

Americans for Democratic Action



A Newsletter for Liberal Activists

ADA TODAY

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ADA WORKING FAMILIES WIN PROJECT AWARDED \$1.8 MILLION

Americans for Democratic Action was awarded a \$1.8 million grant to continue and expand the Working Families Win project through 2008. It is the single largest grant in ADA's history.

The funds, and others, will allow ADA to add approximately 60 paid organizers in 20 states, a new national field director and administrative support staff.

"This is what we've been working toward since November 8th, 2006," said Don Kusler, WFW Project Director. "Our efforts in the last election were so successful, we knew immediately we wanted to expand in 2008."

The goal of Working Families Win is to change the political behavior of key voters in small to mid-sized cities in battleground states by educating them about economic, "bread and butter" issues. Although the mid- to small-sized cities selected for WFW are of critical significance politically, as a group they are under-resourced with regard

to both issue and electoral organizing. Union density is lower than in major metropolitan areas, particularly where factory closings have caused membership in industrial unions to plummet. The non-profit community is weaker. The isolation of these cities from major urban areas creates logistical, communications, and social barriers to their inclusion in state level political activities.

Working in many of these communities over the past 4 years, however, ADA has found many Labor, faith, environmental, retiree, and other local leaders, including elected officials, who are eager to pursue political strategies to achieve social change. With ADA's support, these leaders have shifted the political debate in their communities and altered the political behavior of their neighbors for the better. Creating capacity by growing this leadership is crucial for longer-term movement building.

Working Families Win recognizes that building capacity in (continued on page 2)

ADA LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

As part of an ongoing campaign to improve ADA's communication and membership benefits, www.adaction.org was redesigned in April. The new site was given a fresh, clean look with new features and tools for ADA members.

"We made accessing information easily a priority at the new site," said David Card, ADA Communication Director. "Our members need to be able to find things quickly so they can be as up to date as possible when they contact their lawmakers."

New features such as an interactive survey, downloadable chapter kits and media

outreach guides were added to enhance tools which members can use for lobbying and education. The sections containing policy resolutions and ADA's voting records were reorganized to make them easier to navigate and search. Drop down menus were also added so users could easily find content not posted to the main www.adaction.org page.

"ADA produces so many reports and policy analyses but they often got buried on the old site," said Card. "The new drop down menus will make accessing this important work a snap."

Members can also renew

You Are Invited

**ADA's 2008
National Convention
and Banquet**

June 12-15, 2008 at the
National Education
Association

1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

their membership, join or contribute through a simplified and easy to locate donation section designed by ADA Development Director Joanna Zuercher. In addition, it is easier for members to locate and join their local chapters or start new chapters in their towns.

"ADA is always investing in new way for members to be more effective constituent-lobbyists," said Card.

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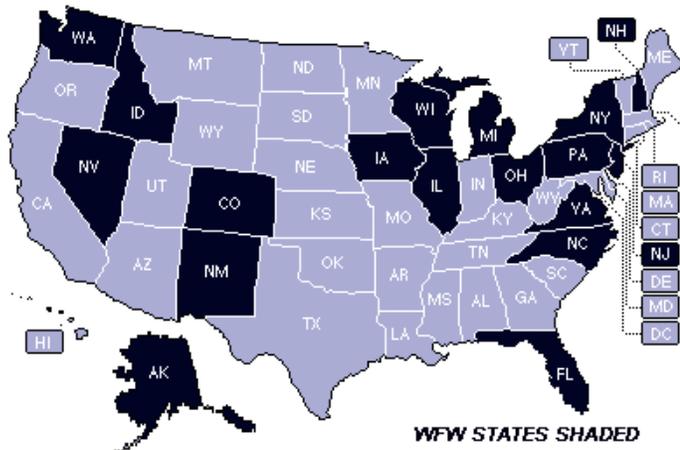
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WORKING FAMILIES WIN EXPANDS

these communities cannot be accomplished effectively with an investment in only the last few months or weeks before elections. WFW takes advantage of the complete election cycle by making a seamless transition from the education and issues organizing campaigns in off-years to a large scale voter persuasion effort in the

participants in, or linking them to, an appropriate struggle such as lobbying the city council for a living wage ordinance, a Wal-Mart campaign, or international worker solidarity activities. These volunteers then will be trained and mobilized to implement the voter persuasion component, beginning no later than August of 2008.

that would benefit working families. The effect was not limited to the newly elected either but also legislators with a long history of opposition to economic policies their constituents were now advocating after participating in WFW trainings and house parties. When communities are organized and working together, legislators listen and respond no matter their party affiliation.



Over the next few years, more factories will close, both blue and white collar jobs will be off-shored, and many workers will see health care, retirement, and other benefits cut. Wages for most workers are stagnant or even declining as inflation

Workers without a union hear very little in their day-to-day lives that helps them see their struggles in a broader context. The media repeats the message of the political and business elites: “To keep their jobs, workers must be willing to give up wages and benefits. Free trade will be good for everyone in the long run. Government cannot create jobs, only business can.” In many communities, the debate over the economy extends no further than which tax benefits and other concessions will be offered to attract an employer, often at great expense to workers and the community’s tax base.

months before an election.

WFW’s communications strategy starts with an understanding that our most effective messengers are community members who have credibility with their neighbors. Thus, the focus in each community is on recruiting leaders and volunteers from diverse constituencies who can be trained as effective communicators. Working Families Win staff organizers will conduct this recruitment and training.

continues to outpace the growth in hourly wages for non-supervisory employees. If interest rates rise significantly, working families with mortgages and credit card debt – already on shaky ground due to the burst of the housing bubble - will face an even more severe economic “squeeze.”

Working Families Win helps voters see that our nation has real choices about how we compete in a global economy, that current trade rules are not the result of irreversible economic “laws,” and that government policies can be rewritten to reverse the “race to the bottom” and make possible better wages and working conditions for workers everywhere. Likewise, the project raises awareness of alternative labor policies that will promote unions and a stronger position for workers in the marketplace; budget and tax policies that encourage more investment in job creation; and other new directions for the economy that will better serve working families.

The project is currently in the leadership recruitment phase and will progress or continue in each city to an outreach, education, and communications phase, utilizing various venues to disseminate information that helps audiences make the link between their economic circumstances and political decisions made at the local, state and federal levels. A media component using local voices will reach a broader public audience and help shift the community’s political debate toward “pocketbook” issues.

Unfortunately, we cannot assume that working class voters will have the information they need to connect their declining economic security with the political choices they face. Indeed much of the information they receive is filtered through campaigns, the media or corporations whose agenda is antithetical to their interests. While ADA and others made significant progress in 2004 through 2006 in reaching non-union households with clear economic information, we continue to face the challenge of effectively engaging working class voters to help them make the link between decisions being made in Washington and their state capitols, and their own economic well-being.

If workers come to believe there are policy choices that can bring about economic changes they desire, they are more likely to organize to demand those changes through a union, social movement, or the ballot box. In this way, Working Families Win contributes not just to the immediate electoral goals of the liberal and Labor movements, but broader movement-building for worker power.

Staff organizers aggressively recruit volunteers through the outreach and education phase, with interest sustained through an “action” component engaging

That is why expanding WFW this year to an additional 20 states is so crucial. Lawmakers from districts where WFW conducted training and education in the past supported overwhelmingly legislation

One immediate opportunity will be helping WFW participants leverage their power to insist that candidates offer a

WORKING FAMILIES WIN

real alternative on trade and advance an economic agenda that speaks more directly to their concerns.

Project participants can help shape the climate in which candidates are nominated by making outsourcing, good jobs, and the status of workers an integral part of the political discussion in their communities. They can educate candidates and party leaders, mobilize their constituencies at critical points in the debate, and create incentives for candidates to speak clearly and boldly. All of the WFW states (especially Iowa and New Hampshire where we have placed organizers since 2004) play an important role in the Presidential nomination process, but just as important is what WFW participants can accomplish by reaching candidates for the state legislature,

Governor, and Congress. The project has already begun hiring organizers in states such as New Mexico, Colorado, Virginia, and Michigan in addition to states where organizers continued working after the election in 2006 including Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Wisconsin.

Organizing workers to use their power to move the political debate is much more effective than waiting for political parties or candidates to address workers' issues. Once there are candidates who offer working class voters a real choice, WFW can influence elections through effective voter persuasion.

WFW will transition from community issue organizing to voter persuasion this year. The outreach, education, communication,

and action components should produce a substantial number of capable, trained volunteers in each community who can have a significant impact on their neighbors' voting behavior.

Voter persuasion will occur through multiple, personal contacts with voters over an extended period of four months (July - October). "Living room" and other small group discussions, one-on-one conversations, door-to-door, phone, and workplace contact will all be employed in developing the most effective model for outreach and persuasion.

"It is an exciting time for us all," said Kusler. "Working families stand to make a real difference this year and ADA is paving the way."

Registration Form: **ADA's 2008 National Convention and Banquet**

Please check your registration selection, fill out name and payment information, and mail form to ADA

À la carte

- Registration(excludes meals) \$55
- Policy Commission (circle one) FM/PG/SD/EEE
- Student/limited income registration \$30
- Friday Breakfast \$20
- Newsmaker Lunch \$40
- Saturday Breakfast \$20
- Working Families Win Lunch \$40
- Banquet Celebration \$160

Unable to attend?

Please sponsor a student with a contribution of \$ _____ .

Step Up to a Full Convention Registration

- Full Convention (No Banquet) \$130

Includes: Discounted Registration, Policy Commission, Friday Breakfast, Newsmaker Lunch, Saturday Breakfast, Working Families Win Lunch.

Indicate: Policy Commission (circle one) FM/PG/SD/EEE

Step Up to a Banquet and Full Convention Registration

- Full Convention and Banquet \$280

Includes: Discounted Registration, Discounted Banquet Celebration, Policy Commission, Friday Breakfast, Newsmaker Lunch, Saturday Breakfast, Working Families Win Lunch.

Indicate: Policy Commission (circle one) FM/PG/SD/EEE

Name _____ Credit Card # _____

Address _____ Exp Date _____

Method of Payment: Visa Mastercard

Check Enclosed (made out to "ADA") Signature _____

Total \$ _____

Mail completed form to: ADA; 1625 K Street, NW; Suite 210 Washington, DC 20006

You Are Invited

ADA's 2008 National Convention and Banquet

Thursday, June 12–Sunday, June 15, 2008 at the
National Education Association
in Washington, DC

1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

It's time to shake up Washington! Come to ADA's 2008 National Convention and Banquet and be prepared to take action.

Thursday will start off with lively debate as ADA members hammer out the liberal action agenda. That evening, ADA honors CWA Secretary-Treasurer Barbara Easterling and former Representative Patricia Schroeder.

Hold onto your seats because Friday, Saturday and Sunday are action-packed. Have breakfast with new Members of Congress, listen to Rep. Jim McDermott tell it like it is and get the 411 from experts. There will be plenty of time for questions, too!

ADA returns to its democratic roots each summer when members from all over the nation come to DC and determine liberal policy. Any registrant can join one of our four policy commissions: Foreign and Military (FM), Politics and Government (PG), Social and Domestic (SD) and Energy, Environment and Economics (EEE). Just mark which commission you want to join on your registration form (page 3) and bring your opinion. You may also register as an at-large delegate by leaving that space blank.

To register for the convention, simply fill out the form on page 3 and mail it to ADA, or, go online and register at www.adaction.org

Speakers

Rep Jim McDermott
Barbara Easterling
Patricia Schroeder
David Bonior
Donna Brazile

Topics

Iraq
The Supreme Court
The Economy
The Race for the White House
and more!

CONGRESS AS WATCHDOGS BY MARY VON EULER

According to civic classes, what Congress does is pass laws. Surely, if it's not passing many new laws, it must be AWOL. Like much that's taught in civics, that's far from the full story. Congress is also a watchdog – not easy with this secretive Administration. The Bush Administration and its partisan lawyers have concocted the notion of a “unitary executive,” with the corollary that no one has a right to interfere with or inquire about anything the Executive Branch does, a notion not widely espoused outside Bush-Cheney circles.

The 110th Congress, since 2006 controlled by Democrats, in significant part as a result of energetic electoral activities by ADA, has passed some important laws: raising the minimum wage, strengthening Congressional ethics standards, barring employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, raising fuel economy standards for cars and trucks, increasing funding for Pell Grants while decreasing subsidies for companies that provide student loans, and strengthening the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Many more bills were passed by the Democratic House of Representatives, but stymied in the Senate by Republican filibustering or the President's veto of such bills as expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

Savvy observers would point out that that wasn't the most important Congressional activity. As ADA has argued vehemently, for six years the Bush Administration carried on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with no Congressional oversight of billions of dollars worth of no-bid contracting, no oversight of the decision to go to war in Iraq or the torture of prisoners, care of wounded soldiers, the Vice President's clandestine development of our national energy policy, the politicization of the Department of Justice, the enforcement of product safety laws, the overruling of scientific staff findings in many departments, the mismanagement of housing people whose homes were ruined by Hurricane Katrina.

The Democratic 110th Congress, now a watchdog, instead of a lapdog, has labored to restore the Constitutional framework of checks and balances. By rejuvenating its oversight function, Congress was forced

to battle the most secretive Administration in living memory. Leading the way was Congressman Henry A. Waxman (D-CA), chair of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, aided by a skilled staff of investigators. He summed up the importance of oversight: “It's almost like having a policeman on the beat. If no one thinks they're being watched and being held accountable, they think they can get away with anything.” Most of the media reported little of the Committee's work, and the public might be excused if it thought the Committee was focused only on whether Roger Clemens used performance-enhancing drugs, a rare moment when all Committee members of both parties showed up for the TV cameras. Yet the Committee's web site is replete with examples of its investigations and reports.

House and Senate Judiciary Committees have questioned many actions of the Administration that may have infringed on Constitutional rights and violated the law of the land. They have delved into interrogation techniques used on prisoners in Iraq and at the US base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; the destruction of tapes of CIA “enhanced interrogation” (torture); and the Bush Administration's use of “signing statements” to disavow portions of laws passed by Congress and signed by the President. They have held hearings on implementation of the Bankruptcy Reform of 2005; the treatment of worker victims of Chapter 11 bankruptcies; the implementation of mandatory minimum sentencing rules; war profiteering and other contractor crimes overseas; immigration issues; minority vote suppression and other irregularities; criminal laws to protect Americans working for U.S. companies in Iraq; lack of federal oversight of state-run “boot camps” for juveniles; successful programs for rehabilitation of and release of prisoners; and the lack of accountability of foreign manufacturers for the safety of imported toys.

Congressional oversight has an honorable history and need not be tarred by unseemly partisanship. While Congressional oversight during the Civil War earned a poor reputation, that during World War II was stellar. Before

the U.S. was attacked at Pearl Harbor, as the country hurried to refurbish its military, Senator Harry S Truman (D-MO) traveled around the country, where he found cost-plus contracts had been awarded at military bases, with a handful of companies awarded a disproportionate share of the contracts. He, therefore, recommended the establishment of a Congressional Investigative Committee. Thanks to that Special Senate Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program,

commonly known as the Truman Committee, the gravy train didn't last. The Committee conducted hundreds of hearings and traveled thousands of miles, saving taxpayers millions of dollars in cost

overruns. The Committee's thorough work was almost universally respected as Truman put the public interest ahead of partisanship or special-interest pleading. A stalwart Democrat, Harry Truman led an investigation of contracting of the Democratic Roosevelt Administration, earning Truman the nomination as FDR's Vice President.

The American people would have been better served had the Republican-controlled Congress exercised its oversight responsibilities during the first six years of the Bush Administration. The people deserved a vigilant Congress at that time to question the conduct of the war in Afghanistan, the intelligence leading up to the war in Iraq, and the conduct of every government department and agency. Although much of the damage may be irreparable, the 110th Congress has served our people honorably in seeking to let sunlight shine on the conduct of the Executive Branch.

House Judiciary Committee chairman John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI) summed up the critical importance of searching Congressional oversight: “We will not allow the Administration to steamroll Congress. The Administration's extreme claims to be immune from the oversight process are at odds with our constitutional principles on which this country was founded.”

Mary Von Euler is a retired civil rights attorney and ADA board member. You can read her article in its entirety at ADA's new website, www.adaction.org.

“It's almost like having a policeman on the beat.”

ADA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: ALISON STERLING AND DAN MUNZ

New Leaders for Democratic Action (NLDA), ADA members under 30 years old, elected Dan Munz and Alison Sterling co-chairs. As co-chairs of NLDA, the two also will serve as officers on the ADA National Board.

Alison Sterling currently works for the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers as the Manager of Information Services. A lifelong resident of Virginia, she graduated from James Madison University with a degree in English in 2002. In addition to contributing her technical expertise to ADA's current website redesign, Ali is working on environmental policy and animal rights.

Dan Munz works as a Project Manager for the National Academy of Public Administration, a non-profit, independent think tank that provides management advice

to public sector entities. Dan specializes in the application of collaborative technologies – such as blogs and wikis – to government. A graduate of Yale University with a degree in political science, his political interests include electoral politics and foreign and national security policy. Dan now lives in Washington, DC with his wife.

The new co-chairs, elected March 13th, have assumed responsibility for guiding the group through the initial stages of reorganization. Because a revitalized youth movement and introduction of a new generation of ADA leaders is critical to the ongoing growth ADA is experiencing, NLDA is prioritizing membership expansion. A series of events directed toward welcoming new NLDA members including a major event at the 2008 National Convention are being planned.

While Washington, DC provides a plethora of young professionals and activists, the co-chairs are urging ADA to seek out similar people around the country who can help revitalize chapters and represent ADA's liberal values nationwide.

Other projects on which the new co-chairs are leading NLDA include the redesigning of ADA's website to appeal to a broader, more tech-savvy audience and matching new members' interests to ADA's policy commissions and committees. "It can be a challenge for people just starting out to have the confidence to jump right in with an organization like ADA with such a long history and with so many respected experts," said Ali Sterling. "The mission of NLDA is to grow a new generation of liberal leaders, so it's important for us to make the process easier."

Mark Your Calendar

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