** FOR **JOE BIDEN AND KAMALA HARRIS**

VOTE BALLOT

Donald J. Trump  
Michael R. Pence  
Joseph R. Biden  
Kamala D. Harris

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to educators and their students. Law makers can make all the difference. Laws must be carefully considered and crafted. An example of this is the way teachers have to “teach to the test”. Some years ago, legislation was passed that would evaluate teachers not on the content of what students could take away from a class but on the grades that the students achieved on a required test.

The result, teachers found themselves teaching the method the test was administered as well as trying to teach content. Had teachers been involved in the legislation establishing Common Core and their performance evaluations, this type of approach to teaching may have been avoided. This is why she works to endorse candidates who will invite input from all stakeholders in education. Asked if she felt her involvement in her union impacted her community, she said this, “I have seen many examples of people who are elevated by union membership into stable and secure positions. These are the people who are more likely to make investments in the community, buy a home, and support the community through their taxes and community involvement. Unions strengthen communities and give workers the tools for work which bestows dignity”.

Kristine Kinsman, United Auto Workers – UAW Local 1097, Chair of Community Service Committee, Co-Chair of Civil Rights committee, on the Political Action Committee and is a member of the Committee for Black

Trade Unionists.

She serves as the work families EAP Representative (Employees Assistance Program). The program she organizes helps members with a variety of different life events that often happen outside of an individual’s workday. She assists making connections and referrals. Often those who need help might not be aware



where to go or be so overwhelmed they have no idea where to start. She was asked, aside from her work in her designation/endorsement committees, what was the favorite part of her job.

“Helping someone with a problem and getting them through the issue”. Understandably, this is helpful in the work place, but possibly even more

important outside of the workplace and in the home. Even with a union job, families may struggle to pay bills, need breakfast/lunch programs for students and need help from SNAP programs. Kristine’s work helps the individual or family and strengthens the community at the same time. Helping people get through stressful situations and reducing the pressure makes life a bit easier. Helping any family positively effects the whole community.

Montina Scott is a Union Benefits Representative Local, UAW - 1097 Chair of the Civil Rights committee, Co-Chair of Community Service committee, and on the Political Action committee. Her responsibility in her local is to help active and retiree members with questions pertaining to their benefits. Through her work to designate and elect candidates she has lobbied in Washington, worked on political action committees and is a member of the Coalition of Black Trades Unionists. Montina feels the current right to work climate misses the point. Unions help not just their own members, but all workers. As union jobs get better pay and benefits, other jobs must improve to keep up. That is a driver for her and our other women to work with political candidates who support unions.

Maria Fisher is a Representative for the Public Employees Federation – PEF, member of Labor Council and United Steel Workers – USW Local 9265. Maria is a third-generation union family member. During World War II her





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Ukrainian grandparents were rescued from a Nazi concentration camp in Austria and brought to America. Her grandfather was able to secure a union job and later her father did as well. After years of service to his union and his employer, her father found himself sent to Poland to train people to do his job, because the company started to out-source the work. Maria, who at the time worked for the City of Rochester, wrote an article about her father's dilemma that received national attention. Not long after, PEF recruited

her. In addition to her tireless work to support her union family and her political action committee work, she volunteers for Rochester's own Blind Baseball team, the Pioneers. She works to support ROC MAPP which is an organization that supports apprenticeship programs for people of color in the building and construction trades. When asked what drives her work in union support of political candidates, she said "It's not about Republican or Democrat. It is making sure the candidate has a strong sense of justice". She credits her family

history for her commitment to her work.

Each of these women knows that promoting candidates who support unions helps all Labor. As we talked to them, what became more interesting than their support for Labor was their passion to help others in and out of the workplace. These dedicated women help fellow employees and their entire community. They make our community a better place. It was truly a pleasure to spend time with each of these women.