



PICO Network News

PICO National Network | *Unlocking the Power of People™*

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NEW VOICES

Assemblies focus members of Congress on family needs

During October and November the PICO National Network held 20 large public meetings with members of Congress and candidates from both parties to press for national leadership on family issues, including housing, education, health care, public safety and immigration reform. More than 10,000 clergy and civic leaders participated in events in Birmingham AL, Allentown, PA, Pensacola, FL, Gainesville, FL, Burlington, VT, Brooklyn, Kansas City, KS, San Jose, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Rochester, NY, Alameda County, CA, Orlando, FL, Stockton, CA, Camden, NJ, Orange County, CA, and Kansas City, MO and statewide assemblies in Colorado and Louisiana. Attendees included Republican and Democratic members of Congress, Senators and candidates, as well as local and state officials and hundreds of congregations and schools involved in 26 PICO federations.

PICO clergy hold pro-family press conference on Capitol Hill

PICO clergy from Evangelical, Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Baptist and Jewish faith traditions gathered at the U.S. Senate on November 18th to insist that a moral values agenda in Washington include pressures facing families as they search for good schools for their children, decent housing in safe neighborhoods and quality health care. Visit the PICO website at www.piconetwork.org to see media coverage.

RECENT WINS AND CAMPAIGNS

Quality Health Care

Covering every child in California with affordable health insurance

PICO California is launching a major new campaign to win affordable health care coverage for all children in the state. Leaders from 20 PICO federations in California are leading this effort in partnership with the 100% Campaign, a group of children's advocacy organizations including the Children's Defense Fund, Children NOW and the Children's Partnership. The campaign builds on work PICO California has done over the last several years to enroll eligible children in health insurance through express-lane programs at public schools and to expand health insurance coverage for working families in the state. For more information visit www.picocalifornia.org.

Good Schools

San Jose PACT creates New Schools Center to spur innovation

To support the creation of dozens of new district-sponsored and charter schools San Jose PACT launched a new non-profit organization, the Silicon Valley New Schools Center. The New Schools Center seeks to transform public education in Silicon Valley, so that all students, particularly children from low-income families and children of color, have access to an excellent public school that prepares them to compete in higher education and in our global society. Newly-hired Executive Director Kendra Ferguson

oversees the New Schools Center's three program areas: New Schools Incubator, Instructional Coaching and Professional Development, and New Schools Grants Program. For more information contact Kendra Ferguson at kendrafergie@hotmail.com.

New Orleans School Board agrees to far-reaching reform proposal

All Congregations Together (ACT) won commitments from all seven members of the new school board in New Orleans to support a comprehensive plan to improve student achievement in a system that ranks among the worst in the United States. ACT hosted nine community forums in each neighborhood in the city to build civic and political support for a 10-point strategy focused on student literacy, individualized learning plans and teacher training and evaluation. The result was an increased interest in the historically low turn-out race by community members throughout New Orleans. Five out of seven board members have been replaced. ACT has received written commitments from each member to support its "People Platform", created by the community. The organization is positioning itself to press for long-term change in how the New Orleans education system functions. For more information contact Mary Fontenot at marynina4909@hotmail.com.

Gainesville wins federal support for model youth program

Congressman Cliff Stearns (R) announced a \$100,000 federal appropriation to support the Teen Zone Program, a model initiative developed by ACTION Network to meet the needs of middle school students in Alachua County. On November 11, 2004 250 leaders from ACTION Network met with Congressman Stearns to share information about the needs of youth in the county and discuss the family policy issues as part of the PICO New Voices campaign. Federal funding will be used to expand the Teen Zone to other schools in Alachua County taking another 150 children off the streets between 2:30 and 6:00 PM. In addition to his support for federal funding, Congressman Stearns agreed to meet with PICO leaders from Gainesville in the winter to explore legislative opportunities on family issues in Washington.

PICO organizers focus on classroom change

Thirty PICO organizers gathered in Denver for three days in mid-November to develop their professional skills. The goal of the session was to help PICO federations develop effective strategies to improve classroom instruction in low-and moderate-income communities.

Housing Opportunities

Rochester Housing and Community Development Trust Fund takes shape

Interfaith Action kicked off a campaign to fund a \$90 million housing and community development trust fund to revitalize Rochester. Mayor Bill Johnson and County Executive Maggie Brooks joined more than 450 Interfaith Action leaders for a public meeting last month in support of the Trust Fund.

San Francisco housing bond falls short of two-thirds vote needed to pass

The San Francisco Organizing Project (SFOP) and other housing groups gathered support from 64% of city voters for a \$200 million affordable housing bond, just missing the needed two-thirds vote necessary to pass the initiative. While deeply disappointed, SFOP clergy and lay leaders are developing an ongoing strategy to insure that families from all income levels can find a home in San Francisco. In addition to its Yes in My Back Yard (YIMBY) campaign to build support for affordable housing development, SFOP

won a policy last year that requires that surplus public properties be used to build housing for the homeless. In the first year 15 properties were turned over, to be developed into housing for 700-1,000 persons. For more information visit www.sfop.org.

Melbourne, Florida receives federal support for homeless services

Congregations for Community Action (CCA) worked with Congressman David Weldon (R) to obtain a \$50,000 federal grant to expand services to homeless individual and families in Melbourne. CCA is a new PICO effort working with religious congregations to address family pressures in Brevard County, Florida. For more information contact Janice Everson at JanEverson@AOL.com.

New Immigrants

PICO federations work to protect new immigrants from fraud

PICO federations in Brooklyn and North San Diego are developing innovative partnerships to respond to the pressures on immigrant families from dishonest lawyers and fraudulent immigration services businesses. Congregations for Civic Action (CCA) in North San Diego held immigration workshops in partnership with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center in San Francisco and 10 local immigration attorneys to provide legal advice to more than 300 local families. On Thursday, December 9, in Brooklyn, the Community Action Project (CAP) Working Group on Fraud Committed Against Immigrants Seeking Legal Advice met for the first time to follow up on commitments made by officials at a public meeting on October 15. The offices of Congressman Major Owens, State Senator Kevin Parker, New York State Attorney General, Brooklyn District Attorney, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, New York State Bureau of Refugee and Immigration Affairs, Catholic Charities, New York Immigration Hotline and CAP were among those that came together to work on the issue of fraud. The working group will concentrate on five specific areas: (1) enforcement of new immigrant protections laws that CAP had worked to pass; (2) increasing the incidence of reporting; (3) media/education campaign; (4) creating more legal services; and (5) increasing coordination/cooperation between those responsible for eliminating the crime. For more information contact Jessica Dias at jessica.capbrooklyn@earthlink.net.

Safe Neighborhoods

Oakland passes crime prevention ballot measure

Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) won passage of a ballot measure that provides new money for crime prevention, intervention and enforcement in Oakland. At a time when federal budget cuts and un-reimbursed homeland security expenses have hobbled the city's ability to respond to rising crime rates, the measure adds 63 additional police officers and \$5 million a year for prevention programs. The past two public safety ballot measures failed to win two-thirds support, but with OCO leaders adding 2,600 new voters to the rolls and calling more than 15,000 new and infrequent voters, the measure passed with a 70% majority. For more information visit www.oaklandcommunity.org.

Anchorage wins federal funds to improve policing

Leaders for the Alaska Interdenominational Sponsoring Committee (AISC) at St. Anthony's Catholic Church won a \$50,000 federal grant for the Anchorage Police Department to increase policing in two high crime neighborhoods. AISC is working with the Anchorage Mayor and U.S. Attorney to bring community oriented policing back to the city. For more information contact Angela Liston at angela.liston@caa-ak.org.

Civic Participation

PICO in Central America

In November, fourteen Catholic Bishops representing the six countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua decided to establish a new PICO organizing initiative in Central America. Last year the Central American Catholic Bishops had invited PICO to assist them in developing grassroots leadership and creating innovative ways to respond to local and regional issues. The goal of the new PICO Central America effort is to promote regional cooperation on trade and development and address poverty, migration, violence, and other issues affecting families and communities in the region. For more information contact Uli Schmitt at uschmitt@piconetwork.org.

Baton Rouge sets agenda for new mayor

New Baton Rouge Mayor Melvin Holden has placed five members of Working Interfaith Network (WIN) on his transition team and agreed to report on his progress in addressing WIN's strategies for revitalizing the city within six months of taking office. Before the November election WIN brought together hundreds of local residents to present both candidates for mayor with a civic agenda for improving life in Baton Rouge. WIN's agenda includes improving education, addressing environmental issues and developing a comprehensive economic development strategy for the city. Visit www.br-win.org for more information.

CAREERS

Career Opportunities in Organizing

San Diego Organizing Project invites persons considering a career in community organizing to apply for a paid six-week internship during spring 2005. Successful participants will have the opportunity to be hired for one of two open positions in San Diego and for other organizing positions in the PICO National Network. Please send a cover letter and resume to Zoraya Oliver-Griffin at Zoraya@sdop.net.

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