



Capital Eye

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CAG 2.0: Building Power by Building Our Base

by Savanna Lyons

This year's legislative session proved once again that people power really can win on issues like education, healthcare and public safety. But it also left me more certain than ever that it's time to tip the political scales so that we can start setting the political agenda, instead of fighting back bad ideas.

Building power is not just about legislative wins. It's also about building influence in the electoral process -- making sure our top issues, like Healthcare for All, clean drinking water and campaign finance reform, play a key role in candidates' campaigns and in voters' decisions. It's about holding legislators accountable during election season. It means bringing lots of people into our movement, not only through activism and citizen lobbying, but also by building a volunteer infrastructure that helps us reach out to thousands of our neighbors about their voting decisions.

That's why I came on board as CAG's Co-Director in January -- to work with Gary on this exciting new chapter of electoral power-building for Citizen Action, and to help our partner grassroots groups around the state to join in that work.

In 2019, **base building** is a big focus for WV Citizen Action. Base building means weaving intentional volunteer recruitment and retention into everything we do, so that whenever we talk to people, we are opening a door for them to become

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2019 Legislative Recap: The Good, The Bad & The Ugly

by Gary Zuckett

In the 2019 legislative session, lawmakers passed 295 bills of the 1,823 introduced during this year's regular session. The Governor signed 264 bills into law, let one become law without his signature and vetoed 30. We measure our success this session not only by the good bills that passed, but also by the many bad bills that we helped stop from becoming law, often with help from constituents like you!

BAD BILL DEFEATED: the "ominous" omnibus education bill. Defeating this bill was one of the biggest successes this year. It would have legalized charter schools, education savings accounts, an anti-union "paycheck protection" provision that would require education union members to sign off annually on dues, and other measures.

For a second year in a row, teachers and service personnel went on strike and rallied under the Capitol dome to defeat the education omnibus. CAG got constituents to make phone calls, lobbied lawmakers, commissioned Facebook video ads that reached over 15,000 people, and publicized rallies and events with partners including Our Children, Our Future. We also helped our local partner, Rise Up WV, to raise and distribute over \$21,000 in strike fund assistance to workers impacted by the strike.

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Our local affiliate, Rise Up WV, helped raise and distribute over \$21,000 to help Putnam County school service personnel who held picket lines when their county Superintendent kept schools open during the strike. Several CAG staff and board members pitched in on this effort. CAG Board member Dan Taylor is shown above with 170 checks ready to mail to workers.

Legislative Recap (continued from page 1)

Finally, in a dramatic moment as teachers packed into the Capitol, the House voted to kill the bill.

Unfortunately, legislative leaders wasted no time in setting up round two. Immediately after the end of regular session, the legislature entered a special session called by the Governor, which will allow them to reconvene to discuss education bills this spring and summer. It's expected to be an instant replay of the fight to privatize our schools. Stay tuned for more action alerts.

BAD BILL DEFEATED: Campus Carry

(HB 2519). This bill would have made WV the 12th state to allow individuals to carry guns on college campuses. Pundits seemed sure that it would pass. But CAG worked with a broad group of students, educators and activists to share info on strategy, helping them maneuver the legislative process. We raised up the issue by live streaming rallies and interviews with students and faculty on Facebook, and as a college dad, I testified at the public hearing and my remarks were quoted in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*.

After passing the House with lots of contentious floor debate, the bill died a quiet death in Senate Judiciary when two brave Republicans joined all the Democrats to vote it down. We're grateful for the efforts of energized college students, professors, administrators, and police and security officers, the youth leadership efforts of Our Children, Our Future, and the youth who led protest events at campuses all over the state to help win on this issue. It was a good reminder of the power of our young folks and the need to invest in them!

BAD BILL DEFEATED: Medicaid Work

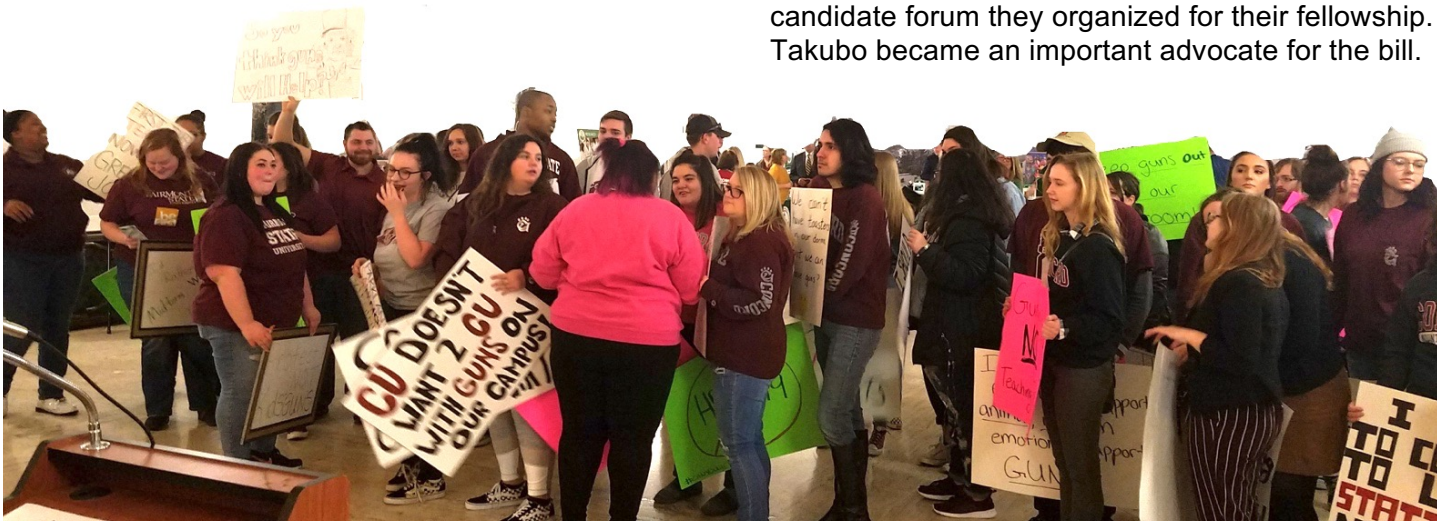
Requirements (HB 3136). This ALEC bill could have taken away healthcare from tens of thousands of people who are unemployed or work unpredictable schedules, by forcing them to prove that they work 20 hours a week in order to keep their Medicaid benefits. CAG joined a statewide coalition of organizations like American Friends Service Committee of WV and West Virginians for Affordable Healthcare to generate hundreds of calls that helped defeat the bill. If we want folks to get back to work, we should support them with training, transportation, and childcare, not take away life-supporting health care from those who are struggling the most to get to work.

GOOD BILL PASSED: Medicaid/CHIP Expansion for Pregnancies (SB 546).

Pregnant people often fall through the cracks of our fractured health care system, but this bill will enable WV to cover 900 more births per year under Medicaid. CAG board member Sally Roberts played a key role in shepherding this huge victory, receiving a bipartisan round of applause from the House Finance Committee for her dogged volunteer work on the bill. The bill also extends coverage to 60-days post-partum, but more work needs done to help parents and babies stay healthy throughout their lives. Medicare for All, anyone?

GOOD BILL PASSED: Ending the lifetime ban on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for people with drug felonies (HB 2459).

WV will become the 48th state to take this important step to reduce recidivism and help formerly incarcerated people get on back their feet. We are proud of our Youth Organizing Fellows from last year, A-Nya Badger and Katelyn Damron, who first brought this issue to the attention of Senate Majority Leader Tom Takubo during a candidate forum they organized for their fellowship. Takubo became an important advocate for the bill.



THE FIGHT CONTINUES: Privatization of foster care. One of the biggest defeats of 2019 was the passage of HB 2010, which turns most aspects of our state's foster care system over to a for-profit managed care organization (MCO). No other state has wrapped medical, social services and mental health care into one big contract and farmed it out to the lowest bidder. Social workers, foster parents, and constituents made heartfelt pleas to the legislature not to pass this bill into law, and CAG worked with volunteer leader Betty Rivard to send over 100 constituent letters to Governor Justice urging his veto. Though the bill did go through, the effort to defeat it was a great show of citizen activism. Accountability for the DHHR and oversight of its MCO contractor will be crucial as the bill is implemented.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES: Severance Tax Cuts and more. As if coal barons aren't making enough money, the legislature gave them a \$60 million/year break in the coal severance tax. Our governor, a coal baron himself, vetoed a \$53 million appropriations bill for Medicaid, saying the state had better things to do with its money. Instead, he signed off on the severance tax *and* a new super tax credit that will allow his companies and other coal operators to deduct new equipment purchases from their reduced severance taxes. Just another reminder of the need to have representatives that care about most West Virginians, not the elite few!

Although this was a challenging legislative session for us, one of the brightest spots has been *you* - our citizen activists who came to the Capitol, sent letters and made phone calls in response to critical bills, and supported our work with your memberships and donations. For all of that, we say *thank you!*

On election day, **this** shouldn't matter more than your vote. 



WV CITIZENS ***
***for CLEAN ELECTIONS

Time to Stop Politicians From Selling Out Our Elections

by Julie Archer & Savanna Lyons

Few West Virginians feel good about the sway that big-money interests have on our elected leaders. But this month Governor Justice signed a bill, SB 622, that would allow big donors to put even more money into our elections.

SB 622 greatly increases the amount an individual can give to candidates, political action committees and political parties. Most West Virginians can't afford to give \$1,000 to their favorite candidates, let alone the new, nearly tripled upper limit of \$2,800. Although the bill creates an online filing system that would make PAC and other campaign activities easier to look up, it does nothing to lessen the influence of or bring transparency to the dark money spent by super PACs and outside groups.

Legislators had the chance to pass an amendment to shine daylight on dark money by making it traceable back to original donors. But, in a party line vote in the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, the same legislators who said SB 622 is so great for transparency voted down that amendment. Some legislators, like Senator Craig Blair (R- Berkeley), claim that mandatory disclosure would go against the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling, which stated that campaign spending is speech protected by the First Amendment. But while speaking on Talkline with Hoppy Kercheval in March, I (Julie) debunked this, explaining that the Court held disclosure to be constitutional in an 8-1 decision. There's no excuse for legislators who stand in the way of transparency.

CAG and many of our coalition partners in WV Citizens for Clean Elections (WVCCE) joined others around the state in asking Governor Justice to veto SB 622 and support a stronger transparency bill. We ran Facebook ads that reached over 40,000 constituents, sent out calls to action and helped local groups to write op-eds. Unfortunately, we didn't win this time -- but the fight goes on. Join WV Citizens for Clean Elections as we continue fighting for a democracy that works for everyone, and to give the people of West Virginia a real voice in our government through the Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption Platform. **To get involved, visit wvoter-owned.org or e-mail julie@wvcag.org.**



Show CAG Some Springtime Love at the Spring Fling on May 16

by Ciera Pennington

One of West Virginia's biggest strengths is its people. This beautiful state is full of passionate folks doing work to keep our people happy, healthy, and successful. That's one reason why, each year, we host an annual awards dinner and fundraiser.

In the past, we've honored people like the late Paul Nyden, long-time Charleston Gazette investigative reporter, and powerhouse citizen activist Betty Rivard. We're looking forward to announcing our awardees for 2019.

Our Spring Fling also raises funds to help WV Citizen Action staff, members and supporters throughout the state continue to fight for clean water, living wages, transparency in elections, and more. As you read in our new Co-Executive Director's article on Page 1, WV Citizen Action is expanding our grassroots organizing presence all over the state, which means more staff and more work to do. Our goal at this year's Spring Fling is to raise \$25,000. Every penny will help our staff and partners build power and create change throughout the Mountain State!

The Spring Fling: Annual Awards Dinner and Fundraiser will take place on Thursday, May 16th from 6-9pm at the Charleston Women's Club.

Tickets will be \$50/person, with a \$25 reduced rate for students, seniors, and low-income individuals, as needed. You can buy tickets or register as a sponsor by clipping out and mailing us the form on

the back page of this newsletter. Or you can buy online tickets, which will go live soon -- visit our Facebook event at bit.ly/wvcagspringfling and click "going" to get updates. We hope to see you there!

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leaders in our movement. Door-to-door canvassing, house parties, and rallies or town hall events are just a few of the "first steps" that grassroots organizations use to reach out in communities and build their base. After that, the next step is to follow up and build a relationship with everyone we talk to who aligns with us, and to find ways to help them build their skills while taking on volunteer and leadership roles.

Local grassroots organizations around West Virginia have told us that base building and volunteer recruitment are among their biggest challenges. Even if they're constantly running campaigns and talking to community members, their organizations still have the same small core of leaders. I know that's been a challenge for Rise Up WV, the local group I volunteer with in Charleston, even though it's held many successful actions and helped elect 5 progressive candidates in 2019.

So, this year we'll be rolling out a new initiative, which we're calling the Citizen Action Network, to help local grassroots organizations to do base building and engage thousands of voters. We'll offer tools for local organizations to canvass in their communities, track each conversation in a database, follow up with people who were supportive, have hold one-on-one conversations to build deep relationships with potential volunteers. We'll also offer financial help and staffing. With these tools, we and our local partners will not only be ready to rally the public and win electoral campaigns, but also to grow our numbers and our power.

Do you know a local citizen-led organization that might want to join with us on this effort? Have them contact me, Savanna Lyons, at savanna@wvcag.org.

4 things

**you can do today
to help us grow
and build power this year!**

1. **Fill out and mail the enclosed CAG Member Survey** to help us plan our work this year and include you in the action!
2. **Write an op-ed against legislators who voted for SB 622**, the bill that raised campaign contribution limits – contact Julie at julie@wvcag.org for details.
3. **Join our Healthcare Campaign** – call our office or contact Gary at garyz@wvcag.org or (304) 346-5891 for details.
4. **Donate to support our new voter outreach initiative & electoral work** around the state – use enclosed envelope or visit www.wvcag.org and click “Donate”

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Health Care Voters Unite

by Gary Zuckett

Around 30 million of us in this nation are still without health coverage. With candidates already lining up for the 2020 elections in state and for federal seats, a new coalition is forming to make sure that universal health coverage is an election issue. Our first organizing meeting was cohosted by WV for Affordable Health Care; WV Center on Budget & Policy; WV Healthy Kids & Families Coalition; Rise UP WV; and WV Working Families Party.

The ACA is important, but there is still far to go. We must elect policymakers committed to a health care system that covers everyone. We need YOUR help to host town halls, set up visits with state and federal candidates, write letters to the editors of local papers and more. To join the Health Care for All WV coalition, contact me (Gary Zuckett) at garyz@wvcag.org or (304) 346-5891.



During the legislative session, WV Citizens for Clean Elections staff and volunteers had fun promoting the Pro-Democracy Anti-Corruption Platform at Kids and Families Day hosted by the Our Children, Our Future campaign. We talked about the need to keep money out of politics, and invited people to stamp their money with messages like “Stamp Money Out of Politics,” “Not to Be Used to Buy Elections,” and “Stop the Attack on Voting Rights.”

WV Citizen Action
1500 Dixie Street
Charleston, WV 25311



WV CAG/WV CAEF Fundraiser Ticket & Sponsorship Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____

_____ tickets X \$50/person --OR-- \$25/student or low income) = \$ _____

Or become a sponsor and have your or your organization's name listed in the program

_____ \$150 ~ Friend ~ includes 1 complimentary tickets and listing in program

_____ \$250 ~ Supporter ~ includes 2 complimentary tickets and listing in program

_____ \$500 ~ Advocate ~ includes 4 complimentary tickets and listing in program

_____ \$1,000 ~ Champion ~ includes 8 complimentary tickets and listing in program

_____ \$5,000 ~ Leader ~ includes 12 complimentary tickets and full page in program

Please checks payable to WV Citizen Action Group (WV-CAG) (not tax deductible) or

WV Citizen Action Education Fund (WV-CAEF) (tax deductible) or donate via www.wvcag.org/awards.