

Capital Eye

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Attendees of our Awards Picnic in September

2023 – What a Year!

By Gary Zuckett, WV CAG Executive Director

As we wrap up another year, we wanted to share some highlights of 2023 and look ahead to 2024. Now is a great time to renew your membership and/or make an end of year donation at www.wvcag.org! Thank you again for your support!

The 2023 legislative session was a dumpster fire, as the Republican supermajority continued to advance their agenda of less government support for those who really need it and more handouts to big business. Marshall University got \$45 million for a Cyber Security program but WVU's \$45 million deficit didn't get a penny. The Public Employees Insurance Agency, which manages health insurance for government workers in WV, soaked state employees and teachers with significant premium increases, while giving wealthy West Virginians the biggest personal income tax cut in the state's history. *See the trend?*

Our Medicaid Bridge bill passed the House but big insurance killed it in the Senate. However, in January, insulin co-pays will be capped at \$35/month as a result of the 2023 bill we helped pass - one of the few 'wins' for our side.

Medicaid is now running a \$100 million dollar deficit due to inadequate funding. There are several causes for this shortfall, but the main ones are, five years of flatline state budgets, and the end of federal COVID relief funds. This coming session, the legislature will have to backfill Medicaid or our state's healthcare economy will suffer. WV would lose four times that \$100 million amount due to the 3 to 1 federal Medicaid match. Rural hospitals and clinics may close and over 5,000 jobs could be lost!

The income tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefit the wealthy mean the state will have a harder time finding the funds needed to keep Medicaid solvent, and address the many other crisis the state is facing such as the ongoing state of emergency in our prisons where the National Guard continues to fill in gaps in staffing because we don't pay correctional officers enough; and the more than 6,000 children in the foster care who are not adequately supported as a result of the same low-pay/high stress issues for employees in the child welfare system. Higher education has been underfunded for over a decade now resulting in staff reductions and program changes at many of the state's colleges and universities, but it's legal now to carry guns on campus.

We can't do it without YOU!

As someone who cares about the future of West Virginia and our communities, this is the perfect time to contribute to support our important work and help us make an even bigger difference in people's lives. Visit: wvcag.org/membership

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Bottom line: the 2024 legislative session will also be a challenge. As 2023 comes to a close, we're gearing up for the January 10th opening of the 2024 legislative session, the last one with Jim Justice as our part-time governor. With aspirations to represent West Virginia in the US Senate, watch for him to use his 'last hurrah' at the legislative session to promote his campaign. Who knows how this will play out? Inside the 'rooms where it happens' we'll be promoting community solar and at the same time fighting to protect net metering. Efforts to 'water down' the Aboveground Storage Tank Act that provides standards and oversight to prevent releases into our water supplies has become an almost annual fight in the halls of the Capitol, as have attempts to undermine vital safety net programs such as SNAP benefits and Medicaid.

Your role as citizen advocates is essential in the fight for a stronger democracy, a sustainable future, and quality, affordable healthcare for all, as we work to both advance needed reforms and play defense on these and other fronts. Here are some ways you can help:

- ⇒ Attend upcoming special virtual and in-person events prior to and during the session, make calls to your legislators on the issues you care about, and watch for our weekly updates to keep informed.
- ⇒ Renew your membership and if possible, kick in a little extra so we'll be better positioned to continue to fight in the year ahead — doing the work needed to make positive change in our state. Go to www.wvcag.org and click on DONATE.

As someone who cares about the future of West Virginia and our communities, this is the perfect time to contribute to support our important work and help us make an even bigger difference in people's lives. **We can't do it without YOU!**

The WV Citizen Action staff and board **thank you in advance for your generosity.**

WV Citizen Action's 2023 Awards Picnic: Meet Our Awardees

[Meet Our Awardees!](#)

On Saturday, September 16th we gathered at Coonskin Park to celebrate our awardees, reflect on the work we've done and what's to come, and spend time with old and new friends.

The Mountain State is full of passionate folks doing the work needed to improve the lives of their fellow West Virginians and ensure our people are safe, healthy, and successful. That's one reason why, each year, we come together to recognize several individuals for their contributions to our state and their communities.

Pam Nixon is this year's recipient of the **Thomas A. Knight Excalibur Award** for lifetime achievement. A life-long resident of Kanawha County, Pam's history in community service began in the mid-1980s, promoting environmental and social justice issues,



She has received numerous awards and recognitions from the US EPA and local civic organizations. In 1998, she was appointed to the position of Environmental Advocate at the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, a position she held until retiring in 2014. In that capacity, Pam was the conduit between the public and the DEP. She organized public education forums on state and federal environmental regulations, the pollution control permitting process, and how to participate in public comment hearings.

As a chemical safety advocate she has testified before Congress on behalf of Kanawha Valley residents on numerous occasions. Pam is a member of the Charleston Branch NAACP and chair of the Environmental & Climate Justice Committee. She is a member of the Kanawha-Putnam Emergency Planning Committee, and previously served on the Boards of Directors of WV CAG, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition and for People Concerned about Chemical Safety. Pam continues to be a tireless champion for front-line workers and fence-line communities.

"I am very honored today to be able to present the Thomas A. Knight Excalibur Award to Pam Nixon, a person whose reserved demeanor, quiet grace and dignity bely her fierce advocacy for justice. And although she is most renowned for her tireless commitment to environmental justice and the health of frontline communities, she is also a constant advocate for voting rights and other social justice causes.... I remember one of my first meetings with Pam Nixon in the halls of the legislature as we were pacing from one side of the legislature to the other during crossover day. Her infectious smile and confidence in the face of all odds reassured me that day, and I knew that I was in the presence of someone who would be a guide, a teacher and friend in the years to come. Her commitment to advocating for the African American community, a community which is too often relegated to living in the most dangerous areas and which experiences the worst exposure to pollution, is part of the driving force behind her tireless efforts. She has journeyed to DC more times than I can count to advocate for environmental, health, food access, voting rights and social justice issues - sometimes on crowded buses, sometimes alone but always carrying all of our WV residents in her heart."

— **Sally Roberts Wilson, WV CAG Board**



Mike Tony, Environment & Energy Reporter for the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* is the 2023 recipient of the **Don Marsh & Paul Nyden Public Service Award**. Mike has written extensively about how West Virginia's topographic and political landscapes make its residents vulnerable to climate impacts. Previously, he reported for the *Herald-Standard* in southwestern Pennsylvania, his hometown newspaper. He is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania.

Earlier this year, Mike was awarded a fellowship from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Environmental Solutions Initiative. The program supports journalists developing a news project that connects local perspectives and priorities with climate change science and solutions.

In the spirit of Don Marsh and Paul Nyden, Mike's reporting exposes hypocrisy and corruption, and seeks to hold those in power accountable. His articles on abuses of power by the WV Legislature and opposition to tighter pollution standards by state officials despite the public health risks to our communities have been reprinted in various national publications including *Governance and Environmental Health News*.

Last, but not least, **Shalom Tazewell** is this year's recipient of the **Si Galperin in Defense of Democracy Award**. Shalom moved to WV in 1993 from the DC Metropolitan area where she had worked for Defenders of Wildlife. Right away she volunteered for the Sierra Club and as an adult literacy instructor at the Hinton Public Library.

In 1997, Shalom started an adult ESL (English Second Language) program in Raleigh County where she was the lead instructor, working with adult immigrants from over 15 different countries who, like her, chose West Virginia as the place they wanted to put down roots. She also helped coordinate a correctional center literacy program where she trained inmates to teach others how to read, and became the lobbyist for the WV Adult Education Association, mobilizing students and teachers in a successful campaign with the legislature to provide free GEDs.



After the shock of the 2016 general election, Shalom co-founded the Summers County Huddle, a growing grassroots advocacy organization which promotes social and economic justice and civic engagement. In June of 2017 she retired from adult education in order to dedicate more time to working in the community as an advocate for government policies and laws that reflect democratic values. Shalom serves on the boards of WV CAG and the Appalachian South Folklife Center.

During the 2020 elections she was a Movement Captain for WV Can't Wait, recruiting and training organizers to Get Out the Vote around the state. She also served on the CORE Support Team for the Wild, Wonderful & Healthy Summers County, an organization working to support safe and affordable housing, strengthen recreational opportunities, and support the economic development of local small businesses in their community.

"Shalom Tazewell is the best ally I know, and I want to be clear on the use of that term ally. I looked up the definition of the word "ally" and discovered that an ally is one who combines or unites resources with another for mutual benefit. An ally is not someone who speaks for and tells groups of minorities what is best for them and their community. An ally is a resource to empower and amplify the work of under-represented groups and communities. This is so important because for 400 years we have had white allies tell us what is best for us and how is that working?... Shalom's community activism began at an early age, shaped by her parents who were active in the civil rights movement in both Richmond and Atlanta in the 60's. While in Atlanta and with the enthusiastic support of her parents, she worked during the summers for a youth program at Ebenezer Baptist, Dr. Martin Luther King's church. She was suspended from high school more than once for "distracting other students," by refusing to sing Dixie at pep rallies, wearing a black armband when Dr. King was murdered, reading Langston Hughes poetry over the intercom instead of the expected school announcements, and resisting a dress code that she considered antiquated.... There is no wonder why I love this woman so much because she is a fierce warrior, standing up and alongside efforts to improve the respect and services needed by others." — Loretta Young, WV CAG Board Member

#CareOverCost: An URGENT Call for Your Claim Denial Stories

By Eve Marcum-Atkinson, WV CAG Director of Healthcare Advocacy

We are in need of healthcare stories. West Virginians willing to share struggles to afford medications or care, success stories due to gaining Medicaid coverage, and most important to us right now are stories of claim denials, specifically from the Medicaid MCO Aetna Better Health of West Virginia.

On Wednesday, October 11th, at around lunchtime, WV Citizen Action Group, People's Action, WV Poor People's Campaign, Rise Up WV, New Economy Works WV and others held a demonstration and press conference outside of the Medicaid MCO Aetna Better Health of WV's offices, located at 500 Virginia St. East, Charleston, WV 25311. Our demand was and is that health insurance corporations stop denying care to its members to pad their profits, honor their contractual obligation, do their job to provide coverage, stop profiteering off of our care, and instead put Care Over Cost.

This event was one of 14 that happened nationally led by the Care Over Cost campaign. Before the demonstration, we spoke with the people inside, respectfully, and they agreed to meet with us in the coming weeks. *But, only if we have claim denials to bring to them.*

AETNA is part of the private health insurance industry, whose business model relies on denying members the treatments and medicines they deserve. Insurance companies make a lot of money off of denying our claims, to the tune of \$260 Billion annually. Nearly 1 in 5 claims are denied (17%), and only about 0.2% of claims are appealed. In other words, since most people can't figure out the complicated appeals process, it is a near guarantee that companies get to keep that money instead of paying it out for people's health care.

Claims denials are when a health insurance corporation refuses to pay for care that your doctor prescribed and you've already received - sticking you with the bill, unnecessary medical debt and even bankruptcy. A prior-authorization denial is when your insurance refuses to pay for a medicine, surgery or other treatment before you even get it. So you can't get the care you need and stay sick, stay injured, or even die as a result. These denials hurt black and brown folks (especially women and infants), and rural and poor folks the hardest.

Private insurance companies deny well over 248 million claims or pre-authorization requests from their policyholders annually, often using AI.

Aetna Better Health of WV, according to a July DHHS report, has a prior authorization denial rate of 13.7%. And their medical directors, according to a CNN article, don't read patient's records before denying claims, they don't have enough time to because they are given ridiculously small windows for reviewing each case. In addition, in Oklahoma, a patient was awarded a \$25 million dollar verdict in a "bad faith" case after Aetna company denied cancer treatment.

Aetna, according to Fierce Health, had record revenues of \$91.4 Billion in 2022, up 11% over the previous year.

Aetna's parent corporation, CVS Health:

- ⇒ Paid their CEO Karen Lynch \$21,317,055 last year.
- ⇒ Took \$6 billion in profit from their Aetna insurance division in 2022 alone.
- ⇒ Spent \$20.57 million on lobbying in the 2021-2022 cycle.

Where are Aetna's huge profits coming from? **They are a direct result of the denials of care to sick patients.**

I spoke with a woman who said she was denied a CT Scan for months by Aetna. She shared that her doctor fought the good fight and appealed again and again. Finally she got the scan she needed. But, by then, the cancer had spread... She is not alone.

Please lend a hand. Help us find these stories, bring them to light and directly to Aetna. Help us fight on on the behalf of West Virginians unable to get the care they need, or are in overwhelming debt. Let's honor them by sharing their stories.



A large group of volunteers and partner organizations came out to support our Care over Cost demonstration. Eve Marcum-Atkinson is pictured being interviewed by a local news station.

11.8 Million Lose Medicaid; States Could Lose Federal Funding

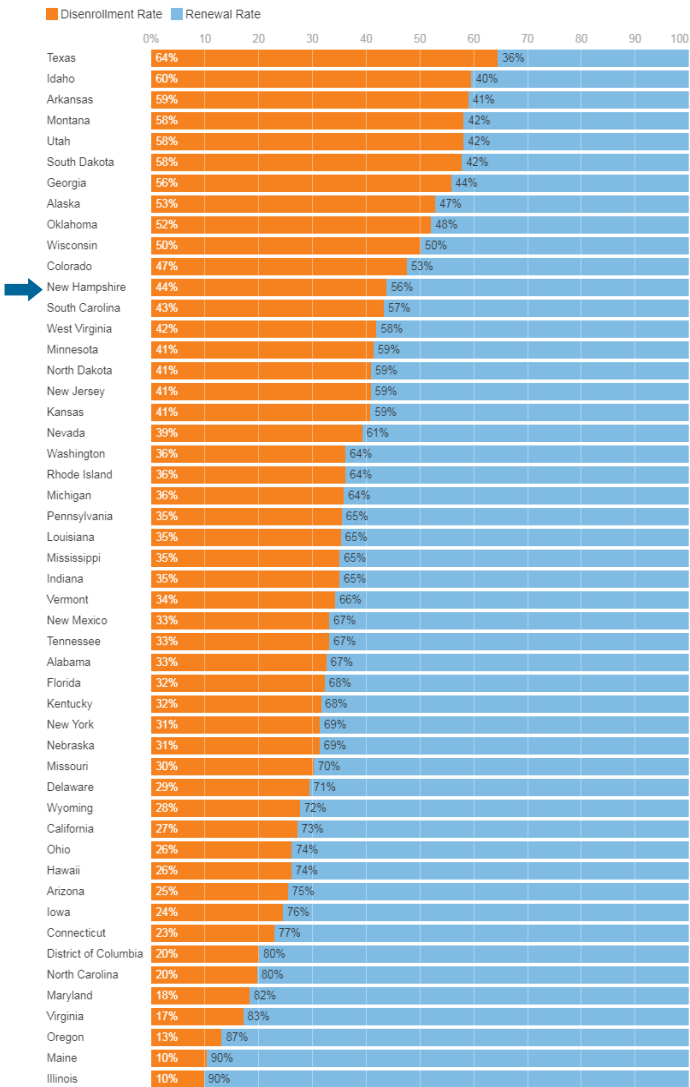
By Eve Marcum-Atkinson, WV CAG Director of Healthcare Advocacy

Over the summer, we spoke with hundreds of West Virginians about healthcare, and the most common thing I heard was people's fear of losing their Medicaid. That fear was well founded.

One of the ways we connect with the public is by being at events, hosting an informational booth, and just walking around and talking to people. At these events and through healthcare story interviews, so many people shared how Medicaid had changed their lives for the better. They were able to stay in recovery. They were able to get an important surgery. They were able to get the medication and care they needed in order to live, function, and work a job.

But people started falling off of Medicaid during the Unwind this year, where the state was required to redetermine eligibility. Since April, out of the roughly 656,000 previously on Medicaid, only about 190,000 have had their coverage renewed. **Over 136,000 West Virginians have lost their Medicaid coverage; 29% of them are children.**

Nationally, 11.8 Million have been disenrolled from Medicaid; 38% of them are children.



[Medicaid Enrollment and Unwinding Tracker], (KFF, Dec 07, 2023) [https://www.kff.org/report-section/medicaid-enrollment-and-unwinding-tracker-overview/] (Dec 12, 2023).

Why have so many lost their Medicaid? According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, mostly because of paperwork. Of all who were disenrolled, 71% were terminated for procedural reasons.

Businesses are still having trouble filling open positions. But, because of the unwinding, over 6.8 Million working age people are now without healthcare, unable to get the treatments, support and medications that allowed them to function and work in the first place. And without care, people will get sicker, and some will die.

And school age children are still recovering from the educational and psychological impacts of the pandemic,

let alone the long term impacts of surviving mass shooting events. But now, over 4 Million are without healthcare. Given that the third leading cause of death for children ages 14-18 is suicide, this lack of care can only lead to tragedy.

Now, states like West Virginia could lose federal funding if they don't comply with the CMS Medicaid Unwinding interim final rule published December 4th. In it, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services outlined its plans to get Medicaid redetermination disenrollments under control. As they review their benefit rolls for ineligible enrollees, states that fail to comply with federal Medicaid policies risk reduced federal funding under the regulation.

Please contact your legislators and congress members to tell them to protect West Virginia's federal funding and our Medicaid, fix the procedural issues, and get people the care they need.

WV CAG and Allies Urge Advancement of March-In-Rights to Lower Drug Costs

By Eve Marcum-Atkinson

Last year, WCAG, People's Action and many others joined together to ask for and rally for the use of march-in-rights to lower prescription drug costs. We demonstrated outside of the Health and Human Services (HHS) offices in DC, urging President Biden and Secretary Becerra to use March-In-Rights and other existing executive authorities to break pharmaceutical monopolies, increase competition and production, and lower costs for prescription drugs at their core. Video of the action is available on our YouTube Channel at youtube.com/@wvcitizenaction.

On October 16, 2023, Public Citizen, WVCAG and over 30 allies wrote to Sec. Raimondo and Sec. Becerra, urging them to advance the interagency review of march-in rights without delay.



Alexandria Bryant (center) and Jude Stephens (bottom right) from WV with national People's Action partners.

The groups' letter comes after earlier this year, Secs. Raimondo and Becerra announced a whole-of-government review of march-in rights, including when to exercise them based on prices. This review has the potential to reorient administration policy to help put an end to big pharma price gouging of prescription drugs invented with the support of taxpayer dollars and to instead make these medicines affordable to everyone.

Medicare Drug Price Negotiations & the First 10 Named Drugs

By Eve Marcum-Atkinson, WV CAG Director of Healthcare Advocacy

Many of us have experienced that dread at the pharmacy, right before check-out, wondering how much a prescription will cost us, and if we have enough to pay for it. Some do. Others don't, and have to weigh which takes priority: rent, food, or medicine. Millions of Americans who simply cannot afford the high cost of prescription drugs, ration, go without, stay sick, and some die. In the richest country in the world, That Ain't Right! We can do better.

We are making some progress. The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 included provisions for Medicare that expanded benefits, improved access to affordable treatments, and allowed for Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices.

On August 29th, the first ten prescription drugs were named that Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services had selected for lower prices through Part D Medicare negotiations. The list includes some of the most expensive medicines in Part D:

- *Eliquis* – Prevention and treatment of blood clots
- *Jardiance* – Diabetes; Heart failure
- *Xarelto* – Prevention and treatment of blood clots; Reduction of risk for patients with coronary or peripheral artery disease
- *Januvia* – Diabetes
- *Farxiga* – Diabetes; Heart failure; Chronic kidney disease
- *Entresto* – Heart failure
- *Enbrel* – Rheumatoid arthritis; Psoriasis; Psoriatic arthritis
- *Imbruvica* – Blood cancers
- *Stelara* – Psoriasis; Psoriatic arthritis; Crohn's disease; Ulcerative colitis
- *Fiasp, NovoLog* – Diabetes

Once implemented, 5 to 7 million more Medicare patients will save money on treating everything from diabetes to cancer and taxpayers can expect to save over \$98 billion over the next decade. That is, if drug corporations stop slowing down progress through frivolous lawsuits.

That means people like my father would finally have some hope that the medicine he needs will be affordable rather than having to skip doses, ration medicine, or go into debt to buy prescriptions.

Dad has COPD, and was diagnosed with blood clots a few months ago. He pays nearly \$300 a month for his Medicare Part D and MediGold coverage. To treat his COPD, he takes Flovent and Incruse, together costing over \$200 a month. And, with his recent blood clots, Eliquis was added to his regimen. But last month, I had to pay for his refill because it was \$136 for one month's supply. Each of these medications are on the anticipated list of drugs whose prices are eventually to be negotiated for Medicare recipients, and Eliquis is on the first list of 10.

For my father and for millions across our nation, skipping medications is a life threatening way to make it to the end of the month. Making ends meet with rising property taxes, utilities, and the cost of groceries has been very difficult for anyone on a fixed income.

Dad keeps doing without in order to make it work, and he's not alone. We, as a nation, can and must do better.

Selecting these ten drugs was just the first step. Now, CMS will need to aggressively negotiate with drug corporations in order to arrive at fair prices that patients can afford. Negotiated lower prices would still allow these corporations to make a profit but without the relentless price-gouging that hurts patients and Medicare.

But lawsuits abound. Johnson & Johnson (Janssen), Bristol Myers Squibb, Merck and Eli Lilly/Boehringer Ingelheim and Pfizer/Astellas have made billions from overcharging patients, so they will keep doing all they can to delay and earn profits.

And speaking of price-gouging, Pfizer just spiked the price of Paxlovid to 100 Times the cost of production.

The good fight to make medications affordable for all continues.

Health Care for All West Virginia: Year in Review

By Kim Jones, Health Care for All Coalition Coordinator

Health Care for All-West Virginia and our partners had a very exciting year in 2023. Starting off with the legislative session, we worked hard to get important bills passed and tried to stop bills that would be detrimental to the health of West Virginians.

The Affordable Medicaid Buy-In or Bridge Plan passed the House before stalling in the Senate. It would help working West Virginians who make too much to be eligible for Medicaid keep their vital health coverage when they make too much money to be eligible but too little to afford private insurance. We will continue to work towards our goal of having everyone in West Virginia covered.

In 2021 a dental benefit for adults was created for Medicaid recipients. We were hoping to see that benefit raised to \$2000 a year, but that bill didn't make it over the line. We opposed a bill that prohibited gender-affirming care for trans youth. Despite dozens of parents and loved ones speaking up to protect their children, it passed. Senator Takubo, who is a physician, added an amendment to mitigate the harm the bill will cause by carving out an exception that would protect care for young people with severe gender dysphoria. We hope that a more enlightened and compassionate day will come that will see the reversal of this dangerous decision by our legislature.

The best news on the healthcare front from this year's legislative session, is that after four years of striving for more affordable insulin for the many diabetics in the state, SB 577 passed! Starting January 1st, all of those with private insurance will have a \$35 copay cap on a month's supply of insulin! And even better, the copay for supplies like testing strips, lancets, continuous glucose monitoring supplies, glucometers, syringes, and insulin pump supplies to no more than \$100 a month in cost-sharing. Hundreds of West Virginians worked with us during these years educating the legislators and the public and supporting this life-saving bill. Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and passion to help ease the terrible

financial burden on diabetics and their families!

In June, the Health Care for All-WV team traveled to Washington, DC and met with the policy advisors of Senator Manchin, Senator Capito and Delegate Miller. We brought to them our concerns about pharmacy benefit managers, Medicare Advantage fraud, medical debt and the national insulin copay cap. We learned more about the healthcare issues our lawmakers were concerned about, like the Reentry Act and issues surrounding childhood trauma. We also got to spend time with our national coalition partners with People's Action at their nationwide Organizing Revival.

Southern WV's Renewable Revolution

By Zach Shrewsbury, WV New Jobs Coalition

In an inspiring effort to foster economic growth and environmental sustainability, Brandi Reece and I, two of the team behind the West Virginia New Jobs Coalition, have embarked on a journey across Southern West Virginia. *Our mission? To promote the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and provide invaluable assistance to towns in securing crucial federal funds for transformative projects.*

Since the inception of this initiative, we have covered an impressive 42 towns, leaving a trail of optimism and opportunity in our wake. Among the communities showing particular interest in the IRA are Ronceverte, Pineville, Bluefield, Matewan, Danville, Fayetteville, and Mullens. These towns share a common vision of progress, seeking to implement a range of eco-conscious measures.



Brandi Reece (center) and Zach Shrewsbury (center left) meet with officials and community leaders in Matewan, WV.

The aspirations of these forward-thinking communities encompass a diverse array of projects. They envision the integration of solar panels to harness clean energy, the creation of water gardens in public parks to promote biodiversity, and the installation of eco-friendly sidewalks and roads to reduce environmental impact. Moreover, they are keen on implementing

solar lighting systems to enhance safety and energy efficiency, as well as weatherizing buildings to optimize energy consumption and reduce costs.

Crucially, Brandi and I are not only advocates, but also hands-on facilitators. We offer our expertise to navigate the intricate process of researching and writing grants, a pivotal step in securing the federal funds needed to turn these visions into reality. Our dedication to the cause is palpable, and our support is readily available to any town that shares their vision for progress and sustainability.

Whether your town is on the list of those already visited or not, we stand ready to assist. Our commitment to empowering communities is unwavering, and we are more than willing to bring our expertise and resources to any town that seeks to embrace sustainable initiatives.

The West Virginia New Jobs Coalition's efforts come at a crucial time, when communities are recognizing the pressing need for sustainable development. By leveraging federal funds and implementing innovative, eco-conscious projects, these towns are not only paving the way for a clean energy future but also creating valuable jobs and revitalizing their local economies.

Our tireless dedication to this cause exemplifies the power of grassroots initiatives to drive positive change. Our work serves as an inspiration for towns across Southern West Virginia, showing that with vision, determination, and strategic collaboration, we can build a more sustainable and prosperous future for all. To invite us to your town or to learn more about these initiatives, don't hesitate to reach out – together, we can turn visions into reality.

Celebrating Sustainability: A Look Back at the Inaugural "Sustainability in Motion" Event

By Heather Gregory, WV New Jobs Coalition

October 14, 2023, marked a significant day for the City of Charleston, WV, as it hosted the first-ever "Sustainability in Motion" event. The event, held at Slack Plaza, brought together environmental enthusiasts, local businesses, and community members, all united under a common cause - sustainability and climate justice.

Speakers for the event included: Brandi Reece and Zach Shrewsbury of the WV New Jobs Coalition; the Honorable Steve Williams, Mayor of Huntington, WV; Xavier Walter of the Building Performance Association; Leah Barbor of Solar United Neighbors; Pam Nixon of People Concerned About Chemical Safety; Linda Frame of WV Environmental Council; Mark Tabbert of WV Citizens' Climate Lobby; and Honey May of West Virginians for Energy Freedom.

Supporters and sponsors for the event included: Bright Futures Now, Sierra Club, Solar United Neighbors, West Virginians for Energy Freedom, WV Citizen Action Group, Healthcare for All, Building Performance Association, WV Environmental Council, ReImagine Appalachia, WV Poor People's Campaign, Citizens' Climate Lobby, WV SOAR, WVDEP, Kanawha Valley Beekeepers Association, the Partnership for Furthering Arts & Education and Jali's Jewelry, Habitat for Humanity ReStore, and Hatfield Union Forestry Association.

The event was a vibrant mix of education, entertainment, and engagement. It was free, making it accessible for everyone in the community!



(left to right) Heather Gregory, Zach Shrewsbury, Brandi Reece, Dani Parent, Eve Marcum-Atkinson, and Morgan Wisniewski at the first "Sustainability in Motion" Fair

The event was not just about fun. At its core, it was a platform for education and awareness about sustainability and climate justice. Various organizations used this opportunity to share their missions, showcasing the steps they're taking to heal our planet and protect our pocketbooks.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of the event was a presentation by Alex Eaves, the creator of the ReUse Box Truck. This innovative project features a box truck converted into a tiny house using all reused objects. Eaves's creation was on site for tours, giving attendees a firsthand look at the possibilities of sustainable living.

"Sustainability in Motion" was more than an event; it was a movement. It brought together different factions of our society, united in their commitment to a more sustainable and equitable future. The event not only amplified the voices calling for climate justice' but also celebrated the power of community in driving sustainable change.

Although the event was cut short due to heavy rains, the echoes of the event's success still resonate within our community. The inaugural "Sustainability in Motion" event was a testament to Charleston's commitment to sustainability and climate justice. It provided a platform for education, fostered a sense of community, and, most importantly, served as a reminder of our collective responsibility towards our planet.

As we look forward to the next "Sustainability in Motion" event, let's carry forward the spirit of sustainability and climate justice in our everyday actions. After all, every small step counts!

Until then, let's continue to embody the spirit of "Sustainability in Motion," focusing on how we can make a difference in our daily lives and in our community. Because when it comes to protecting our planet, every action matters.

WV CAG & Partners Host "Lunch Out Loud" Webinar Series

In July, WV CAG and partners launched **Lunch Out Loud**, a webinar series focused on challenges to our democracy and a series of webinars focused on challenges to our democracy and the actions we can take to protect our freedom to vote and hold those in power accountable.

If you missed our previous webinars, no worries. You can find the videos on the WV Citizens for Clean Elections Facebook page.



Our first Lunch Out Loud on July 28, featured **Atiba Ellis**, Professor of Law at Case Western Reserve University School of Law, and **Anthony Majestro**, a Charleston attorney with experience in election law, discussing recent decisions by the US Supreme Court that affect voting rights, and what they mean for ballot access in West Virginia. The conversation was moderated by former Secretary of State **Natalie Tennant**.

In August, our series continued with two events. Recently the WV Legislature has taken extraordinary measures to fast-track legislation and keep the public out of the process. On **August 24th** a panel of lobbyists, former legislators, and journalists discussed what is happening, the lack of transparency and the impacts on democratic participation.

Panelists:

- ⇒ *Eli Baumwell, Policy Director, ACLU of WV*
- ⇒ *Margaret Chapman-Pomponio, Executive Director, WV FREE*
- ⇒ *Former Delegate Barbara Fleischauer*
- ⇒ *Phil Kabler, Columnist/ Retired Statehouse Reporter, the Charleston Gazette-Mail*

The conversation was moderated by former Secretary of State **Natalie Tennant**.

We also held a "bonus" event to commemorate the **60th Anniversary of the March on Washington** on **Monday, August 28th** to hear from West Virginians who were there on that historic day. **Al Anderson, Rev. Ron English, Gibbs Kinderman, and Betty Rivard** shared memories and reflections from that historic day. **Al Anderson, Rev. Ron English, Gibbs Kinderman, and Betty Rivard** shared memories and reflections from that day and hearing Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Community advocate and organizer **Kathy Ferguson** facilitated the conversation.

The series continued in October with a discussion on the challenges that youth face in our democracy hosted by **Takeiya Smith** and student leaders from **Young West Virginia**. Former Secretary of State **Natalie Tennant** co-facilitated the discussion along with Takeiya. Students shared their experiences mobilizing peers in the electoral process. The goal was to uplift youth's pivotal role in civic engagement.

We are looking forward to hosting more conversations in 2024 and continuing the fight for a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable democracy.

Upcoming Events

Clean Water for All: Reflecting on the 2014 Water Crisis and Shaping a Water-Secure Future

Ten years ago, Freedom Industries threatened the health of 300,000 West Virginians when a chemical used to clean impurities from coal leaked from a tank into the Elk River, upstream from the West Virginia American Water municipal water intake and distribution center. This devastating occurrence had far-reaching consequences that called for accountability from polluters and emphasized the need for a water-secure future. Ten years later, our work is far from over. **Ticket Required for Entry*

Date: Tuesday, January 9, 2024
Time: 5:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Where: The Culture Center (1900 Kanawha Blvd. E., Charleston WV)
Get Your Free Ticket: wvivers.salsalabs.org/cleanwater4all

Please join WV CAG, the WV Rivers Coalition and other partners as we reflect on the 10th Anniversary of the 2014 Water Crisis and shaping a water-secure future.

Register Today for Black Policy Day 2024!

Black Policy Day (BPD) is a transformative event held annually at the Capitol in West Virginia. It is much more than a single-day gathering. It represents a powerful movement that aims to address policy issues affecting Black communities in West Virginia and foster cooperative and united communities

Registration for 2024's Black Policy Day at the West Virginia State Capitol on February 7th is open! **Visit givebutter.com/BPD2024** to register for a free ticket or to support Black Policy Day with a donation or by becoming a sponsor.



Visit the new Black Policy Day website blackpolicydaywv.org to learn more and stay up to date on all things Black Policy Day.

Join Us for E-Day at the WV Capitol

You're invited to Environmental Day (E-Day) at the WV State Capitol on **Tuesday, February 13, from 9 am – 2 pm!** E-Day is a chance to see the legislature at work, visit and tour the Capitol, meet environmental groups and advocate for our legislative priorities.

REGISTER FOR E-DAY: wvecouncil.org/eday

In addition to exhibits from environmental groups, E-Day will include a rally with advocates and legislators to discuss critical environmental issues and promote legislation. See highlights and coverage from last year's E-Day here. Join us on February 13 to build momentum and make a difference!

Save Our Solar Rally

Solar is under attack by legislators and monopoly utilities that are leading the effort to change net metering rules—important policies that ensure solar is economically viable and accessible to all consumers. West Virginia lawmakers must not let this happen.

Ensuring that consumers are fairly compensated for the power they produce is a crucial part of energy freedom. Join us for the **Save Our Solar Rally** on **Saturday, January 20, 2024 in Charleston, WV.**

RSVP HERE: energyfreedomwv.org/events



Power companies have a plan to kill solar in West Virginia

For over a decade, WV's net metering policy has helped create local jobs, kept the lights on, and protected Mountaineers from unfair fees and rising utility bills. Now greedy power companies are pushing to eliminate these protections.

West Virginia has embraced a net metering policy that empowered households and businesses to harness solar energy and contribute excess power back to our local electric grid. This fair crediting system has allowed consumers to be compensated at a reasonable market rate for their surplus energy, providing a powerful incentive for more solar adoption across the state. Not only does this approach help consumers save money, but it also enhances grid stability and resilience—a win-win for West Virginia.

Two power companies – Mon Power and Potomac Edison – are attempting to rewrite the rules in their favor, threatening to cut the benefits of West Virginia's fair market net metering for their customers. Under their proposed changes, newly-installed solar panels would only receive half of the current retail rate for their energy, effectively denying us full credit for producing our own power. This move would spell disaster for the emerging renewable energy market, stifling economic growth in half the state and overburdening a fragile power grid.

Let us stand united and oppose this regressive plan. Together, we can safeguard our energy freedom, protect the emerging energy sector, and preserve the many benefits that net metering brings to our state.

Take action at energyfreedomwv.org/take-action to stop monopoly utilities from taking away more of our energy freedom.

Learn more at energyfreedomwv.org/net-metering.

WV Legislators and staff learn firsthand about dangers of leaky, orphaned gas wells

During the October Legislative interim session, the WV Surface Owners' Rights Organization (WVSORO), the WV Rivers Coalition, and the WV Environmental Council hosted an informational hike in Kanawha State Forest just outside of the capital city. Dave McMahon, counsel for WV SORO, led the excursion to several different well sites: One "orphaned" well too old to even know who drilled it or when. A well that is still in production and owned by Diversified. Another old orphan that was bubbling odorless methane. One that is owned by a local operator that has not produced in years, has not been plugged, and is leaking lots of methane and other smelly gasses. And finally a plugged well which had supposedly been properly decommissioned, but there is no way to tell for sure.

When tested, three of the five sites had detectable gas leak using the handheld monitors — Phew!

The purpose of this excursion was to highlight the need for more DEP well inspectors and funding for plugging leaky orphaned wells because of the danger they pose to property values, groundwater, climate, and the health of local residents. We'll also be asking lawmakers to pass the "Orphaned Gas Well Prevention Act" for new and transferred wells, to require drillers to set aside money in the Treasurer's office as the well produces income to cover the eventual plugging costs when the wells stop producing (become "abandoned"). Most of these wells are located in rural areas, but many are close to homes as the ones recently brought to our attention in a neighborhood within the Charleston city limits



Dave McMahon (second from right) explains the process used to plug gas wells as the group views an old plugged well (to the left of Dave).

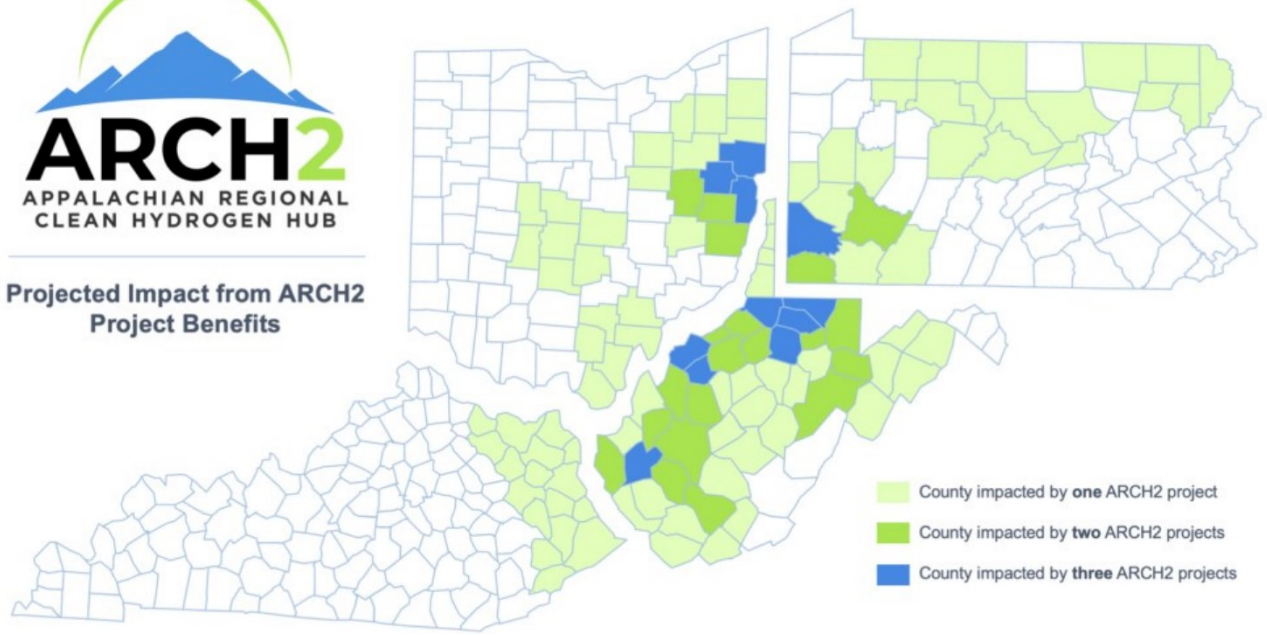
We also have a tour video to elevate the issue, and show legislators who weren't on the tour. You can find the video at youtube.com/@wvcitizenaction. Please share with your legislators and urge them to support the Orphaned Well Prevention Act!

ARCH2 Hydrogen Hub: Another Economic and Ecological Boondoggle

By Dani Parent, Organizing Director

Communities in Appalachia and the Ohio River Valley continue to bear the brunt of the economic and ecological effects of extractive industries with the approval of up to \$925 million in funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for the Appalachian Regional clean hydrogen Hub (ARCH2) coming last week.

The ARCH2 project, spanning Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, will create hydrogen pipelines, multiple hydrogen fueling stations, and CO2 storage facilities for the purpose of extracting hydrogen for energy generation and emission reduction by means of carbon capture and storage (CCS). Hydrogen processes are given color names to differentiate the processes used, and the ARCH2 project will be using blue hydrogen, which separates hydrogen from methane (commonly referred to as natural gas) through a steam process and produces (CO2) as a byproduct, necessitating the CO2 pipelines and storage.



source: *Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub* (arch2hub.com) .

Technology for green hydrogen, or hydrogen made by using renewable energy sources to power electrolyzers that split water into hydrogen and oxygen, exist but are not common yet.

However, putting billions of dollars into a blue hydrogen false solution will only deepen the region’s dependence on fossil fuels, prolong the health and environmental impacts of the existing natural gas industry, and expose communities to the impacts of a large buildout of carbon capture and storage infrastructure. A hydrogen hub would also burden ratepayers and taxpayers since these projects are fundamentally uneconomic and require significant public subsidy.

The CO2 component of the hub is just as, if not more concerning than the fossil fuel-to-supposedly-clean-energy process that’s being billed as the solution to climate change. In a state already pushing back against dangerous pipelines and various economic and ecological boondoggles, the network of CO2 pipelines will be the next big fight for our state.

The Three Facets of WV Citizen Action: A 50 Year Legacy!

By Gary Zuckett, WV CAG Executive Director

When I get the question, “What does WV Citizen Action do?”, it presents a challenge as we’re not a one-issue group, or a two-issue group, but a multi-faceted one, so I tell them this... We focus on three main issues or policy areas.

#1 Climate/Environmental - WV-CAG was one of the founders of the WV Environmental Council back in the late 1980s. In the mid-2000s we organized landowners (who were getting bulldozed by oil & gas drillers) to form the WV Surface Owners’ Rights Organization (wvsoro.org). A decade ago, we started Energy Efficient WV (EEWV.org). We’re a founding member of the WV Climate Alliance,

which grew out of the ad-hoc WV Climate Caucus we started around 2014. Our newest coalition work is with the WV New Jobs Coalition (newjobswv.org) and West Virginians for Energy Freedom (energyfreedomwv.org)

#2 Democracy/Voting Rights - In the late 1990’s we helped form the People’s Election Reform Coalition, which exposed how special interest campaign donations were negatively affecting our state’s public policies. Through WV Citizens for Clean Elections, (wvoter-owned.org) we’ve continued to fight big money in politics, oppose overly aggressive purging of voters by the Sec of State, and work to protect and expand access to the ballot box for all citizens of our state.

#3 Health Care for All - Health care is a human right. That’s why we support a ‘Single Payer’ or Improved Medicare for All type of public health insurance that covers everyone. Until we get there, we’ll continue working to expand affordability and access to medical care for all residents of our state and nation. As a founding member of the HealthCareforAllWV.org coalition we’re working with other state groups to lower Rx costs, make Big Insurance pay for the care we need, and remove social and income barriers to life-saving care.

As you can see, we do much of our organizing and advocacy work in close alignment with other WV nonprofits. Coalitions are where we build strength in numbers and power. This approach leverages your membership dues and donations to increase the reach and effectiveness of our advocacy and campaigns.

2024 is the BIG 50th year for WV Citizen Action! It’s hard to believe we’ve been around for half a century now! David Grubb and friends came together in 1974 with a vision, lots of energy, and enthusiasm to build an organization that has withstood the test of time!

Please consider becoming a supporting member of WV Citizen Action or making a tax deductible donation to our Citizen Action Education Fund!

WV Citizen Action Group
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