



## Capital Eye

Volume 13, Number 11 – Winter 2020

### Goodbye 2020!

*by Gary Zuckett*

Welcome to the roaring '20s! Would someone please hit the volume control? Seriously, a lot of critical issues were tackled and some progress made during 2020 (including a new incoming administration), but this year will not be over soon enough.

The pandemic didn't hit WV until March - the week the legislative session ended. We were celebrating some healthcare expansion wins and hurting over hard fought battles to expand green energy and oppose watered down water safety standards, when everything just shut down. The 2021 session, with conservative supermajorities in both houses, will be another challenge altogether. It starts in February due to the inauguration of the re-elected governor.

COVID relief came quickly from Washington but then slowed down to a trickle as the governor squirreled away most of the state's portion. CAG facilitated weekly COVID emergency response calls through West Virginians United for Social and Economic Justice that organized protests at Senator's offices, sent flurries of calls and letters to the governor and local newspapers to shine light on our communities' hardships and safety concerns. **Take action now:** Call Senator Capito and tell her to cosponsor the bi-partisan COVID-19 Emergency Relief Framework with Senator Manchin, as a down payment on a much larger recovery needed in the coming year.

The voter engagement tables we helped launch

## Health Care For All WV – A 2020 Review

*by Kim Jones & Eve Marcum-Atkinson*

Our [Health Care For All WV](#) campaign has been working hard this year to help improve access to affordable, quality healthcare, to expand Medicaid, and fight for legislation that puts the health of West Virginians first.

Our coalition has lobbied and worked towards more humane prescription drug prices and got the Insulin Affordability Act passed. It successfully placed a cap on the price of insulin copays at no more than \$100 a month for West Virginians with private insurance. We got a bill passed that added a \$1,000 worth of dental coverage for adults on Medicaid. And, we got the IDD Waiver waitlist cleared, where before families of children with disabilities used to have to wait months or years for funds and services. Further, we helped stop the barrier of Medicaid work requirements.



During this "Year of COVID-19", Health Care For All WV and our partners hosted a number of virtual events including: four town halls; a two-day summit with healthcare experts, policy makers, consumers; and four candidate forums where attendees from state, congressional and gubernatorial races answered policy questions on health care issues.

Medicaid is a critical health care safety net for a third of West Virginians. The COVID-19 virus has driven home the value of the Medicaid program for our state. Indeed, it has been the single most critical tool in our state's response to the pandemic with its flexibility to adapt to emergencies and meet new health service demands.

Our legislative agenda for 2021 includes policies that would create a Medicaid Buy-In program and Children Health Insurance Buy-In programs for working families who can't afford private insurance. We are also following up our success with the Medicaid dental bill with a vision bill for adults.

## Goodbye 2020! (cont. from PG 1)

kicked in ahead of our postponed primary. We texted and called voters statewide to get them to send in their ballot requests and help them understand this new way to vote. Half of the WV voters who cast ballots voted by mail for the first time ever! The table's voter engagement in the fall was more narrowly focused on young people and they came out big time! Too bad the President's 'coattails' were so long in our state this November. As a result, the 2021 session, which starts in February, with conservative supermajorities in both houses, will be another challenge altogether.

We all learned how to Zoom, Facetime, and Google Chat with colleagues and activists who, like us, were working from home and often serving as the mom/dad teacher. Lots of carbon was kept out of the sky as we didn't have to travel to meetings anymore (or even the office) - just turn on the computer!

Speaking of carbon, WV-CAG also assisted in the release of the [WV Citizen's Guide to Climate Change](#) and then moved on to work with allied groups to form the WV Climate Alliance. Regardless of who ends up with a majority in the US Senate, climate issues will be on the table in 2021 and the [THRIVE agenda](#) is the new call for climate justice and a green energy economy.

In 2020, we couldn't have gotten all this done without the support of you, our membership! Thank you for your continued support, volunteering, and yes, that green \$ energy that keeps the lights on. Please take a minute to fill out the enclosed membership form or hit [this link](#). Of course, end of year tax-deductible donations can be made out to our [Citizen Action Education Fund](#). Go Team! ♦



## Health Care For All (cont. from PG 1)

We believe that dental and vision care are part of health care, just as our eyes and teeth are part of our body.

We are working with WV United on a Minority Health Advisory Board bill, to study and address structural and racial inequities in our health system.

We are also working on policies that make permanent the emergency rules for telehealth, expand Medicaid coverage postpartum from 3 months to a year, enact family paid and sick leave for West Virginians, regulate high prescription prices, and to explore ways to cover social determinants of health.

West Virginians were struggling with health care accessibility and affordability long before COVID-19. We must do everything in our power to make sure that our fellow citizens do not continue to suffer these cruel realities in the age of this deadly pandemic.

For more information about our 2021 legislative agenda, visit [www.healthcareforallwv.com](http://www.healthcareforallwv.com). ♦



## Attack on ACA Could Be Fatal

by Gary Zuckett

After all the election lawsuits are history, there is one more supported by the outgoing administration and WV Attorney General, Patrick Morrissey, that could have a negative effect on your health.

CA vs TX is the federal ACA lawsuit, now before the US Supreme Court, that seeks to invalidate the whole law and send our health care policy back to 2010, when insurance companies could deny care for pre-existing conditions and place 'lifetime caps' on coverage for chronic disease treatments. Close to 160,000 West Virginians who gained health

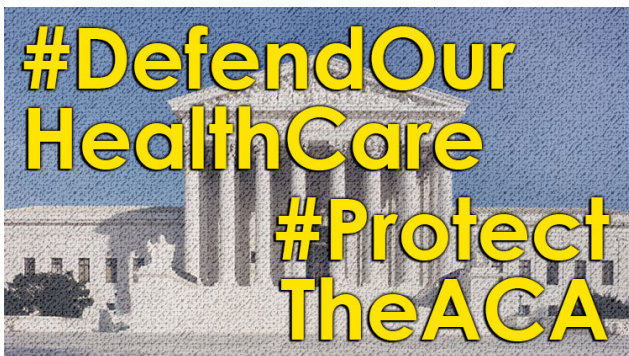


## Attack on ACA (cont. from PG 2)

coverage through Medicaid expansion would also be thrown back to being uninsured. We could go on listing harms from this asinine lawsuit since [there are a multitude](#). We should also mention it's a big economic hit to the whole state and especially rural hospitals and providers who rely on federal health dollars to stay open.

Don't worry, says our AG and lame duck President, we'll fix it, if we kill off the ACA we'll make a better plan. Well, they've been trying to kill it off since 2017 and we've yet to see that 'better proposal' to replace it. That's because they don't have one. Seems like the current administration's main goal was to basically undo Obama's achievements no matter what the cost to people's health, our economy or the environment.

Opening arguments were heard on CA vs TX one week after the election. We're pleased that even the most conservative judges were [asking pointed questions](#) and seeming like they're not taking the bait. However, the final ruling isn't expected until Spring. Please [sign our petition](#) to the AG and governor to demand that our lawmakers defend the ACA and protect our access to health care.



Also, if you have a pre-existing condition, have coverage as a result of the ACA's Medicaid expansion or would otherwise be harmed if the ACA is struck down and would like to share your story, contact [eve@wvcag.org](mailto:eve@wvcag.org).

With a new federal administration coming in 2021, now is the time to push for expanded health coverage by lowering Medicare's minimum age to 50, enact a buy in for Medicaid so low wage workers can stay covered if they get a raise, and work toward Medicare for All! We'll continue our decades of advocacy for Health Care for All on both the federal and state levels to push for universal health coverage as a human right! ♦



## Let's Make It Permanent

*by Julie Archer*

**We saw the impact that increased access to the ballot box had on voter participation, and we cannot allow that to be taken away.**

**Thanks to your support, WV Citizens for Clean Elections (a coalition co-lead by Citizen Action and the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition) was were able to accomplish a lot this year,** despite the obstacles that came about due to COVID-19. Here is a quick recap:

Prior to Governor Justice issuing a stay at home order, we fought to ensure that the state had plans in place to administer the primary election safely and **protect the health of voters and poll workers.**

After the primary election was delayed and absentee voting became more widely available, we worked with partners and allies to **educate voters about their voting options.**

We also partnered with the WV Consumer Protection Alliance to **help voters learn more about [Supreme Court elections and candidates](#).**

Moving forward, we continued these efforts through the summer and fall. We fought to make sure that voters were ready and able to cast their ballots in the November election, and that the state had steps in place to ensure everyone's safety while voting in the midst of the pandemic. This included expanded access to absentee voting, which allowed voters to make their voices heard without risking their lives -- leading to record turnout in the state and across the nation.

Although the November election went smoothly and securely, barriers to voting remain, and it's

### ***Let's Make It Permanent (cont. from PG 3)***

important that we continue to fight to ensure all eligible voters can participate and make their voices heard. We saw the impact that increased access to the ballot box had on voter participation, and we cannot allow that to be taken away.

**In order to have a healthy democracy and to hold our leaders accountable, everyone's voice should be heard.** That's why we are continuing to push our pro-voter, pro-democracy agenda, and put pressure on our political leaders to make this year's expanded voting options permanent.

Now that the November election is over, it is time to continue the work to hold our government accountable to ensure we create a country where everyone can thrive. We remain committed to increasing transparency and accountability in our elections, and to strengthen our democracy by furthering fairness and impartiality in our courts. **And with your continued support, we will be able to continue this work and prepare for the new year.**

We're counting on you to be a major part of our efforts — fighting for free, fair, and safe elections for West Virginians and a fair and impartial court system — so please make sure you are signed up to receive our actions alerts by visiting [wvoter-owned.org](http://wvoter-owned.org) and clicking on the "[Subscribe to Action Alert](#)" button.

And while you're there we could really use your financial support, too. A generous supporter has agreed to match every donation up to \$10,000 we receive between now and the end of the year. Click the "[Donate](#)" button to have double the impact as we continue our work to organize West Virginians, and bring our communities together to strengthen our democracy and protect our institutions.

Thank you again. **We can't do this without you!** ♦



## **THRIVE: Bold Green Economic Renewal Plan Now In Congress**

*by Gary Zuckett*

In September, a national coalition of grassroots groups, labor unions, Black, Brown and Indigenous leaders from across the nation, hailed the introduction of a bold plan for economic renewal known as the [THRIVE Agenda](#).

**THRIVE (Transform, Heal, and Renew by Investing in a Vibrant Economy)** is a unifying roadmap that meets this moment by creating nearly 16 million good jobs, reviving our economy, and addressing the interlocking crises of climate change, racial injustice, public health, and economic inequity. The THRIVE Agenda is supported by over 150 organizations and advocacy groups.

The THRIVE resolution was [introduced](#) in Congress on September 10th by Senators Chuck Schumer, Cory Booker, Elizabeth Warren and 11 other members of congress. Since then, the list of congressional cosponsors has grown to 99.

*"THRIVE is exactly what West Virginia needs right now to jump start our economy and address the generational inequalities that hold workers and families back from achieving the American Dream," stated Gary Zuckett, Executive Director of WV Citizen Action. "THRIVE will help our state move into the clean energy future, which creates jobs that can't be sent overseas and rebuilds communities left behind by fossil energy's decline."*

*"Communities across the country cannot afford incremental and piecemeal solutions to the dire intersectional issues we face, including the climate crisis, racial injustice, mass unemployment, and the deadly pandemic, to name a few," said Michael Brune, Executive Director of the Sierra Club.*



## **THRIVE (cont. from PG 4)**

*"The Sierra Club calls on members of Congress to take immediate action and invest in a healthy, just, equitable economic recovery for all."*

A new, independent economic analysis from the University of Massachusetts Amherst finds that a bold economic renewal plan, as outlined in the THRIVE Agenda, would create nearly 16 million new jobs -- enough for all of the 14 million currently unemployed U.S. workers to go back to work building a more just, healthy, and stable economy. As outlined in the THRIVE Agenda, these 16 million new jobs would offer safe workplaces, family-sustaining wages and benefits, and access to unions to workers building clean and affordable public transit, replacing lead pipes for clean water, expanding wind and solar power, caring for our children and the elderly, retrofitting buildings to cut costs and pollution, expanding manufacturing of clean technologies, restoring our wetlands and forests, and growing food sustainably on family farms. Contact [alex@wvcag.org](mailto:alex@wvcag.org) to become an active supporter of THRIVE.

For more info: [www.thriveagenda.com](http://www.thriveagenda.com). ♦



## **Demand Racial and Economic Justice in WV**

*by Julie Archer*

West Virginia and the nation are hurting. More than a quarter-million people, including nearly 900 of our fellow West Virginians, have died. It's been nearly eight months since Congress passed any significant COVID-19 relief package for regular Americans — and most of those relief programs have already expired. Countless people are now struggling to pay rent or to secure their next meal.

Meanwhile, over \$800 million of the \$1.25 billion West Virginia received in April to help address the

health and economic costs of COVID-19 remains unspent. These funds represent a significant opportunity to address the extreme hardship present throughout the state. Before COVID-19 hit, 40% of West Virginia residents were already mired in poverty. Things have only gotten worse since, and communities of color have suffered the brunt of that pandemic, dying at a disproportionately high rate, compared to white residents. Black and Latino people also are far more likely to have been laid off or evicted because of the pandemic, with little resources available for those newly thrown into poverty.

However, even before the pandemic, Black West Virginians were almost twice as likely to be living in poverty, according to the recent ["State of Racial Inequality"](#) report released by the WV Center on Budget and Policy. The report also documents that inequities continue to persist in education, wages, health, and the criminal legal system, and "that the effects of systemic racism continue to harm our Black communities today."

In May, the Charleston Branch of the NAACP and faith leaders in the African American community wrote to Governor Justice and state legislative leaders, urging them to take urgent action to address the disproportionate negative impact the Coronavirus is having on our state's African American and low income communities.

Their letter requested that 20% (or \$250 million) of the \$1.25 billion in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act money West Virginia received be designated to address the impacts of the virus and at the same time promote health and economic equity in the state's minority and low-income communities by using a portion of the funding to stimulate work force participation and economic development in these communities. Census tracts with a poverty rate of 20% and higher would be given priority.

To date, no response to the letter has been received. The critical needs of West Virginia's minority and low-income communities continue to go unaddressed, while hundreds of millions in federal COVID relief funds remain unspent.

We must seize this opportunity to address the health and economic disparities that amount to an unequal distribution of personhood and move our state economy toward one that serves the needs of all our people. ♦

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Enclosed is \$\_\_\_\_\_ made payable to **WV Citizen Action (WV CAG)** (not tax deductible).

Enclosed is \$\_\_\_\_\_ made payable to **WV Citizen Action Education Fund (WV-CAEF)** (tax deductible).

**Please mail checks to:** WV CAG or WVCAEF | 1500 Dixie Street | Charleston, WV 25311

**You can also donate online at [wvcag.org](http://wvcag.org) or [wvcaef.org](http://wvcaef.org).**

*Please consider setting up an automatic monthly recurring donation.*

**Thank you for your support!**