



PUBLIC POLICY WATCH



The Newsletter of The Arkansas Public Policy Panel

Fall 2004

TAKING IT TO THE STATE

Citizens First Congress Gears up for the 2005 Legislative Session

It's that time again! The Arkansas legislature convenes in January and legislators will be making laws that affect you - - the environment, civil rights, economic development, taxes, education and more. That means that it's time for Arkansans to get ready with a People's Agenda for Arkansas.

Join the Citizens First Congress, October 8 – 10, at our convention in Hot Springs. People from all over the state will be in Hot Springs to create the People's Agenda. This is your chance to help determine how to make Arkansas better. We need you to be involved.

The Citizens First Congress is a coalition of community groups and organizations fighting together for changes at the state legislature that will benefit Arkansans.

The CFC and member groups have won:

- extended early voting hours for working people
- increased funding for domestic violence shelters with more protections for victims of violence
- renewable energy legislation
- education reforms like pre-school for low-income children
- and more fair taxes.

The Congress has fought to create an Arkansas Department of Agriculture for family farmers, to end conflicts of interest on State boards and



Shirley Bondon, Chair of CFC, addresses the Congress during the Statewide Convention.

commissions; and to strengthen the penalties for Hate Crimes.

As part of the Citizens First Congress, you will bring a voice and power to grassroots communities across Arkansas that will affect our lawmakers. Without us working together, our lawmakers only see the hundreds of corporate lobbyists pressuring them every day to look out for corporate interests. The result is laws that heavily favor people with deep pockets.

The Citizens First Congress is changing that by working together to make sure our legislators hear from us, the people.

The process only works when citizens get involved – and it's a lot easier to stay involved and make a difference when hundreds of people are with you in coalition and solidarity.

October 8-10 in Hot Springs is your chance to announce how you'd like to change things in the state. People from all over the state will be in Hot Springs to create the 2005 People's Agenda for Arkansas. Join us.

For more information please contact Beth Pease at 501-376-7913 ext.11 or bethpease@earthlink.net

Find out more about CFC inside!

ACTION UPDATES

Audubon Arkansas needs volunteers for: Woodson Joint Venture Wetland Reserve Program; Bryant Alternative Learning Center environmental education for at risk teens; and Fourche Creek trash clean-ups, re-vegetating corridors, and stream-bank stabilization. Contact Gabe Sewell or Daniel Devun at 501-244-2229.

Fayetteville H.O.P.E.S. works to increase School Board communication and mutual decision-making; focus on getting voters out for the 9/21 School Board election and forming Neighborhood Associations to hold School Board representatives accountable. Contact Kathy McGurie-Bouman, 479-582-3929 kathyb@cox-internet.com

OMNI: Center for Peace, Justice, and Ecology, in Fayetteville is having Fall Forums on the causes and consequences of violence and wars, and on peacemakers. For more info www.omnicenter.org or Dick Bennet jbenet@uark.edu 479-442-4600.

9/25 The Northwest Arkansas Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice will hold a workshop about "Safety and Health Rights in the Workplace" and "Safety Standards in the Poultry Industry," at St. Mary's Hospital in Rogers from 2 to 4 pm. Contact Lucia Hernandez at 479-544-2421. wrj_lc005@hotmail.com

9/25 Save Our Schools and newly formed **Advocates for Community and Rural Education** will have a fundraising brisket dinner and pie supper at St. Vincent Parish Hall in Hattiesville. Contact Gary Kaufman, 501-354-1362.

9/30-10/1 The Low-Income Advocates Leadership Summit at the Wyndham Riverfront in NLR. Sponsors are The AR Assets Coalition, Central AR Development Council, and Entergy. Contact Robin Freeman, CADC, 501-315-1121.

10/20, 7 p.m. The League of Women Voters of Washington County and **U of A School of Law** will conduct a forum on "Civil Liberties and National Security in a post 9/11 World." During October "Meet Your Candidates" will be aired on the Cable TV Government Channel. Contact Genie Donovan 479-521-3296 Donovan29@cox-internet.com

Congratulations to the following organizations for taking the lead and building grassroots strength in the Delta and south Arkansas:

Great River Regional Committee
Delta Women Achieving Goals
Delta Youth Achieving Goals

Southeast Regional Committee
Gould Concerned Citizens Committee
Mitchellville Concerned Citizens Committee
Oakwood Bayou Community Development, Inc.

South Arkansas Good Government Commission
Stamps Citizens in Action
Little River County Training School Academy Alumni Association
Bearden Concerned Citizens
Thornton Concerned Citizens
Community Hope of People and the Environment



South Arkansas Good Government Commission installs new board members. From left - Mary Cones, Willie Daniels, Dr. Lee Davis Hines, Billy Scott, Esq., Mary Griffith, Flossie Moore, Candi Williams, Rev. Mary Purifoy, Rev. John Owens

Deepening the Grassroots in South Arkansas and the Delta

The 2003 special legislative session on education reform prompted many Arkansas grassroots groups and leaders to mobilize for education reforms that were meaningful for their communities. Participation in that process created a core of grassroots people with more experience in political action, a taste of success, and they are not stopping there.

Most community members know that education reform will take years of more work to achieve. But for things like real equity, closing achievement gaps, and investing adequate resources, there are other vital issues that need to be addressed in their community as well. Since March, activists have convened over fifty community meetings in South Arkansas and the Delta. The education campaign showed them what they could do. Now community groups are forming in fifteen communities to continue the work to improve schools, raise political participation and awareness, create economic development opportunities, engage youth, and address other issues as they build organizations that will press for the reforms that our communities need.

The South Arkansas Good Government Commission redeveloped its board and began strategic planning with a survey in Camden on environmental issues. A two-week voter registration campaign registered 75 new voters. On September 18 they'll host a regional caucus meeting to build a regional agenda, coordinate regional activities and plan their agenda for the Citizens First Congress. On November 6 they'll host an economic development seminar.

A community group in Garland is assessing community needs to develop a civic participation campaign, and a group in Bearden and Thornton is creating a community response to drug and crime problems. A group in Stamps is working towards election reform and the Little River County Training School Alumni Association is continuing to develop a local community center in Ashdown.

In Marvel, Delta Women Achieving Goals and Delta Youth Achieving Goals have collected over 100 community surveys to identify issues and involve residents. Gould residents conducted a community survey, a citywide clean-up and hosted their first annual Day on Main. A Helena group

has held two community meetings to move forward on public education reform. Residents of Oakwood Bayou, Mitchellville, and Dumas are beginning the planning process to form groups to strengthen their communities.

Americorps VISTA members Willie Allen, Precious Williams, Joy Andrews, and Marilyn Kountz who have worked over 4000 hours this year to develop this project. Over the summer they were aided by interns Walter Everett and Kyron Green, thanks to the Southern Education Foundation and University of Arkansas at Monticello who supported these two outstanding young people.

Strong organizations are developing thanks to the investments of time, commitment, and faith of many community leaders. The energy level is high, and the groups are coming together into a coalition of organizations that will empower Arkansas grassroots people to control their lives.

For more information or to join a group, call Panel lead organizer Bernadette Devone at (870) 872-8980 or email her at bdevone2002@yahoo.com.



Student intern Walter Everett, Panel organizer Bernadette Devone, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowry and student intern Kryon Green.

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark decision to end racial segregation in public schools, students worked across the south with community groups promoting equity and excellence in education. Dr. Lowry, co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, spoke to a gathering of interns and staff leaders. Thank you to the Southern Education Foundation for sponsoring this great program.

Why The Arkansas Citizens First Congress?

Several years ago representatives of community groups from across Arkansas came together to discuss their frustration at how much big money and big business controlled Arkansas' politics.

They had been fighting battles for better schools, a healthier environment, safer workplaces, equal rights, fairer taxes and more accountable government for years. Individually they were defeated almost every time they tried to make progress by the same big money interests at the State Capitol. They were talking about how all of the business lobbies acted together in coalition, and that's when it dawned on them: we need a grassroots coalition of our own!

And so the Arkansas Citizens First Congress was created with the wild notion that the people of Arkansas should actually come first in our political system. The Congress started with the beliefs that we could find common ground, that we faced common threats, and that when we acted together we could be more powerful and make Arkansas politics fairer, more responsive and more progressive.

It hasn't always been easy, there are hard issues and we have a thousand reasons to be divided. It's hard to choose priorities, hard to create the common ground necessary for such a diverse coalition, and it's hard to fight the much more powerful forces that dominate our political system. But we have done it, we've stuck together, and we have won reforms that no one but us thought were possible.

We've worked with children and the elderly, farmers, labor unions, people from the Ozarks and people from the Delta, environmentalists, government reformers, economic developers, child advocates, civil rights activists, school reformers, and many more. We are Arkansans coming together in a spirit of community to make the state better, to learn more about each other, develop better strategies and face all of the diverse problems of our state.

We're building a more progressive, prosperous, healthy, fair and open Arkansas. **We hope you'll join us!**



Delegate Delores LeCompte addresses The Congress

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING AT THE CFC CONVENTION?

The Steering Committee will propose that the CFC get more involved in

- voter registration and education, and
- educating voters on candidates' positions,
- developing long term campaigns.

A new steering committee will be elected to guide the Citizens First Congress through the legislative session and these exciting changes.

Arkansas needs your voice on October 8-10 in Hot Springs.



Julia Sampson, of the Arkansas Farm-Community Alliance, testifies before the Arkansas State Legislature in 2003 in support of creating a Department of Agriculture. The Congress and AFCA members came within 2 votes of winning this campaign.

Don't Let Them Dismantle America

Opinion

Free Trade Is Not Fair Trade



By **E.J. Miller**

Arkansas has lost nearly 40,000 high paying manufacturing jobs over the last three years. Our nation has lost millions more.

Now economists predict that up to 14 million white collar jobs could be shipped out. These are high paying jobs in fields like computer sciences, engineering, entertainment, financial and medical services.

To quote Dr. N. Gregory Mankiw, chairman of President Bush's Council of Economic Advisers, "Outsourcing is just a new way of doing international trade. When a good or service is produced more cheaply abroad, it makes more sense to import it than to make or provide it domestically."

Most experts agree that the good jobs America has lost are not coming back. In their place are lower-wage jobs that provide few if any benefits. In the industries that are adding jobs, the pay is 21 percent less than in industries that are losing jobs. The Census Bureau just reported that the Arkansas median household income dropped almost 4% last year. And Arkansas' incomes are already among the lowest in the nation.

This economic upheaval is supported by the economic policies of the current administration.

This crisis in America did not have to happen. It is purely the result of bad policies put forth by the wealthy to enrich the already rich and their friends. Their trade agreements have prompted worker exploitation and environmental damage at home and across the globe. Nations are being forced into a global race to the bottom that destroys jobs and depresses wages and benefits. To make matters worse here at home, tax cuts that favor

the rich were pressed into place during a recession and during wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It's the wrong strategy. To quote financier Warren Buffett; "Putting \$1,000 in the pockets of 310,000 families

with urgent needs is going to provide far more stimulus to the economy than putting the same \$310,000 million in my pockets."

If we don't change course, our children could end up worse off economically than our generation is, a first in American history. Not since Herbert Hoover, who led us into the Great Depression, has a President ended his term with more people out of work than when he started his term.

Most decent jobs today require a college education or some special training, but financially strapped states are cutting

tuition aid and raising tuition costs while parents aren't able to save for college costs. Personal savings are at record lows, and personal bankruptcies and debt are at record highs. So many families are using credit cards to make ends meet that personal debt (not including mortgages) now averages \$18,700 per household. Health costs are exploding, while access to care is declining, especially in rural areas.

It doesn't have to be this way. To fix this mess, the United States needs to:

- invest in our nation's infrastructure and education system,
- negotiate trade agreements that include workers' rights and environmental protections,
- provide financial assistance to the states, which have scrambled to close budget gaps of nearly \$200 billion in just the past three years,
- increase the minimum wage by at least \$1.50 per hour,
- close loopholes and tax gimmicks such as the foreign tax credit and phony pricing that reward multinational corporations for moving jobs abroad,
- deny government contracts to corporations that reincorporate offshore to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

America's economic policies must change. Our children's futures depend on our success at fighting back this assault on the working families of this country.

E.J. Miller is co-chair of the Arkansas Public Policy Panel and International Representative for IUE/CWA, AFL-CIO

“Nations are being forced into a global race to the bottom that destroys jobs and depresses wages and benefits”



The Arkansas Public Policy Panel

a nonprofit organization working statewide to build grassroots groups and connect people to improve Arkansas.

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ACTION UPDATES

Women and Children First Center Against Family Violence will sponsor the Clothesline Project at the State Capitol on 10/26; a clothesline of t-shirts depicting names of women who have died from domestic violence. Upcoming fundraisers include NLR merchants accepting cell phones for recycling in October and a McCain Mall gift wrapping booth from 11/26 to 12/24. Call 501-376-3219.

Arkansas ACLU filed a lawsuit to remove Amendment 3 from the November ballot, on the basis that the title and amendment are vague and misleading. Voters are led to believe that the amendment only prohibits same sex marriage (already illegal in Arkansas), but ACLU states that the amendment also prohibits civil unions and domestic partnerships. It could threaten other rights that single people and heterosexual married couples now enjoy, including the right to keep one's home in the event of bankruptcy.

10/20 The Arkansas Disability Coalition will host a Disability Awareness Day Celebration from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the State Capitol. Guest speakers will include legislative representatives followed by entertainment and a reception. Contact the Coalition office at 501-614-7020.

10/14-15 Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation's 24th Annual Conference and Membership Meeting, "Cultivating Rural Community Development," with "Youth Day" activities on Thursday and General Conference and Membership Meeting on Friday. Contact: Ms. Mary Harris 870-734-1140.

1/24/05 Arkansas Hunger Coalition and low-income advocates "Coalition Against Poverty" will have a "Beans and Cornbread Reception" from 5:30 to 7:30 at the First United Methodist Church in Little Rock. Contact Hope Coulter 501-374-6675 or 1-877-RHUNGER arhunger@comcast.net



Linda Polk, co-chair of the Panel Board and Basil Kyriakakis, Panel Board member, participate in the planning retreat in Little Rock.

MEET THE CHALLENGE



Give to the Panel and get your donation matched dollar for dollar.

A strong, well organized progressive constituency is necessary for holding elected officials accountable once the election is over. In this election year, you can double your donation when you give to build an organized base of people that will hold candidates to their promises.

If you've never donated before, or if you give above and beyond your usual gift, a Panel donor will match your gift up to \$5000. Generous donors have already given \$1,895 to meet the Challenge. With just

**A Salute to Activist Friends!
In memory of Becky Rawlings,
a \$300 gift from Nan DeVries.**

\$3,105 more in "new money" donations, we will have raised an extra

\$10,000 to press for progressive reforms — better education, better protection for civil rights, for the environment, for victims of domestic violence, and more. Just tear off and use the form below to send in your gift.

Help Arkansas become a more progressive state – Give to the Challenge, and get a bigger bang for your buck in 2004!

Yes! I am up for the Challenge!

Enclosed is my donation:

\$15 \$30 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$_____ Other

Make checks out to **The Panel**, 1308 W. Second Street, Little Rock, AR 72201

Please Charge my Visa/Master Card

Name as it appears on card: _____

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Signature _____

I wish to remain anonymous

I want to volunteer some time.

Contact me at (include name)



**The Arkansas
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Trade***

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Thanks for Recycling!

The 5th Arkansas Citizens First Congress



Creating a People's Agenda for Arkansas

- Member groups are eligible to send delegates!
- New groups may still join!



HOW DO I GET INVOLVED WITH CFC?

Regional Caucuses are meeting in your area!

- Northwest Arkansas - September 15 , 6pm-9pm
- South Arkansas - September 18 , 9am-3pm
- Southeast Arkansas - September 25 , 9am-3pm
- Great River (Helena area) - October 2 , 9am-3pm

For more information, contact Beth Pease at 501-376-2973 ext. 11 or bethpease@earthlink.net