Protecting the Affordable Care Act (ACA)

The GOP led Congress and new Trump administration, launched a major attack on the Affordable Care Act throughout 2017. Citizen Action worked with our national partners at Healthcare for America NOW to successfully beat back those attacks. Much of our work was focused on Cong. Peter Roskam (IL-6), as well as in Cong. Hultgren (IL-14), Cong. Bost (IL-12) and Cong. Kinzinger (IL-16) districts. We were a leader in numerous actions in these districts. The most famous action caught Roskam on video leaving a meeting through the back door to avoid the 400 protestors who were waiting outside in the cold for him to appear. That clip made national news and earned him the title “Runaway Roskam”. Also, with the help of numerous volunteers we generated over 2000 calls to Peter Roskam’s office. In partnership with the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans and local 6th District Indivisible groups we launched a Senior Citizen Action Team to hold Peter Roskam accountable for his votes on healthcare and his plans to cut Medicare and Medicaid.

We also targeted Governor Rauner for his complete lack of leadership on the national healthcare debate. At a time when many Republican Governors in other states voiced their disapproval of the ACA replacement plans presented by Congress, Rauner’s silence was deafening. Along with our allies from SEIU Healthcare, we organized a major faith based event in Chicago to support the ACA. With our grassroots partners we launched a petition campaign that gathered over 3000 signatures in a week to present to Governor Rauner at a major action in front of the Thompson Center. Rauner was also targeted at his Springfield BBQ fundraiser during the State Fair.

2017 Annual Pauls Event

On October 6th Citizen Action was proud to present the 2017 Paul Simon award to long time civil rights activist and author Dr. Timuel Black for his decades of work on behalf of the progressive agenda. We were also honored to present Kari Moe with the Paul Wellstone award. Before Kari retired this past summer she worked for Mayor Harold Washington, Senator Paul Simon, and most recently for Congressman Keith Ellison. Congressman Ellison joined us as the keynote speaker for the event. We also gave recognition to two outstanding new grassroots organizing groups Indivisible Illinois and the Coalition for a Better Illinois 6th. The groups received a 2017 Jan Schakowsky Community Organizing Award which was presented by none other than Congresswoman Schakowsky herself!
2017 will be known as the “Year of Resistance” across America as hundreds of thousands of new activists took to the streets and social media to protest the hate filled agenda of the Trump administration. Early on, Citizen Action developed relationships with many of the new groups and their leaders across Illinois. We helped organize several training sessions for these new leaders and provided support and guidance as we all struggled to make a difference in this new post-Obama era of politics.

Our biggest accomplishment is working with leaders to help form the Coalition for a Better Illinois 6th (CBIL6), bringing together 20 community activist-led groups to work in the 6th Congressional District. CBIL6 coordinated a massive summer and fall volunteer canvass which knocked on 10,000 doors to inform voters of their Congressman’s record on the issues that we care about – healthcare, immigration, the economy and jobs, education, environment, women’s issues, and gun safety. CBIL6 organized major townhalls with Cong. Jan Schakowsky (who adopted the District when Roskam refused to hold a townhall), as well as with Senators Duckworth and Durbin. The group also sponsored a Democratic candidate forum in partnership with Glenbard North High School Civics Club which was moderated by NBC anchor Mary Ann Ahern. CBIL6 is ready to roll in 2018 as the 6th Congressional District is one of the key districts that could move from Republican to Democratic in the upcoming election. Finally, we organized the first Community-Labor table in Illinois to bring together community activists and labor leaders to support our common agenda.

Helping to Build the Resistance

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Citizen Action/Illinois Fights for a Responsible Budget

Citizen Action/Illinois is a founding member of the Responsible Budget Coalition (RBC), a statewide coalition of more than 300 organizations including human services, labor, faith-based organizations, community groups and others. We fight for a fully-funded budget with enough revenues to fund education, health care, human services and public safety. These are the public investments that make our families stable and our communities strong.

In July 2017, the legislature with bipartisan support, overrode Governor Rauner’s budget veto of SB 9 with Chief Sponsor Hutchinson in the Senate and Will Davis in the House. This budget ended the nation’s longest state fiscal crisis that was created by Governor Rauner. Though this budget agreement raised $5 billion more dollars and provided some relief to our state universities and social service agencies, it still left the state with $15 billion in past due bills. Since the Illinois Revenue System does not provide enough money to pay for needed services, we must reform our tax structure to match the need.

In 2018, Citizen Action/Illinois will spearhead the legislative effort along with the Shriver Center on Poverty Law and other RBC allies in support of a Constitutional Amendment for a Fair Tax. The Fair Tax would permit lower tax rates for folks with lower incomes and higher tax rates for those with higher incomes. This reform would put more money in the pockets of working people and small businesses while ensuring that the wealthiest among us pay their fair share for needed public investments in our schools, our economy and our future.
Supporting a Woman’s Right to Choose

Citizen Action was supportive of a major legislative effort to ensure that the women of Illinois continue to have access to safe and affordable abortions. The passage of HB40 in Illinois means that the “trigger” language in the Illinois Abortion law of 1975, which stated that Illinois would revert back to criminalizing abortion if the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the decision in Roe v. Wade will no longer be in effect. The authority to outlaw or severely restrict abortion would return to the states, if the court were to overturn Roe. HB40 ensures that no matter what happens at the federal level, abortion will remain legal in Illinois. HB40 also protects the right of a woman to safe and legal abortion regardless of how much money she makes or where she lives.

Citizen Action/IL Celebrates Student Loan Bill of Rights

Citizen Action/Illinois was proud to be a part of Attorney General Lisa Madigan’s team of advocates that helped pass and then override Governor Rauner’s veto of SB 1351 with Chief Sponsors Senator Biss and Representative Guzzardi. The Illinois Student Loan Bill of Rights will protect young people from predatory and abusive student loan debt collection practices.

It creates a Student Loan Ombudsman in the Attorney General’s office to protect consumers and help them navigate a confusing and costly student loan system. This bill is particularly important now that President Trump and his Education Secretary have rolled back the student loan protections put in place by former President Obama.

It will prevent Illinois consumers from being steered into debt repayment plans that increase their debt instead of being told about affordable, less expensive payment options. It will also lessen the borrower’s access to the unfair, harmful and deceptive practices of the debt collection industry.

We look forward to working with the Attorney General’s Office to protect and grow the assets of these students who have studied hard and played by the rules, yet struggle to make ends meet. The Illinois Student Loan Bill of rights will move young people from debt devastation to asset accumulation.

Opposing the GOP Tax Scam

Cong. Roskam (as chair of the Subcommittee on Tax Reform in the House Ways and Means), wrote the GOP plan that will roast the poor, middle class, and seniors. A plan that will provide permanent and massive tax breaks to the super wealthy and big corporations. In partnership with the Coalition for a Better Illinois 6th Citizen Action led major actions in the 6th Congressional District to hold Roskam accountable for this devastating tax plan that could have a devastating impact on future generations. We also worked with community leaders to develop dozens of Letters to the Editor in opposition to the plan.

Citizen Action/IL Hails Passage of Life Insurance Reform Act

Citizen Action/Illinois celebrates the passage of HB 302, the Life Insurance Reform Act with chief sponsors, Representative Martwick and Senator Collins. Citizen Action/Illinois was appointed by Illinois Treasurer Mike Frerichs to serve on the Task Force on Unclaimed Life Insurance Policies. Last year, the Task Force recommended and passed the Unclaimed Life Insurance Benefits Act which required that life insurance companies use the Death Master File to pay beneficiaries death benefits in a timely manner and not use those monies to pad their profit margins.

This year, the Task Force recommended further reforms to close loopholes and further strengthen the Act. We were proud to be a part of the lobbying effort to pass and then override Governor Rauner’s veto of the Life Insurance Reform Act. It requires insurance companies to look back and cover older lapsed policies since 2000 to determine if the policyholder died when the policy was still in force and to pay the death benefit to the beneficiary. Before the passage of this bill, over $550 million have been returned to life insurance beneficiaries in Illinois. After listening to the many heartbreaking stories of consumers during the Task Force’s statewide hearings, it is heartening to know that death benefits will be finally released from the insurance companies’ assets to grieving Illinois families.