2011 Issue Campaigns

Quality, Affordable Healthcare for All
In 2011, CA/IL played a central role at the state level in an effort to pass key platforms within the Affordable Care Act, specifically the creation of a Health Care Exchange and the creation of a Rate Authority. Our small business team, community member team, and Illinois Health Advocate Coalition lobbied State legislators, participated in over 15 stakeholder meetings with the Department of Insurance, and worked closely with other key departments.

Despite a strong lobbying effort, both pieces of legislation lacked the health care and insurance industry support needed to enact such sweeping changes on the first try. CA/IL is well-positioned to play a key role in the passage of these critical pieces of legislation in 2012.

Saving Cook County Health Services
In 2011, CA/IL built a strong citizens’ organizing committee in the Southern suburbs of Cook County to stop the proposed closure of Oak Forest hospital. We advocated against the closure of the public hospital at County budget hearings, Illinois Health Facility Planning Board hearings, and Cook County Health and Hospital System meetings. This hard-fought battle forced our community members to organize rapidly to respond to various strategies to close the hospital, including an attempt to pass a state law making large metropolitan areas exempt from state oversight.

Our use of media played a key role in this battle, with over eighty-five news stories published over the course of the year. The Southtown Star printed several pro-patient stories and editorials in support of our efforts. In the end, we were able to obtain a commitment from the county to keep a 24/7 clinic open at the site. CA/IL Co-director William McNary was also appointed to a Southland Advisory Board whose purpose is to oversee healthcare concerns in the area.

Diesel Pollution
CA/IL continues to lead the Illinois Campaign to Clean up Diesel Pollution in partnership with Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago (RHAMC). The campaign is a statewide coalition comprised of over 100 health, environmental, labor, faith, and community organizations. In 2011, the campaign won a number of significant victories. In the spring, the Chicago City Council unanimously passed the Chicago Clean Diesel Contracting Ordinance, which requires the use of cleaner diesel fuel and less-polluting diesel trucks and equipment on city-funded construction projects.

In the fall, Chicagoland’s Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding program became official, directing $30 million over the next five years toward 10 major diesel emissions reduction projects. Metra, CTA, PACE, and the IEPA all received significant awards.

Finally, CA/IL has been working with the Clean Air Task Force to pass a clean construction provision at the federal level through the reauthorization of the transportation bill. The Clean Construction Act of 2011 (H.R. 3122) was recently introduced as a companion to a Senate bill introduced last May.

Social Security and Medicare
CA/IL continued to partner with the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans (IARA) to protect Social Security and Medicare. In May, Congressman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin came to Chicago to promote his plan to privatize Medicare. CA/IL, IARA and our allies came out strong to send a message that Ryan’s plan would end Medicare as we know it. Also in the spring, CA/IL and IARA held a Social Security forum in Chicago with Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky. CA/IL also worked with IARA to conduct “This is About Justice” workshops to educate seniors about the connection between economic justice and Social Security. Social Security and Medicare will still be under attack in 2012, and CA/IL will continue to partner with IARA to protect retirement security for current and future retirees.

Fair Utility Rates
CA/IL worked in coalition with Governor Quinn, Attorney General Lisa Madigan, AARP, the Environmental Law and Policy Center, and many others to protect Illinois electricity customers against unfair rate hikes. An industry-sponsored bill to raise rates was passed by the state legislature and then vetoed by Governor Quinn. Ultimately the ComEd "Smart Grid" legislation supported by the industry did pass and will put in place an automatic rate increase for electricity consumers. However, due to the work of consumer advocates, the bill also included “trailer language” which contained provisions regarding senior and low-income assistance, net metering, and energy efficiency.

New Ways to Connect with Citizen Action/Illinois in 2012:
- “Like” Citizen Action/Illinois on Facebook.
- Watch for the February 2012 launch of our new cutting-edge progressive political Twitter feed, @CitizenActionIL. Our first tweet will be our 2012 primary election endorsements.
Civic Engagement

CA/IL’s state political committee, the Progressive Action Project, held an endorsement session in January for the 2011 Municipal Elections. All the major candidates for Mayor of Chicago participated and presented to our Policy Council, which then asked questions of the candidates. Although no mayoral candidate was able to garner the required 60% for an endorsement, twenty-nine aldermanic candidates received our endorsement and twenty-two of those endorsed candidates were elected to Chicago’s City Council.

Civil Rights

In 2011, CA/IL supported the passage of the Civil Union law, which allows same-sex couples to receive the same access to state-created rights and obligations of civil marriages. The law provides protections related to medical and legal issues as well as estate planning.

Responsible Budget Coalition

CA/IL is a leader in the Responsible Budget Coalition (RBC). RBC is a coalition of over 500 public interest, human service, education, community and labor groups that have united to build the support needed to solve Illinois’ budget crisis, prevent harmful cuts to essential public services, save jobs, eliminate the state’s long-term structural deficit, and provide Illinoisans with relief from regressive taxation. On January 12, 2011 the Illinois General Assembly met its responsibility and supported a revenue increase that will set the foundation for our state to once again be able to meet its moral and legal obligations to protect public safety, safeguard public health, strengthen our economy, and ensure every child has the educational opportunity he or she deserves.

This past fall, two large employers in Illinois, the CME group and Sears, threatened to leave the state if they did not receive a tax break. CA/IL worked to ensure that if the state legislature granted the corporate interests a tax break, then low-income families also deserved tax relief. Consequently, we fought hard and successfully passed S.B. 400 to provide help to working families. S.B. 400 increases the Earned Income Tax Credit in 2012 from 5 percent to 7.5 percent, and to 10 percent in 2013. The personal income tax exemption will also be adjusted for inflation, and the estate tax deduction will be raised from $2 million to $3.5 million.

Payday and Installment Loan Reform

For over a decade CA/IL has been a leader in the Monsignor John Egan Campaign for Payday Loan Reform, which was instrumental in passing a new landmark consumer protection law in 2010. The law, which went into effect in March of 2011, caps rates for nearly every short-term credit product in the state, prevents the cycle of debt caused by frequent refinancing, and gives regulators the tools necessary to crack down on abuses and identify potentially predatory practices before they become widespread. The law also makes the Illinois lending industry one of the most transparent in the country by allowing regulators to collect and analyze detailed lending data on both payday and installment loans.

We Are One

In 2011, conservatives in Wisconsin and throughout the country attempted to gut hard-fought workers’ rights laws in an attempt to crush organized labor’s ability to protect public employees. In March and April, over 13,000 people gathered in Chicago to demand an end to this assault on the middle class. These rallies highlighted the need for the middle and working class to join with labor in demanding the right to earn a reasonable wage, fair benefits, and good working conditions. “What’s at stake in Wisconsin is a basic concept of American liberty and freedom,” Senator Dick Durbin said at the Chicago rally, drawing applause and roars from the crowd.

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