2013 Campaigns

A Better Illinois - the Fight for Fair Taxes

2013 saw the beginning of an unparalleled campaign to help overhaul Illinois’ outdated state income tax system by advocating for a fair tax, whereby people with lower incomes pay lower rates and people with higher incomes pay higher rates. Currently, the state taxes all incomes at the same rate, putting a disproportional burden on middle-class families and those struggling to get into the middle class. The goal of A Better Illinois (ABI) is to put together a soup-to-nuts political and legislative operation that will result in a fair tax replacing our current flat tax scheme.

The first step in this campaign is for elected officials in Springfield to place the question of a fair tax on the 2014 ballot. To date, ABI has organized and mobilized grassroots supporters in dozens of districts, held rallies and press events around the state, and lined up an impressive initial number of co-sponsors for the bills. In the House, Representative Naomi Jakobsson’s HJRCA 33 has garnered 38 co-sponsors, while Senator Don Harmon’s SJRCA 40 has received 25 co-sponsors in the Senate.

ABI will be intensifying its grassroots mobilization and lobbying campaign when the 2014 session begins in Springfield. In order for the issue to be placed on the 2014 ballot, the House and Senate must vote affirmatively on one or both of the measures. Once the bill passes, it will be up to voters in November support the constitutional amendment to allow for a fair tax. For more information, visit www.ABetterIllinois.org.

Corporate Accountability

In Spring 2013, Citizen Action/Illinois (CA/IL) joined with a large coalition of public advocacy, service, budget, and labor organizations to announce the beginning of a full-scale “Corporate Accountability Campaign.” The root of the idea is that in a time of dire fiscal constraint, when programs for education, healthcare, and the poor are being cut relentlessly, similar restraint should be shown in the amount of tax dollars devoted to corporate loopholes and breaks in the tax code.

The Affordable Care Act Moves Forward:

Medicaid Expansion Signed into Law

In 2013, CA/IL worked closely with a diverse coalition to advocate for the passage of Medicaid expansion in Illinois. Through direct lobbying, media events, and public actions, CA/IL worked tirelessly to make sure Medicaid expansion became a reality for Illinois families.

A key component of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) is the expansion of federal Medicaid benefits to low-income individuals who currently fall into the “coverage gap.” In order to achieve real cost savings in healthcare spending and help bring our nation closer to universal coverage, the ACA needed to help the working poor obtain coverage without creating a new financial burden on those who could not afford it.

On July 22, 2013, Governor Pat Quinn signed SB 26, the Medicaid expansion bill, into law. Medicaid expansion is a key component of the ACA, allowing Illinoisans earning less than 138% of the poverty level ($15,860 per adult, $21,400 per couple) to sign up for health insurance under Medicaid.
Nationally, 803,077 have signed up for the new Medicaid program. 30,446 have signed up in Illinois. Overall, there are expected to be 610,000 individuals in Illinois eligible for the new Medicaid program. Congratulations to Senator Heather Steans and Representative Sarah Feigenholtz for leading the charge to pass this critical piece of legislation.

**Illinois Health Marketplace Launch**
In 2013, CA/IL continued its work to make the new Illinois Health Insurance Marketplace a reality. CA/IL played a central role in making sure Illinoisans understood the benefits of the Affordable Care Act through a series of media events, public actions, social media blasts, trainings, and forums.

The Health Insurance Marketplaces have been established across the country. Out of 1.6 million uninsured Illinoisans, 1 million will be eligible to buy insurance in the new marketplace. Illinois residents and small business owners will also be able to compare quality and affordable health insurance options, apply tax credits directly, and receive enrollment support. The state of Illinois will participate in a partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for the first year and plans to use this opportunity as a bridge to a state-based marketplace for the second year of operation.

There is a steady increase in enrollment across the country and in Illinois. To date, over 60,000 Illinoisans have signed up for a plan under the ACA. Earlier this year, Governor Pat Quinn awarded $27 million in federal funds to 44 community groups to conduct outreach, provide education, and facilitate enrollment in the marketplace through the In-Person Counselor Program. CA/IL and its partners will continue to take whatever action is needed to make the marketplace successful.

For more information, visit [getcoveredillinois.org](https://getcoveredillinois.org). To find help in your area, go to [https://localhelp.healthcare.gov](https://localhelp.healthcare.gov).

**Comprehensive Health Education**
CA/IL joined Planned Parenthood and over three dozen other coalition partners in advocating for a law that would create a single standard for existing sexual health education courses taught in grades 6 through 12. HB 2675 (Rep. Camille Lilly), known as the Medically Appropriate, Age-Appropriate, Complete Sexual Health Information Act, was designed to prevent certain school districts from deciding which sexual health topics to cover and which to ignore, usually at the peril of our students.

Particularly due to an increase in the teen pregnancy rate and transmission of STDs and STIs in Illinois, this legislation was critical not only to the health and well-being of teenagers, but also to the power of fully informative, comprehensive education.

After a nearly decade-long battle in Springfield, this legislation finally passed the House and Senate and was signed by Governor Pat Quinn on August 16th, 2013. CA/IL is proud to have played a prominent role in passing this landmark piece of legislation.

**Social Security and Veterans’ Benefits**
The Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans (IARA) and CA/IL mobilized seniors across the state to stop the dangerous chained CPI proposal, which would cut Social Security benefits by tying the cost-of-living adjustment to a smaller measure of inflation. This summer, IARA members protested in front of Congressman Aaron Schock’s office in Peoria and formed a human chain at Congressman John Shimkus’ office in Danville to call on them to oppose the chained CPI proposal. To celebrate Social Security’s anniversary, IARA stood with Congresswoman Cheri Bustos in Rockford and Congressman Bill Enyart in Alton to thank them for cosponsoring a resolution opposing this plan. For Veterans Day, IARA delivered petitions to Congressman Rodney Davis’ office in Champaign to ask him to protect veteran benefits and oppose the chained CPI proposal.

**Voter Registration Reform**
In 2013, CA/IL supported and lobbied for HB 2418. The legislation modernizes election law, enabling people to register to vote online.

Beginning in 2014, 17-year-olds will be able to register and vote in a primary election if they will be 18 by the time of the general election. Beginning July 1, 2014, anyone with a valid driver’s license or state identification card can sign up to vote online.

Cook County Clerk David Orr, a Policy Council member and longtime CA/IL ally, has long championed these types of reforms.

CA/IL convened a briefing to hear directly from the Clerk and his staff about the rollout of online voter registration, his recommendations for ensuring that the system is widely available to everyone eligible, and how groups who register large numbers of voters can take advantage of the new online capabilities. Members ranging from the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and AFSCME to Chicago Votes and the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans (IARA) participated in the briefing. CA/IL looks forward to using this new tool to enhance and improve our voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts in 2014.