

Gwen Mills Elected President of UNITE HERE, First Woman to Lead the Union in its 130-Year History

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Under Mills, UNITE HERE will double down on new union organizing, take on tough industrial campaigns, and expand political organizing program in key battleground states ahead of 2024 election

NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Today at UNITE HERE's 2024 Constitutional Convention, Gwen Mills was elected as the international union's new president, making her the first woman to hold this position in the organization's 130-year history. Gwen's election as President marks a significant milestone for both UNITE HERE—which has a membership of nearly 275,000 hospitality workers across the U.S. and Canada, a majority of whom are women—and the broader labor movement.

UNITE HERE President Gwen Mills. She is the first woman to lead the union in its 130-year history. (Photo: Business Wire)

"I am deeply honored to lead UNITE HERE into a new era," said Mills. "Our Union has

shown incredible resilience and strength through the pandemic and has set new standards for jobs in our industries, proving that hospitality jobs can be good union jobs. We don't shy away from taking on powerful corporate interests, and we don't back down from a fight. Now is the time to do even more to support workers who want a union. UNITE HERE members enjoy a standard that millions of other hospitality workers in the U.S. and Canada don't yet have—but we're ready to take bold action to ensure that all industry workers get the respect, wages and working conditions they deserve."

At the Convention, Mills highlighted her vision for the future of the union, emphasizing a dedication to building power against corporate influence through investing in union growth, expanding UNITE HERE's political organizing, and taking on issues that directly impact workers, such as climate change and technology.

Building on UNITE HERE's momentum as the fastest growing private-sector union in the AFL-CIO, Mills committed to doubling the annual investment in union growth across hotels, casinos, institutional food service, and emerging hospitality industries. With more workers than ever looking to unionize, UNITE HERE aims to seize the moment to organize and empower the nearly 14 million nonunion workers in the service industry to unionize, and provide a platform for women and people of color to lead.

Mills also outlined key campaigns for this year, including a historic showdown in the hotel industry, where room rates are the highest in history, but workers are struggling to support their families and the industry cuts jobs and guest services. 40,000 hotel workers in 22 markets are ready to take on major brands like Hilton, Marriott, and Hyatt to demand respect for their work through increased wages and a reversal of staffing cuts.

Additionally, Mills announced plans to ramp up the union's political organizing program in key battleground states like Nevada, Arizona, and Pennsylvania, and launch new programs in Ohio and Michigan. UNITE HERE runs the largest labor-led canvassing program in the U.S., which is unique in that its canvassers are union members: housekeepers, cooks, dishwashers, and concessions workers who have fought and won in their workplaces and communities. They take the skills they learned organizing their coworkers to turn out voters to elect officials who will fight for workers and support their ability to organize, and support legislation that improves jobs in the hospitality industry.

"On behalf of the 12.5 million union members in the AFL-CIO, I am thrilled to celebrate the election of Gwen Mills to her first full term as President of UNITE HERE. President Mills is a visionary leader who has helped guide UNITE HERE through some of the hospitality industry's most challenging and transformational moments. When the pandemic devastated the hospitality industry and nearly all UNITE HERE workers lost their jobs, President Mills put members to work and created one of the country's most powerful and effective get-out-the-vote operations, unleashing victories up and down the ballot in the 2020 and 2022 elections," said **AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler**. "Under her leadership, UNITE HERE is delivering historic new contracts for workers, expanding into new workplaces and regions, and bringing in more women and people of color—not only to be a part of the movement, but to lead it. President Mills and UNITE HERE show us every day what a modern, inclusive and resilient union looks like — a union that empowers its members to fight and win. We look forward to continuing our fight together to improve the lives of hospitality workers—and all workers—across this country."

Mills, a seasoned community organizer and labor leader, has a remarkable record of transforming communities by growing the power of the labor movement. Her early work in her hometown of New Haven, Connecticut built broad-based support for workers at Yale and across the city, resulting in groundbreaking organizing victories and the highest job standards in higher education nationwide. As Secretary-Treasurer, Mills played a crucial role in guiding UNITE HERE through the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining the union's financial stability and helping it

emerge stronger. She is also the architect of the union's political program, which was pivotal both in defeating Trump in 2020 and fending off the "Red Wave" in 2022, securing key electoral victories in swing states and ensuring relief for millions of unemployed Americans during the pandemic. Most recently, Mills' strategic leadership in national labor efforts has led to significant gains for hospitality workers, including a successful multi-union coalition strike in Detroit in 2023 that resulted in historic contracts for thousands of casino workers.

"I am thrilled that New Haven's own Gwen Mills will become the International Union President for UNITE HERE," **said Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT).** "She is the first woman to serve as President in the union's 130-year history, and I can think of no one more deserving to take the reins of leadership during this pivotal time for the national labor movement. Gwen and I have stood side by side in countless fights for workers, from defending local organizing efforts like Local 33 at Yale to expanding the national labor movement by welcoming all voices—especially those who are often marginalized like women, Black workers, people of color, and immigrant workers. President Mills understands that the American economy is built on a union label, and that workers are stronger when they are united. I look forward to working with her in her new role as President to make sure that American workers always come first, because when workers organize together, they win together!"

Known for her hands-on approach, Gwen has been a crucial leader behind some of UNITE HERE's greatest wins. She has built strong relationships with union members, always prioritizing their needs and ensuring they receive the rights and benefits they deserve. Under Mills' leadership, UNITE HERE is poised to embark on a new chapter in building the labor movement, improving the lives of workers, and tackling corporate exploitation and profiteering head-on.

Additionally, UNITE HERE's new elected leadership is a true reflection of the union's membership, who are majority women and people of color. Many are immigrants. In addition to Mills, the union's General Officers include: Secretary-Treasurer Nia Winston, the first Black woman to serve as the union's Secretary-Treasurer; Recording Secretary Rich Maroko; General Vice President Wendi Walsh; and General Vice President for Immigration, Civil Rights, and Diversity Enrique Fernández.

UNITE HERE is the hospitality workers' union in the U.S. and Canada, representing nearly 275,000 workers in the hotel, gaming, food service, manufacturing, textile, distribution, laundry, transportation, and airport industries.

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Source: UNITE HERE