



Representing the West

In this section we introduce our Board of Directors. We asked our two newest members to share their ideas on building progressive community in the West. Also, joining our board this fall is Sandra Weese, organizer for the Culinary Workers Union in Las Vegas, Nevada. She will be profiled in our next newsletter.

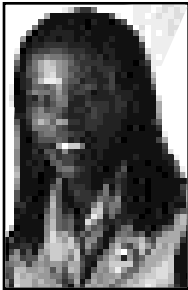
Jo Ann Bowman

State Representative, House District 19

“I first became aware of Western States Center through their annual training conference for grassroots non-profit workers, and I was impressed with their focus on bringing together people who traditionally were not able to participate in that kind of training. I personally became involved with Western States while I was employed with the Black United Fund of Oregon doing developmental marketing. They were an excellent resource for my organization and we utilized that resource on a regular basis. I’ve been in and out of involvement with Western States Center since that introduction, and for about three years I was a co-trainer with Cynthia Guyer (former Development Director at Western States Center) for the grassroots fund raiser workshop.

As a new state representative, I wasn’t really looking for a new board opportunity, but the thing that excited me about getting involved with Western States Center is the work they’re doing toward getting more women and people of color involved in the political process. Spending six months in Salem and realizing that out of eighteen freshman I was the only female and the only person of color that was elected last November really scared me. We’re missing out in having people from all walks of life being elected and represented. I know that Western States Center is committed to getting more women and more people of color involved, and when I met with the current board president and the director, and they emphasized that this is part of the vision that they are moving toward in the next few years, I decided I had to be there. I had to help with this, because this is something I have made a personal commitment to working on.

Knowing the reputation of Western States Center I feel it will be a good partnership.”



JO ANN BOWMAN



RAMON RAMIREZ

Ramon Ramirez

Co-founder and current president of PCUN (Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), the Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers Union

“At a very young age I had the privilege of meeting Cesar Chavez, and the struggle really inspired me. I’ve been involved in the farmworker movement for about 23 years now. I was one of the founders of the farmworker union in Oregon. One issue I’ve worked on consistently is immigration, and I was part of the movement for immigrant rights back in the early seventies up to the current time.

Over the last year or two, the organization I represent, the farmworkers union, has decided to do more coalition building. We’ve seen that the work Western States Center is doing is really important in developing the kind of strategies necessary to beat back the lies and myths that are being promoted in this country about Latinos and about immigrants. There are bridges that need to be built, and we’ve seen that Western States Center can play a viable role in the building of those bridges and the building of community.

More and more in this country, we’re seeing there is a move to the right, and we’re starting to see a system develop that is not for the people. So it becomes of the utmost importance to the progressive movement to really start addressing some of these issues — like race, like class, like gender issues, sexism and homophobia. Because those are the tactics that are used against working class people to divide us.

Organizations like PCUN are paving the way. Moving the issues forward, trying to build coalition, working with other communities not just people of color, but the gay and lesbian community, students, religious communities and white working class people.

We’re trying to build a broader network of support, not only for the farmworker movement, but for all people who struggle for social justice. If we are true to our principles and as honest as possible we’ll be successful.” ■