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# public policy WATCH

  
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## ARKANSAS CITIZENS FIRST CONGRESS CELEBRATES FIRST TEN YEARS

by Jo Stewart



*Activists from around the state met at the Capitol in June to work on the legislative agenda that they will present to lawmakers. Rev. Kenneth Anderson of Camden, Gladys Tiffany of Fayetteville and Gould residents Ermer Preston, Essie Mae Cableton and Janice Scott focused on new options for economic development.*

Many people involved with the Arkansas Citizens First Congress over the last 10 years agree with the organization's co-chair Bruce Lockett, who calls its work "community-based activism at its highest level." Lockett says, "We no longer have to march outside the system. Now we can be part of the system."

The Citizens First Congress will be joined by former Senator Dale Bumpers when it celebrates its

tenth anniversary on August 16 (see page 5) along with Arkansas Public Policy Panel, which is celebrating its forty-fifth anniversary.

Lockett reflected on the connections that have developed between community activists, policy experts, agency administrators, and legislators. "We hold deep discussions about what needs to happen to make Arkansas a better place to live, and then we figure out how to make

it happen."

Bill Kopsky, Panel director, says that the CFC "was started by a few dedicated organizations. Now, nearly seventy organizations are involved in the discussions."

These discussions have led the CFC into a broad variety of policy campaigns, with each campaign headed by an organization already at work on the issue. The \_\_\_\_\_ see **First Ten Years**, page 2

## FIRST TEN YEARS [continued from page 1]

other organizational members of the Citizens First Congress – Kopsky says that most years there are approximately 40 dues-paying members – sign on to the campaign to give it an extra boost. The CFC also hires a professional lobbyist.

In one of its earliest successes, the CFC helped the Coalition Against Domestic Violence win the right of victims to get an order of protection from an abuser on a weekend. Before that, a victim had to wait until Monday morning.

Arkansas Sierra Club, a founding member of the coalition, has led successful campaigns to protect Arkansas' pristine waterways and prevent the pollution of drinking water.

Grassroots community groups in the Southeast Regional Council have driven successful campaigns to protect the archives of historic black schools and turn empty school buildings into community centers. They also persuaded the coalition to make closing the education achievement gap a long-term priority.

The CFC gave Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families a helping hand in its successful campaign to gain full access to pre-school education for all

children from low-income families. The CFC helped the Give Arkansas a Rai\$e Now coalition make Arkansas the first southern state to raise the minimum wage through legislative action.

"It's hard to change 'the way things are' to what they can and should be," says Lockett. In its hardest-fought campaign to date,



*Activists vote to choose their top priority issues for the 2009 legislative session.*

the Citizens First Congress spent seven years persuading Arkansas legislators that there was a need for a Department of Agriculture. Even though Arkansas farmers were clearly struggling and needed the resources a department could provide, the opposition to creating one was fierce. Past governors and institutions had tried and failed. A small group of farmers met in 1999 and started a campaign that grew into groundswell of farmer advocacy. In 2005, legislators finally cre-

ated an Arkansas Department of Agriculture.

Angela Duran, a former CFC chair who works for The Southern Good Faith Fund, a member of CFC, says that even when a campaign fails, everyone benefits. Although the attempt to pass hate crimes legislation failed, Duran says, "The work brought together white people from the mountains, African-American civil rights leaders, and gay rights activists. It was amazing!"

Duran says it has been beneficial for organizations like the one she works for to be a part of the coalition because they are doing service and public policy work but no organizing. "Policy work shouldn't be done in a vacuum," she says, "and we have the policy analysis expertise that can be helpful to grassroots folks."

Lockett is excited about the group's ability to serve as what he called a "poor man's lobby." He says he tells members of groups around the state why they should join. "For \$50 a year, non-professional people can tap into a group of professionals that can help them write a bill, find a sponsor, do research, and bring in people who are willing to testify before legislative groups."

\_\_\_\_\_ see **First Ten Years**, page 7



## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN THE NEWS GOULD FORUM DRAWS LINCOLN COUNTY CANDIDATES TO ANSWER CITIZENS' QUESTIONS

Candidates for County Judge, County Clerk, Circuit Juvenile Judge, Assessor, and District 9 Justice of the Peace appeared at a forum in Gould on May 13 to answer community members' questions. The forum drew about 30 Gould residents and was sponsored by the Gould Citizens Advisory Committee (GCAC), a community group working to engage residents to improve the city. The forum was moderated by Tamika Edwards, community affairs specialist for US Senator Blanche Lincoln.

"We are here tonight to ask these candidates where they stand on the issues, and we are going to hold them accountable for serving the public after they're elected," said Curtis Mangrum, GCAC's President. "But accountability starts at home and we need to be active, organized and united if we are going to make our community better."

Gould residents pressed the County Judge candidates about what they would do to reduce the debt that Gould owes the county. The candidates talked about working with the Quorum Court and the mayor to address the debt situation.

Residents pressed the County Clerk candidates on what they would do to improve the quality of the voting roles, improve voter registration and improve

elections. They complained of outdated voter registration files still containing numerous people years after they either moved or died. They noted that residents were not confident that their

aged members to vote, get their neighbors to the polls and call on elected officials when they need help. "That's why they are in office, to serve you," Rev. Nash said.



*Rep. Earnest Brown received the group's endorsement for Juvenile Judge after addressing the audience about crime prevention.*

votes were being counted and their elections run fairly.

Representative Earnest Brown was asked what he would do if elected as Juvenile Judge to reduce the number of young people going to prison. Brown said that he would expand prevention programs and take other steps to help young people to avoid prison.

The Rev. Earnest Nash, Political Action Chair of GCAC, encour-

After hearing from the candidates, the members of GCAC voted to endorse Representative Earnest Brown for Circuit Juvenile Judge and Katherine Lawson for County Clerk.

## CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION AT LAST by Eddy Moore

Arkansas is taking its first major steps to address global warming. Lawmakers created the Governor's Commission on Global Warming in 2007 after activists statewide ran a successful and high profile campaign.

Led by the Omni Center, the Citizens First Congress spearheaded passage of the act creating the Commission. The Governor then appointed Commission members to represent a range of public interests including industry, academia and agriculture. The members immediately began studying hundreds of possible responses to global warming.

Citizens First Congress members are recommending several policies to the Commission, including:

- Major investments in energy efficiency programs. Other states are already implementing programs to reduce electricity usage by 15% or more. These programs will reduce the need for new power plants, saving consumers hundreds of millions of dollars and avoiding the pollution of air and water.
- New policies to promote renewable alternative energy, such as temporarily paying above-market prices for solar and wind energy generation, to grow the market for these non-polluting options. Research has shown that each time the market for solar electricity doubles, the cost of solar energy drops 20%.

### THE PANEL BOARD

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**Rev. Mary Purifoy**, Chidester

**Margarita Solarzano**, Springdale

- Adoption of greenhouse gas standards for new cars. Sixteen states which are home to over 100 million people have already adopted these standards. This will put more efficient cars on the market.
- Plugging the loophole in Arkansas air quality regulations. Carbon dioxide is exempt from regulation in Arkansas. It's time to admit that carbon dioxide is a pollutant and begin to deal with a challenge that will increasingly affect our economy and environment.



*Climate change activists Matthew Petty, Art Hobson and Robert McAfee met with other environmentalists in May to review progress to date and set new priorities for environmental protection in Arkansas. Hobson and McAfee are members of the Arkansas Governor's Commission on Global Warming.*

You can help influence this Commission by attending committee or subcommittee meetings. The Commission will meet July 31, 2008, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the State Capitol, Room 171. Other meeting times and documents are available at <http://www.arclimatechange.us/>

Want to get connected to people working on this issue? Contact the Panel at 501-376-7913.



## ARKANSAS LAUNCHES TASK FORCE TO ADDRESS HIV/AIDS IN MINORITY COMMUNITIES

"The Minority HIV/AIDS Task Force provides Arkansas the opportunity to join other states in addressing a major health issue before it develops into a pandemic in this country," said Rick Collins, Task Force co-chair. Governor Beebe appointed Task Force members on January 19 to examine HIV/AIDS among the state's minority populations and recommend ways the state can strengthen HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment among blacks, Hispanics and other minorities.

A Citizens First Congress campaign persuaded legislators to establish the Task Force. Future Builders, a coalition member, led the campaign to address the escalation of HIV/AIDS in Arkansas' minority communities.

In their first meeting, the Task Force members learned that African Americans accounted for 51% of the 341 new HIV cases in 2006, even though they make up only 15.6% of the state's population. Ten years ago, Caucasians accounted for two-thirds of new cases.

Collins said the Task Force has held the first of four public forums in Arkansas' four congressional districts to "raise awareness of the disease and give citizens a chance to provide input and ideas on how Arkansas can effectively meet the challenge confronting women and minorities who are affected and infected with HIV/AIDS."



*In Little Rock, co-chair Rick Collins facilitated the first of four public meetings of the Minority HIV/AIDS Task Force. Future meetings to solicit public input will be held in Fayetteville, Pine Bluff and West Memphis.*

On November 1, the committee will submit a report of its findings and recommendations to Governor Beebe, Arkansas House and Senate leaders and the Arkansas Department of Health.

### Upcoming public meetings:

**Pine Bluff**  
**Jubilee Christian Center**  
**August 21, 2008**

**West Memphis**  
**Mid-South Community College**  
**September 22, 2008**

#### THE PANEL STAFF

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

#### VISTA Volunteers:

**Janice Tillman**, Gould  
**Demetrick Haggins**, Forrest City  
**Mervin Moultrie**, Forrest City  
**Brett Miracle**, Little Rock

**FIRST TEN YEARS** | continued from page 2 |

THE CONGRESS STEERING COMMITTEE

- Alice Andrews**, Arkansas Canoe Club
- John Austin**, Gould Citizens Advisory Committee
- Alejandro Aviles**, Community Leaders for Fair Policy
- Rick Collins**, Future Builders Inc.
- Debbie Doss**, Arkansas Canoe club
- Rosie Dunn**, Wilmot Concerned Citizens
- Fannie Fields**, Co-Chair, Concerned Citizens Of Marvel
- Bruce Lockett**, Co-Chair, Future Builders Inc.
- Carsell Mathis**, Arkansans for Excellence in Education
- Onie Norman**, Southeast Regional Council
- Randi Romo**, Center for Artistic Revolution
- Michael Rowett**, Southern Good Faith Fund
- Evelyn Washington**,  
South Arkansas Good Government Commission
- Myrtle Watt**, Wilmot Concerned Citizens

effort to bring about change, as time and resources permit. Water quality, delivery, and disposal issues and closing the educational achievement gap are two issues that CFC has been researching and talking about in the past year, so those in attendance can expect to hear about

are serious about that responsibility. Fields says over the past five years she has seen many more people get involved. Although the group is diverse, she says she has found that “we have more things in common than differences.”

Duran says in the next 10 years she expects the CFC to be successful in building support for the effort to do economic development work “of all stripes, not just bringing big corporations into the state.” She also predicts there will be more progressive tax policies enacted. Lockett says the group is evolving and that he expects that 10 years from now CFC will have expanded its reach and that it will be holding lobby days in Washington, D.C., not just in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Another big task the Public Policy Panel and CFC have taken on is educating the public about the political process. CFC co-chair Fanny Fields says she has seen people wake up and realize that they can have an impact on what is happening in their local communities and then move into the statewide legislative arena. Lockett says he loves bringing groups of young people to the Legislature to testify and watch their senators and representatives in action.

On August 15-17, 2008, the Arkansas Citizens First Congress will hold its annual convention in Ferndale. Delegates will debate and vote on the group’s legislative agenda for the 87th General Assembly in 2009. Then they will choose five priority issues on which to devote time and energy. Even if a group’s issue is not given high-priority status, Lockett says the coalition will work to support any member’s

those subjects.

In a 1960 campaign speech during his run for the presidency, John F. Kennedy said, “Political action is the highest responsibility of a citizen.” CFC members



*Candice Smith of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, Ken Smith of Audubon Arkansas and Eddy Moore, consultant to the Panel, discuss the state and federal budget processes and how they could affect the Citizens First Congress legislative agenda.*



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## WHAT'S INSIDE

**Citizens First Congress  
Convenes to Set 2009 Agenda**

**HIV/AIDS Task Force Launched**

**Climate Change Action at Last**

**Gould Holds Candidate Forum**

## JOIN

**Former U.S. Senator  
Dale Bumpers**

in celebrating the

10th Anniversary of the  
Citizens First Congress

45th Anniversary of the  
Arkansas Public Policy Panel



August 16th  
5:00 to 8:00 p.m.

see page 5 for details

## public policy **WATCH**



*Onie Norman of Dumas makes a point to Anthony Scott of Parkdale and Charlotte Wales of Monticello at the Delta meeting to develop the Citizens First Congress agenda.*