

citizens' BRIEF

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Arkansas Citizens First Congress

Arkansas Citizens First Congress Records Wins During 2011 Session



Landowners like Shannon Hensley of Damascus are working with legislators like Rep. Lenderman (Brookland) and Rep. Webb (Little Rock) for protections to ensure that natural gas is developed responsibly in Arkansas.

Thanks to our dedicated members and leaders working with our legislators, the CFC made progress on nearly all of our **Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas** while also helping defeat some key negative bills!

As usual, we had the most success where our members were the most engaged. Hundreds of people came to the Capitol for the CFC's five lobby days. Our members met, called and e-mailed their legislators at home. The volunteer CFC Steering Committee met every week to monitor bills and direct our campaigns. Our interns read all 2,367 bills and resolutions filed.

"We are very pleased that many of our priorities were enacted this session," said CFC Co-chair Kate Althoff. "Several of our bills that failed were sent to interim committees for study, where we'll continue working on them with our members and legislators."

The 88th General Assembly adjourned on April 27 after passing over 1,200 new bills into law. The legislature's most notable accomplishments included: a Congressional redistricting plan; a budget that maintains education as a top priority and preserves other essential services; corrections reform; and starting on a new state water plan.

Here's a summary of how CFC fared this session on our *Ten Priorities for a Better Arkansas*:

Improve opportunities to learn for all students:

The Arkansas Opportunity to Learn (OTL) campaign is a coalition of parents, students and education leaders ensuring that every child in Arkansas has access to a great education. Key campaign accomplishments this session included expanding after-school programs, ensuring that school districts effectively spend funds targeted to boost low-income student achievement, and improving parental involvement. OTL leaders are already preparing for next legislative session!

Support fair tax reform:

Only three of the many proposed tax cuts met the CFC criteria of cutting low and middle income taxes without threatening the state budget: exempting low-income families with children from income taxes, reducing the grocery sales tax, and increasing the geotourism tax credit in the Delta area. Legislators passed these three and only three others. Their decision not to pass several big tax cuts for big business and the wealthy was a victory – these cuts would have left critical state services like education without enough funding.



Some of the more than 100 youth attending the CFC Youth Lobby Day have their picture taken with Gov. Beebe.

Support the DREAM Act - Ensure that all Arkansas high school graduates have the opportunity to pay in-state tuition rates at Arkansas colleges:

CFC leaders chose to continue supporting the federal DREAM Act and not push a state bill this session. They focused instead on fighting HB1008, which would have required Arkansas students to be US citizens or legal residents. It was tabled in the House Education Committee after students and education leaders spoke against it.

Require the natural gas industry to follow best management practices:

Environmental leaders and landowners developed legislation to protect water and air quality and preserve landowner rights from natural gas development. The measures faced overwhelming opposition from the industry and legislators voted to refer them to interim studies. This allows lawmakers, landowners, state agencies and industry another opportunity to ensure that natural gas is developed responsibly.

Discourage wage theft by increasing penalties for employers who fail to pay workers:

Dishonest employers face few penalties for wage theft, while workers face a long legal process to recover their wages. HB1881 would have increased fines for employers who refuse to pay wages, but it failed on the House floor due to opposition from some large employers. CFC leaders from the Northwest AR Workers Justice Center vowed to return next session. Honest workers should receive honest wages.



Regina Von Tungeln - Co-Chair of the AR Opportunity to Learn (OTL) Campaign speaks at OTL Lobby Day.

Develop a new state water plan that uses the best science and engages a broad range of stakeholders:

Arkansas's 20-year-old water plan focuses mainly on water quantity for agricultural use. The legislature voted to create a new water plan that focuses on both water quality and quantity, protects ecologically sustainable in-stream flows and opens the process to the public. This followed several forums sponsored by Arkansas's Water Future Coalition (Audubon Arkansas, Nature Conservancy, and the Panel), a year's review by the Water Quality Task Force and discussions called together by Speaker Moore.

Oppose state-level immigration reform:

Immigration is a national issue that should be reformed at the federal level – state-level anti-immigration laws are ineffective and discriminatory. Several anti-immigrant bills, such as one prohibiting services like prenatal care for undocumented immigrants, were defeated thanks to CFC leaders, the Natural Justice League, the Arkansas Friendship Coalition, and leadership from the Governor and legislators.

Implement new energy policies to save consumers money, create jobs and combat climate change:

The Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) bill, providing low-interest loans to homeowners and small business for energy improvements, lost by only 3 votes in the House. Incentives for renewable energy were also defeated by industry opposition. The bills failed but the campaign to improve energy efficiency and renewables gained more momentum thanks to CFC members' work.



Leaders from across Arkansas attended the 5 CFC Lobby Days to talk with their legislators about the issues.

Reform prison sentencing practices to improve the parole and probation process and reduce costs:

The Governor's working group on corrections reform proposed SB750, now Act 570, to reduce prison costs, improve sentencing practices, enhance parole and probation guidelines, and expand drug courts. Other reforms are still needed to address the needs of youth offenders and to help former inmates return to productive society.

Expand the ARKids First health insurance program:

The CFC supported the Kids Count Coalition to pass SB65, now Act 771, which cuts the red tape in the ARKids First health insurance program. This will help over 20,000 children maintain health insurance who might have otherwise been dropped for bureaucratic reasons.

NEXT STEPS Meeting June 25

CFC members are meeting on June 25 to debrief the session and start planning next steps for each issue

caucus. January 2013 seems far away, but success depends on starting early and building our base of support.

See how your legislator voted and info on more bills:

More information on these priorities and the many other bills (36 in all) we worked on is in our *Community Guide to the 2011 Arkansas Legislative Session* at www.CitizensFirst.org. The *Guide* scores your legislator's voting record in the session.



COMMUNITY GUIDE
TO THE
2011 ARKANSAS
LEGISLATIVE SESSION

2010-11 CFC 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 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 Oklahoma, Inc.
- 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
- White River Environmental Protection Assn.
- Wilmot Concerned Citizens
- Women's Action for New Directions



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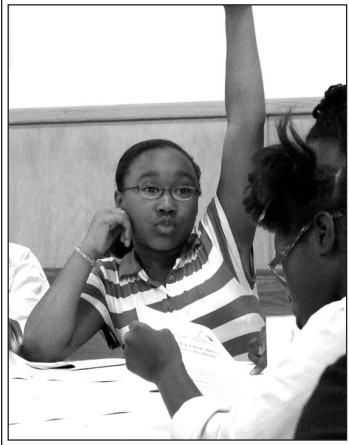
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Whose future are you fighting for?

Join us June 25!

**Help us celebrate and thank the Arkansas
activists and legislators who work for us ALL**

June 25

12:00 Noon Lunch

First United Methodist
Church of Little Rock,
723 Center St.

Cost: Free.

Everyone Welcome!

Donations appreciated.

RSVP and make a donation to support our work at
www.CitizensFirst.org - or to 1308 W. Second St.,
Little Rock, AR 72205 - or call 501-376-7913 x 10



**CFC MEMBER GROUPS
AND DELEGATES**

Post-Session Review

June 25

8:30 - 4:00

First United Methodist Church of Little
Rock, 723 Center St.

We'll debrief the session and plan the
next steps for civil rights, economic
development, education reform, the
environment and more.

Register, find more information at

www.CitizensFirst.org
or call 501-376-7913 x 10

For member groups only!
Contact us to learn how to join