



West Virginia Citizen Action Group

# Capital Eye

Volume 9, Number 3; September 2016

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## USAction Merger Builds Power for Justice New Organization has 30 State Affiliates, 600 Organizers, 1 Million Supporters

by: Gary Zuckett

In July we sent two delegates, myself and a supporter, to attend the first national assembly of our new, combined national affiliate, People’s Action. This is the new face of four merged national progressive organizations including USAction which we joined in 2003. The other groups who combined forces are: National People’s Action, Alliance for a Just Society, and Campaign for America’s Future. Your voice is now amplified across our nation with affiliates in 30 states, 600 organizers, and a combined membership of one million!

This assembly was one of the most diverse conferences I have attended. There were inner-city groups from Detroit, Chicago, and Buffalo; Native American tribal organizations; millennials; and seniors. We voted on the issues that we will be working on together over the next several years, including a policy to fully oppose the election of Donald Trump.

At the end of September, we joined their climate justice campaign to protest the *West Virginia v. EPA* federal court challenge of the Clean Power Plan led by our state Attorney General Patrick Morrisey. Check our social media for pictures and quotes from the event.

Whatever the outcome in November, this new combined organization is even more ready and able to fight for social, environmental, and economic justice.

**Be sure to renew your membership at [wvcag.org](http://wvcag.org) to be a part of the new People’s Action!**

## Connect with Us



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# Thousands Gather for Democracy Awakening

## Take Action on Voting Rights, Fair Elections

With your support, WV CAG has been a leader in the state level efforts to increase accountability and transparency in elections for more than 20 years. Working in coalition with our allies and partners, WV CAG works to implement changes like public financing of elections and robust disclosure of political spending that can help shift the balance of power in our political process from special interests to the public interest.

With your help, we've also fought against unnecessary and restrictive voting laws, that would suppress the votes of people of color, seniors, and low income West Virginians.

This spring we took our fight to Washington, DC where we were joined other West Virginians and thousands of people from around the country for a rally and march to demand a democracy that works for all of us – where our votes are not denied and money doesn't buy access and power. The Democracy Awakening gathering was supported by more than 200 organizations fighting for change on many fronts – for action on climate change, racial justice, workers' rights and fair pay, safe food and water, health care, peace, immigration reform, and improvements in education.

However, what brought this diverse coalition of groups together is the fight to ensure that every voice is heard and every vote counts equally. An array of barriers – from restrictive voting laws to a campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors and corporations to influence the outcome of our elections and the policy-making process – are shutting everyday Americans out of the political process.

**We need your help in the fight to break down these barriers.** Tell Congress to pass a reform agenda that creates a democracy that works for all of us, and that includes the following:

**The Voting Rights Advancement Act** (H.R. 2867, S. 1659) to restore the protections against voting discrimination that were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in its *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. This bill would make additional, critical updates to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

**The Democracy For All Amendment** (H.J.Res. 22, S.J.Res. 5) is a constitutional amendment that would overturn U.S. Supreme Court decisions like *Citizens United* and allow elected representatives to set common sense limits on money in elections.

**The Government By the People Act/Fair Elections Now Act** (H.R. 20 and S. 1538), to empower small donors. This bill will encourage and amplify small contributions from everyday Americans by providing qualified candidates for Congress with grants, matching funds, and vouchers from a Fair Elections Fund. This would provide an alternative to campaigns that generally rely on contributions from large donors and special interests.

While we were in DC, we met with staff for all but one of our members of our congressional delegation. Unfortunately, Senator Manchin is the only representative to cosponsor any of these measures. We commend Senator Manchin for his support of the Democracy for All Amendment.

We need you to speak up and urge Senator Manchin to cosponsor the Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Fair Elections Now Act. **Sign the petition today urging Senator Manchin to support these democracy reforms:** [bit.ly/tsm2tbod](https://bit.ly/tsm2tbod).



Above: Thousands gather in DC for Democracy Awakening.

Below: WV CAG staffers Gary Zuckett & Ciera Pennington, alongside summer intern Matt Massie, deliver petition signatures to Senator Manchin's state director demanding he support the VRAA.



# Medicaid Needs Your Support and Protection

by: *Renate Pore*

For the past year, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care (WVAHC) has been organizing a Medicaid Coalition to bring all stakeholders to the table to protect and preserve Medicaid and the Medicaid expansion.

In 2015, more than 200,000 West Virginians received health care through the Medicaid expansion and an additional 400,000 were enrolled in traditional Medicaid.

West Virginia's Medicaid budget is about \$4 billion per year with less than 25% coming from state funds. Medicaid spending in West Virginia has important implications for the healthcare industry, employment and economic development.

With one in three West Virginians dependent upon Medicaid, we need to create a strong voice to make sure that Medicaid is adequately funded.

We are looking for you to join us! To get on the mailing list for more information and action alerts on Medicaid, email your contact information and organizational affiliation to me at [renatepore@gmail.com](mailto:renatepore@gmail.com).

**If you are a Medicaid beneficiary, we need you to share your story about how Medicaid has helped you or your family; contact me.** Numbers are important, but stories are much more effective.

For more information, visit [bit.ly/WVAHC\\_BTMC](http://bit.ly/WVAHC_BTMC).

**Join us for First Friday  
Progressive Happy Hour!**

October 7th | 5-8 pm  
WV CAG Office | 1500 Dixie St.

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## Expensive Power Plant Bad for West Virginians Make FirstEnergy Shop Around for a Good Deal

by: *Emmett Pepper*

FirstEnergy wants West Virginians to bail out its Ohio subsidiary again. FirstEnergy is the parent company of Mon Power and Potomac Edison, the electric utilities for roughly the northeastern half of the state. FirstEnergy is also the parent of Allegheny Energy Supply, an Ohio-based subsidiary. Because it falls under Ohio's deregulated utility market, Allegheny's power plants have to sell on the open market and compete with other power plants. If Allegheny is not selling at a cheap rate, then it will not sell its power. FirstEnergy wants to force West Virginia ratepayers to bail out an Allegheny-owned power plant, the Pleasants Power Station, located upriver from Parkersburg near Willow Island, West Virginia. This would be good for FirstEnergy's stockholders, but bad for West Virginia rate payers.

Forcing Mon Power and Potomac Edison customers to pay the high price of the Pleasants Power Station will cause rates to go up in the short-term and keep going up in the long-term. With natural gas and renewable energy getting more cost-effective, coal plants are not

the cheap and accessible power they once were. The effect is that the coal plants cannot compete in the current electricity market. FirstEnergy is finding new ways to justify putting coal plants into in a regulated market like West Virginia. In a regulated market, power plants do not have to compete and all their costs are passed along to consumers.

FirstEnergy uses twisted logic to justify the Pleasants sale. They say they need more power. FirstEnergy tried this before, for the Harrison plant, another expensive coal plant it did not need. In settling the case that allowed FirstEnergy to buy Harrison, it agreed to use a competitive process for any future power needs. The Harrison agreement described when exactly FirstEnergy would need more power. Now FirstEnergy says it needs more power, even though that condition in the Harrison settlement has not been triggered. The trigger was supposed to happen when the regional market where Mon Power participates (called "PJM") shows a need for more demand. The regional market calculates that need by looking at the summer peak demand, but in West Virginia we have a higher peak in the winter. FirstEnergy ignores the fact that the regional market controls their need for demand. FirstEnergy's lawyers say that it should buy this power plant because someday it might need more power in the winter.

You can help WV CAG and Energy Efficient West

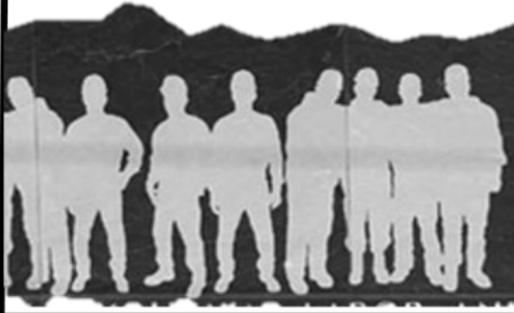
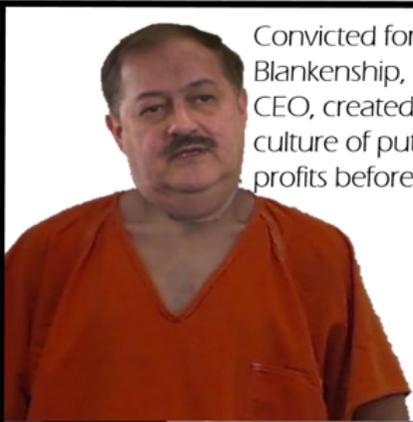
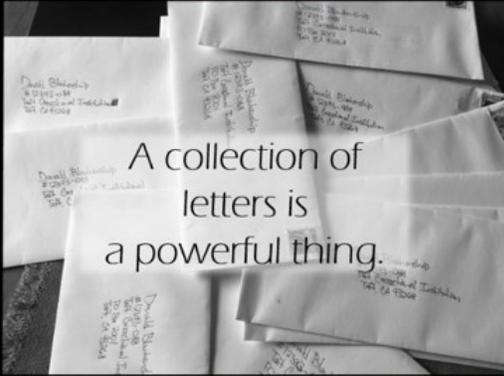
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Virginia (EEWV) fight these rate increases. In the coming months, EEWV will be monitoring the goings-on at the Public Service Commission. We will give you the information you need to push for change. We are already a party in one case to require FirstEnergy to use

a competitive process for any new generation and we will get involved with any other related cases.

Join the EEWV email list by clicking on the left-hand side of [eevw.org](http://eevw.org).

<p>29 miners died in the Upper Big Branch a Massey Energy mine on April 5, 2010</p> 	 <p>Convicted for 1 year, Blankenship, then CEO, created a culture of putting profits before people</p>	<p>Blankenship's castle</p>  <p>Can justice exist when there's such inequality?</p>
<p>Would you write a letter?</p> <p>I don't know what to say.</p>  <p>Tell Blankenship how you feel. Your thoughts matter.</p>	 <p>A collection of letters is a powerful thing.</p>	<p>Write a letter. Join a community. Remember the miners.</p> 
 <p><b>S. 1145</b></p> <p>The letters can change laws. They can change votes.</p>	<p>Come to West Virginia and we'll show you how to live... how to treat people. We're open for business.</p> <p>—Senator Manchin</p>  <p>The letters can change businesses.</p>	<p>Help us by Making One Year Count</p> <p>Write a letter to Don Blankenship.</p> <p>Send a letter to: <a href="mailto:makingoneyearcount@gmail.com">makingoneyearcount@gmail.com</a></p> <p>Like us at: <a href="https://facebook.com/makingoneyearcount">facebook.com/makingoneyearcount</a></p> <p>157 of 365 letters written</p> <p>The letters can change hearts.</p>

## Making One Year Count

WV CAG is proud to support Making One Year Count, the letter-writing campaign to Don Blankenship. We are continually inspired by the work and dedication of community members working to create safer workplaces and empower their fellow citizens. Staff have pledged to write letters before September ends for an effort they are proud to be a part of. We hope you will join us in remembering the miners and thinking of how you can shape the future of West Virginia!

# Special Interests, Secret Money Win in Supreme Court Takeover

## More Disclosure of Political Spending Needed

by: Julie Archer

In May, wealthy special interests groups pulled off another victory in the West Virginia Supreme Court race. Largely anonymous groups spent more than \$2 million supporting Beth Walker's candidacy, duplicating the feat Don Blankenship pulled off 12 years ago.

In 2004, Blankenship spent more than \$3 million to help Brent Benjamin win this very seat. Justice Benjamin was twice the deciding vote to overturn a \$50 million judgment against Blankenship. The U.S. Supreme Court found that Benjamin should have recused himself from the case because Blankenship's support posed a risk of bias.

This time around there is no public knowledge of what donors and what companies were behind some of these outside efforts to elevate Beth Walker onto the court. After recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions like Citizens United, there are even more ways for monied interests to influence elections, but no disclosure is required. West Virginians will never know if Walker is deciding a case on its merits or returning the favor of her campaign supporters.

There is a reason that the West Virginia legislature has twice passed legislation to make our courts less partisan and less susceptible to outside influence: to prevent bias from skewing justice. Just last year, our legislature took the step to make all judicial elections nonpartisan, removing party identification. In 2010, the legislature established a judicial public financing system after the Blankenship Supreme Court case. The public financing system was designed so that Supreme Court candidates would not have to rely on support from lawyers and special interest contributors who frequently have cases before the court and could focus more on engaging everyday voters.

Walker's victory puts West Virginia's Supreme Court elections at risk of returning to a time before the public financing system was established - when court seats are only available to those who have the backing of secret money groups, keeping good candidates from participating.

It also highlights the need to strengthen our disclosure laws to shine light on all groups that spend money to influence West Virginia's elections. Most money

spent by third-parties in the Supreme Court race came from undisclosed sources. We shouldn't allow this lowly form of campaign cowardice to continue.

**Will you help us make disclosure of political spending a top issue in the 2016 election?**

Public financing and campaign spending transparency are important democratic safeguards. The corporate elite, millionaires, and billionaires should not get away with dictating what happens in our state by giving secret money groups six figure checks for mud-slinging TV and other ads. Political donors should not have more access to and influence over our government.

**Here are three things you can do to help us raise awareness about the need for more robust disclosure of political spending this election:**

1. **Ask candidates:** "Do you support legislation that would require secret money groups to disclose their donors and spending when they engage in political activity that mentions a candidate and/or is intended to influence an election?"
2. **Write a letter to the editor.** We can provide facts on outside spending in recent elections and examples to help you connect money in politics to other issues you care about.
3. **Follow us on Twitter and "like" us on Facebook:** @WVCAG, @WVCleanElection. Share our tweets and posts...or create your own. (Bonus points for creating original memes we can use in our campaign. We can send you highlights from our soon to be released report to serve as inspiration.)

You deserve to know which politicians on the ballot in November will do their best for the state of West Virginia and for each of us, not just their campaign contributors. Full disclosure of campaign cash is an important step to ensuring our state remains in the power of the people. All West Virginians have a right to know exactly where the money is coming from, no matter who they are voting for.

**Join us October 11th for  
Continuing the Revolution  
Conference Call #2!**

Oct. 11 | 8-9 pm  
RSVP: [bit.ly/CTRcc2](http://bit.ly/CTRcc2)

# Your Free Energy Audit Helps Non-Profits

by: *Andy White*

In 2014, Energy Efficient West Virginia (EEWV) reached a settlement with American Electric Power (AEP) to increase spending on energy efficiency measures. One part of that initiative was for AEP to pilot a new competition for non-profits. The goal of this program is to compel more AEP customers to get a FREE Home Energy Assessment and help West Virginia non-profits become more energy efficient.

This program helps nonprofits by giving them good reasons to ask their members and friends to get energy assessments; for each energy assessment completed under their name, that organization will receive a \$10

credit for energy efficient upgrades. The most exciting part is that the nonprofit with the most assessments over 100 will win \$10,000 in energy efficient upgrade credits!

Starting the summer of 2015, EEWV began the job of locating and educating non-profits from key locations in the state. We held a series of meetings in Charleston, Huntington, Wheeling, and Beckley. After months of work and communication between the non-profits, EEWV, and AEP, we identified and signed up nine non-profits for this pilot program!

We are nearing the final stages of the program, which is ending on October 31, 2016. We will keep you updated with the results in future newsletters. If you have questions, please email me at [andy@eewv.org](mailto:andy@eewv.org).

**To sign-up for your free energy audit, visit [bit.ly/FreeEA](http://bit.ly/FreeEA).**

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## Your Voice, Your Vote

by: *Ciera Pennington*

This is an important election year. As such, it's imperative for you to be involved! That can look different for everyone and there are a lot of ways to be involved. WV CAG has been working the past several months to help people like you figure out how you can be involved in this election, and we will continue to do so until November 8th.

### Voter Registration

In August, we participated in two of West Virginia University's service-learning days. With the help of 32 students (mostly freshmen!), we were able to register 94 voters on campus and in the community! (Shout out to the WVU Center for Service and Learning for putting the service-learning days together and letting us be a part of them.)



WV CAG Field Director Ciera Pennington trains WVU students on voter registration; students registered 94 voters over two days.

Voter registration will be a continuous activity from now until October 18th (the deadline to register to vote in the November 8th election). You can help give regular West Virginians a voice by getting involved with these efforts. If you are interested, please contact me at [ciera@wvcag.org](mailto:ciera@wvcag.org).

### Voter Education

Our wonderful summer intern, Matthew Massie, helped us create a scorecard for voter education purposes. To see more on this, read Matt's article on page 7. During voter registration efforts, we are providing a link to local versions of this scorecard to help voters educate themselves.

We continuously educate folks on when, where, and how to vote. Thanks to the American Civil Liberties Union of WV, we now have an entire brochure on West Virginia voting rights! You can arm yourself with any of these voter education materials for your meetings, events, voter registration drives, etc. Just contact me at [ciera@wvcag.org](mailto:ciera@wvcag.org).

### Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV)

It is important to get people registered and educated, but the most important component is actually getting them to the polls. This summer we participated in a series of Civic Engagement Workshops hosted by the Our Children, Our Future campaign across the state. We trained approximately 125 activists and community members like you on how to be involved in the election in a non-partisan way.

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I facilitated a training at these workshops on how to do GOTV phone banking and canvassing. As a result, we now have approximately 35 new people who have the basic skills to facilitate a GOTV phone bank and/or canvass this fall. I will continue these conversations and trainings until election day. If you are interested in receiving a training on GOTV, email me at [ciera@wvcag.org](mailto:ciera@wvcag.org). I'm happy to help you more effectively turn out voters!

Additionally, WV CAG will be phone banking and canvassing to help turn voters out to the polls. If you can volunteer a few hours (or a few days!) to call community members or knock on doors, shoot me an email at [ciera@wvcag.org](mailto:ciera@wvcag.org). The more hours you can give, the more voters we can get to the polls!

**Register to vote at**  
[govotewv.com](http://govotewv.com).



West Virginia Citizen Action Group

We need your support, we can't do it without you! Please renew your membership or send a donation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please select your donation amount:

\$25     \$50     \$100     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Please renew my membership.

Return this form along with your check to:

West Virginia Citizen Action Group  
1500 Dixie St., Charleston, WV 25311

You can also donate online: [www.wvcag.org](http://www.wvcag.org)

## Where Does Your Legislator Stand?

by: *Matthew Massie*

Republican control of the state legislature is an ongoing disaster. It will come as no surprise to WV CAG members that the 2014 Republican majority has lived up to its promises and enacted one of the most regressive legislative agendas in West Virginia history. In our anger at the state legislature's actions, however, it's easy to lose track of which legislators actually stood up to leadership instead of toeing the line. For that, WV CAG is here to help.

During my internship here at WV CAG, one of my main projects has been compiling a progressive scorecard — a way for regular people who don't have the time to follow state politics on a daily basis to know which of their senators and delegates have been standing up for working families over these past two years.

The scorecard tracks legislators' votes on more than a dozen key issues for progressive West Virginians. These issues include right-to-work, water protections, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, concealed carry, and many more. It scores each member on whether they voted correctly or incorrectly on an issue and turns the rate at which they voted correctly into a percentage score. Perfect legislators scored 100 percent, while the worst of the worst scored zero percent.

We will be releasing this scorecard soon, well in time for the November elections. When you visit the polls, you will want to be sure that the people you vote for have taken a stand in support of workers, women, the environment, and the LGBTQ community against this legislature's onslaught of regressive policies. WV CAG wants to help you get the information you need to make those decisions.

**To be notified of the scorecard's release, be sure to sign-up for our action alerts at [bit.ly/WVCAG\\_AA](http://bit.ly/WVCAG_AA), "like" us on Facebook, and follow us on Twitter.**

### WV Environmental Council & WV Highlands Conservancy: 2016 Fall Conference

Oct. 21-23 | Camp Virgil Tate

Schedule: [bit.ly/Fall\\_Conf16](http://bit.ly/Fall_Conf16)

RSVP: [bit.ly/FallConf16](http://bit.ly/FallConf16)

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**WV CAG has been working for better public policy, citizens' rights, a cleaner environment, and a stronger democracy since 1974.** Our staff and members work to increase the voice of the average citizen in public affairs through research, education, lobbying, organizing, and coalition building.

**Will you help WV CAG fight for a fairer state?** Together we can organize for a better future for all by demanding economic, social, and environmental justice. **Together, we can make West Virginia a better place to live and thrive.**

## 2016 WV Election Dates & Info

- **10/18:** Voter Registration Deadline
  - **10/26-11/5:** Early Vote
  - **11/8:** Election Day
- **Find your polling place** at [bit.ly/FindMyPollingLocation](http://bit.ly/FindMyPollingLocation).
  - What are **your voting rights**? Learn here: [bit.ly/MyVotingRightsWV](http://bit.ly/MyVotingRightsWV).
  - Other **questions about voting**? Visit [bit.ly/WVSOS\\_elections](http://bit.ly/WVSOS_elections).
- Stay tuned to our social media & website for a **voter guide!**