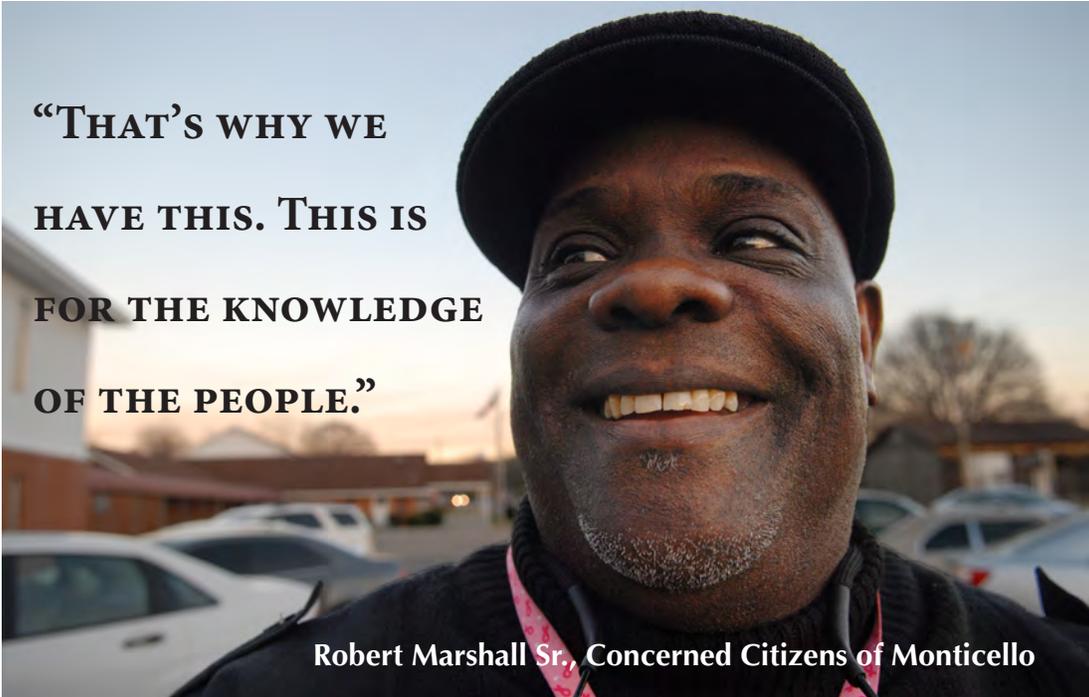


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**“THAT’S WHY WE
HAVE THIS. THIS IS
FOR THE KNOWLEDGE
OF THE PEOPLE.”**

Robert Marshall Sr., Concerned Citizens of Monticello

SOUTH ARKANSAS EVENTS ENGAGE AND INFORM VOTERS

Candidate forums across South Arkansas are giving community members a deeper understanding of the political process and how elected leaders affect everyday life.

“They’re making decisions for you and your kids,” said Concerned Citizens of Monticello Chairperson Joe Britton. “We need good schools. We need jobs in our community. We need our streets fixed. We’re taxpayers, and we want to know where our money goes.”

Community groups from Gould to Monticello to Magnolia are meeting with politicians running for local

and statewide office, and hosting public forums to help the public make an informed vote. Concerned Citizens of Monticello recently hosted eight candidates for city council and the surrounding areas.

“Voters need to know who is who and what’s their background,” said Robert Marshall Sr. “We need to know exactly where they stand and what they plan to do to help this community.”

Marshall joined CCM last year, and is now serving as the chair of the Political Awareness Committee.

“When I started, I didn’t know much

about local government period,” Marshall said. “I didn’t know who I was voting for. I’d just vote because someone said, ‘Hey man, this person is a good guy.’”

The forums are part of a strategy to win reforms. Each community develops a platform on issues they want to see addressed.

“Our platform brings people together to push for infrastructure and cleanup,” said Retha Spencer of the Gould Citizens Advisory Council. “We want to make a difference in the neighborhood, and we want people to take pride in Gould.”

see **Voters**, pg 4

SYSTEMIC RACISM UNDERMINES OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL



In February, more than 150 Arkansans gathered in a small church basement in Little Rock for a conversation about racial equity and social justice.

The Panel invited the Center for Social Inclusion, one of the leading racial equity and social justice think tanks in the US, to lead the workshop. The crowd brought an overwhelming amount of support, and together, we created an open environment for honest conversations about race and justice. The room was filled with a natural energy and it was incredible to see people from all walks of life engage one another and share their stories in a safe space.

Our goal is to strengthen the analysis of a diverse group of leaders about how inequality has influenced policy decisions for decades. Individual bias is harmful to our society, but structural bias written into our laws and policies is having a profound impact on who has a fair chance to succeed and who has to jump extra hurdles for opportunities.

The Panel is forming a Steering Committee on Racial Equality to create a strategy to move forward. For more info, contact David at david@arpanel.org.

Help Us Celebrate Arkansas Dragon Slayers June 25

Leaders across Arkansas have fought together in the past year against efforts to turn our school systems over to private corporations and stop legislation that would legalize discrimination. They've won progress for clean water and energy, for basic civil rights, and for access to health care.

We hope you will join us in thanking fantastic leaders from across the state for standing up for a better Arkansas!

George Goehl, national director of People's Action, is our guest speaker. George is leading an effort to challenge social justice organizers and advocates to stop settling for the change that is possible now and invest in longer-term strategies to change what is possible.

People's Action is uniting over one million people coast-to-coast who have a fierce commitment to fighting for human dignity and rebuilding our country on a foundation of racial, gender and economic equity and climate justice. You don't want to miss him.

Join Us Saturday, June 25, at the Dragon Slayer Award Banquet, Arkansas 4-H Center, Ferndale.

CARBON FEE STUDY SHOWS CLEAR BENEFITS FOR ARKANSAS

A new study shows Arkansas could add tens of thousands of jobs while reducing air pollution and improving quality of life across the state.

CFC member organization Arkansas Citizens' Climate Lobby commissioned the report to show the impact a Carbon Fee and Dividend (CF&D) would have on our economy and environment. The Panel helped raise money for it to support CCL and the CFC.

"Arkansas has a chance to capitalize on this free-market approach to carbon reduction," said Robert McAfee of CCL. "We can make the state a healthier place, while boosting the economy and attracting new jobs. It also puts Arkansas' economy in position to be a leader in the coming clean energy revolution."

Under the plan, electric power plants that burn coal or natural gas would be charged a fee for each ton of carbon pollution they emit. The fee would be distributed monthly to every Arkansan over the age of 18. Employers also receive dividends, based on the number of people they employ.

The policy is expected to generate 20-30,000 additional jobs over the baseline scenario. The reduced emissions would bring the state into compliance with the EPA's Clean Power Plan by 2030.

"As the price of fossil fuels increases, polluters will look for cleaner and more efficient energy," said Chris McNamara of CCL. "This increases renewable energy investments, and the monthly distribution of the fees puts money back in peo-



"WE CAN MAKE THE STATE A HEALTHIER PLACE, WHILE BOOSTING THE ECONOMY AND ATTRACTING NEW JOBS."

— Robert McAfee, Citizens' Climate Lobby

ple's pockets, encouraging spending and stimulating the economy."

Arkansas, and every state, needs to dramatically reduce carbon emissions to meet the demands of the federal Clean Power Plan, international treaties, and a moral imperative. The scientific consensus is that our planet is headed toward a major crisis because of carbon pollution. The question is what is the best way to reduce those carbon emissions.

Some proposed regulations simply cap pollution levels. Some would create a cap-and-trade system. This new report shows that an innovative, market-based fee and dividend system may have the most promise while also boosting the state's economy.

The study examines the potential economic, demographic, fiscal and emissions impact of eight different alternatives to cut carbon pollution and meet the Federal Clean Power Plan targets. The results make it clear Arkansans will benefit greatly from the CF&D approach.

CF&D would also add \$500 million to \$1 billion to the economy

in the first year alone, and as much as \$4 billion over the long term. Households and employers will get a monthly rebate of \$200 dollars per month.

The study was done by Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI), which develops economic models to inform government and corporate decisions. REMI was the firm chosen by the State of Arkansas to model the economic impact analysis of the Big River steel mill in 2013.

"We wanted to use this model, because it is already familiar in Arkansas," McNamara said. "It's hard to argue with the results, when the report uses methodology that's already been accepted in other major development projects."

CCL members presented the findings to several state agencies. They are working on a campaign to push for the policy during the 2017 legislative session and building public support. You can learn more about CF&D in Arkansas, or learn how to join the campaign at www.arkccl.org.

VOTERS |continued from page 1|



Panel Policy Director Kymara Seals facilitated the Concerned Citizens of Monticello's candidate forum. Candidates answered the public's questions, as well as a series of questions based on the community group's platform. These forums are being held across South Arkansas, and aim to engage and inform voters, while increasing accountability for promises made during each campaign.

The community groups build campaigns on the platforms, and use the forums to strengthen momentum to get the reforms their members have prioritized.

"I've seen elections where the candidates were very strongly in tune with platforms, and they sought to adhere to those ideas once elected," said Norvell Dixon, of Gould. "Like anything else you have ups and downs."

The meetings are also the first step to holding leaders accountable if they fail to meet those promises.

"You're asking for our votes, and we want to know what can you do to help build our town, to bring us together and make it a better place to live," Spencer said. "Then, if something is not being taken care of, we want to know why? It's important that you get the job done. That's what you were elected to do."

Gould Mayor Essie Cableton said in the past Gould's elected leaders ignored constituents and did as they pleased.

"Some of us would raise issues and ask that they be addressed, but we weren't being heard," Cableton said. "It was devastating, but not knowing what to do you kind of looked the other way."

Cableton said local government has undergone a complete transformation since GCAC formed, and the public forums are a major part of the change.

"It's a great feeling to know that people can no longer do whatever they want," she said. "We know that now someone is watching."

This year GCAC opened its candidate interview process to the public. The executive board develops a list of questions based on the platform elected by members, and candidates answer them at the front of the room.

"We have to do what we do and do it right, and not just GCAC but the citizens now know we are accountable," Cableton said. "They will let you know you are going to do it right or they will vote you out."



Although Marshall's interest in politics is relatively new, he says Concerned Citizens of Monticello's format allows anyone to participate, no matter their level of experience.

"A lot of people don't understand this process, but after they attend they are more comfortable and one thing brings another," he says. "This is getting the knowledge out to the city of Monticello. That's why we have this. This is for the knowledge of the people."

PARENTS HELP SHAPE SPECIAL EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents from across the state are working with the Panel, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families and other partners to help legislators find better ways to educate students with special needs.

A task force issued an initial draft of its report on Special Education in Arkansas, following months of meetings with teachers, administrators, advocates and state agencies. The preliminary report summarizes the current state of the program, but recommendations to improve service for the nearly 56,000 K-12 students in special education are still being developed.

The CFC and other education advocates pushed the 2015 legislature to create the task force after parents complained that many schools were not meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Shirley Renix represents the Panel on the Task Force as one of our Lead Community Organizers but also as a mom of a child with disabilities. While the experience has been informative, she wants to see more of a focus on parents' perspectives.

"We have heard quite a bit from teachers and state agencies," she said. "But I know from my personal experience that some schools aren't following the law, or at least its intent."

The Panel shared Renix's story about the struggle to make sure her daughter received a quality education, and it resonated with other parents across the state. The article was shared hundreds of times on Facebook, and seen by more than 15,000 people. In addition, dozens of parents who also have children

with special needs asked to be a part of the process.

"What we need more than anything else is for more families struggling with special education needs to step forward and share their stories about what's working and not working," Renix said. "We can't solve problems we can't see, and it's those parents, families and teachers who experience the system first hand who have so much to offer."

Parents working with the Panel are developing suggestions to address concerns which range from discipline issues to teacher requirements and the way students are identified for special education programs in the first place.

"The number one priority is to make sure students have a high-quality education and are prepared for life and career," Renix said. "We also need accountability. Parents need to know how to submit grievances, and we must ensure those com-

plaints are quickly and properly reviewed."

The suggestions also call for restorative justice practices to be used in place of suspension or expulsion, and ongoing training for teachers on disciplining children.

"Any student who has severe behavior problems should automatically be screened for learning disabilities," Renix said. "Unfortunately all too often these children may be punished in harsh and unnecessary ways. We must ensure parents are notified and consent to any disciplinary actions like restraints or seclusion unless students are in imminent danger."

In September, the task force will file a written report to governor, with final recommendations.

The task force meets monthly, and is open to the public. For more information visit www.arpanel.org.

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STRONGER WATER PLAN GOES INTO EFFECT



In April, the Mississippi River Collaborative held its Spring meeting in Little Rock to collaborate and update plans to protect the river's watershed. To kick off the conference, the Arkansas Nature Conservancy provided a paddling tour of its recently acquired Ranch North Woods Preserve.

A new plan to protect the quality and quantity of Arkansas' water is now in effect, but people must stay engaged to ensure the protections are fully implemented.

Farmers, recreationalists, scientists and policy makers worked with the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) for the past three years to update the Arkansas Water Plan. The new plan will guide the use, management, and development of our water resources through the year 2050.

"This is a holistic and adaptive management approach to assess and enhance water quality in the Natural State," said Debbie Doss, CFC environmental leader and Arkansas Canoe Club officer. "Now we need everyone to support and participate in protecting the water they love to fish in, play in and drink."

The Panel, CFC Member Organizations and other environmental groups pressed for a new plan

based on sound science with robust participation from diverse stakeholders to update a version that hadn't been touched since 1990.

"We got knowledgeable people appointed to the workgroups, and made sure Arkansans representing all walks of life were at every public meeting to help shape the plan," Doss said.

As a result of that commitment, the new plan provides a framework for sustainably managing one of Arkansas' most valuable natural resources. The plan also addresses updating and maintaining our water and wastewater infrastructure.

"The Arkansas Water Plan encourages measures to conserve groundwater, and recognizes the unique regional differences in our state," said ANRC Commissioner and CFC environmental leader Don Richardson. "The new plan addresses challenges on a more local level, and it creates a systematic evalu-

ation of existing water laws and procedures."

The plan calls for the gathering of reliable data and use of science to make informed decisions, and pushes for collaboration among state agencies and other organizations.

There will be numerous opportunities, especially during the 2017 legislative session to support and encourage policymakers to pass policies that uphold the state water plan.

"People depend on clean and affordable water every day," Richardson said. "Implementing the recommendations that came out of the meetings on the Water Plan is of utmost importance."

The updated Arkansas Water Plan went into effect February 1, 2016.

View the full plan at www.arkansaswaterplan.org/



STANDING UP FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN LITTLE ROCK



Hundreds of parents, lawmakers, educators and community members stood together on the Capitol steps to support the students of the Little Rock School District and public education statewide. The Panel helped organize the rally.

We stand united for high quality PUBLIC EDUCATION because the overwhelming consensus among education researchers is that it makes our children and communities stronger. Strategies such as increased parental involvement, improving discipline policies, quality pre-K, quality afterschool and summer programs, community schools, and services that counter or reduce poverty have much more evidence and promise than privatization and charter schools. This is uniting different parts of the city and we are working in coalition with many partners to engage more students and parents focused on improving education for all students.



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