

FALL 2008  
Little Rock  
Arkansas

# public policy WATCH

  
ARKANSAS  
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## A 10-POINT MANDATE FOR CHANGE ARKANSANS DEVELOP AGENDA FOR LAWMAKERS

When the Arkansas legislature convenes in January, it will have about three months to take care of the state's business for the next two years. The Arkansas Citizens First Congress will be there, pressing lawmakers to make the right decisions for all Arkansans.

"The legislative process should be a two-way street between the public and lawmakers. We are getting the public more involved," said Bruce Lockett, co-chair of the Citizens First Congress from Little Rock.

The Citizens First Congress culminated months of preliminary meetings with a convention in August to elect a final agenda to present to lawmakers. Delegates from 45 member groups included grassroots activists, farmers, economic developers, parents wanting better schools, environmentalists and others.

### **The Congress' 2009 Top Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas are:**

#### **Allocate increased resources for rural and small business economic development.**

"Arkansas' economic development priorities have not included some of the efforts that could help low-income and rural communities the most," said Ines Polonius, who serves as executive director of Alt Consulting and served on the planning team for the Mid South Delta Initiative.

#### **Enact the recommendations of the Arkansas Minority HIV/AIDS Task Force.**

The task force will release their recommendations in early November. "We were able to get Legislators to form the task force during the last session. Now we're asking them to follow up on what they created," said Lockett. "This type of legislation saves lives." HIV/AIDS infections are spreading most rapidly in African-

*see Legislative Agenda, page 4*



## **ATTACK THE GAP OCTOBER 27<sup>TH</sup>**

### **Support better schools for everyone!**

The Arkansas Legislature is having one of its first hearings ever on the achievement gap, October 27th at 1:30pm at the State Capitol. Parents, students, experts and others will testify about the achievement gap in our

schools and how to solve it. Middle to lower income and minority children perform about 1/2 as well as wealthier and white children in schools. There are solutions -- see [www.ARPANEL.org](http://www.ARPANEL.org). Join us to make a difference.

## HOW THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES STAND ON IMPORTANT ISSUES

### EDUCATION



#### **SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN**



Wants to keep No Child Left Behind's emphasis on standards and achievement but focus on individual achievement rather than group averages.

Would reallocate 60 percent of the \$3 billion in current federal spending on teacher quality programs to finance direct payments to "high-performing teachers" who took jobs in high-needs schools and to those who improved achievement.

Supports use of publicly funded vouchers to send students to private schools.

#### **SENATOR BARACK OBAMA**



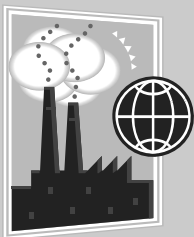
Proposes \$18 billion a year in new federal spending on education initiatives.

Would rewrite No Child Left Behind, retaining its emphasis on high standards and accountability but offering more help to high-need schools, including training thousands of new teachers to serve in them.

Would offer federal financing to districts that negotiated performance pay programs with teachers' unions and allow bonuses for high-performing veteran teachers or those who teach in hard-to-staff schools.

Would double federal spending on public charter schools while insisting on accountability. Opposes publicly funded vouchers for private schools.

### GLOBAL WARMING



*Both Obama and McCain support cap-and-trade regulation that would set nationwide limits on the amount of carbon that could be emitted and allot pollution allowances to individual plants and industries so those exceeding their limits must buy credits from those that do not.*

Was an early champion of cap-and-trade in the Senate and last supported a 60% cut below 1990 levels of pollution. He would allot credits to existing polluters, rather than auctioning them off.

Would aim to cut emissions by 80% below 1990 levels by 2050, in line with the scientific consensus for avoiding the worst consequences of global warming. His cap-and-trade regulation would also include an auction of all pollution credits. The money generated will support renewable energy and energy efficiency goals that he says would create millions of new "green collar" jobs.

### ENERGY COSTS



Would expand domestic production of oil and natural gas. He opposes a windfall profits tax on oil companies.

Would focus on improving the energy efficiency of the federal government, the largest single power user in the U.S. He would create tax incentives for wind, solar and other renewable energy sources.

Would enact a windfall profits tax on oil companies and use the money to give families a \$1,000 "Emergency Energy Rebate." He would invest in plug-in hybrid cars, boosting fuel economy and increasing efficiency to reduce oil imports.

Pledged to provide credits to people struggling to pay higher electricity bills. He would require local utilities to derive 25% of energy from renewable sources by 2025.

**HEALTH CARE**



**MCCAIN**

Proposes to allow people to buy health insurance nationwide instead of limiting them to in-state companies, and permit people to buy insurance through any organization or association they choose as well as through their employers or an insurance company.

McCain also proposes a refundable tax credit to pay for health insurance premiums or other medical expenses of \$2,500 to individuals and \$5,000 to families as an incentive to help them buy insurance. Under his plan, workers would be taxed on the value of any health benefits paid for by their employers, which isn't the case under current law.

**OBAMA**

Would establish a new public insurance program that would be available to Americans who neither qualify for Medicaid nor the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). His plan would require that all children have health care coverage, and expand eligibility and funding for Medicaid and SCHIP.

Obama's plan would require medium-size and large employers to contribute towards health coverage for their employees or towards the cost of the public plan. Obama estimates that his plan would cost the federal government approximately \$50 billion to \$65 billion a year.

**TAXES**



**Individual income tax:** McCain would make all of the 2001 and 2003 individual income tax cuts initiated under President Bush permanent.

**Corporate income tax:** McCain would reduce the two highest corporate tax brackets from 34% and 35%, to 25%.

**Tax on dividends and capital gains:** McCain would maintain the current 15% tax rate on dividends and long-term capital gains for the wealthiest taxpayers (for capital gains taxing purposes, individual taxpayers with adjusted gross income of \$200,000 a year or higher and married couples with adjusted gross incomes of \$250,000 a year or higher).

**Estate tax:** McCain would increase the estate tax's exemption on inherited funds from the 2009 level (\$3.5 million) to \$5 million. The top estate tax rate on remaining wealth would be cut from 45% to 15%.

**Individual income tax:** Obama would make permanent the four lowest income tax brackets created under the 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts. Obama would return the 33% and 35% brackets to the Clinton-era levels of 36% and 39.6%. Obama's campaign has said the plan would not raise taxes on couples with adjusted gross income of less than \$250,000 a year.

**Corporate income tax:** Obama would maintain the highest corporate tax bracket at 35%.

**Tax on dividends and capital gains:** Obama would increase the tax rates on dividends and long-term capital gains from 15% to 20% for taxpayers above \$250,000 a year.

**Estate tax:** Obama would keep the estate tax in the same form scheduled for 2009 — an exemption of \$3.5 million and a top tax on remaining wealth of 45%.

**BUDGET AND DEFICIT**



*The most recent estimates by the Congressional Budget Office—not taking into account the \$700 billion financial bailout — project that the annual federal budget deficit as the next President takes office will hit a record \$438 billion. The next President will inherit an outstanding national debt of nearly \$10 trillion.*

Senator McCain's tax plan would add an estimated \$5 trillion to the national debt over the next decade.

Senator Obama's tax plan would add an estimated \$3.5 trillion to the national debt over the next decade.

**Details on the economic stimulus and other issues, as well as sources are available on [www.ARPANEL.org](http://www.ARPANEL.org).**

**CFC LEGISLATIVE AGENDA** |continued from Page 1|

American, Latino and rural Arkansas communities.

**Enact progressive tax reform to provide low and middle income tax relief while generating sufficient state revenue.** Low-income families pay twice the tax rate of high-income families in Arkansas. Candace Smith, of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, argues that “a state-based earned income tax credit would make the system more fair and help working families make ends meet.”

**Enact the recommendations of the Arkansas Governor’s Global Warming Commission.** Most experts agree that there is a critical deadline to curb greenhouse gas emissions before facing dire consequences. They also say there is an enormous opportunity for economic growth as the rush to create greener energy



*CFC delegates approve legislative recommendations*



will be the global economic engine for the next several generations. The Commission is outlining a set of policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, help Arkansans save on energy costs and create “green-collar,” local, high paying jobs.

**Create an Arkansas Civil Rights Commission.** “Arkansas’ civil rights law is weak, but enforcing what we do have will give all people a more fair setting in which to work and raise children,” said Randi Romo, executive director of the Center for Artistic Revolution. “There’s no state-based enforcement in Arkansas without hiring a lawyer. A Commission could mediate a lot of issues to keep them out of court.”

**Close the education achievement gap between low- and high-income, and white and minority students.** “The Gap is crippling our communities economically and socially. We need a comprehensive approach to attack the gap that starts in school, extends into homes and communities, and addresses basic disadvantages caused by poverty,” said Regina Von Tungeln, of Pine Bluff. The Congress is pursuing the recommendations outlined in “What Is Arkansas Doing to Close the Achievement Gap?” (available at [www.ARPanel.org](http://www.ARPanel.org)). The report recommends expanding access to pre-kindergarten; improving teacher quality and accountability; improving and expanding school-based health services, summer programs and after-school

programs; reducing class size especially in kindergarten to third grade; and supporting more parental involvement.

**Enact the Dream Act to make sure every student graduating from an Arkansas school has the opportunity to pay in-state college tuition.** Today, students without residency papers are forced to pay out of state tuition even if they have gone to Arkansas’ schools since kindergarten. Rafael Arciga Garcia says this effectively denies them the college education that would lead to a more educated work force and higher incomes. “If you have the grades and the commitment, and have graduated from an Arkansas high school, you should pay in-state tuition,” said Garcia, president of the Young Adults chapter of the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

**Create a Task Force on Arkansas Water Resources.** “We have several looming water crises in Arkansas that will hurt families, limit our economic potential and threaten our wildlife,” said Debbie Doss, chairperson of the Arkansas Conservation Coalition. Doss said a commission should be assigned to update the state’s 20-year-old water management plan and recommend policies to address the bevy of water conservation issues such as drinking water supplies, agricultural needs, wildlife needs and adequate pollution monitoring.

*continued on next page*

**THE CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS STEERING COMMITTEE**

- Rubye Graham-Emerson**  
Co-Chair, McGehee Desha Alumni Community Center, Inc.
- Bruce Lockett**  
Co-Chair, Future Builders Inc.
- Kate Althoff**, Sierra Club
- Kenneth Anderson**, Southwest Arkansas Good Government Commission
- Rick Collins**, Future Builders Inc.
- Daniel Diaz**, Phi Iota Alpha
- Debbie Doss**, Arkansas Canoe Club
- Rafael Garcia**, LULAC Council #761
- Earnest Nash**, Gould Citizens Advisory Council
- Ines Polonius**, Delta E-Team
- Randi Romo**, Center for Artistic Revolution
- Anthony Scott**, Eastside Community Club of Dermott
- Regina VonTungeln**, Jenkins Memorial Childrens Center and Industries, Inc.
- Kathy Wesho-Bauer**, Center for Artistic Revolution
- Kara Wilkins**, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
- Franni Willoughby**, Arkansas Rice Growers Association

**Increase penalties and enforcement for wage theft.** Many workers are ripped off every year by unscrupulous employers but the crimes are never prosecuted because of a loophole. The Arkansas Department of Labor can't investigate wage theft over \$1,000, while the federal Department of Labor investigates claims only if a company makes \$500,000 or more annually. "Our proposal closes the loopholes so the Arkansas Department of Labor has the authority to make sure workers get paid," said Rachel Townsend, of the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center.

**Expand state incentives for land conservation.** Joyce Hale said legislative support for conservation easements should come with tax incentives for land owners and developers. Hale belongs to the Ozark Headwaters Group of the Sierra Club and the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association. These groups say that conservation easements are a primary tool to preserve land. "These easements protect farmlands, water and other resources," Hale said.

**Progress depends on the public getting involved.**

"Our issues were created by the people of this state who see first-hand how policy affects their lives," said community developer Polonius.



Marvin Johnson, Robert McAfee and Beatrice Shelby listen to community development expert Dianne Williams present "asset based community development," a model especially relevant to rural Arkansas communities, at the Citizens First Congress convention.

In addition to presenting these priorities to lawmakers in January, Congress members will also monitor the legislature. Each session unexpected bills come up that could help or threaten the public good. The Congress reads all 4000 bills that are filed and informs the public about how they can make a difference.

"What I love about the Congress is coming together with all the different kinds of people in Arkansas to solve our common challenges," said Reverend Howard Gordon, of First Presbyterian Church in Little Rock.

Visit [www.CitizensFirst.org](http://www.CitizensFirst.org) or call (501)376-7913 to sign up for the Congress' Legislative Alerts.

## NEW REPORT ON WATER ISSUES

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation recently released a comprehensive report on water issues in Arkansas. One of our greatest assets faces new challenges from over-consumption and pollution. High quality drinking water remains too vulnerable. But there are solutions.

The Panel is collaborating with several other Arkansas groups to host public forums on water issues in the coming year. More details will follow. Find a link to WRF's "Water Issues In Arkansas" on our website.



Jose Luis Aguayo votes on the CFC agenda.

# PANEL AND CFC CELEBRATE

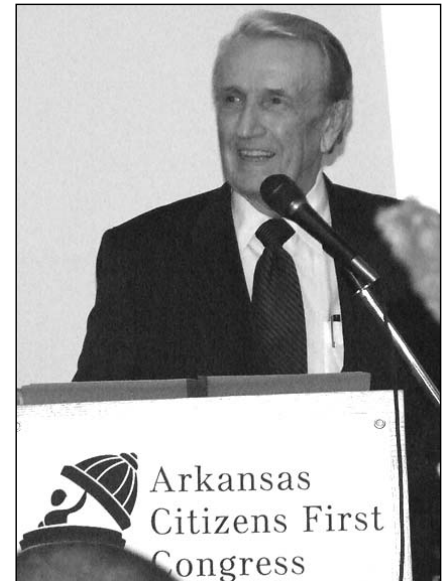


The Gould Citizens Advisory Council accepts the Dragon Slayer award at the Panel and Congress' anniversary banquet.

Two hundred supporters gathered on August 16th to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Citizens First Congress and the 45th anniversary of the Arkansas Public Policy Panel.

The Panel and Congress gave the Dragon Slayer Award for Outstanding Activism to the **Gould Citizens Advisory Committee** for their work to revitalize their community in Southeast Arkansas. They also recognized: **Southwest Arkansas Good Government Commission; Dick Bennett** and the **Omni Center**, Northwest Arkansas; **Jody Hardin**, agriculture; **Jim Miranda**, civil rights; the **Southern Good Faith Fund**, economic justice and development; **Dr. Calvin Johnson**, education; **Gene Dunaway**, environment; **Ruth Bell** and the **Pulaski County League of Women Voters**, election and government reform; and **Future Builders, Inc.**, public health. They also gave awards to several foundations.

The banquet program is on our website. Thank you to everyone who is making the Panel and Congress leaders for change in Arkansas!



*Strong democracies that improve lives are the result of people getting involved to make a difference, said Former Senator Dale Bumpers.*

## Help Build Stronger Communities and Better State Policy

Your donations help the Panel get more grassroots people organized to improve their communities. They help the Congress get the public involved in the Legislature to advance the Agenda for a Better Arkansas. Your gifts help us watchdog the whole process. Thank you!

Make checks out to The Panel - 1308 W. Second Street,  
Little Rock, AR 72201 **or** donate online at [www.ARPANEL.org](http://www.ARPANEL.org)

*Donations to the Panel are 100% tax deductible*



*Sen. Joyce Elliott (center) congratulates Wonda Faye White and Brianna Hill from The Gould Citizens Advisory Council.*

## UPCOMING WORKSHOPS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

The Eastside Community Club of Dermott and Southwest Arkansas Good Government Commission are hosting workshops about state and local governing processes. Arkansas Public Policy Panel will conduct the workshops.

One of the sessions is tentatively scheduled for Oct. 25 in Camden, at the Ouachita Valley Business and Technical Development Center, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The other political awareness workshop is scheduled for Nov. 8 in Dermott at the Jenkins Youth Center, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For more information, contact Rosemary Brown, Panel organizer, at (870) 460-0444.

### THE PANEL BOARD

**E.J. Miller**, Co-Chair, Little Rock  
**Linda Carnahan**, Co-Chair, Russellville  
**Curtis Mangrum**, Gould  
**Rev. Howard Gordon**, Little Rock  
**Perry Hayes**, Pettigrew  
**Basil Kyriakakis**, Parks  
**Rev. J.C. Owens**, Bearden  
**Maria Cristina Moroles**, Boxley  
**Barry Haas**, Little Rock  
**Rev. Mary Purifoy**, Chidester  
**Margarita Solarzano**, Springdale

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**Bill Kopsky**, Little Rock  
**Bernadette Devone**, Pine Bluff  
**Beth Ardapple**, Bass  
**Celestine Wesley**, Little Rock  
**Fay Knox**, Deer  
**Rosemary Brown**, Monticello

### VISTA Volunteers:

**Brett Miracle**, Little Rock  
**Ethan Moore**, Little Rock  
**James Szenher**, Little Rock  
**Janice Tillman**, Gould



*Lashe Thomas encourages voter registration during a drive in Wilmot.*

## COMMUNITIES CONDUCT VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES

Several community organizations across the state held voter registration drives to help citizens vote in the Nov. 4 general election.

The following groups partnered with the Mid South Delta Initiative to register Arkansas voters: Gould Citizens Advisory Council; Concerned Citizens of Wilmot; Eastside Community Club of Dermott; Southeast Regional Council in Dumas; Stamps Citizens in Action; Southwest Arkansas Good Government Commission; and McGehee Desha Alumni Community Center, Inc. Some of these groups plan to place election

observers in polling places to ensure fair elections.

One group having trouble registering to vote is ex-felons, who are eligible to vote in Arkansas after they have their discharge papers and papers showing they have paid any fines or fees. County clerks are then required to restore voting rights, according to Arkansas Act 1451 of 2003.

The voter registration deadline for the November General Election was October 6th, but people can still register now for future elections.

## VOTE!

### October 20th — Early voting begins

Early voting is open between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Saturday through November 3rd

### November 4th — Election Day

Polls are open from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

If you have questions or problems, call the ACLU Voting Rights Project at 1-877-523-2792.



# ARKANSAS public policy panel

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## WHAT'S INSIDE

**Citizens First Congress Finalizes  
Legislative Agenda**

**How the Presidential Candidates  
Stand on Key Issues**

**Rural Organizing Update: Voting and  
Politics Workshops**

## public policy WATCH



*Members of Arkansas' Citizens First Congress celebrate completion of the group's 2009 legislative agenda.*