

SUMMER 2012
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ACTIVISTS UNITE WITH ‘ONE VISION, ONE VOICE’ AT 2012 CFC CONVENTION

We are Family! – Sister Sledge’s anthem to solidarity echoed through the halls of the Arkansas 4-H Center as over 140 representatives from 54 Citizens First Congress member groups attended caucuses together, ate together, talked in the hallways together, voted together, and celebrated together. They elected a new agenda for 2013 to improve schools, protect the environment, help struggling families, fight discrimination, and ensure accountable government and fair elections (see *priorities*, page 3).

“We’re united, we’re excited, and we’re ready to make progress on these issues,” said William El-Amin, newly elected CFC Steering Committee Co-Chair. “The convention gives us the chance to build stronger connections and understanding with each other so that we leave together with a unified vision for change in Arkansas.”

Delegates met in six different issue caucuses to narrow a long list of resolutions down to a priority ballot, from which they elected the CFC’s Ten Priorities for A Better Arkansas.



Mireya Reith of the Arkansas United Community Coalition and Eric Treat of Arkansas People First celebrate the Citizens First Congress’ endorsement of their proposal to form an Arkansas Civil Rights Commission.

Before the decisions were made in caucus meetings, delegates spent a lot of time talking with each other in the hallways, sharing stories, and getting to know each other. They discussed the issues and lobbied each other to support the issues that would make their way onto the ballot.

“I was impressed by the diverse and savvy set of new leaders at this year’s convention, said

outgoing Steering Committee Co-Chair Rev. Kenneth Anderson. “Everyone was more effective and strategic in the way they participated; delegates were determined to develop an agenda that would serve the interests of all the member groups and they worked to make it happen.”

“We had a big variety of youth representation at the conven-

see *Convention*, pg 4

VICTORY IN GOULD!

Gould residents recently won a major victory in their battle to preserve the integrity of the democratic process. For months, they worked to unite the community and stand for accountable government and fair elections as they faced an unresponsive city council with two aldermen holding office illegally.

On July 11, Lincoln County Circuit Judge Robert Wyatt, Jr. removed the two ineligible aldermen, because one was a convicted felon, and the other did not live in the ward she was elected to represent.

"This ruling is a major victory for the citizens of Gould," stated Mr. Sam King, a member of the Gould Citizens Advisory Council. "GCAC will continue to fight for a better Gould and accountability from all of our elected officials."

GCAC questioned the legality of these two council members' positions even before they were elected in 2010. They spoke with the Lincoln County Election Commissioners, the Lincoln County Clerk, other county officials, and the Attorney General, who all refused to address the issue. Seeing legal action as the only available option, Sam King and Norvell Dixon signed onto a lawsuit against the two aldermen. With pro-bono legal work from Little Rock Attorneys Bruce McMath and Ross Noland, they won the case.

"We didn't want to cause more conflict in the community, but we knew that this was the only way to hold these people accountable," said Mr. Dixon.

The Gould City Council has been at a standstill since the ruling, as

two other aldermen are refusing to attend meetings, preventing the quorum necessary for the city council to take any action. GCAC is putting pressure on these aldermen to do the right thing so that the city can take care of essential business. They are also working to ensure that a more responsive and accountable city council is elected in November.

"GCAC is committed to electing people who will serve the interests of the city of Gould, and not be distracted by personal agendas," said William El-Amin. "We believe that the coming election will clear everything up and help the city move forward, and we will hold accountable whoever is elected."



Members of the Gould Citizens Advisory Council voting at the Citizens First Congress Convention. Based on the work they are doing to make local elections more fair, GCAC introduced the election reform proposal that is now one of the CFC's Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas.



The Gould Tax Relief Fund received the Southeast Arkansas Activist of the Year award for their work to pay the city's back taxes in the face of City Council inaction.



THE CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS TEN PRIORITIES FOR A BETTER ARKANSAS

1. **Improve opportunities to learn for all students.**

Support legislation to increase access to and funding for high-quality pre-k and afterschool programs, get parents more involved, support better teachers, pass the DREAM Act, and enact other proven solutions to close achievement gaps.

2. **Support fair tax reform while protecting the integrity of the state budget.**

Low- and middle- income families pay nearly twice the tax rate that wealthy Arkansans pay. We'll support fair solutions that address the Medicaid budget shortfall and we'll oppose tax cuts that gut the budget and increase the burden on struggling families.

3. **Save consumers money and create jobs with energy efficiency and renewable energy policies.**

Expanding energy efficiency and renewable programs will reduce our energy dependence, create high-wage jobs, and improve our economy. We need a state energy plan that covers these issues.

4. **Protect Arkansas's water resources by developing a new state water plan.**

Arkansas's future depends on protecting our abundant, clean water resources. We need a transparent and inclusive process that engages a broad range of Arkansans, emphasizes scientific data, and addresses water quantity and water quality issues.

5. **Oppose state-level punitive anti-immigrant legislation.**

Immigration reform belongs at the federal level; state level immigration legislation is discriminatory, ineffective and expensive.

Jose Tobias of Phi Iota Alpha and Cathy Mendoza of the Northwest Arkansas Workers Justice Center celebrate the adoption of "stop wage theft" to the Citizens First Congress Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas.

6. **Create an Arkansas Civil Rights Commission.**

Nearly every other state has an agency charged with enforcing civil rights laws. We must ensure that all Arkansans are protected from discrimination.

7. **Ensure fair elections in Arkansas.**

Increase the number of state-wide election monitors, train poll workers and enforce criminal background checks on candidates for office.

8. **Protect landowners and Arkansas water resources by requiring the oil and gas industry to follow existing best management practices.**

Oil and gas resources must be developed with respect for landowners and the environment.

9. **Strengthen laws to prevent wage theft.**

Many Arkansas residents are being forced to work "off the clock," not receiving overtime pay, having their final paychecks withheld, or simply not being paid. We need to increase penalties for employers who refuse to pay workers.

10. **Ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).**

The ERA would amend the Constitution to ensure that women have equal access to education, health-care, jobs, and earnings.



CONVENTION | contiued from page 1 |

tion, and we all got along well,” said Miranda Wilson, newly elected Steering Committee member. “The process was set up to make sure everyone was heard equally. I know that’s difficult and I’m glad we did it the hard way to ensure that.”

This year was the first time that CFC Youth leaders met together in their own caucus to consider a youth-crafted resolution. The Youth Caucus passed a resolution that would require youth representation on school boards across the state.

“When I see the other young people who are here, wanting to make a difference, it makes me think of all the possibilities of what we could accomplish by working together,” said Jazzmin Nash, the new Education Caucus Chair from the Gould Citizens Advisory Council.

The CFC hosted a panel of leaders who talked about the future of the progressive movement in Arkansas with Tamika Edwards of Southern Bancorp Community Partners, Fannie Fields of Concerned Citizens of the Marvell Area, State Rep. Uvalde Lindsey of Fayetteville, and Mireya Reith of Arkansas United Community Coalition. Panelists spoke about the importance of getting to know each other, sticking together, finding messages that resonate across broad audiences, getting active in local elections, and continuing to

respond to the real needs of our communities.

Communications consultant Jessica Szenher spoke during lunch on Saturday, echoing the need to communicate better about CFC issues. She highlighted the need to use both data and personal stories to reach a broader audience.

As their last action, delegates elected a new Steering Committee, the CFC’s most diverse yet. Over the months leading up to the 2013 legislative session, the Steering Committee will meet to coordinate the CFC’s activities as member groups continue caucus meetings and develop campaigns to support the Ten Priorities.

“With the new priorities we’re going to be tackling several critically important issues, and we’ve got our work cut out for us. Thankfully, we also have an amazing coalition of groups from across the state who know they can make a major impact on the legislative process,” said new Steering Committee Co-Chair Mark Robertson.

Outgoing Co-Chair Kate Althoff echoed his words, saying, “As we assess the upcoming legislative session, we’re more prepared and on top of things than ever before, and we’re determined to push these issues to help drive and sustain the progressive movement in Arkansas.”



Thanks to outgoing CFC Co-Chairs Rev. Kenneth Anderson and Kate Althoff, and welcome to new Co-Chairs William El-Amin and Mark Robertson!

Delegates at the CFC Convention met in caucuses to discuss the issues, lobby their fellow delegates of resolutions (bottom), before voting on the CFC

THE PANEL BOARD

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Panel Staff – www.ARPANEL.org

CFC Steering Committee – www.CitizensFirst.org



...es such as the Youth Caucus (top and far right) for support (center), and consider presentations C Platform for 2013 (right).

ARKANSAS' FUTURE HANGS IN THE BALANCE WITH 2012 STATE LEGISLATIVE RACES

The Arkansas Legislature is changing rapidly, and it's critical that we don't let the progress that we've made slide back. We need you now more than ever to help push for a better Arkansas. We must ensure that issues of fairness, opportunity, and justice are on the top of the political agenda.

Last session saw a level of partisanship previously unseen at the Arkansas Capitol. Many votes were largely split along party lines, a major shift from the bipartisan cooperation behind most of Arkansas' major legislative successes in the past few decades.

This year's election will bring even more changes. Over one third of the legislature will be new. Democrats and Republicans are in a very close race for control over both the Arkansas House of Representatives and the Arkansas Senate.

"With so many races being very tightly contested, control over the legislature could go either way, or we could end up with a split decision, with one party controlling the House and another the Senate," said Dr. Jay Barth, politics professor at Hendrix College. "Whether we continue to move forward with progressive public policy or we recede into a polarized politics hangs in the balance this November."



There is a major difference between the worldviews of the leadership of the parties vying for control. Opinions have never been more polarized on the major issues. There are radically different views on how to address the budget shortfall, how to improve education, and how to create economic development.

"We only need to look to Washington to see what happens when polarization takes over," said Rep. Uvalde Lindsey of Fayetteville.

The possibility of political gridlock in Arkansas is very real, and it's critical that voters elect individuals who will work together to move Arkansas forward and build on the progress we've made in recent years. After the election, it's just as important for voters to stay in frequent contact with their legislators and encourage them to vote for bills that will help Arkansans who are struggling.

There is still great potential for progressive work in Arkansas if we stay alert and adaptable. Mireya Reith of Arkansas United Community Coalition said: "Even if partisanship takes hold of the legislature, it doesn't mean we can't affect policy; it just means we have to get creative."



ACTIVISTS HONORED AND CELEBRATED AT DRAGON SLAYER AWARDS DINNER

The voices of Aretha Franklin, Bob Dylan and other socially conscious musicians resounded as over 200 people gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of activists all over the state and to honor a few individuals for outstanding work.

Joyce Hale received the **Brownie W. Ledbetter Dragon Slayer Award** for moving Arkansas forward on environmental challenges, especially natural gas development.

Freeman McKindra received the **E.J. Miller Lifetime Achievement Award** for his many years of building social justice infrastructure. More award winners are listed below.

Dr. Sherece West of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation got the crowd fired up by drawing on the story of Nehemiah in the Old Testament. Her words echoed the theme of the convention, 'One Vision, One Voice,' when she said, "We've got

an assignment. We need to protect the most vulnerable in our state, and we need to have each other's back."

The Dragon Slayer Award Dinner raised \$9,811 for the Citizens First Congress priority campaigns (see page 3). Just as important, people left encouraged and energized for the work ahead.

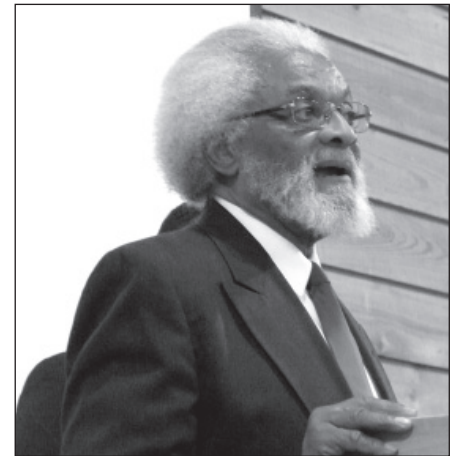
To support these efforts, go to www.ARPANEL.org.



"Only with the backing of CFC's progressive membership and legislative guidance have my goals been achievable."

—**Joyce Hale**

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, working together is success."
—**Dr. Sherece West**



"It's an honor to receive an award named after a person who did so much in his lifetime. E.J. contributed to the well-being of people in this state in a major way."

—**Freeman McKindra**

More Award Winners:

Northwest Arkansas: **Mikel Lolley**, for promoting clean and renewable energy.

Southeast Arkansas: **Gould Tax Relief Fund**, for raising \$14,000 for their city to pay back taxes.

Southwest Arkansas: **Concerned Citizens of Prescott**, for improving their school district.

Economic Justice: **Arkansas Poverty Task Force**, for their anti-poverty agenda and advocacy.

Education: **Arkansas Coalition for DREAM**, for pressing to make higher education available to all Arkansas students.

Election and Government Reform: **William El-Amin**, for leading efforts to hold elected leaders accountable and engage voters.

Environment: **Shannon Hensley and Tom Kimmons** for spreading awareness and taking action to address the impacts of natural gas development.

Civil Rights: **Hank Bates and Bruce McMath**, for supporting the people of Gould to use the legal system to challenge injustices.

Learn more about our award winners on our website: www.arpanel.org

VOTING IN ARKANSAS

How to vote

Make sure you are registered and find out where to vote at your County Clerk's office, or at www.voterview.ar-nova.org

Polls are open from 7:30am to 7:30pm on election day.

Call your County Clerk for early voting times & locations.

What to Expect When Voting:

1. An election official will ask you to state your name and address and confirm your date of birth.
2. They will ask you for identification.
 - ♦ Any **one** of: a current and valid photo ID, a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, pay-check, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter.
 - ♦ If you submitted required ID when you registered to vote, you do not have to show ID to vote a regular ballot.
 - ♦ If you did not submit the required ID when you registered to vote, you may be required to show ID to vote a regular ballot. You may vote a Provisional Ballot without presenting ID, however it will be challenged by the Election Commissioner.
3. You will sign the Precinct Voter Registration List and they will add your name to the list of voters.
4. They will give you a ballot or direct you to a voting machine. You may have one other person in the voting booth with you if you choose.
5. If you vote a paper ballot, you will deposit it into the ballot box or an electronic scanner.



Candidates for school board answer questions from parents at a forum hosted by the Strong Community Leadership Alliance.

How to Register

To vote in the November General Election you must submit your voter registration form by **October 8th**.

Call your County Clerk's office to get a voter registration form.

You must register to vote where you live. You may not register to vote using property where you do not reside.

To register to vote in Arkansas you must:

- ♦ Be a U.S. citizen.
- ♦ Be an Arkansas resident (residing in Arkansas at least 30 days prior to the election).
- ♦ Be age 18 or turn 18 on or before the next election.
- ♦ Not be a convicted felon whose sentence has not been discharged or pardoned.
- ♦ Not be presently adjudged as mentally incompetent as to your ability to vote.

Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign Launch

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation along with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, will launch the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading on Sept. 4 at 3:30 pm.

The launch will be held at the Boys and Girls Club of Central Arkansas, 1212 Wetherington Place in North Little Rock.



The Campaign will release a new report, "Reading to Learn: The Importance of Grade-Level Reading in Arkansas," and launch a website, www.ar-gl.r.net. For more information, contact Angela Duran, aduran@duranassociates.com.



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First United Methodist Church, Little Rock



Find more information at www.ARPANEL.org

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Vote!

**September 18th –
School Board Elections**

Early voting begins September 11th.

**November 6th –
General Election**

Early voting begins October 22.