

FALL 2013
Little Rock
Arkansas

public policy WATCH


ARKANSAS
public policy panel
Putting the PUBLIC back in public policy since 1963
1308 W. 2nd St.
Little Rock, AR 72201
T: 501 376 7913
www.ARPANEL.org

COMMUNITY GROUPS PLANNING BIG IMPACT ON 2014 ELECTION



Residents attend a candidate forum in Pine Bluff, asking questions about pressing issues in the community.

The stakes of the 2014 elections are high, and South Arkansas residents are preparing to make their voice heard. Building on unprecedented successes holding candidates accountable in the 2012 elections, leaders are focusing on local and state level races coming next year.

Control of the Governorship, the State House of Representatives, the U.S. House, and the U.S. Senate are at stake. Community leaders realize that many of these races are likely to come down to razor thin margins, and they are laying the groundwork for a major campaign to engage,

educate, and mobilize voters.

They are bringing together leaders and prioritizing issues that are most important to local residents. They present these platforms to candidates and ask for support.

Groups are looking to increase turnout through raising voter awareness and participation. They go through voter registration files and recruit people likely to get involved in the group's Political Awareness Committee. They go door-to-door to conduct surveys, distribute information about voting, and promote candidate forums and other events.

They hand out flyers educating voters about their platform and where the different candidates stand on the issues.

They also host political trainings where Panel organizers provide information about voting rights, and the electoral and political processes. Residents learn how to work together to develop platforms, engage candidates on the issues, and hold elected leaders accountable after elections.

"This is a strategy that's worked very well locally," said William El-Amin of the Southeast Regional Council, made of leaders

see **2014 Elections**, pg 4

ARKANSAS STUDENTS NEED PROVEN REFORMS NOW

500,000 students in Arkansas are waiting for reforms that will improve their schools and give them more opportunities to learn. They cannot afford to wait. We know how to help them and we need to act now.

“We have the solutions, we know what will work,” said Richard Hutchinson, Co-Chair of the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign. “There is no debate about pre-K or after school programs, or about parent involvement. These are proven reforms that will help every student in Arkansas tomorrow if we implement them.”

The Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign (OTL) is a coalition of parents, students, educators, advocates, business leaders, and other public education supporters. OTL supports research-proven, real and tangible improvements for every child that will close the opportunity gaps for low income and minority children:

- 1) Genuine family and community involvement;
- 2) High quality pre-k for everyone who wants it;
- 3) Effective teachers and administrators who are culturally competent and flexible enough to meet the needs of their individual students;
- 4) College and career ready curriculum;
- 5) Sufficient funding that is effectively used;
- 6) Effective interventions to boost learning for vulnerable students, like summer and after-school programs;
- 7) Access to higher education; and
- 8) Programs outside the school to build healthy families and communities by fighting poverty, hunger, homelessness, violence and poor health to name a few.

As simple as it could be, this set of proven reforms is being neglected while a largely irrelevant and distracting ide-

Rosa Velasquez of AR Coalition for DREAM, Fannie Fields of Marvell Concerned Citizens, Richard Hutchinson of the AR OTL Campaign, and Jerri Derlikowski of AR Advocates for Children and Families at a panel presentation to the CFC advocating for proven reforms for Arkansas students.

logical debate over charter schools and privatization consumes our political discourse on education.

“The research shows that on the whole, charter schools do not do any better at educating children,” said Hutchinson. The Panel released a report in 2011, *Analyzing the Success of Arkansas’s Charter Schools: Unfulfilled Promises*, which attests to this.

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families has re-

cont. →



Bill Kopsky, the Panel’s Executive Director, and Sen. Linda Chesterfield spoke about education opportunities at a meeting of the Arkansas Legislative Black Caucus.



leased two reports this year showing major disparities in both disciplinary procedures and educational facilities. "These disparities are a huge contributor to opportunity gaps," said Rich Huddleston, Director of AACF. "We need more equitable and effective discipline policies and we need sufficient funding so that school facilities give every student an opportunity to learn."

In South Arkansas, where the Panel is organizing parents and students to improve schools at the local level, education disparities are a huge issue.

"The perception is that low-income & African American students are treated differently in the classroom, and that the parents are treated differently when they come into the schools," said Gloria Majors, chair of Prescott Concerned Citizens. "Many parents don't believe that their child's education is valued as much as other students. This is going to be a tough problem to solve, but we can start with requiring more effective cultural

competency training, and recruiting and developing more teachers from the local community."

The Opportunity to Learn Campaign knows that the status quo is not good enough. But they also know that Arkansas has made great progress in the last 10 years, and that we cannot abandon our public schools. They know what reforms will work, and they know that we need them now.

"My kids cannot afford to wait any longer, and neither can the rest of Arkansas' students," said OTL Co-Chair Regina Von Tungeln, a parent of two children. "We don't need unproven theories or experiments, we need proven reforms now that will help them succeed."

Join the OTL Campaign at www.arkansasotl.org.

Find the Panel's report at www.arpanel.org.

Find AACF's reports at www.aradvocates.org.

Help the Panel and the Citizens First Congress improve Arkansas!

1. Donate online:
www.arpanel.org
2. Become a monthly donor:
<http://arpanel.org/donate>
3. **Leave a bequest** to the Panel.
For more information, call Beth at (870)434-5265 or email beth@arpanel.org
4. **Mail your gift to**
Arkansas Public Policy Panel
1308 W 2nd St
Little Rock, AR 72201



Sen. Joyce Elliott of Little Rock and Dr. Jay Barth, Hendrix College Professor Co-Hosted a House Party at Original Panelist Jean Gordon's house, bringing in several new donors to support the Panel and CFC.

2014 ELECTION |continued from page 1|

from various community groups. “We think we can coordinate efforts across the region to have more impact on Arkansas’ legislative races and others.”

In 2012, groups like the Concerned Citizens of Monticello (CCM) had several very successful candidate forums, some with over 100 in attendance. They are ready to build on these efforts, include more candidates for statewide office, and effectively engage them on the issues.

“We are moving beyond the notion that you support candidates just because you know or recognize them,” said Joe Britton, chair of CCM. “We have to make sure that when we help someone get elected, it’s because they’ve committed to support our issues.”

Residents know from experience that it doesn’t end at the election. “We’ve seen plenty of public officials who say one thing and then do another when they get elected,” said Britton. “Even if someone agrees to support our issues, we have to continue to hold them accountable after they are elected. We have to let them know that they are serving us, and we have the power to remove them if they are not following through on their pledges.”

In addition to educating the public and engaging candidates, residents are planning to mobilize voters and get out the vote.

“We are looking to increase turnout by at least 50%,” said Delois Spencer of CCM. “We cannot afford to stay at home next November. We know that if we want to see better schools, more economic development, and stronger communities, we have to make sure that we elect



William El-Amin of Southeast Regional Council at the State Capitol taking questions from reporters on the Voter ID law. The law could disenfranchise thousands of Arkansans. Voters who may be affected should call the number listed below.

leaders who are going to help us with those issues.”

One obstacle to voter turnout is the new Voter ID law which was passed in the 2013 session. Thousands of voters who do not have the required forms of identification could be disenfranchised. Many believe the law is unconstitutional and violates Arkansas’ voting rights statutes. While advocates are preparing lawsuits to challenge Voter ID in the courts, local groups are working to educate voters about what they need to do

to make sure they can vote.

“The CFC fought hard against this law during the legislative session,” said Barry Haas, Panel Board member. “Unfortunately it passed and now we need to make sure that everyone who will be impacted gets what they need so that no one is turned away at the polls.”

With the November 2014 election drawing closer, and primaries coming up in May, it is never too early to get involved.

IMPACTED BY THE NEW VOTER ID LAW?

If you do not have a driver’s license or other form of photo ID, and do not have the means to get a new ID, your right to vote is in danger! Call us at (501) 376-7913 x10 and let us know, so that we can help make sure your vote is counted in November!

PANEL AND CFC LEADERS WIN REPEAL OF BILL THREATENING ARKANSAS WATER



Attorney Ross Noland of McMath Woods Law firm testifies on behalf of the CFC against Act 954 at a Committee Hearing, which threatened to damage Arkansas' pristine fresh water sources. The law was repealed last month.

Act 954 is no more! The law, which lowered Arkansas' water quality standards, allowed for more pollution, and violated the federal Clean Water Act was repealed by the Arkansas legislature during the Special Session held in October.

"This is truly a David vs. Goliath moment," said Senator Joyce Elliott. "It's an unprecedented victory for grassroots leaders who have worked to repeal this law."

Citizens First Congress member groups led the opposition to Act 954 during the legislative session and testified that it would degrade Arkansas' water bodies and cause the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to intervene and enforce the Clean Water Act. It removed the drinking water designated use from every water body in the state not

currently used as a drinking water source, raising allowable levels of pollutants in the vast majority of water bodies across the state.

Despite those efforts, Act 954 was passed in March 2013, but leaders did not give up the fight. They gave testimony at commission hearings, wrote letters, contacted agency officials and let them know that implementation of this law would damage Arkansas water quality and violate federal law.

The Panel contracted with Ross Noland from McMath Woods Law firm to pursue legal options to challenge the bill and press EPA to intervene.

"This was an unprecedented step for the Panel, but we felt this legislation was so egregious that it warranted a legal challenge," said Policy Director John Whiteside.

EPA responded swiftly and sent a letter in September to the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality and the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission rebuking the law while suspending Arkansas' ability to issue water permits without EPA approval.

"This is what we said would happen all along," said Ross Noland. "We knew that no one wanted EPA to come down and take over the permitting process, but they passed the law anyway."

When the news of EPA's intervention spread, it seemed Act 954's days were numbered. Shortly before the Special Session started Rep. Andy Davis, the original sponsor of the bill, reached out to leaders about the possibility of repealing Act 954. After agreeing to a full repeal, he then requested that Governor Mike Beebe add a call to repeal the law to the Special Session. The resolution to repeal Act 954 passed on October 19 with 90 votes in the House and 33 in the Senate.

"The CFC and the Panel thank everyone who testified, made phone calls, wrote letters, and donated time and money to help protect Arkansas' water and defeat this law," said Debbie Doss, Chair of the CFC's Environmental Caucus. "We need to remain vigilant, though, since this probably won't be the last attempt to decrease regulations and allow for more pollution of the clean water that Arkansas residents and wildlife depend upon."



Supporters gather at House Parties hosted by Fannie Fields in Marvell and Jean Gordon in Little Rock to celebrate 50 years of social justice work in Arkansas and help lay the foundation for the Panel and CFC's efforts for the next 50 years.

**ARKANSAS
CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS
STEERING COMMITTEE**

William El-Amin, Co-Chair

Mark Robertson, Co-Chair

Rocio Aguayo

Kenneth Anderson

Brittney Banks

Debbie Doss

Larry Froelich

Richard Hutchinson

Liobardo Ibarra, Jr.

Samuel King

Bruce Lockett

Robert McAfee

Juan Mendez

Earnest Nash

Jazzmin Nash

Onie Norman

Joanna Pollock

Wayne Smith

Eric Treat

Miranda Wilson

**See the Panel Board and Staff
at www.arpanel.org**

HIGH STAKES IN 2014 BUDGET SESSION; ARKANSANS SHOULD BE WATCHING CLOSELY

When the people of Arkansas voted in 2008 to initiate a Budget Session for interim years where the full General Assembly was not in session, no one was sure how the new addition to the legislative process would work out. The first two Budget Sessions in 2010 and 2012 were relatively uneventful. This year will be different.

With health care for over 250,000 Arkansans, funding for low-income students and other vital services being considered, the 2014 Budget Session has more at stake than ever before.

The passage of Act 1498 in 2013 allowed the state to use funding under the federal Affordable Care Act to set up private health care exchanges for low-income Arkansans. It was a difficult and close fight. All Democrats and a majority of Republicans supported it, but a vocal minority of Republicans vehemently opposed the law and its funding

authorization, which now has to be re-authorized by a 3/4 majority.

"We expect there to be significant opposition to reauthorization," said Rich Huddleston of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. "For those who fought the bill during the session, this will be their last chance to stop implementation of the private option."

Coverage under the new health care exchanges takes effect on January 1st for those who sign up by December 15th. "Once people are signed up and start seeing the benefits of the new coverage, it will be much more difficult for legislators to take it away," said Huddleston.

If they don't block authorization directly, legislators may try to target the appropriations for outreach efforts to help people enroll in the exchanges. There are already hints at this, such as when legisla-

cont. →



Over 50 people joined us for a party in Gould celebrating the grassroots organizing and advocacy successes in South Arkansas and to raise money to continue the work! Tommy Daniels of Monticello, Panel Board chair Curtis Mangrum of Gould and Panel lead organizer for South Arkansas Rosemary Brown are pictured.

tors tried to cut funding for specific outreach efforts including advertisements in local media outlets such as the Arkansas Times and Arkansas Business.

Another possibility is that legislators who opposed the private option could threaten to block reauthorization unless the legislature approves more new tax cuts. Several cuts were already passed in the 2013 session which almost exclusively benefit wealthy Arkansans. They also reduce revenue for programs that low-income and working families depend on such as education and health care services.

Funding to help boost low-income student opportunities, called NSLA funding, could become another hot issue. There were a few proposals during the last session to change the way that NSLA money was allocated. The end result means less NSLA

funding for kids who need it most.

Despite these threats, there are also opportunities. The Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign and the CFC supported measures to require districts to spend NSLA funds on programs that are proven to help low-income students achieve, and it's possible that the budget session could allow for this to be incorporated into an appropriations bill.

Additionally, there may be opportunities to increase funding for programs like Pre-K and after school. "This is Beebe's last session as governor and we'd really like to see him use some political capital for an increase in pre-K funding," said Rich Huddleston. "Funding has flatlined since the last increase in 2008 and we know that these programs would have a huge impact in increasing opportunities for Arkansas students."

Panel Hires New Environmental Policy Coordinator



The Panel is happy to announce that Anna Weeks will be our new Environmental Policy Associate!

Anna will work with our leaders to develop strategies for organizing, mobilizing, and policy work around clean water, clean energy, energy efficiency and other environmental issues.

"I'm excited to be working with so many great leaders in Arkansas," Weeks said. "Many don't know that we're actually paving the way for other states in the region in our energy programs, and that our water resources are some of the most pristine in the world."

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
Paid
Little Rock, AR
Permit 756



ARKANSAS
public policy panel

Putting the PUBLIC back in public policy since 1963

1308 W. 2nd St., Little Rock, AR 72201

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



public policy
WATCH

Join the Panel and CFC

**at our annual
Holiday Party**

December 6th at 5:30



Join us as we come together to mark the end of our 50th year of social change in Arkansas! We'll celebrate our accomplishments and look forward to what's coming next year!

The holiday party will be at the Iron Worker's Union Hall across the street from the Panel office (1315 West Second Street).