

# PUBLIC POLICY WATCH

The Newsletter of The Arkansas Public Policy Panel

Fall, 2000



## **Grassroots coalition meets to create Citizens Agenda**

The citizens movement in Arkansas was in full force on a rainy weekend in Hot Springs. The *Arkansas Citizens First Congress* met at the Majestic Hotel to network, share stories, and - most of all - debate a new agenda for 2001. 53 groups representing farmers, students, workers, people of color, women, the disabled, environmentalists, and others came together and made the 3rd *Citizens First Congress* a great success.

Delegates from across Arkansas introduced resolutions, discussed issues in depth in caucuses, debated and elected a new Citizen's Agenda for the 2001 legislative session. After 2 days of discussion, debate, and fun, the *Congress* chose 25 issues to include in its broad agenda. 5 of these were then chosen to be priority

**The Congress is calling on legislators to listen to the citizen's voice.**

issues, that the coalition not only agreed upon, but will work together to pass through the legislature. A 19-member steering committee was elected.

The next step is to mobilize hundreds of Arkansas citizens to attend lobby training workshops and get involved in pushing the new Citizen Agenda at the legislature. The Congress' goal is to help mobilize as many citizens as possible to push for a common progressive agenda.

The power of grassroots lobbying can not be overstated. Legislators will respond to the efforts of their constituencies, but we have to make them do it. Contact the Panel to set up a lobby training in your community today. Then get ready for the session!



## Note from the director:

### What Kind of Community Do You Want?

It's the fundamental question the Panel helps folks all over the state answer. For some it's safe drinking water and cleaner streams, for others it's more respect for basic civil rights or fair access to opportunities, or better jobs and fairer taxes. For some it's just creating a safe space to share ideas and come together. For some, it's all of the above.

Arkansans, whatever their walk of life, deserve a voice in shaping their community. It's our fundamental value at the Panel.

### Who Is Speaking for Your Community Vision?

The question has never been more relevant. Election mayhem is over, for this year, and the Arkansas Legislature is set to convene again.

Powerful interests are organized to tell policy makers what kind of society they want. Most lone individuals are drowned out. The way to make your voice heard is to organize with your friends and neighbors and workers and make a common voice to express what YOU want.

Citizens who are organized to express a common vision, analyze problems, present solutions and hold officials accountable – that's our vision of Arkansas.

To Make it happen, the Panel works on three fronts:

#### 1. Organize community groups.

We're here to help citizens address community needs or problems. We've helped local groups get drinking water protected, toxic spills cleaned up, and raise the awareness of basic civil rights. We also organize

See Director's note (pg 5)

## Block Party raises \$11,000 for grassroots work

"Tons of fun," and "It's over!" were quotes heard from Panel staffers about the Block Party and Auction held September 9, 2000, at Progressive House.

The event featured music by Ho-Hum, guerilla political theater by Red Octopus, lots of donated food, a kid's play area, and a silent and live auction. The street was blocked off, the weather was perfect, and even though tents were delivered late, it appeared a good time was had by all.

The Progressive House has never been cleaner than the day of our Open House. Almost 100 items were donated by local merchants and Panel friends for the auction. Items ranged from unique hand-crafts and food from local restaurants to stays at a city hotel or country lodge. Auctioneer Jim Jensen, of Montana, helped generate bids on lunch with Representative Vic Snyder, round-trip airline tickets, and Silver Eagle coins. Renee LeBeau made 1,000 cookies! to go



Auctioneer Jim Jensen urges party-goers to dig deep to support grassroots organizing.

with burgers, dogs, veggie burgers, fixins, and beverages.

The Block Party was months in the planning and involved many volunteers. It raised about \$11,000 to be split between a lobbyist for the Congress and the house mortgage.

THANK YOU to all who came and all who helped pull it off, and a HUGE thank you to all who contributed to the feast, donated auction items, and presented a fabulous program. We raised \$11,000 for The Progressive House!

### We gratefully acknowledge the following major donors to the Progressive House

Bruce & Becky McMath  
Sherry Curry  
Cal Lebetter  
First Presbyterian Church  
Good Faith Fund  
June Williams  
Ben Allen  
IIE, District 8  
The Poultry Growers Group  
Quindred and Ralph Veatch  
Friends For Fayetteville



Ozark Headwaters Group,  
Sierra Club  
Linda Polk  
Community Environmental Watch Association  
Central Arkansas Labor Council  
Sam and Nancy Lebetter  
Sierra Club, Arkansas Chapter  
Roger & Susan Amick  
Arkansas Fair Housing Council

Thank you for your vision and gracious donations to help the cause of citizen involvement in public policy.



## Looking for work?

Want to make a  
difference?

**Work for us!**

Contact Bill Kopsky at  
(501) 376-7913.

The *Citizens First Congress* is hiring a paid intern to assist its lobbyist full-time during the 2001 legislative session. Earn college credit and gain experience with the political system.



The Panel is hiring an agricultural organizer to work w/small family farmers. We also need a few good VISTA Volunteers to work in the Delta/South Arkansas region or out of its Little Rock office.

## NEWS BRIEFS

The **Arkansas Community Foundation** has issued a request for proposals for its Grants for Children and Youth projects. The deadline is November 17. Eligible projects will involve all youth K-12 from anywhere in Arkansas. The awards will range from \$500 to \$5,000. Stipulations for use of the funds are fairly flexible. Details and are available from the ACF at (501) 372-1116.

The **Pine Bluff NAACP** hosted its 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Freedom Fund Banquet on October 6. The speaker was Tavis Smiley host of BET Tonight and author. Attendance was 1100 plus - the largest ever hosted by the branch as well as the largest sit-down meal event ever held at the Pine Bluff Convention Center. Funds from this event will be used to continue initiatives in voter education, youth development, political action and civil rights.

The **Arkansas Hunger Coalition** supports emergency food providers in the state by keeping them informed and in touch with one another and by offering periodic mini-grants. Particular issues right now are the upcoming reauthorization and facelift of the Food Stamps Program and the fragile economic status of low-income families.

The **Alliance for Reform of Drug Policy in Arkansas** needs 5000 volunteers to work on the Arkansas Medical Marijuana Act campaign. Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, would be to gather 20 signatures. The proposed Act would allow people with debilitating medical conditions to possess a limited amount of marijuana.

## Bus Tour spreads message across state



1,243 miles and 9 press conferences in three days: The Arkansas Citizens First Congress Bus Tour 2000 was a rolling success. The Bus Tour (actually a rental van) left from and returned to Progressive House each day, Friday, December 1, Saturday, December 2, and Sunday, December 3.

Congress Steering Committee members plus support staff traveled around the state to promote the Citizens First Congress platform for the 2001 Arkansas legislative session, 5 Points for a Better Arkansas. Press conferences were held at Texarkana, Camden, Warren, Pine Bluff, Helena, Jonesboro, Elkins, Fayetteville, and Fort Smith.

At the press conferences, riders answered questions about the Congress and explained the 5-point agenda. At each stop, on average 10 riders were greeted by local members of the Congress. 30 people turned out in Helena to support, and 40 people in Fayetteville stood outside in very cold weather to meet the traveling crew.

Stories about the Bus Tour were printed in daily and weekly newspapers around the state. View the news clippings on the Congress website: [www.citizensfirst.org](http://www.citizensfirst.org).

Thanks to all who helped plan the tour, rode along or met the bus.



The **Newton County Wildlife Association** has been “Keeping Our Eyes on the Forest” for the past 25 years. The NCWA has been actively involved in developing better management for our Ozark National Forest and other public lands. We are working toward public management plans based upon watershed and habitat protection with dispersed low-impact recreational opportunities.

**Crooked Creek Coalition** needs your help to watch over stream quality. Halliday Trucking of Yellville AR has applied for a new streambed gravel mining permit in a previously unmined section of Crooked Creek near Pyatt, AR. Scientific studies conducted on Crooked Creek demonstrate how these mines reduce the stream’s water quality and smallmouth bass habitat.

The **Arkansas Working Families Project**, a collaborative of **Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, Good Faith Fund**, and the Panel has recently released a new study “Working Families and the New Economy: How Are Arkansas Families Really Faring in Today’s Job Market?” The report reveals that many families can not meet their basic needs despite a “healthy” economy. This is largely due to the kinds of jobs that the economy is creating. To obtain a copy of the study, go to [www.aradvocates.org](http://www.aradvocates.org).

The **Arkansas ADAP Working Group** is gaining bipartisan support for a bill requesting a state contribution to our AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP). This cost-effective funding would provide life-saving medications to hundreds of Arkansans with no other resources, prevent new HIV infections, and preserve Medicaid for children and the elderly. Arkansas is the only southern state that does not contribute to AIDS medications or services.

## “5 Points for a Better Arkansas”

*The legislative priorities of the Arkansas Citizens First Congress:*

**2001 Legislative Session**

**POSITION ONE: Create a Dept. of Agriculture and Farm Sustainability**

Arkansas is one of only two states without an agency to develop and promote its agricultural sector and protect family farms. We need to create and fund a Dept. of Agriculture and Farm Sustainability that will: 1.) Develop, promote and diversify the state’s farming sector, 2.) Coordinate the various state agencies that currently regulate Arkansas agriculture, and 3.) Represent Arkansas at the federal level.

**POSITION TWO: Eliminate conflicts of interest voting on state boards and commissions**

Appointees routinely deal with issues on which they have a conflict of interest. The Arkansas Citizens First Congress calls on legislators to eliminate conflict of interest voting on state boards and commissions. Current laws allow board and commission members to vote on items that affect the financial interests of immediate family members, employers, or clients.

**POSITION THREE: Provide public employees the same legal right to bargain wages, hours, and working conditions that workers in the private sector have long enjoyed.**



*Dustin Duke from the UA Campus Democracy Collective announces the Congress’ legislative agenda at the Arkansas State Capitol.*

A majority of states, but not Arkansas, have adopted such legislation. Many public sector workers earn below poverty level wages and have no effective way to resolve disputes with their employer. Collective bargaining could bring dignity and a higher standard of living to thousands of teachers, firefighters, police, and state, county and municipal employees. The state’s 168,000 plus hard working public employees deserve the same rights as any other employee in Arkansas.

**POSITION FOUR: Legislate strong penalties for hate crimes**

Arkansas is one of only seven states with no hate crime legislation. Hate Crime legislation recognizes that crimes motivated by bias are in effect terrorist actions directed not only at the immediate victim, but also the whole group to which he or she is perceived to belong.

**POSITION FIVE: Support the Arkansas Renewable Energy Act (AREA), .**

AREA will provide incentives for consumers and companies to develop renewable energy, and help ensure true competition for utility companies.

**The Citizens First Congress will be lobbying legislators on these issues at the upcoming 2001 legislative session**

# How can I get involved in the Congress???

## How can you get involved?

Tired of politics as usual and watching citizen interests lose out time and time again? There are several ways you can get involved to affect the state legislature and make your perspective known:

### From your home:

Phone calls to you legislator from his or her district are one of the most effective tools a citizen has. Letters from you are very effective as well. The Congress is organizing phone trees to get the word out about legislative issues and they're willing to help you set one up for your own group or community. Give them a call at 501-376-7744 x 14.

### Come to the Capitol:

Citizens can lobby their legislators at the Capitol directly – it's easy. One of the best things about Arkansas is how easy it is to contact our elected officials directly.

The Congress and Panel are hosting lobby trainings to help folks understand the essential ingredients of citizen lobbying and political strategy – everything from what kinds of arguments are effective, down to where the water fountains are in the Capitol. Currently planned lobby trainings are:  
January – LR  
January – Fay

The Congress had one citizen lobbyist at the legislature almost every in the last session and it made a huge difference. Folks sacrificed just one day during the session to work with the Congress in Little Rock, and knew that they would have the whole session covered with citizen lobbyists sharing the workload. No one gets overloaded and the legislators have a constant reminder that citizens are watching.

The Congress has a full time lobbyist and several interns who will be working the

legislature for the citizens interest – but that's not enough. Elected officials need to hear from citizens who actually vote in their districts, folks like you, to understand the importance of citizen issues.

### Form a Community Group:

Is there an issue in your town that you wish you could affect? Are some of your neighbors or friends concerned about the same things? The Panel is here to help citizens organize community groups to tackle local issues. We've helped organize groups around agriculture issues, water pollution, consumer issues, civil rights, clean air, and more. Give us a call, we're here to help, together we can change things for the better. 501-376-7913.

### Help is available:

Congress volunteers are ready to help you get involved. Training, fact sheets, and other information is available. Together we are supporting each other to make a difference.

## JOIN US!

### Directors note (cont'd from pg 2)

around emerging issues where a citizen group is not yet involved... on issues like energy deregulation, water conservation, and farming.

2. **Work with existing groups to strengthen their work.** We provide training on building community power, strengthening leadership, political strategy, holding officials accountable and a hundred other things. If we don't have the knowledge you need, we'll help find it. The Panel has no real power on our own, our only strength comes through strengthening the groups we work with.

3. **Connecting.** We facilitate coordina-

See *Director's note* (pg 6)

The **Sierra Student Coalition** at the University of Arkansas is the only student environmental group on campus. It is focusing on educating students on local issues affecting Fayetteville and in turn teaching its citizens about our concerns for the UofA. The current major campaign is to reduce the massive waste stream on campus by creating more of a community partnership among the students, administration, and large corporations chosen to carry out food services.

The **Ouachita Watch League** (OWL) recently appealed a massive timber sale project in the Ouachita National Forest. The Forest Service ruled against the appeal, but the sale was added to a lawsuit for the Southeast US challenging the FS's poor management. OWL also signed on to a petition to save the Cerulean Warbler, a neotropical migratory bird. OWL also provided comments at public hearings and at a US House Field Hearing in Hot Springs dealing with President Clinton's roadless area conservation plan.

Members of the **Poultry Growers Group** are encouraged that 16 State Attorneys General have endorsed new laws to protect contract growers and producers who raise livestock or grains for large contractors. Unfortunately, Arkansas' Attorney General, Mark Pryor has not signed on to this Producer Protection Act yet. Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Admin. (GIPSA) has been holding a series of town hall meetings. This has been an opportunity for poultry producers to meet with GIPSA personnel, voice their concerns, and get organized.

The **UA Campus Democracy Collective** (CDC), is currently working on its third annual Democracy Teach-In (DTI). The DTI's are events held on many campuses to raise issues

of education and participatory democracy. This year's DTI will expose the transfer of resources from education to prisons and the resulting disastrous effects on democracy. The DTI will take place Nov. 1-3 at the UA-Fayetteville. The CDC is involving many groups in the DTI in order to build a strong coalition on campus to challenge the power of the corporate-controlled UA administration.

**The AR Community Action Agencies Association** represents 16 community action agencies in the state, which manage more than \$71 million in social programs to help more than 210,000 people of low income. The non-profit organizations provide utility assistance, food, transportation and other services to meet basic needs, and Head Start, affordable housing and employment assistance to help gain a lasting self-sufficiency.

**Delta Women Achieving Goals (DWAG)** is a group of women living in the rural delta communities of Marvell and Gould, Arkansas. The women's ages range from 18-80. They meet monthly and discuss issues to promote systemic change in each community. DWAG women work together in making a difference where they live through community organizing and community building. The women have received PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) training. DWAG also mentors a youth group, Delta Youth Achieving Goals (DYAG), ages 13-17.

The **SW Ark. Good Government Commission** is gaining momentum. More than twenty persons participated in the recently held Redistricting Workshop in Camden. Representatives from Ouachita, Dallas, Little River and Union counties participated in the workshop. This training is ongoing and now in the second phase where investigating and gathering of information is done in preparation for the second scheduled workshop.

## Are We Having An Identify Crisis?

Nope, we're just getting some help from the best in the organizational development business to help us get where we want to go. Wesley Woo of the Center for Community Change, Jennifer Henderson of Strategic Interventions, Inc., and independent consultant Vicki Quatmann are challenging us to think deeply about the Panel's work and goals.



Back when the Panel began in 1961, panels of 5 women; Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, black, white; visited civic groups around the state to persuade people to embrace diversity. .

What have we accomplished since then? How far have we strayed from our beginnings? When 35 diverse Panel people gathered with Wesley and Jennifer, we looked back at our work in

The seventies: developing multicultural curricula for public schools  
The eighties: education on tax fairness, civil rights, agriculture and environment  
The nineties: building the strength of

grassroots groups, and linking them with traditional advocacy groups to form a statewide coalition

What lies ahead? The group described a vision: "Arkansas is a place where an enlightened and empowered population ensures that the economic, social and political resources are managed to serve the public good, and the state's natural environment is respected and nurtured."

To achieve that, we said that the Panel is "dedicated to achieving social and economic justice by organizing citizen groups around the state, educating and supporting them to be more effective and powerful, and linking them with one another in coalitions and networks. The Panel seeks to bring balance to the public policy process in Arkansas."

Over the next few months we'll talk with our stakeholders, examine Panel programs and capacity, and develop a long term plan. Stay tuned!

*Director's note (cont'd from pg 5)*

tion between nearly 70 groups in Arkansas. They connect across issues, geography and other barriers to work for common goals. Check out the Arkansas Citizens First Congress, highlighted in this newsletter.

Some of the best consultants in the business are here to help. Center for Community Change, Strategic Interventions and Southern Empowerment Project are working with our board, staff and other allies to evaluate our work and set new goals and expectations. A good long range plan is the key to accomplishing any real social change.

### What Kind of Community Do We Want?

The question is so fundamental that we're taking time to answer it again at the Panel, and make a new long range plan to achieve our answer.

**So, what kind of community do you want?** It's not so impossible, you can create it with your neighbors. We can help. We're ready to roll up our sleeves and work with you, just call.

## Citizen volunteers work to pass reforms at legislative session

The season is nigh upon us! The Arkansas legislature only meets every other year. Therefore, the window of opportunity to influence public policy in that arena is small.

As you probably know, the Citizens First Congress met in September and discussed issues within caucuses, then chose five priority issues (see story elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Panel staff are working in advance of the session to help you be informed on the issues and feel comfortable contacting your legislators. Your phone calls during session are very important. Legislators are used to hearing from paid lobbyists-mostly industry's viewpoint -so the few calls they get from informed constituents can be critical. The dozen or so calls you will be asked to make could

mean the difference between good and bad legislation.

Because so many bills are proposed in the legislature, House and Senate



*Basil Kyriakakis and Eric Reece plan for the upcoming session in the Citizen's First Congress office.*

members rely on committees to do in-depth work on issues. That's why most calls to you will be on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday

evenings, the day before committee hearings. Our new lobbyist, Jennifer Polk, needs your support.

There is a lot of good information

available to help citizen lobbyists in the Citizens First Congress/Lobby Corps office within Progressive House at 1308 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> St., just a few blocks from the Capitol.

The Congress will take a bus tour around Arkansas to promote our issues. (see front story). We also hope to have at least one citizen lobbying each day of session, and will offer Lobby Training workshops.

We are recruiting for interns to update information during session on a phone hotline and on the Congress web page. We plan to send postcards as needed and are discussing sending weekly or bi-weekly updates.

For more information or to be on our network of callers, call Becky (501) 376-7913, ext-16 or (501) 821-5567.



## Congress announces new lobbyist!!!

**Jennifer Polk** is the first paid lobbyist for the *Citizens First Congress*, still a young coalition. At the 2001 Arkansas Legislature, she'll press the issues for farmers, the environment, victims of hate crimes, working families and consumers. Do you want to help?

- Yes! Here is a donation to help the Citizens First Congress pay for a lobbyist!
- I'll have some time during the session (Jan.-Mar.)to help out in the office.
- I want to learn to be a citizen lobbyist.
- I'll come to the legislature to help lobby.
- I will call/write my legislator and/or get others in my group to do the same.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



*Jennifer Polk will be giving the Arkansas legislators a piece of the Congress' mind. She needs you help to pass the new Citizen's First Congress legislative agenda. Contributions of time and money are desperately needed.*



**The Arkansas  
Public Policy Panel**

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**\_\_ Yes! I want to see more citizens advocating for progressive issues...**

Enclosed is my donation

per month using credit card

check enclosed:

\_\_ \$10      \_\_ \$25      \_\_ \$35      \_\_ \$50      \_\_ \$100      \_\_ \$ Other

Make checks out to The Panel, 1308 W. Second Street, Little Rock, AR 72201

**Please Charge my Visa/Master Card (circle one)**

Name as it appears on card: \_\_\_\_\_

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80% of your donation to the Panel is tax deductible. The other 20% directly supports the advocacy efforts of the *Citizens First Congress* at the state legislature.