

SUMMER 2010
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ARKANSANS UNITED FOR CHANGE: ARKANSAS CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS SELECTS PROGRESSIVE AGENDA TO TAKE TO LAWMAKERS by Patty Barker

When the Arkansas General Assembly convenes in January 2011, the state will be emerging from the worst recession in recent history and legislators will be facing tough decisions about how to revitalize our economy, improve our schools, protect our environment, expand health care for our families, and improve opportunities for all Arkansans. The Arkansas Citizens First Congress (CFC) will be there to ensure our legislators make the right choices for all Arkansans.

With a growing membership base of grassroots community activists and state-wide organizations, the CFC continues to be a strong lobbying force at the Capitol. In preparation for the upcoming legislative session, 100 representatives from our 45 member groups gathered at the Arkansas Citizens First Congress Convention in June to select their priority agenda.

"This was our smoothest Convention ever!" said Arkansas Public Policy Panel Director Bill Kopsky, "We had great proposals and debate, more delegates and observers, plus we had a strong

youth contingent." According to CFC co-chair Kate Althoff, "It's a beautiful thing to participate in the CFC Convention and see the diversity of people and issues come together and, in the end, have consensus!" CFC members approved a ten-point platform for moving Arkansas forward that will focus on improving public education, creating jobs, protecting our natural resources,

ensuring health coverage for those in need, and preserving our civil rights.

The CFC's Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas are:

Improve opportunities to learn for all students and close education achievement gaps.

"Arkansas children need to be competitive with other children

see *United for Change*, pg 2



Delegates to the Citizens First Congress Convention hear testimony from fellow delegates before they vote on their new platform for the Arkansas legislature.

UNITED FOR CHANGE |continued from page 1|



across the nation to succeed. Involving parents; expanding pre-school, after school, and summer programs; and expanding school-based health programs will help all students move ahead," said Regina VonTungeln, co-chair of the CFC's education caucus. The CFC will focus on ensuring that existing state funds for students in poverty are spent more effectively.

Support fair tax reform that lowers the burden on low- and middle-income families, while protecting the integrity of the state budget. Low-income Arkansans pay twice the tax rate that wealthy Arkansans pay, and middle-income families pay a heavy share as well. "Arkansans have suffered too long under the current tax system," said CFC co-chair Rev. Kenneth Anderson, who also chairs the Association of Minority Businessmen in Camden. "We need a tax system that is fair for all Arkansans."

Implement energy policies to save consumers money, create jobs, and combat climate change. Expanding energy efficiency and renewable energy programs will not only address the threat of climate change, but also reduce our energy dependence, create new high-wage jobs, and improve our economy. "We need better financing options

to make efficiency and renewables more accessible. When Arkansans utilize energy efficiency and renewable energy, they create jobs and increase the value of their homes and businesses," said CFC Steering Committee member Robert McAfee with the OMNI Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology. "Confronting global warming just makes good sense."

"IT'S A BEAUTIFUL THING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CFC CONVENTION AND SEE THE DIVERSITY OF PEOPLE AND ISSUES COME TOGETHER AND, IN THE END, HAVE CONSENSUS!"
— Co-chair Kate Althoff

Develop a new state water plan that uses the best science and engages a broad range of Arkansans. Don Richardson of the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission said, "I was at the signing of the bill creating the State Water Plan after the 1991 session, and thought at that time it was a good start. 20 years later it is way past time for us to have a comprehensive State Water Plan that addresses both quantity

and quality and involves all the stakeholders. We have extraordinary waters that need protection and depleted aquifers that need recharging. The best way to address these problems and opportunities is through a comprehensive State Water Plan."

Oppose punitive anti-immigrant legislation. "Immigration reform belongs at the federal level – it's time for Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform. State level immigration laws are discriminatory, ineffective, and expensive," said Daniel Diaz, a member of the Phi Iota Alpha fraternity at the U of A.

Ensure that all graduates of Arkansas high schools have the opportunity to pay in-state tuition at state colleges by passing the DREAM Act. Any student who attends an Arkansas high school for 3 years and graduates should have the opportunity to pay in-state tuition at Arkansas colleges regardless of their immigration status. "We need the DREAM Act to ensure that all Arkansas students have access to a college education, to good jobs, and a brighter future as contributors to their community and the state." said Rafael Arciga-Garcia, CFC education caucus co-chair and member of Phi Iota Alpha.

Require the oil and gas industry to follow best management practices to protect landowner rights and Arkansas's water resources. Oil and gas resources must be developed with respect for landowners and the environment before Arkansas has a major catastrophe like the Gulf BP oil spill. "Arkansas is unique in that it has some of the highest quality water resources not only in the United States, but in all of North America," said Debbie Doss, chair of the Arkansas Conservation Coalition. "The natural gas industry is threatening that and we must make sure that they use best management practices to protect our clean and abundant water."

Increase penalties for any employer who refuses to pay workers. "Many employers take advantage of workers by not paying them full wages for their work," said Rev. Steve Copley with Arkansas Justice for Our Neighbors. With virtually no options for immediate recovery, these workers are forced

to seek complicated and long-term remedies. The CFC improved wage theft laws last session, but workers are still forced to wait months, or sometimes years, to get paid. All employers should be required to pay full wages to their workers or be subject to penalties.

Reform prison sentencing practices to make the parole process unbiased, reduce costs, and restore former inmates back into productive society. "We need to find practical ways to reduce the huge backlog of inmates in county jails and improve conditions in our overcrowded prison system," said Larry Froelich with the Inmate Justice Project. Rev. Larry Nicks of Camden adds, "Arkansas prisons are breaking our budget and house a disproportionate number of African American males." The CFC wants to make the system more fair and less expensive by increasing alternative sentencing for first-time, non-violent offenders, and provide a path back into society for people who pay

their debt and play by the rules.

Insure 43,000 more low-income children by expanding the ARKids First health insurance program.

"This expansion of the ARKids First program is very important for Arkansas families, especially in these tough economic times, when more and more kids are falling into poverty and need access to adequate health care," said Jennifer Ferguson with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. Improved enrollment procedures and expanded coverage will give more kids access to benefits such as preventive doctor visits.

The CFC needs your help to push for solutions to these priority issues during the 2010 legislative session. Progress depends on the public getting involved and staying involved.



Joyce Hale of the Sierra Club Ozark Headwaters Group shares a laugh with Margarita Solorzano of the Hispanic Women's Organization as Solorzano receives the delegate credentials she'll use to vote for the new CFC policy platform.

**GET INVOLVED!
LEARN MORE!**

**Go to CitizensFirst.org
or call 501-376-7913 to:**

Sign up for CFC legislative alerts; attend lobby days at the Capitol; see legislative updates and video footage of legislative hearings; review your legislators' vote record; learn about upcoming CFC events and more.

The Arkansas Citizens First Congress — Where the voices of all Arkansans are heard!

Please make a donation to support the CFC campaigns at www.ARPANEL.org or to The Panel, 1308 W. Second Street, Little Rock, AR 72201

YOUTH FROM ACROSS THE STATE MEET AT CFC

by James Szenher

On Friday, June 25, 2010, the Citizens First Congress (CFC) Convention held its first Youth Caucus. Youth came together to discuss what they could do to make a difference in their communities. Some of the youth were delegates sent to represent community groups, such as the South Arkansas Youth Coalition, Gould Citizens Advisory Council, and Center for Artistic Revolution.

The group started off playing a trivia game about politics and government in Arkansas, where they learned the four sources of political power: relationships, people, information, and money. They discussed issues in their communities that need to be addressed, such as improving their schools, cleaning up their communities, and creating more afterschool and summer opportunities.

Everyone had several ideas about what they could do to get involved, including leading a clean-up campaign, starting a small business to make money for a new community center, and a campaign to change people's attitudes about littering and community pride. They also discussed ways to raise and save money, and talked about the importance of financial knowledge and financial independence.

Jazzmin Nash, a Gould native and delegate from the South Arkansas Youth Coalition said, "It was great to have youth from different parts of the state there. It shows that youth are ready and able to make a difference." Everyone was very excited to be getting involved with the CFC and take that enthusiasm back to their communities to work on specific projects with their groups.



Jeremiah and Jazzmin Nash of Gould and Carlos Renix of Camden played a part in convening the first Youth Caucus of the Arkansas Citizens First Congress.

EXPANDING ARKANSAS'S OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

COMING TOGETHER FOR A BETTER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Save the Date: November 12 & 13 – Little Rock

The summit will bring together parents, students, educators, business people and community residents who are committed to giving Arkansas children more and better opportunities to learn.

More information coming soon – go to www.ARPANEL.org

THE PANEL STAFF

Celestine Wesley, Little Rock
Ana Phakhin, Little Rock
Brett Miracle, Little Rock
Bill Kopsky, Little Rock
Fay Knox, Deer
Bernadette Devone, Pine Bluff
Rosemary Brown, Monticello
Patty Barker, Little Rock
Beth Ardapple, Bass

VISTA Volunteers:

Janice Tillman, Gould
James Szenher, Little Rock
Shirley Renix, Camden
Ashley Mathis, Little Rock
Greg Cooper, Little Rock



A Dumas small business owner at a town hall meeting of the Legislative Task Force on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity.

POVERTY TASK FORCE MEETS IN DUMAS TO HEAR CONCERNS

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity met in Dumas on July 19th to get public feedback about ways that poverty can be reduced in the state. The Task Force, which is made up of both lawmakers and concerned citizens, will identify strategies to reduce child and family poverty in Arkansas. The Task Force must issue its recommendations to the Legislature by December 2010.

“Going into the community and getting feedback is critical on this issue,” said Bernadette Devone, who represents the Arkansas Public

Policy Panel on the Task Force. “The public’s input will be a major part of the Task Force’s recommendations.”

Citizens identified priorities for education reform, community economic development, improving individual financial well-being, and public health.

Created through legislation sponsored by Sen. Joyce Elliott (D-Little Rock), the Task Force is part of a new approach to tackling poverty.

The Task Force also held forums in Texarkana, Springdale, Little Rock, and Jonesboro.

THE PANEL BOARD

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THANK YOU to outgoing board members:
 Linda Carnahan,
 Basil Kyriakakis
 and Perry Hayes
 for years of great service!

THE CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS STEERING COMMITTEE

Kate Althoff , Co-Chair	Robert Harper
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CONCERNED ABOUT THE QUALITY OF YOUR DRINKING WATER?

Safe, abundant, clean water – one of Arkansas’s greatest treasures – is at risk. Join us for dinner and a discussion with experts and advocates on how to improve Arkansas’s water future.

Join us for dinner and discussion

Friday, September 10, 5:30-8:00pm

Camp Couchdale on Lake Catherine,

301 Catherine Park Rd., Hot Springs, AR

DRAGON SLAYER DINNER HONORS ARKANSAS HEROES

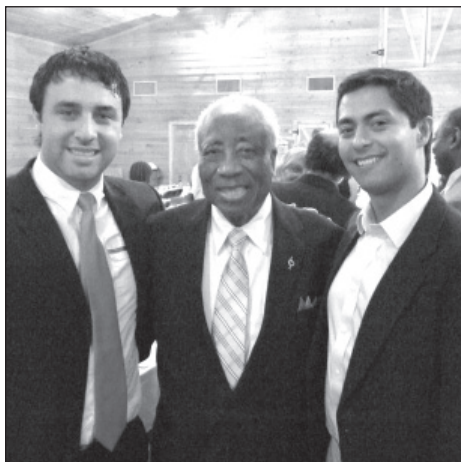
Two hundred people celebrated their heroes at the Citizens First Congress convention to raise money to support the CFC priorities.

Dr. Ozell Sutton, legendary civil rights activist from Gould, was our keynote speaker and recalled the sacrifices made by heroes during the sit-ins and voter registration drives of the 1960's and his days at the Justice Department.

We honored two visionaries of the Panel and CFC who passed away this year, Brownie Ledbetter and EJ Miller. Grainger Ledbetter evoked his mother's life and work. EJ's daughter Lindsey Miller and his longtime friend and labor colleague Larry Kelley accepted the first *E.J. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award*.

Beatrice Shelby received the 2010 *Brownie W. Ledbetter Dragon Slayer Award* for her nearly 30 years of leadership at the Boys, Girls and Adults Community Development Center in Marvell. Ms. Shelby has watched children who received the Center's education, health, and economic services become leaders in their own right.

Ten outstanding community activists received leadership awards for their contributions to a better Arkansas.



Above: Daniel Diaz, Dr. Ozell Sutton, and Alejandro Aviles

Right: Dr. Calvin Ledbetter and Ernie Dumas



ARKANSAS ACTIVISTS OF THE YEAR

- **Wonda Faye White**, Southeast Arkansas
- **Rev. Mary Purifoy**, Southwest Arkansas
- **Jack White**, Northwest Arkansas
- **Charlotte Wales**, Agriculture
- **Alice Andrews**, Environment
- **Rick Collins**, Public Health
- **Phi Iota Alpha**, Civil Rights
- **alt.Consulting**, Economic Development
- **Arkansas Education Association**, Education
- **Gould Citizens Advisory Council**, Election and Government Reform

**For photos and stories
of these great Arkansas leaders,
go to
www.ARPANEL.org/Program.pdf**



Please make a gift to the Panel in honor of your heroes, the ones leading change, inspiring others, and doing the nitty-gritty work of making community activism succeed.

Go to **www.ARPANEL.org** or send a check to The Panel, 1308 W. Second Street Little Rock, AR 72201

REMEMBERING BROWNIE W. LEDBETTER SOCIAL JUSTICE INNOVATOR, 1932 - 2010



It seems that Brownie, our longtime Director, knew almost everyone in Arkansas and half the world outside. All of them have vivid memories of her: “funny,” “determined,” “storyteller,” “tall,” “great cook,” “terrifying driver.”

Brownie was also a brilliant community organizer and political activist who created a distinctly **Arkansas** model for creating change that centered on the relationships that intertwine our state and the common inter-connections between issues and people.

She did not see isolated people, communities or issues, but rather the common relationships, stories and goals that bind us. She worked for farmers, civil rights, the environment, education, women’s rights, workers and countless others because she saw them as Arkansas issues. She brought people together across lines of race, class, culture and gender that they never imagined they could cross.

Brownie conceived The Arkansas Citizens First Congress with then-AFL-CIO director Bill Becker to bring grassroots activists together in coalition with labor, faith and

state advocacy organizations to build a progressive movement in Arkansas and balance the moneyed interests that control our state. The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation supported her to bring hundreds of Arkansans together over a couple of years to design the “big hoobie-doo,”

as she initially called it. Together, they built a coalition that is now 12 years old and has a track record of winning reforms once thought impossible – from better schools to cleaner water. And the Congress has a new list of reforms for this session!

Brownie knew that organizing a diverse, progressive movement in Arkansas would be hard and slow work that must go on for generations. She hired organizers to help communities develop winning campaigns on their issues and sustain infrastructure. Brownie was always learning, speeding home on dark, winding roads after meetings while looking into the backseat of the van to debrief with staff and develop new ideas for what was next. Somehow we survived! She always pushed herself and everyone around her to be better.

Brownie learned the political landscape early on by working for US Senator Fulbright and managing campaigns for her husband Cal. In 1964 first time candidate Cal Ledbetter received a surprising 48% of the vote in a race for the state senate against a well known

incumbent and segregationist. Two years later, Brownie helped Cal win election to the state legislature, where he served for ten years and enacted groundbreaking reforms to make the legislature more transparent. Brownie saw what it took to build the political support necessary to pass progressive reforms.

Brownie was authentic and principled to the bone. She developed and honored relationships even with her fiercest opponents. “We are all children of God,” she often said. She brought her own “Arkansas Chic” to countless other organizations and issues across the country and even the world through women’s groups working at the UN. Brownie was also a wife and mother who bragged about her grandbabies incessantly. See our website for her many other contributions.

To us, she was our friend and the primary author of the blueprint that we continue to refine with hundreds of leaders across the state to build a better Arkansas together.





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Arkansans United for Change

Remembering Brownie W. Ledbetter

Dragon Slayer Dinner Honors Heroes

Poverty Taskforce Meets in Dumas

Youth Caucus for Change

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Delegates and observers representing the 45 member groups of the Arkansas Citizen First Congress pause for a photo before voting for the coalition's 2010 policy platform.