

Arkansas Public Policy Panel



60th

25th

Citizens First Congress

Anniversaries

*Gala and Symposium
Celebration*



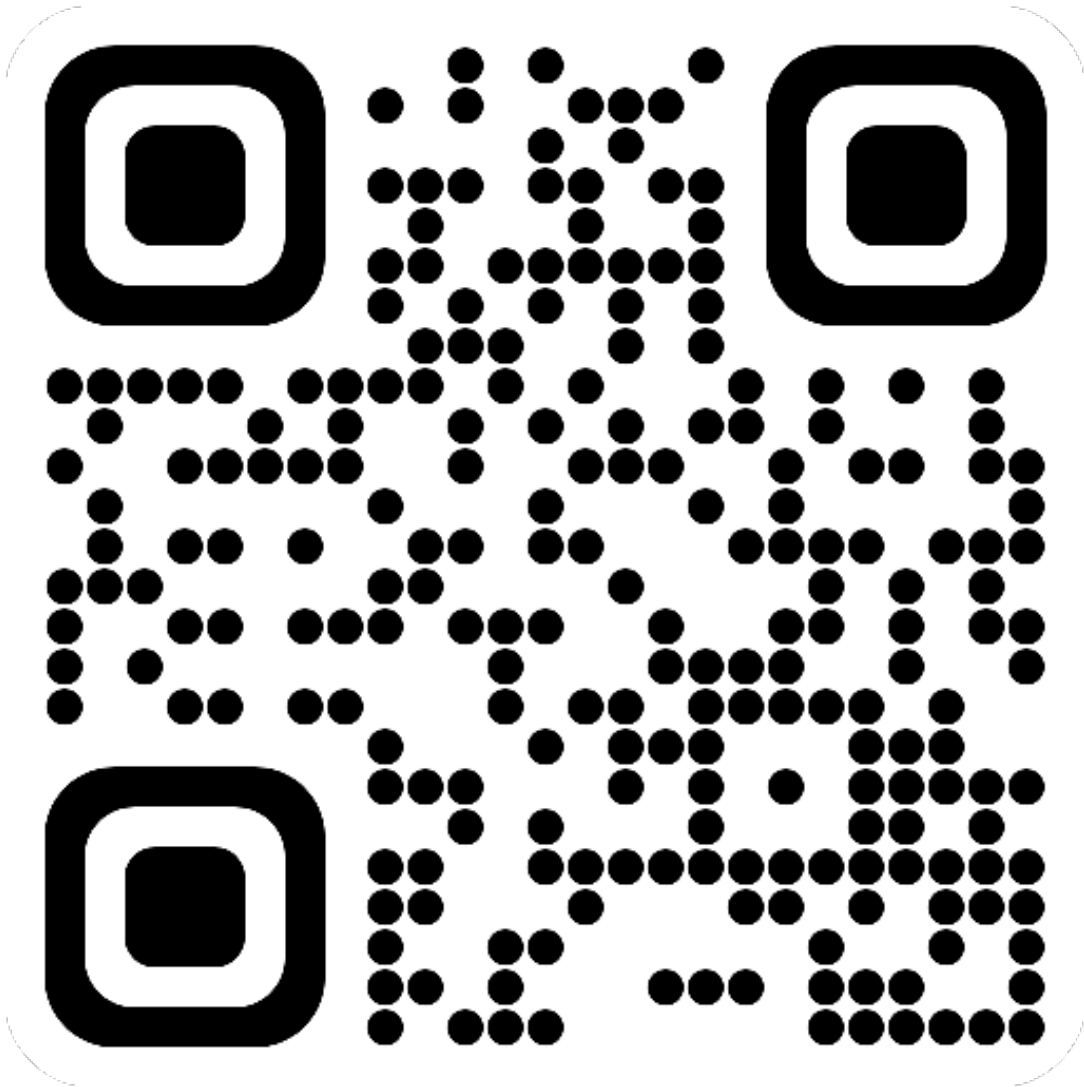
Cover photo: Early Panelists having a get-together.

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Frank Gordon | 9. Faustenia Bomer | 17. John Snider |
| 2. Frank Lambright | 10. Ellen Kaufman | 18. Margaret Snider |
| 3. Beth Gilmore | 11. Brownie W Ledbetter | 19. Barbara Philips |
| 4. Pat Murphy | 12. Jim Conne | 20. Joe Kaufman |
| 5. Negail Riey | 13. Rose Cone | 21. Jim Gallman Sr. |
| 6. Dave Phillips | 14. Jeanne Gallman Akins | 22. Sarah Murphy |
| 7. Connie Obsitnik | 15. Joan Campbell | 23. Gwen Riley |
| 8. Jean Gordon | 16. Sissy Griffin | 24. Cal Ledbetter |

The Original Little Rock Panel of American Women

Sarah Murphy, Founder	Charlotte Gadberry	Ruth Kretchmar	Glenna Presley
Jeanne Gallman Akins	Joan Garner	Kathryn Lambright	Gwen Riley
Carolyn P Baker	Liz Gaston	Brownie Ledbetter	Nan Selz
Anne Bartley	Beth Glancy	Carol Taylor Martin	Lottie Shackelford
Martha Bass	Jean Gordon	Susan May	Margaret Snider
Janet Beck	Sandra Green	Christine McDonald	Raida Snyderman
Faustenia Bomar	Mary Snider Griffin	Jane Mendel	Evelyn Soo
Irma Hunter Brown	Mary Heil	Clarice Miller	Joyce Sparks
Joan Campbell	Dorisene Hill	Mabel Milton	Lillian Springer
Rose Cone	Ada Hollingsworth	Mabel Mitchell	Shirley Strauss
Nelwyn Davis	Dortha Jo Jackson	Blanche Moore	Joanna Sutton
Sister Thomas Desales	Belynda Ford Jeffries	Beth Rule Nyhus	Mildred Terry
Rose Douglas	Rachel Alline Myers Jones	Connie Obsitnik	Gwen Wetzel
Clara Draper	Ellen Kaufman	Barbara L. Phillips	Janet Williams
Catherine Eckford	Alice Korenblat	Bobbi Pitts	Joyce Williams
			Pat Youngdahl





**View & share our videos
“Tribute to Ms. Celestine”
&**

**“Partners in Progress - The History of the Arkansas
Public Policy Panel and Citizens First Congress”**

Gala Program

Friday, December 1, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Four Points by Sheraton Ballroom

**Emcees – Ryan Davis, Panel Board Member
Nell Matthews, CFC Steering Committee Member**

Opening Invocation – Dorothy Oliver, CFC Steering Committee Member

Greetings - Scharmel Roussel & William El-Amin, CFC Steering Committee Co-chairs

**DINNER IS SERVED
(Diamond Empire Band Plays for 30 Minutes)**

Video Tribute to Ms. Celestine Wesley – Osyrus Bolly, Racial Equity Coordinator

Honoring Our Founders & Organization History – Bill Kopsky, Executive Director

Spoken Word Artist – Victory Jackson

Reflections – Dr. Sherece West, CEO, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Introduction of Keynote Speaker – Janice El-Amin, Organizing Director

**Keynote Speaker – Sulma Arias
Executive Director People's Action Institute**

Presentation of Awards – Beth Ardapple, Former Panel Staff Member

**End of Year Appeal and Closing Remarks
Bruce McMath, Panel Board Member
Kymara Seals, Policy Director and Event Coordinator**

Closing Invocation – Elaine Williams, Panel Board Member

**Dance
Diamond Empire Band Plays for 30 Minutes**

Note from our Executive Director

Thank you for being here tonight. Thank you for your support through the years.

An organization like the Panel – grassroots, Southern, founded by diverse women and committed to racial equity and social justice through a feminist lens – does not just make it to 60 years everyday. Citizens First Congress – a multi-racial, multi-issue, statewide coalition – doesn't always make it to 25 years either.



Neither organization made it alone. Our strength is our base of leaders, volunteers and supporters. There are so many grassroots leaders who made the bet that we could accomplish something important together. They thought it important enough that they were willing to sit with occasional discomfort or uncertainty when we brought all of our members together. They thought it important enough that they were willing to put themselves out there, sharing their stories, their experience, their time and their donations.

The Board of the Panel and Steering Committee of the CFC have invested countless hours strategizing, steering and guiding us. Panel Board Chair Curtis Mangrum, and CFC Co-Chairs William El-Amin and Scharmél Roussel deserve a lot of credit.

And backing them, we've had amazing institutional partners in labor, like at Arkansas Education Association, and in the nonprofit sector, like Advocates for Children and Families and the NAACP.

And backing them, we've had amazing partners in philanthropy who took a risk by investing in us – like Opal Simms at VISTA, Dr. Sherece West, and Freeman McKindra before her, at the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, the amazing Gladys Washington and her colleagues at the Babcock Foundation, Cynthia Renfro and Janelle Choi with their colleagues at the Marguerite Casey Foundation, Kathy Bonnifield at the Piper Foundation, Lori Bezaler at the Hazen Foundation and so, so many more.

Over the years our staff has changed, but the quality of our team remained incredible. We are committed to hiring people from rural communities where we work and training them as organizers. We miss many of our colleagues who've moved on, but we're proud of the work we've done together and the work they continue to do in the world.

EJ Miller, IUE-CWA Organizer, our former board chair and mentor, used to tell me all the time that my main job – above anything else – is to make sure that the Panel and the CFC are still anchors for social justice 25 and 50 years from now. That is still our vision: building sustainable community power to make progress today and in the future.

EJ also always led off each CFC meeting by reminding all of us that the most important thing about us coming together, is that we leave together and stick together. That's how we build the power to really change the state.

So thank you for many, many years of sticking with us and sticking together. And thank you for providing the time, talent and treasure necessary to build and sustain a grassroots movement still led by diverse folks from all walks of life making progress no one would think is possible in the South. It's not always easy, but it's always worthwhile.

Thank you!





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Letter from CFC Steering Committee

Dear Loyal Friends and Supporters of the Panel and CFC,

Thank you for joining us tonight as we celebrate 60 years of advancing social justice in the great state of Arkansas!

The Arkansas Public Policy Panel has worked diligently to stay true to the vision of our resilient founders who paved the way for us to continue making our state a better place. In 1963, a group of mothers traveled the state calling together the community in efforts of integrating the school system. Our founders simply wanted the best for all children despite the condition of the world at that time. Little did they know, their brave efforts would have a lasting effect on Arkansas legislation.

We share the same belief that we have the capacity to build relationships in order to connect people from all backgrounds to achieve one thing - social justice. Overtime, the Panel's strategies have improved. Whether it's through organizing rural communities in Arkansas, coordinating statewide coalitions like the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign, or advocating for better legislation at the Capitol through the Citizens First Congress, our work depends upon the relationships we've developed over the years to sustain it. You play an essential role in our efforts – thank you.

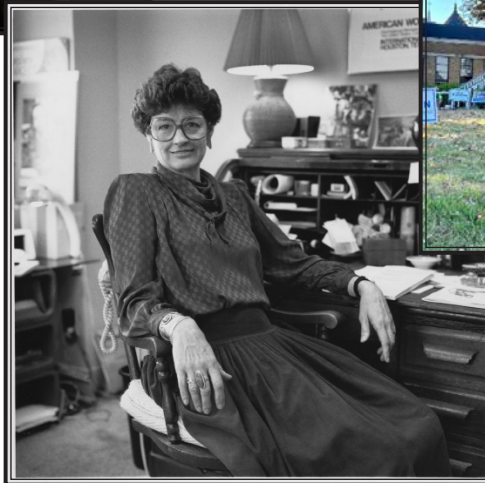
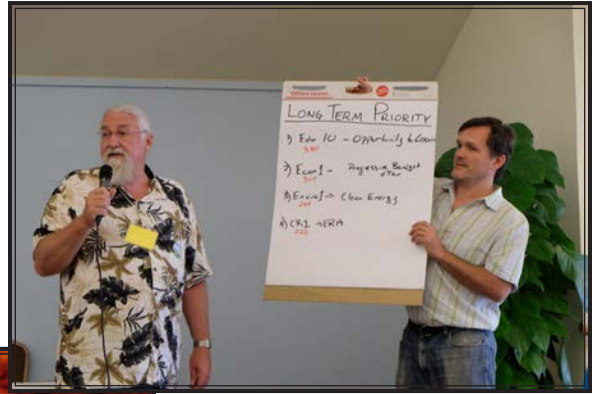
60 years shows our commitment to improving our state and we are proud of the work that has been done thus far. The Citizens First Congress also celebrates its 25th anniversary and its impact on state policy. We hope you'll feel some of that pride tonight as we look back at how we have progressed throughout the years, and press onward to what's next.

Your support has been instrumental to our growth and progression. Thank you for everything you've done for the Panel and CFC throughout the last 60 years. We hope you'll continue to provide your support for the next 60 years!

Sincerely,

The Arkansas Citizens First Congress
Steering Committee





Thank you to our Anniversary
Sponsors!

Social Justice Fighter



Barry Haas
and Susan
Hardin

Social Justice Advocate

Patty Barker Hank Bates And Barbara Miles

Social Justice Supporter



Kymara Seals

Social Justice Friend



Beth Ardapple
Fay Knox



Jennifer Ferguson

Dina Nash

Shirley Renix

Richard Hutchinson

Floyd and Rebecca Martin

From Susan Hardin & Barry Haas (Panel Board Treasurer)

What a grand night it is to celebrate and be with the APPP and CFC folks again!

It's been years since we could have such a Christmas party and raise a glass and a cheer to those who have toiled to bring about positive change in our great state of Arkansas, so what a wonderful group and gathering this is!

With current freedoms and Arkansas state laws being challenged, I take great heart in knowing that the Arkansas Public Policy Panel and the Citizens First Congress are once again ready to spring into action. I'm so grateful that these groups have been going long and hard, and are only becoming more accomplished and successful with their undertakings.

These two groups are so necessary in our state. I applaud your hard work which attempts to work in ways that include ongoing respect for the individualism that all bring to the effort.

So happy we're all here again!

—Susan Hardin

I've had the privilege of serving on the Arkansas Public Policy Panel Board for more than 20 years. That has given me an appreciation for both Panel staff and volunteers and Citizens First Congress volunteers who drive the successes we have seen despite considerable political challenges in recent years. Many Arkansans' lives have been made better as a result of working in collaboration with the Panel and CFC.

That may result in a better understanding of how state or local government works, and how individuals can choose to participate to benefit both themselves and their communities. Being your own advocate on important public policy issues that impact your life or your community is a satisfying feeling. Knowing you are a part of something bigger than yourself is a rewarding feeling. Knowing you helped make both your life and the lives of your fellow community members better is a powerful feeling.

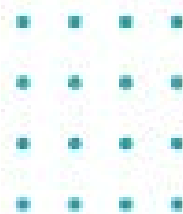
My life has been made measurably richer in befriending so many talented, diverse and dedicated folks working to make Arkansas a better place to live. Giving in many cases rather than receiving. Public service in its true form.

Congratulations to the Arkansas Public Policy Panel on its 60th anniversary and the Citizens First Congress on its 25th anniversary. It's up to all of us to make Arkansas a more equitable, inclusive and diverse place for ALL its residents.

Equitable. Inclusive. Diverse. Words to live up to.

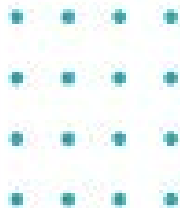
—Barry Haas

We support the Arkansas Public Policy Panel and Citizens First Congress.



Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Congratulations to the Arkansas Public Policy Panel and the Arkansas Citizens First Congress on your anniversaries. The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation continues to be a proud supporter of your fantastic work!





ARKANSAS PUBLIC POLICY PANEL

ORGANIZED PEOPLE HAVE POWER



Best wishes to the AR Public Policy Panel and Citizens First Congress on a successful anniversary celebration. Thank you for your work over the past decades and here's to many more decades of social justice work.



**In Memory of
BARBARA JARVIS
CFC Member
Faithful Environmentalist**

The Panel and CFC thank the Arkansas Education Association for 60 years of partnership to help ALL students achieve their full potential!



Congratulations AR Public Policy Panel & Citizens First Congress on these milestone anniversaries

I am honored to be part of this phenomenal fight. Let's do it another sixty!

Kymara Seals
Policy Director
AR Public Policy Panel





Congratulations!

Arkansas Public Policy Panel
60 Years

Citizens First Congress
25 Years





CONGRATULATIONS
TO THE ARKANSAS PUBLIC POLICY PANEL
& CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS



FOR YOUR YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN ARKANSAS!
WE APPRECIATE YOU!



ORGANIZE.
ADVOCATE.
VOTE.



ARKANSAS PUBLIC POLICY PANEL

PEOPLE + POWER + POLICY = DIRECT DEMOCRACY

In 2024, we have the opportunity to put ourselves back into the equation by choosing to protect and secure the blessings of liberty and justice for ourselves and for the next seven generations.

Let's decrease the number of children living in poverty, in ALICE households, and in food deserts.

Let's strengthen and expand government transparency, electoral access, and civic engagement.

Let's reimagine and redefine public safety by reintegrating it with public education, health and welfare.



I commit to providing principled representation to all Arkansans equally, equitably, efficiently, and effectively, while working to overcome any and all barriers to ensure that an environment is created, and maintained, that primarily fosters the voices & ideas, the wants & needs, of all Arkansans who will be encouraged to participate directly in our collective democracy as we co-create our beloved common-unity.



501-436-9119 campaign@kwamiarkhouse69th.info
www.kwamiarkhouse69th.info

Paid for by Friends of Kwami – Ark. House 69th, a non-profit 529 political organization

Panel 60th / CFC 25th Anniversary Symposium Sessions

Friday December 1 and Saturday December 2, 2023
Four Points by Sheraton, Little Rock, Ballroom

Friday: How did we get here? Understanding how our politics and economy ended up where we are:

1:30 - 2:20 – **Understanding Economic and Political Power – WHY UNIONS MATTER**
with Diane Thomas-Holladay, Labor Education Program

2:30 - 3:20 – **Reversing Runaway Inequality** – Building the politics and economy to serve everyone
with Bill Kopsky, Executive Director, Arkansas Public Policy Panel

Saturday: Teaching accurate history for racial equity, and organizing to win:

10:30 - 11:20 – **The Black History We SHOULD Be Teaching**
with Osyrus Bolly, Racial Equity Coordinator, Arkansas Public Policy Panel

11:45 - 1:30 – **The Tools and Skills You Need To Help Lead An Organizing Revival**
with Sulma Arias, Executive Director, People's Action,
Janice El-Amin, Organizing Director, Arkansas Public Policy Panel
Jesselia Maples, Lead Organizer, Arkansas Public Policy Panel
Lasonia Standoak, Regional Organizer, Arkansas Public Policy Panel



The Brownie W Ledbetter Dragon Slayer Activists of the Year

Brownie W Ledbetter was the Director of the Panel for roughly 35 years, and was known from a George Fisher cartoon of her as a Dragon Slayer for tackling racism, classism, sexism and more. Brownie did not feel worthy of the title because she said things like racism and sexism are a disease in our culture that must be tackled anew everyday – there is no “slaying”. But Brownie was tireless, fierce, funny and committed. Much of our work today stands on her shoulders, and we are proud to present the 2023 Winners of the Brownie W Ledbetter Dragon Slayer Awards for Activists of the Year:



Elaine Williams – Elaine is a community leader who is going above and beyond to build power to change her local community and connect with state level advocacy. She is the mother of 3 very successful young men, and Ms. Williams is a member of the First Church of God in Prescott. She wears many hats in the church from singing in the choir to helping with the church food pantry. She is an active member in the Woman for Christ Group where women over South Arkansas have prayer meetings.

She is a retired early childhood educator and serves as the Political Awareness Chair of Concerned Citizens of Prescott – a community group that is making Prescott better. They have successfully advocated for better school discipline and literacy policy, and they’ve elected some of their members to the school board, among other things. Elaine is also active in the Prescott Alliance for Community Development Association that focuses on literacy, after-school tutoring and making books available to students across Nevada County where she chairs the Dolly Parton Imagination Library committee. She has knocked on many doors and walked many streets to build membership and participation. She is also passionate about getting people to vote and is the Chair of the Nevada County Democratic Party, the Rotary Club President and a great mentor for young women in the community.

The Panel works closely with CCP and PACDA to organize locally and connect with other groups at the state level. Ms Williams serves as the Co-Chair of the Education Caucus of the Citizens First Congress and was recently elected to join the Panel Board.



Huckabee eats words scorning environmentalists
 BY SETH BLOMELEY
 ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Steve Grappe

– In the Spring OF 2023, Steve formed the CAPES (Citizens for Arkansas Public Education and Students) organization with some other leaders concerned about education to organize the state to put a proposal to repeal the LEARNS Act on the ballot. He spent several months organizing the state to collect more than 55,000 signatures over a period of weeks. He traveled, at his own expense and put in 60-80 hours a week finding volunteers and guiding them to a place to plug in. He inspired hundreds of people to engage in the civic process and use their collective voice to affect positive change. They collected a miraculous number of signatures in weeks – an unheard of accomplishment by a volunteer group. Though they fell short of their goal by a few hundred signatures, the initiative left a sea of volunteers ready to take action.

Since the CAPES initiative, Steve has continued to work relentlessly as a volunteer organizing the rural communities, recruiting quality candidates and supporting them as they step up to run for office. He is passionate about ALL Arkansans having a voice and is continuing to fight for this every day, especially people in rural Arkansas.



The EJ Miller Lifetime Achievement Awards

EJ Miller was a labor organizer from South Arkansas for the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE), which later merged with the Communications Workers to become IUE-CWA. EJ was a brilliant strategist, organizer and negotiator. He was committed to coming together across lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, class and all the other lines that divide us to build long term power for working people in Arkansas who have been taken advantage of for generations. EJ was our Board chair in the early 2000's and we created the EJ Miller Lifetime Achievement Award after his death to recognize other leaders who are building sustainable power to make Arkansas better. This year's recipients are:

Celestine Wesley – We are proud to give this award posthumously to Celestine.

She would have hated being the center of attention. Celestine was the Panel's long time Finance and Office Manager, long time as in 35 years. As such she played a vital part in the Panel's and CFC's successes under both former Executive Director Brownie Ledbetter, the original "Dragon Slayer", and current Executive Director Bill Kopsky. Celestine died September 26, 2022. Her passing was deeply felt by many, and not just due to the many valued financial duties she performed. As important or maybe more so, she was a kind, cheerful presence in the Panel offices and a guiding light of the important work being done.

Celestine wasn't a show horse, she was a work horse. She was valued by her family, by her church and certainly by those of us who are part of the Panel/CFC family. Her values were beyond reproach. She was curious about others and open to people who were different than her, in part because she was so secure in who she was. The Panel and CFC owe much to Celestine's efforts during her 35 years at the Panel. E.J. Miller would be proud of Celestine being given this award that bears his name. We hope everyone knows the many, often quiet but vital, contributions she made to advance racial equity and social justice in Arkansas.



First Congress

Arkansas citizens group attempts to speak for everyone

By SARAH FISHER

Times Staff Writer

Brownie Ledbetter has war stories to tell.

The tall and energetic 66-year-old Arkansas native has made a life out of politics and wants to make sure everyone has a chance at equal representation in the state government.

Her solution to a more representative government is called the Arkansas Citizens First Congress.

"We're attempting to pull together citizens to present a stronger voice for themselves," Ledbetter said. "We've worked historically for civil rights, tax reform and environmental and consumer protection."

Ledbetter is a lobbyist for the Citizens First Congress and also the executive director for the Arkansas Public Policy Panel. She made a trip to Fayetteville on Sunday to hold a workshop at the University of Arkansas Law Library about how to be a lobbyist, how the legislature works and, she said, "to develop respect for the process."

The Arkansas Citizens First Congress held its first session on Nov. 20 in Hot Springs with 90 people representing grassroots groups from around the state. The purpose was to "correct the imbalance of power in Arkansas politics

■ See Citizen / A11



ANDY SHUPE Northwest Arkansas Times

Brownie Ledbetter of Arkansas Citizens First Congress leads a discussion during a workshop on lobbying techniques Sunday at the University of Arkansas School of Law. Ledbetter said she is working on bringing citizens together to generate stronger voices.



Barry Haas – Barry is a longtime stalwart of the

environmental and voting rights community. He serves as a poll worker, on his local water district board and is a military veteran. He has testified countless times before the legislature and other government bodies on water quality, voting rights, unfair tax policies and other issues. Barry is an accomplished birder and is a long time leader in the Arkansas Audubon Society. He volunteers with their summer youth camp for 11 and 12 year olds. He is a long time member of the Panel Board, serving as Treasurer. He is one the CFC founders, and has served on our fundraising committee for a very long time. Barry helped pass Arkansas campaign finance laws and helped lead the campaign years ago to prevent Rebsamen Park Road along the Arkansas River in Little Rock from being turned into a highway. Today Rebsamen Park Road is home to the Arkansas River Trail and world class parks. Few of our leaders volunteer as much time and show as much wisdom and passion as Barry.



60 Years of Social Change in Arkansas



A 1964 newspaper article described the panel as “a Catholic, a Jew, an Anglo-Saxon Protestant, a Negro and an Oriental, who appear with a moderator to tell about themselves, their differences and their common bond as Americans.”

In 1963, Sarah Murphy led a group of brave mothers to travel our state together, talking with people in churches and civic groups to help them accept school integration and to promote understanding among various ethnic and religious groups. They were the Panel of American Women. They were black, white, Asian American, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. Their message—that they were all mothers who just wanted the best for their children—seems universal today, but it was truly radical in Arkansas at the time. The Panel made over 150 appearances in their first 18 months and spoke with over 28,000 Arkansans.



Brownie Ledbetter, the Panel's first Executive Director, conducting a job training.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Panelists shifted their strategy and began working in the schools, helping facilitate integration more directly. The Panel incorporated as a 501(c)(3) and started programs such as Green Circles, working with elementary school children to teach values of diversity. They coached teachers on how to be more aware of cultural differences and avoid discrimination and helped develop the first diversity curriculum in the Little Rock School District.

In 1973, Panel member Brownie W. Ledbetter became the organization's first Executive Director. Brownie and other Panel leaders became involved with the Women's Rights movement and broadened the organization's focus to include equal rights, environmental justice, and fair economic policies. Brownie's leadership helped sustain the organization for over twenty-five years.

In the 1980s, the organization started focusing more on public policy issues such as civil rights, farm sustainability, consumer education, environmental protection, and tax policy. The Panel tried to initiate major tax reform at the legislature with the help of then Gov. Bill Clinton, but the political will simply wasn't there and Clinton eventually withdrew support. This setback caused the Panel to rethink its strategy, seeing that attempts at major reforms without an organized base to support them were not likely to succeed.

In 1983, Brownie worked with Bill Becker from the Arkansas AFL-CIO and other grassroots, labor and non-profit leaders to establish the Arkansas Fairness Council (AFC), a coalition of groups that advocated for civil rights and fair tax issues. This coalition would serve as the foundation for what would later become the Arkansas Citizens First Congress.

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, the Panel began developing a uniquely Arkansan organizing strategy focused on local group-autonomy, relationships, flexibility, strategic planning, and networking across issues and geography. The organization would later focus on organizing in low-income rural communities in South Arkansas and other parts of the state.



Above: A 1997 rally at the Capitol by the coalition which would become the CFC.
Below: The CFC's 2012 Youth Advocacy Day Rally to support education reform.



The Arkansas Citizens First Congress (CFC) was established in 1998 after several years of planning as a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization. Built on the foundation of the Arkansas Fairness Council, this broader and more participatory coalition set out to bring together diverse grassroots groups, non-profits, labor coalitions, environmental activists, and other allies to leverage their numbers and collaborate across issues to help pass better legislation at the Capitol.

Today the Panel organizes groups all over the state, helping them become effective agents of change in their communities and supports the Citizens First Congress, whose 56 member organizations represent 32,000 Arkansans at the Capitol.

The Panel and CFC Today

The Battle For the Future **A 10-Year Power Building Strategy**

- A people-powered movement supported by highly trained organizers
- Expanding Community organizing to drive local change and build power
- Coalition work, through the CFC and partners, to resist the extreme right-wing agenda
- Double bottom line of winning key policy goals through strategically sequenced ballot measures while building long term power
- Increase voter engagement, where Arkansas currently ranks last
- Develop and support more of our members to run for office and govern effectively and accountably



**ARKANSAS'S PAST
SUCCESSFUL
INITIATIVES:**

**RAISING THE
MINIMUM
WAGE**

**MORE
ETHICS RULES
FOR POLITICIANS**

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

Arkansas Unique Opportunity to Make Change Through Ballot Measures

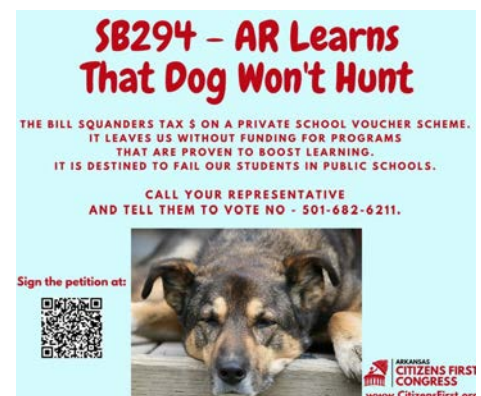
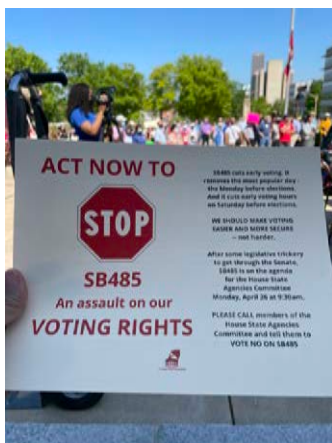
- Accessable numbers of signatures to qualify for the ballot
- Strong populist and libertarian streaks among voters, regardless of party
- Small scale of Arkansas
- Network of strong collaborative partners
- Regional reverberations, meaning Arkansas punches above our weight influencing the national dialogue
- Track record of progress

Proving the Theory...

The Issue 2 Campaign in 2022

- A strong and diverse ground game led by a strong coalition of partner organizations
- Organic, peer-to-peer network of grassroots Arkansans
- 35,000 doors in key counties
- 180,000+ peer texts
- 20,000+ peer phone calls
- Distributed 50,000 push cards and flyers, 150,000 direct mail
- Town hall forums, earned media and debate opportunities
- Targeted digital ads
- Social media outreach through a peer-to-peer network of trusted community leaders
- Won with 60% of the vote including majorities of Independents and Republicans (up from 57% against a similar measure in 2020)
- Increased voter registration and turnout in key communities, and helped several of our members win local elected offices

Arkansas is still worthy of our moto: Regnat Populus!



25 years of progress - The Story of the CFC

An unlikely experiment in grassroots democracy begun 25 years ago in Arkansas today boasts a rich track record of profound improvements to the state's agriculture, civil rights, education, economic, education, election, environmental and health laws.

It started about 5 years prior than that, when the Panel asked leaders of about 40 community groups around the state what they needed to have more impact. They said 2 things clearly that became the foundation of our strategy. They said that Arkansas just needs more community groups, especially in low income and underrepresented parts of



the state. We needed to build more power to move the state forward. The Panel used those sessions with community leaders plus a report from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation called "Building Constituency" as the foundation for developing community organizing as a central part of our work.

And they said that the groups who are in Arkansas need to collaborate more together, across issues and across lines of race, geography, income, gender, etc so we could exercise more collective power on policy and policymakers. They asked the Panel to help them build a long-term, multi-issue, statewide coalition. Initially it was just called the "Big Hoobie-Doo".



At its founding, few thought the effort to build a powerful statewide coalition of community and social justice groups would succeed. They said we could not overcome the state's history of moneyed domination, or our state's deep divisions on race, geography and class. Despite the challenges, our members have created a model of how to build community power across a range of diversity that stands unique in the nation.

Led by Brownie W Ledbetter, we engaged a broad cross-section of Arkansas leaders to figure out how to build this new strategy. Bill Becker of the AFL-CIO and other labor leaders formed part of the core planning team that also included civil rights leaders, environmentalists, faith leaders, education and health advocates and community activists and developers. It was a coalition of people who were frustrated that their voices were not being heard — those of the vast majority of Arkansans.



We held big, unruly planning meetings over a couple of years. Our leaders had to suspend their disbelief and trust one another to create something that would benefit everyone. They relied on stories and building genuine relationships with one another as they developed a structure and process for developing a common agenda to move the state forward in a way that is uniquely Arkansan.



It's often messy and a little chaotic, but the improvements for Arkansas are incredible. Creating a state Department of Agriculture to help farmers. Expanding voting hours, Saturday voting, training poll workers and expanding election monitoring. Protecting our drinking water and natural resources. Protecting workers from wage theft. Expanding the minimum wage, multiple times. Criminal justice reforms, like mental health diversion programs, expanding drug courts and finding alternatives for nonviolent offenders. Protecting victims of domestic violence. Education reforms, like quality pre-K and help for low-income and special-needs kids. Increasing energy efficiency and opportunities for renewable energy while protecting consumers. Expanding access to health care.



Equally important are the bad ideas our members have helped stop. Fighting legislation that targets immigrants, or dismantles public schools, or legalizes discrimination, or guts protections for your drinking water, or limits the public's right to vote. And, most recently, protecting the Freedom of Information Act, the foundation of the public's right to know what their elected officials are doing.

We have done none of this alone. That's the point. Our member groups work together with allies to press for change. Our biggest source of influence is the thousands of Arkansas we've informed about how proposed laws will impact them. There are few things more persuasive to a lawmaker than an informed constituent in his or her district who is organizing with others. We are one of the few groups that reads nearly all of the 3,000-plus bills that get filed each legislative session and we educate the public about what impact they could have.

While the Arkansas Citizens First Congress advocates, the Arkansas Public Policy Panel continues organizing to build more community groups, more powerful groups, and stronger campaigns to move Arkansas forward.



Funding the Progressive Movement in Arkansas

Thanks to you we have grown through the years, helping more communities and advancing more issues than ever. In 1999, the Panel's income was only \$98,000. In 2023, it is \$1.2 million.

Hundreds of Arkansas families and groups donate about 10% of the Panel's income. This funds CFC advocacy and gives us the flexibility to respond quickly to breaking issues and new opportunities.

Over the years, the work of the Panel and CFC has been supported by the generous donations of people like yourself alongside grants from our funding partners, below. **Thank you!**

- ◆ Ford Foundation
- ◆ W. K. Kellogg Foundation
- ◆ Marguerite Casey Foundation
- ◆ Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
- ◆ Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
- ◆ Arkansas Community Foundation
- ◆ C.S. Mott Foundation
- ◆ Catholic Campaign for Human Development
- ◆ Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation
- ◆ Norman Foundation
- ◆ Schott Foundation For Public Education
- ◆ Rural School & Community Trust
- ◆ Edwards Mother Earth Foundation
- ◆ McKnight Foundation
- ◆ Tides Foundation-Beldon Fund
- ◆ Northeast Environmental Policy Center
- ◆ Belvedere Fund of Rockefeller Family Fund
- ◆ State Environmental Leadership Program
- ◆ Southern Partners Fund
- ◆ Threshold Foundation
- ◆ Foundation for State Coalitions
- ◆ Open Society Institute
- ◆ Southern Organizing Cooperative
- ◆ Consumer Federation of America
- ◆ New World Foundation
- ◆ Edward W Hazen Foundation
- ◆ Corporation for National and Community Service
- ◆ New World Foundation
- ◆ Piper Fund
- ◆ Environmental Support Center
- ◆ Democracy South
- ◆ Deer Creek Foundation
- ◆ Herb Block Foundation
- ◆ Funding Exchange
- ◆ Southern Education Foundation
- ◆ Ottinger Foundation
- ◆ Progressive Technology Project
- ◆ Acorn Fund
- ◆ Ben & Jerry's Foundation
- ◆ M. C. Wray Charitable Trust
- ◆ National Rural Funders Collaborative
- ◆ University of Arkansas
- ◆ Greensboro Justice Fund
- ◆ Sisters of St. Francis
- ◆ Arkansas Sierra Club
- ◆ People's Action
- ◆ Economic Policy Institute EARN in the South



Arkansas Citizens First Congress: 25 years of Advocacy at the Capitol



The Arkansas Citizens First Congress is a coalition of grassroots organizations and allies working together to establish a strong public voice to influence political and policy decisions and ensure accountability.

We do this by:

- Convening 56 organizations from across the state including local community groups, established policy development groups, professional advocacy organizations, and institutional partners to advance common goals.
- Mobilizing constituents from across the state to engage their legislators and advocate for better policies.
- Securing major legislative victories that have improved schools, promoted fair elections, ensured the viability of local farms, and much more.

The impacts of our work are a more engaged, informed, and effective citizenry; stronger policies; more accountability; and stronger leaders, as well as the key legislative victories listed on the following pages.

Top: The first CFC Convention, 1998.

Bottom: The 2012 CFC Convention.



CFC Impact Through the Years

2023

- ◆ We helped expose problems with the Governor's education privatization bill and we rallied opposition
- ◆ We helped stop attacks on Affirmative Action, the Freedom of Information Act and we mobilized opposition to the Governor's sweeping tax cuts for the wealthy

2022

- ◆ We helped lead opposition to Issue 2 that would have allowed just a 40% minority of voters to block ballot measures. We defeated it with nearly 60% of the vote.
- ◆ We expanded our voter registration, voter education and voter mobilization. Several of our leaders were elected to local city councils and school boards.

2021

- ◆ Bill was passed that prevents juveniles from being placed in solitary confinement if they are pregnant or caring for a child.
- ◆ Legislation enacted that grants teaching licenses to DACA recipients
- ◆ We stopped several bills that would have cut back on our voting rights
- ◆ We held a CFC convention and advocated at the legislature in the midst of the pandemic!

2019

- ◆ We stopped a legislative attack on the minimum wage increase that we'd helped voters elect by an overwhelming majority just months earlier.
- ◆ We helped pass an Arkansas DREAM Act for undocumented students, which had been a CFC priority for 15 years. Sometimes it takes a long-term strategy.
- ◆ We released a report on Arkansas' worst-in-the-Nation rental housing laws that are dangerous and grossly unfair, but the Realtors Association blocked the needed reforms.

2017

- ◆ Helped pass a bill that prevents minors from being sentenced to life without parole.
- ◆ We helped defeat yet another attempt to privatize Arkansas public schools through a universal voucher scheme. Education Chair Alyce Love, testified about the segregationist impact of vouchers and her testimony has been viewed online over 60,000 times.

2015

- ◆ We released a report on how mental health diversion programs serve people in crisis better while also saving money and we passed a bill creating 5 mental health crisis centers.
- ◆ We ran an aggressive campaign against a religious discrimination bill that would have legalized discrimination. The Governor blocked the bill at the last moment.
- ◆ Extended Medicaid expansion by a single vote while defeating 6 attempts to repeal it.
- ◆ Helped pass a moratorium on industrial hog farms near the Buffalo National River.

2013

- ◆ Helped expand health coverage to a quarter million currently uninsured Arkansans
- ◆ Passed the Landowner Notification Act to protect rights of those in the Fayetteville Shale
- ◆ Enacted laws to improve discipline policies and increase parent involvement in schools
- ◆ Passed a new package of election reform bills to improve accountability in elections
- ◆ Improved policies for energy efficiency, renewable energy and green jobs

2011

- ◆ Stopped all bills that would have unfairly targeted immigrant populations
- ◆ Began process for developing State Water Plan
- ◆ Reduced sentences and provided alternative sentencing for 1st time non-violent offenders
- ◆ Helped stop many regressive tax proposals while passing a grocery sales tax reduction
- ◆ Ensured that schools use poverty funding for programs that help close the achievement gap

2009

- ◆ Passed a package of bills to hold schools accountable and help close the achievement gap
- ◆ Created conservation easements for landowners
- ◆ Improved energy policies to address climate change and save consumers money
- ◆ Improved laws to stop wage theft



CFC members from across Arkansas come together at the convention to present, discuss, and vote on the issues that the CFC will focus on at the next legislative session: the Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas.



2007

- ◆ Implemented legislation to protect archives of historic black schools
- ◆ Secured full funding of pre-kindergarten education for low-income children
- ◆ Passed tax reforms that reduced burden on low-income people
- ◆ Established the Arkansas Global Warming Commission
- ◆ Established the HIV-AIDS Minority Task Force
- ◆ Expanded Drug Courts as an alternative to prison for non-violent offenders



2006 Special Session

- ◆ Increased minimum wage by \$1.10/hour



2005

- ◆ Established the Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- ◆ Expanded funding for pre-kindergarten education
- ◆ Required paper receipts for all voting equipment purchased after 2005
- ◆ Preserved crucial water protection provisions across the state



2004 Special Session

- ◆ Defeated 1 cent sales tax increase
- ◆ Secured funding to boost opportunities for low-income students
- ◆ Expanded funding for pre-kindergarten education
- ◆ Reduced enrollment threshold for retaining rural schools from 500 to 350



2003

- ◆ Expanded early voting hours and created Saturday early voting
- ◆ First state funding for domestic violence programs

2002 Special Session

- ◆ Protected funding for Medicaid by passing tax increase



2001

- ◆ Created incentives for renewable energy

1999

- ◆ Added protections for environment and consumers in Energy Deregulation bill
- ◆ Strengthened laws protecting victims of domestic violence
- ◆ Increased oversight for state boards & commissions, & eliminated inactive ones
- ◆ Required public hearings at Public Service Commission for rate increases



Citizens in Camden compare notes at a candidate forum, and a resident of Wilmot advocates at the Capitol for better education policies.



Arkansas Public Policy Panel Board

- Curtis Mangrum, Chair, Gould
- Barry Haas, Treasurer, Little Rock
- Ana Aguayo, Springdale
- Fannie Fields, Holly Grove
- Rev. Howard Gordon, Little Rock
- James Moore, Magnolia
- Bruce McMath, Little Rock
- Ryan D. Davis, Little Rock
- Retha Spencer, Gould
- Elaine Williams, Prescott



CFC Steering Committee

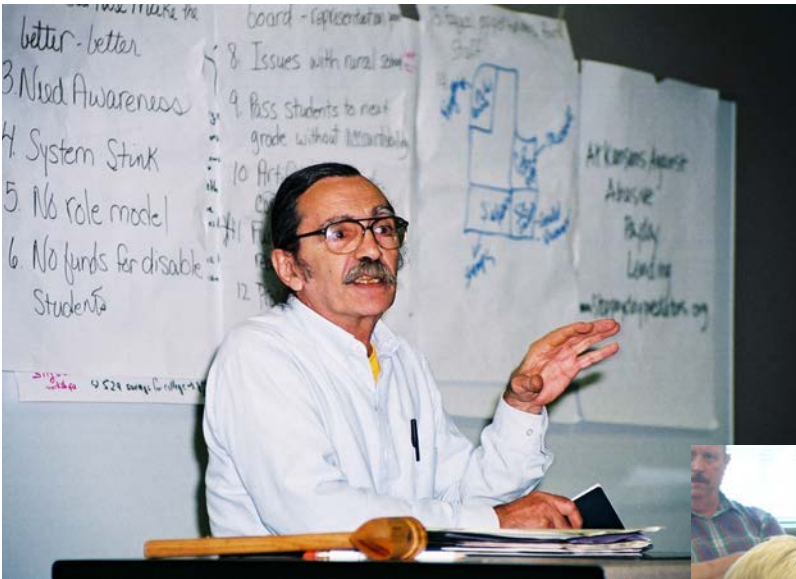
- William El-Amin - Co-Chair, Gould Organizing Project
- Scharmel Roussel - Co-Chair, Arkansas Interfaith Power and Light
- Bruno Showers
- Pear Byers, Concerned Citizens of Monticello Area
- Richard Hutchinson
- Dorothy Oliver, Pine Bluff Branch NAACP
- Charles Sisco, Citizens Climate Lobby of Arkansas
- Barry JEFFerson, Arkansas NAACP
- TJ Simba-Medel, Arkansas Youth Coalition for Social Change
- Eric Reese, Arkansas Human Rights Campaign
- Shelley Buonauto, Citizens Climate Lobby of Arkansas
- Rich Roy, Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock
- Nell Matthew, League of Women Voters
- Sylvia Moore, Concerned Citizens of Marvell Area
- Elaine Williams, Concerned Citizens of Prescott
- Felisha Perrodin, American Association of University Women of Arkansas
- Anais Trodec, Unitarian Universalist Village Church
- Evelyn Thomas, Strong Community Leadership Alliance



Panel Staff

- Bill Kopsky - Executive Director
- Kymara Seals - Policy Director
- Janice El-Amin - Organizing Director
- Osyrus Bolly - Racial Equity Coordinator
- Shaytrese Byers - CFC Outreach Coordinator
- Kwami Abdul-Bey - Elections Coordinator/Organizer
- Ben Washington - Federal Relief And Infrastructure Spending Campaign Coordinator
- Brady Shiers - Database Administrator
- Ashton Eley - Communications Coordinator
- Shirley Renix - Southwest Organizer, Camden
- Lasonia Standoak - Organizer, South Arkansas
- Jesselia Maples - Lead Organizer, Marvell
- Barbara Smith - Organizer, Magnolia





Grassroots effort

Arkansas Citizens First Congress meets

By Perry Wooten
of the Arkansas Press

LOCAL/STATE
Wednesday, January 31, 2007

COMMERCIAL

Members of the Arkansas Citizens First Congress, a coalition of grassroots lobby groups, were in town Tuesday morning to discuss their legislative agenda and urge others to get involved in the political process by becoming a "face for a law".

The congress, which includes a membership of more than 60 community groups statewide, including the Gould Citizens Advisory Committee, met Tuesday at the Gould City Hall.

Curle Mangrum Ball, chairman of the Gould Advisory Committee; Roy Ruffin, the committee's vice president; and Bernadette Devine, an Arkansas Public Policy Panel organizer, discussed the Arkansas Citizens First Congress legislative agenda Tuesday at a meeting at Gould City Hall.

THIS WAY
TO THE
CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS





An image taken from a videotape shows a Fowler Technologies tanker truck dumping liquid hog waste at a Tyson Foods hog farm at Hiwassee earlier this month. The incident was taped by Billy Hutchins of Elm Springs, a former employee of Fowler Technologies.



The Arkansas Citizens First Congress
BUILDING A GRASSROOTS COALITION FOR EVERYONE THAT'S STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE ALL OF OUR VOICES HEARD



DONATE HERE

To help fund the next 60 years of progress in Arkansas. Donations between now and the end of the year will be matched dollar for dollar, so your \$100 donation has \$200 of impact!



Visit Our Websites

For great resources like reserach reports and guides to how your lawmaker voted and how to contact them.



www.ARPANEL.org



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for Exciting News Soon*

