

SUMMER 2011
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GOULD MATTERS

For seven years, members of the Gould Citizens Advisory Council have fought for their city. They have engaged citizens in keeping their city safe, clean, and moving in a positive direction. More than that, though, their efforts have brought the community together and restored citizens' faith in their ability to work with each other to improve their city.

Unfortunately, this story has been overshadowed by media coverage of recent events in Gould. GCAC made headlines in July when the Gould City Council passed several unconstitutional ordinances, including one that banned GCAC. Soon after, Mayor Earnest Nash was violently assaulted. For many, this overwhelmingly negative publicity was their first introduction to Gould. However, GCAC and its supporters are not finished telling their story.

While their work has gone unnoticed by most state and local media outlets, the city has made major progress due to the work and passion of hundreds of active residents. GCAC hosted Youth Summits to educate, empower and entertain young people. They fought to repair



60 people attended the Gould Citizens Advisory Council's August meeting. This was the first meeting after the Gould City Council passed a resolution banning the group from existing within the city.

leaky pipes in the town's water system, and they helped reform local elections and improve their schools.

More recently, the Gould Tax Relief Fund, a partner of GCAC, has focused on raising money from community members to help pay the IRS back taxes owed by the city.

"We raised \$11,000 from residents in just three weeks because we love our city," said Sam King, who leads the Tax Relief Fund. "It included pennies donated by a four-year-old who

was saving for a swimming pool. And we are not finished: we intend to continue raising money to pay off the rest of the debt."

The news coverage has not explained why the current City Council has been at odds with GCAC.

In 2008, Gould faced several crises. The city was in bankruptcy, the water system was failing, and City government was dysfunctional. GCAC knew that they had to act. They developed a platform, recruited candidates,

see **Gould**, pg 7

OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN CAMPAIGN LAYS OUT NEXT STEPS FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN ARKANSAS

Over 50 community leaders, advocates, foundation officers, teachers, parents, and students are driving a new campaign to support and improve Arkansas schools. Their Opportunity to Learn (OTL) campaign calls for improved access to after school and summer school programs, more teacher development, making sure that ‘poverty’ funds are spent on programs that improve student achievement, and establishing college and career readiness standards. The Campaign kicked off at a statewide summit last November. During the legislative session, the coalition’s members worked with legislators to pass supporting legislation.

Arkansas OTL Co-Chair Richard Hutchinson of the Arkansas Education Association says the OTL Campaign is just getting started: “...we have already taken some big steps forward. The

Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign has the potential to become a significant force for public education in this state.”

OTL Co-Chair Regina Von Tungeln of Pine Bluff added, “[Our recent planning retreat] helped everyone to get on the same page, and now we have a more cohesive coalition. We’re unified in our approach to addressing education issues.”

Stay tuned for more information, or contact Ana Phakhin at ana@arpanel.org or (479) 387-0415.



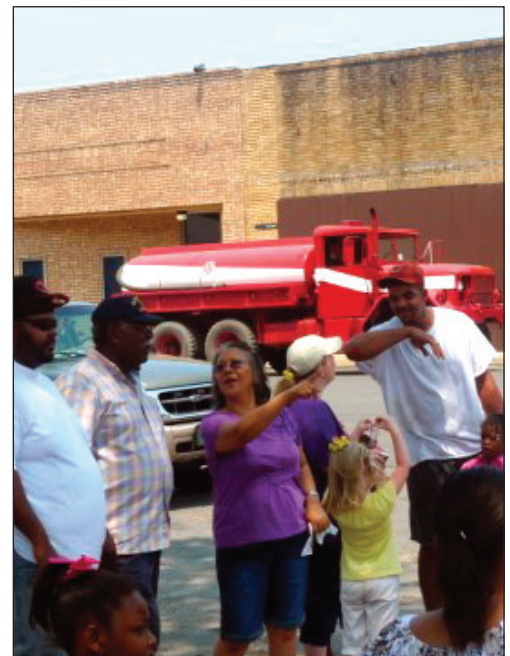
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Above and Left
Leaders of the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign met for a weekend to plan how to move the campaign forward.

Right
The Strong Community Leadership Alliance mixed education with a Family Fun Day to get parents more involved in education reform.



COALITION PUSHES TO IMPROVE OVERSIGHT OF NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY

A coalition of environmental leaders and local landowners is pushing for stronger regulations on the natural gas industry's hydraulic fracturing (also known as "fracking") operations in the state. Members from the Arkansas Canoe Club, League of Women Voters, Ozark Society, Shirley CDC, Pew Environmental Group, Van Buren County Natural Gas Advisory Board, Trout Unlimited, and other organizations want to clarify and protect the rights of Arkansas landowners while preserving our water resources and air quality.

"We came together to pass legislation to implement these regulations in the 2011 General Assembly," said Debbie Doss of the Arkansas Canoe Club. "Instead, our bills were sent to interim study. To make progress, we need a broad coalition that will engage more environmental leaders and landowners, especially around Shirley, Clinton, and Greenbrier."

The coalition is gaining steam. Tom Kimmons of Shirley has distributed surveys for landowners through local newspapers and door-to-door canvassing. "We've gotten back almost 300 responses so far," Kimmons said. "About 90% think that the gas industry is helping the economy, but about 90% also think that the industry is not properly regulated in the state."

Kimmons and other coalition members want city and county officials to pay for water testing in the affected areas. The most recent testing for methane and chlorides was conducted with help from Duke University. "It's a gift for us to

have Duke come down to Arkansas as part of a larger testing regimen. We are waiting until September 1st to get the results back; then we will analyze them."

The efforts of activists have led to the creation of the Van Buren County Natural Gas Advisory Board by the County Quorum Court. The board will monitor natural gas operations and seek to ensure that the industry is in compliance with regulations.

Shannon Hensley, a member of the Advisory Board and local landowner has been involved since the industry first began drilling fracking wells near her home town of Damascus. Hensley has been going door to door and handing out flyers to inform others in the area about the issue. "We're just trying to make sure everyone's aware of what's going on," Hensley said. "Arkansas citizens do have power in numbers and we can take action

to make sure Arkansas stays the Natural State."

To support their efforts, the Panel has released 2 reports: *Arkansas in the Balance: Managing the Risks of Shale Gas Development in the Natural State*, and *Model Oil and Gas Laws, Regulations, and Ordinances*. Both are available at www.arpanel.org

Two more reports coming out soon will cover the industry's compliance record and the economic impacts of gas drilling in Arkansas.

The Agriculture Committee will hold a public hearing regarding natural gas regulations on September 13, 10:00 a.m., Room A, MAC building on the State Capitol grounds.

For more information, contact Peyton Rose at (501) 499-5778 or peyton@arpanel.org

Impacts of Advocacy, Organizing and Civic Engagement in the Gulf/Midsouth Region



The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy report, *Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities*, surveyed groups in five states, including the Panel, Citizens First Congress and three CFC member organizations.

The report shows that every dollar invested in these organizations brings \$114 in benefits to their communities.

Find the report at www.ncrp.org

WHAT DOES THE FEDERAL BUDGET CRISIS MEAN FOR ARKANSAS?

James Szenher of the Panel asked Rich Huddleston, Executive Director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families to help us understand.

The federal budget talks in July settled on \$2.5 trillion in budget cuts. What does that mean for Arkansas?

Rich Huddleston — It's still too early to know everything, but it's fair to say that the cuts will cause pain here. Even though Arkansas is a small state, we will end up with a significant share of those cuts.

Why will Arkansas be more affected than some other states?

RH — Arkansas is a relatively poor state, and we rely on a lot of federal funds for assistance. Many in Arkansas rely on federal spending for jobs and are in danger of becoming unemployed. Low-income children and families will clearly be impacted, although exactly how will depend on how the rest of the budget process plays out.

Recently there was a push for massive tax cuts at the state legislature.

RH — Fortunately, the final cuts were modest, and much of the tax cuts will benefit low-income families in the form of a food tax cut and a state income tax fix to exempt poor single parents with 2 or more kids from the state income tax. Even so, we had to hold a lot of programs flat in terms of funding and some had to take small cuts. If bigger tax cuts pass in the future, such as a proposed capital gains tax cut that would only benefit the wealthy, then Arkansas will face some serious cuts.

What about education funding?

RH — Public education funding is mostly protected; however, that means that the rest of the budget will have to be cut even more. Higher Education, Corrections, and Human Services programs like Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare are most at-risk.

What about Medicaid?

RH — In Arkansas Fiscal Year 2014, Medicaid is expected to have a \$200 million shortfall. State officials are developing a plan for controlling spending called "Medicaid Transformation." As of now, the plan would not involve cutting eligibility or access to services, and would focus on changing how providers are chosen and how services get bundled. If the plan doesn't pass, however, the Medicaid shortfall will force more cuts throughout the state budget.

What can an ordinary Arkansas citizen do?

RH — If there are legislators pushing for big tax cuts during the 2012 budget session, citizens are going to have to get involved to stop them. We should not be cutting the budget on the backs of families while we let corporations, millionaires and billionaires off the hook.

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Leaders of the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn campaign are studying school issues, such as education funding.

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GOULD CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER HONORED AT FREEDOM RIDERS ANNIVERSARY EVENT

On July 10, Ms. Essie Cableton of Gould was honored along with other Freedom Riders at the Old State House Museum in Little Rock. The event was hosted by the UALR Institute on Race and Ethnicity and the UALR Department of History.

Ms. Cableton is a member of the Gould Citizens Advisory Council, and has worked with the Civil Rights caucus in the Citizens First Congress.

"I thought the event was wonderful," Ms. Cableton said, "it brought back a lot of memories, and I got to meet some people that I hadn't seen since the movement."

Ms. Cableton said it was an honor to give an account of what it was like in Gould during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. "We had to fight for our rights," she said, "and we are still fighting today."



Ms. Essie Cableton, second from left, spoke about life in Gould, Arkansas during the Civil Rights Movement at a Freedom Riders anniversary event.

Civil Rights leaders like Ms. Cableton stand as strong reminders of what can be accomplished when people work together for change.



SAVE THE DATE

Arkansas Citizens First Congress Convention

June 22-25, 2012

4-H Center – Ferndale, AR

Join us as we choose our legislative priorities for 2013!

CFC LEADERS CELEBRATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, KEEP MOVING FORWARD

After a tough legislative session, the Arkansas Citizens First Congress had a lot to celebrate at the 2011 Legislative Review. Despite the most partisan legislative session in years, the CFC helped win progressive policy changes for education, prison reform and protection for natural resources, while helping stop a flurry of proposed policies that would unfairly target immigrants.

After CFC members spent the morning reviewing campaign progress and next steps, over 100 people gathered at First United Methodist Church in Little Rock to honor 25 campaign leaders and legislators who sponsored bills supported by the CFC. Many speakers commented on the remarkable breadth and depth of issues that the CFC works to address.

Rep. Uvalde Lindsey told activists, "Your work produces unmatched results!" Rep. Kathy Webb thanked the Panel and Citizens First Congress members, saying, "You don't shy away from the hard issues, you bring public, community-based support behind your priorities and you don't give up!"

This event raised \$3,500 for Citizens First Congress campaigns.

Didn't get a chance to give? It's not too late!
Make your donation at www.arpanel.org
or send a check to The Panel
1308 W. Second Street
Little Rock, AR 72201.

Many thanks to our 2011 fundraising volunteers – Kate and Emily Althoff, Ricky Belk, Nan Devries, Debbie Doss, Barry Haas, Robert McAfee and Barbara Miles!

Join us and learn how to be a successful fundraiser for your organization! We put on events, send mailings, and visit with donors.

Our committee meets monthly for one hour. Contact Beth Ardapple, bardapple@arpanel.org or 870-434-5265.



The Citizens First Congress honored leaders and legislators for their work supporting the Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas.

Back row: William El-Amin, Rep. U. Lindsey, Sen. D. Johnson, Rep. H. Lenderman, Rep. J. Edwards, Rep. J. Nickels, Steve Copley, Lee Moore, Jose Aguayo, Rich Huddleston. **Front row:** Rep. K. Webb, Jenny Wilkinson - Gov. Beebe's Office, Sen. S. Flowers, Debbie Doss, Joyce Hale, Regina VonTungeln, Juan Mendez, Mikel Lolley, Richard Hutchinson, Keaton Smith.

GOULD |continued from page 1|

and held candidate forums to educate the public about the issues. Six of the seven GCAC-endorsed candidates were elected into office.

Over the next two years, Gould made significant progress, and the city emerged from bankruptcy with financial arrangements with creditors. City Council meetings were run more effectively and public input was welcomed.

The progress was hard though, and in 2010 several council members chose not to run for re-election. This time, GCAC was not as engaged in their electoral strategy, and a new majority was elected to the City Council.

The new majority on the City Council came into office with a hostile attitude towards the Mayor, and council meetings have become dysfunctional again. The financial shape of the city appears to be weakening as the IRS and other creditors are again threatening foreclosure. Three of the council members actually voted against accepting an \$800,000 grant to improve the city's sewer system.

When GCAC started calling for the Council to be held accountable for neglecting the city's finances, the Council responded by passing the unconstitutional ordinances. They even tried to ban residents from raising their own money to help pay off city debts, and they are attempting to renege on the city's lease for a building being used as a community center for GCAC and other organizations.

Needless to say, residents of Gould are concerned about the direction of their city.

"The very viability of Gould is

at stake," said Curtis Mangrum, chair of GCAC and co-chair of the Panel Board. "We don't want to be controversial, but some of the decisions of the city council are hard to understand."

The pushback from the city council – after seven years of strengthening the community through collective action – has only served to galvanize GCAC members and supporters. Residents who had nearly given up on their city are beginning to understand that they have the power to help change the situation in the community, and that Gould's future depends on them.

This transformation among Gould residents from cynical observers to committed change agents is causing ripples throughout South Arkansas. More citizens in other communities are seeing what's possible when citizens are committed to moving their city forward.

We believe that Gould matters, not just for the citizens of Gould, but for everyone who is working to hold their leaders accountable and strengthen their communities. The Panel is proud to be a partner of GCAC, and we hope you will stand with us and support their efforts to fight for their city.

"WE RAISED \$11,000 FROM RESIDENTS IN JUST THREE WEEKS BECAUSE WE LOVE OUR CITY. IT INCLUDED PENNIES DONATED BY A FOUR-YEAR-OLD WHO WAS SAVING FOR A SWIMMING POOL."

— Sam King, Gould resident



Wonda Faye White of the Gould Citizens Advisory Council spoke about her love for the city of Gould. Other residents shared their stories about living in Gould and why they love the city, while non-residents said that they found the work that the group was doing for their city inspiring.



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Gould Matters

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Panel Board Co-Chair Curtis Mangrum and CFC Steering Committee Members Melissa Kordsmeier and William El-Amin review the session's progress and setbacks in the CFC's Civil Rights Caucus.