

citizens' BRIEF

1•28•2011



Arkansas Citizens First Congress



Over 60 people from 15 Arkansas communities gathered at the Capitol to see the Arkansas Legislature in action. They lobbied their legislators about after school programs, prison reform, and the Dream Act, among many other issues.

2011 Session off to a snowy start!

Despite the snow and frigid temperatures, the 88th General Assembly did convene on Monday, January 10 for what will likely be a three month session. The Legislature will address issues such as the very tight state budget and vote on over 2,000 legislative measures on topics ranging from tax cuts to ethics reform. With a near record number of new legislators coming on board for the 2011 session (13 in the Senate and 46 in the House), we will need your help to make our issues known and help them get traction!

We were pleased to hear several of the Arkansas Citizens First Congress' priorities addressed in opening comments by both Speaker of the House Robert Moore, who wants to see the state water plan updated, and Governor Beebe, who wants to improve the corrections system, increase funding for public schools and higher education, and increase the number of college graduates.

We look forward to working with CFC members to ensure that these and our other top legislative priorities gain the attention of our legislative leaders.

Help Bring the Grassroots to the Legislature

Join us for one of the CFC's lobby days to meet your lawmakers, share your concerns, attend legislative hearings, and help watchdog the proceedings.

Over 300 lobbyists swamp the halls every day – we need you!

Energy and Water Legislative Breakfast

Capitol Hill Building

Wednesday, February 9th

Opportunity to Learn Legislative Lunch

Arkansas Education Association

Thursday, February 24th

CFC Priorities Legislative Lunch

Arkansas Education Association

Wednesday, March 16th

Youth Legislative Breakfast

Capitol Hill Building

Thursday, March 24th

For lobby day schedules and more information, check CitizensFirst.org or contact Brett at (501) 376-7913 x10 or Brett@ARPanel.org

Priority Update: Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign

The Opportunity to Learn Summit was a great success, with over 200 people in attendance ranging from parents, students, teachers, administrators, legislators, and local and even national policy leaders coming together to discuss ways of improving education in Arkansas.

As promised, the OTL planning team, chaired by Regina von Tungeln and Richard Hutchinson, has developed a campaign infrastructure and set our priorities for the 2011 Legislative Session:

1. Expand after school and summer programs by supporting the Arkansas Out-of-School Network's proposals.
2. Improve support for struggling students to reduce the need for remediation.
3. Ensure that poverty funding is spent on effective programs and limit carryover of those funds.
4. Expand quality Pre-K and early childhood education programs.
5. Support the Arkansas DREAM Act to ensure that all Arkansas high school graduates have access to college.
6. Increase transportation funding for rural/high needs districts as recommended by the Joint Adequacy Committee.

Make plans today to attend our **Opportunity to Learn Lobby Day on Feb. 24** to tell legislators about the campaign!



Priority for a Better Arkansas: Prison Reform

The Arkansas prison population has more than doubled in the last 20 years and corrections costs are nearly 8 times higher than in 1990. Costs are projected to continue climbing while little is done to help first-time, minor offenders re-enter productive society.

New recommendations from the Arkansas Working Group on Sentencing and Corrections, a bipartisan group appointed by Governor Beebe, address many

concerns highlighted by our CFC members: reducing costs, reducing prison populations through improved diversion, probation and parole process, and improving support systems to introduce former inmates back into productive society. We expect to support new legislation from the Governor's work group and will continue looking for other ways to make our criminal justice system more effective, fair and affordable.

Priority for a Better Arkansas: Protect People and the Environment While Developing Natural Gas

Arkansas needs a balanced approach to natural gas development that recognizes economic opportunity from the gas industry while protecting our health, water, air, wildlife, and the rights of private landowners.

Responsible energy development is essential in order to preserve the natural resources of our state. The natural gas industry should be required to follow best management practices to protect our water resources and to adopt new standards for protecting the individual property rights of landowners.

Priority for a Better Arkansas: A Science Based State Water Plan

Arkansas's clean and abundant water resources are at risk because our out-of-date water plan does not adequately address problems such as lowering aquifer levels, aging infrastructure, and increasing demands for clean and reliable water.

The Arkansas Water Quality Task Force recently called for a water plan revision and Speaker of the House Robert Moore created a working group to develop a new state water planning process. We are joining other environmental groups to recommend that the new state water plan:

- be based on strong science emphasizing healthy rivers, lakes, and aquifers using sustainable in-stream flows;
- have shared responsibility and funding between the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, Department of Environmental Quality, Game and Fish Commission, and the Health Department; and
- have a process that is clearly defined, transparent and accountable to the public and all stakeholder groups.

Priority for a Better Arkansas: Improve Energy Efficiency and Renewables

The CFC calls on lawmakers to implement energy policies that will create jobs, save consumers money, and combat climate change.

We support the recommendations of the Arkansas Alternative Energy Commission to improve state energy policy by:

- increasing the capacity of residential customers to use renewable energy,
- developing a feed-in tariff to promote clean energy production, and
- studying how the state can increase energy efficiency as its first and lowest-cost energy resource.

CFC 2011 Member Groups

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
Arkansas Canoe Club
Arkansas Commission on Child Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence
Arkansas Conservation Coalition
Arkansas Design Work Group
Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance
Arkansas Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice
Arkansas Justice for our Neighbors
Arkansas People First
Arkansas Renewable Energy Association
Arkansas Wildlife Federation
Audubon Arkansas
Boys Girls and Adults CDC
Camden Community Association
Center for Artistic Revolution
Citizens Against Resource Exploitation
Concerned Citizens of the Marvell Area
Delta Citizens Alliance
Desha County Grassroots Coalition
Drew County NAACP
El Dorado Community Group
First Presbyterian Church
Future Builders, Inc.
Gould Citizens Advisory Council
Hispanic Women's Organization of Arkansas
Inmate Justice Project
Living and Affected Corp.
LULAC Council #761
McGehee Desha Alumni Community Center, Inc.
Northwest Arkansas Workers Justice Center
OMNI Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology
Parkdale Citizens in Action
Pew Environment Group
Phi Iota Alpha
Pine Bluff Citizens In Action
Planned Parenthood of Arkansas and Eastern OK
Sierra Club, Central Arkansas Group
Sierra Club, Ozark Headwaters Group
South Arkansas Education Coalition
South Arkansas Youth Council
Southwest Arkansas Good Government Commission
St. Francis County CDC
Stonewall Democratic Caucus of Arkansas
Strong Community Leadership Alliance
The National Center for Appropriate Technology
US Green Building Council, Arkansas Chapter
White River Environmental Protection Assn.
Wilmot Concerned Citizens
Women's Action for New Directions



Arkansas Citizens First Congress

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to the legislature
at CitizensFirst.org



Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas

- Improve opportunities to learn for all students.
- Expand the ARKids First health insurance program.
- Require oil and gas industry to follow best practices.
- Oppose state-level immigration reform.
- Support fair tax reform.
- Implement fair energy policies.
- Develop a new state water plan.
- Support the DREAM Act.
- Increase penalties for wage theft.
- Reform prison sentencing practices.

CFC members from across south Arkansas came to the Capitol on Thursday, January 27th to support the Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas.