

**Sheila Payne addresses the attendees at the
Women's Equality Day Luncheon, 2022.**

Thank you June!

Thank you for honoring me with the Susan B. Anthony award and I so appreciate all of us honoring the Anniversary of Women's Equality Day and the long struggle for the passage of the 19th Amendment. Especially in Florida, we are constantly reminded that our rights, especially women and civil rights must be continually fought for, including the right to our own body.

Of course, there are many women in this room who could be accepting this award and I know is that the activism we do is not done alone. In my case, much of it in Gainesville is with my comrades in the Alachua County Labor Coalition. ACLC members could please stand up. I am blessed to be partners with Paul Ortiz. We have organized together for worker and human rights for over 25 years. We met organizing together in a Farm worker campaign that took 8 years to win. Those farmworkers are still under union contract.

The Labor Coalition has been fighting for the Renters Rights Housing ordinance for 3 years. The anti-discrimination component of the ordinance, passed by the city and county, has made a huge improvement in the ability to stop landlords from discriminating against tenants who use housing vouchers, are veterans, or because of their familial status. We used it to advocate for the dozens of people who contacted us because their landlords would not accept the Emergency Rental Assistance program money during Covid-19. This ordinance comes before the county again Sept. 13th.

We are fighting for kids to avoid living in homes full of mold, exposed electrical units, and rooves caving in. And the rent still goes up \$200 a month every year. We organized to stop an investment company, who bought 84 units of rental property, from doing a mass eviction of tenants who wanted to stay together as a community.

The Wage Theft ordinance, which our own state senator testified against and who introduced a bill in the Florida legislature to stop wage theft, has won over \$100,000 in stolen wages for workers. It is projected that as much as twice that amount has been won for workers, because once the employer is contacted by the county, they pay up.

None of this is easy for the people trying to get help with these programs. I am astonished at what people must do to seek redress when they have been wronged by powerful landlords or businesses in this community.

Why do we all do this work that is never finished? When you are a person that becomes angry about all the injustice you see and hear about from those who can't fight alone, you can either get depressed or you do something. **Action is the only cure for despair.** Being an activist is a form of self-preservation of the heart. It has kept me from becoming a cynic. I invite you to join the Labor Coalition or another organization that is fighting for justice even if you are not enraged or do not feel immobilized by what you see and read. **There is much to do!**

I am so glad we are talking about Title IX, which we know was degraded under the Trump administration, but we also need to keep an eye on Title X, which was created to provide affordable birth control and reproductive health care to people with low incomes. Much of the funding and rules were also corrupted under the Trump administration, with concurrent reduction of clients seen by 52%.

Thank you for this honor and thank you to all of you who fight for justice.

Lastly, rest in power brother James Thompson.