2014 Campaigns and Issues

Tax Fairness
In 2014, Citizen Action/IL was a leader in the battle to keep corporations headquartered in the United States. During the summer, Walgreens announced its plan to use “inversion” to move its corporate headquarters to Switzerland and dodge billions in U.S. taxes—leaving the rest of us to make up the difference—even though they receive almost a quarter of their profits from American taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid, and millions more in subsidies from the state of Illinois.

Citizen Action/IL played a critical role in pushing the issue through a series of press events, letters to the editor and one-on-one interviews with FOX and WBEZ. On July 24th, we held a press event outside the Walgreens flagship store in Chicago to highlight the issue and drop off 70,000 petitions against their plan to relocate the corporate headquarters. The campaign resulted in Walgreens abandoning their plans to use inversion to escape taxes.

Aside from the Walgreens victory, Citizen Action/IL also helped pressure Pharma giant AbbVie to stay in Illinois.

Toxic Products
Citizen Action/Illinois joined with the “Mind the Store” Campaign in an effort to protect families from toxic chemicals in everyday products.

The campaign was a coordinated effort to work directly with leading retailers to eliminate the 100 most toxic chemicals from their supply chain. Citizen Action/IL took the lead in Illinois by applying pressure on stores to remove these items from their shelves.

For retailers that were unwilling to take a second look at their inventory, we held a series of actions and press conferences outside stores in the Chicagoland area to highlight the dangers of these products.

In December, Walgreens committed to a series of negotiations with the national campaign to address our concerns. We will continue to work with our allies to pressure stores to remove the products from their shelves.

Voter Registration
In 2014, Citizen Action/IL took part in the largest voter registration drive in the City of Chicago as part of Every Vote Counts. Together, we registered over 100,000 voters during the summer and the fall.

Civic Engagement
Citizen Action/IL staff was in the field leading up to Election Day, running a successful passing program at major transit stops in Chicago, handing out thousands of informational flyers and talking one-on-one with voters. In addition, CA/IL political staff were deployed on the Northwest and South suburbs to help manage GOTV operations.

National Payday Loan Protections
Last year, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau announced they were preparing to issue new rules for payday lenders.

This historic opportunity to finally curb the payday loan debt trap nationwide has led Citizen Action/IL into a coalition with Illinois organizations, small business and state legislators to call on CFPB Director Richard Cordray to issue the strongest rules possible including: A) Requiring lenders to take into account borrowers’ ability to repay a loan; B) Limiting the amount of time lenders can keep borrowers in debt; C) Restricting lenders from requiring post-dated checks or electronic access to a checking account as a condition of lending.

In 2011, Citizen Action/Illinois passed the Consumer Installment Loan Act, which caps rates for nearly every short-term credit product in the state and prevents the cycle of debt caused by frequent refinancing.

Alliance for Retired Americans
In 2014, members of the Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA) mobilized across the state to educate seniors about state and federal candidates’ records on retiree issues.

In celebration of Social Security’s 79th anniversary, ARA members held birthday parties with Congresswoman Cheri Bustos and Congressman Bill Enyart.

On Medicare’s 49th Anniversary, seniors protested outside Congressman Rodney Davis’ office in Champaign to draw attention to his positions on retirement security.
The 2014 Session of the 98th General Assembly in Springfield saw a flurry of active campaigning by Citizen Action/IL on a wide array of issues, including legislation on social justice, consumer protection, healthcare and budget matters. However, two of Citizen Action/IL’s biggest campaigns during the session were economic fairness issues—specifically, enacting a Fair Tax and boosting the Illinois Minimum Wage.

**Fair Tax Campaign**

The campaign to amend the Illinois Constitution to allow for a “Fair Tax”, where people with lower incomes pay lower state income tax rates and people with higher incomes pay higher rates, went full-steam ahead in the 2014 Session.

Citizen Action/IL played a critical role in *A Better Illinois* (the official campaign to pass the Fair Tax) by serving as a lead advocacy group, briefing and persuading key legislators, monitoring legislative movement and working with *A Better Illinois* staff to activate grassroots activists and leaders across the state and put pressure on lawmakers to see the root need for change and justice in how we tax our citizens.

Although the House and Senate failed at the final moment to take up the measure, solid support was built in both chambers—the legislation to get the amendment on the ballot for a public vote in the 2014 Election garnered 39 Co-Sponsors in the House and 27 Co-Sponsors in the Senate and had “quiet” support from many representatives that didn’t Co-Sponsor the bill but were prepared to vote for it if the bill was called.

Citizen Action/IL will continue its efforts in the 99th General Assembly to educate legislators on the Fair Tax and make the case to get the question on the ballot for the 2016 Election.

**Raise the Minimum Wage**

Illinois was among several states in 2014 working to raise its Minimum Wage – along with its coalition partners and chief sponsor Senator Kim Lightford, Citizen Action/Illinois led the charge in the 2014 session to raise the Minimum Wage in Illinois from the current rate of $8.25 per hour to at least $10 per hour by the beginning of 2015, with future increases in steps over the next two years.

After House and Senate leadership decided that the first action should be to put to voters in a non-binding question on the ballot, Citizen Action/Illinois built solid support in both chambers to ensure that voters were heard on the issue. For the better part of the Summer and Fall, Citizen Action/Illinois worked with grassroots forces to get out the message to voters that the time was right for the state to take action.

Overwhelmingly, voters agreed. The measure recommending a raise in the Minimum Wage passed with 66% of support from Illinoisans. In spite of a clear message from the voters that Minimum Wage needs to be a priority for the General Assembly, there were not enough votes in the House during the Fall Veto Session to call the bill up for a vote. Citizen Action/Illinois will continue to work towards a statewide Minimum Wage increase moving ahead into the 99th General Assembly.

**Rideshare Consumer Protections**

Citizen Action/IL also moved to support legislation aimed at bringing Rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft into compliance with safety and consumer regulations observed in many other states and cities outside Illinois.

Unlike taxicab services in Illinois, which are required to maintain car insurance that protects riders as well as drivers, Rideshare services have no such requirement and therefore provide rides while putting consumers at risk of having to pay for damages or medical bills linked to a driver’s accident.

In addition, Rideshare services have no requirements to conduct background checks on drivers before hiring them, unlike taxicab companies that undergo strenuous background checks, drug testing and training. After a series of high-profile cases of abuse from Rideshare drivers, we led a consumer campaign in Springfield to educate legislators on the dangers of having an unregulated Rideshare industry.

In December, legislators were finally able to come to agreement on a bill that would require Rideshare services statewide to perform background checks and carry sufficient insurance for riders.