



**“CAN YOU  
HEAR ME  
NOW?”**

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**CWEA**

PROTECTING CALIFORNIA'S MOST  
CRITICAL RESOURCE

# Member Story



In high school, I was a spokesperson for females in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). During that time, I did a lot of public speaking. Even though there were boys and girls in the audiences, I targeted the girls with the message that they could excel in STEM-related education and careers.

While seeking scholarships to attend college, I made sure that I featured my role as a STEM advocate on my resume. At one college where I applied to a full-ride scholars program, I had to interview with an alumni panel. When it was my turn, the panel consisted of one man and two women. The man on the panel immediately asked me to tell him about my public speaking experience.

After I talked about women in STEM and the fact that there are disturbing reasons why women make up only 28% of the STEM workforce, the man replied, "That's not a problem anymore, especially not here at this university. Men and women are equal." I responded with disbelief and went on to mention the wage gap between men and women as well as between white men and people of color. Again, he tried to shut me down.

[Hailey Rowbatham, Student, University of California, Berkeley](#)



## “You can’t shut me down”

All it took was a moment for my colleague to listen. One of the women on the panel, who looked a bit uncomfortable, finally spoke up and echoed what I was saying about the lack of women in STEM.

The man immediately invalidated her and denied that there was a gender gap before repeating his position that women and men are treated as equals. “Besides,” he said, “any discrimination like that would be illegal.”

Since I had the facts on my side, I was not going to back down. I didn’t receive the scholarship, but that was fine with me. I ended up exactly where I should be.

### TAKEAWAYS:

- Female CWEA members have reported they have been “shut-out” and “shut down” during conversations.
- What can be done to make sure all co-workers are heard?
- What steps can you take to support a welcoming and inclusive environment at your workplace?

According to  
Data USA

**93%**

**of water operators  
are male**



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**Hailey Rowbatham**  
Student  
UC Berkeley

**Thank you Hailey for sharing your story!**  
**To share a story or for resources, visit [dei.cwea.org](https://dei.cwea.org)**

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