



Virginia Organizing Project

News from the Grassroots

Special points of interest:

- VOP Martinsville is set to open a storefront office in February.
- VOP NOVA knocked on 400 doors in the special election in SD 37 reminding voters that their vote counts!
- The fight against predatory lending continues in the General Assembly and VOP is on the front lines.



VOP and other civil rights and faith groups joined together to encourage Governor Tim Kaine to sign an **Executive Order to restore voting rights** for all of Virginia's disenfranchised felons prior to leaving office. The groups shared their message via media lobby meetings, letters to the editor and thousands of phone calls generated to the Governor's office and the White House. VOP South Hampton Roads held a phone bank and waffle breakfast, encouraging Governor Kaine to "stop waffling and sign the Executive Order." Kaine declined to sign an Executive Order. While the decision was disappointing, new members got involved and the issue received significant national attention.

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Fighting for Health Care Reform

VOP organizers and supporters have been working around the clock to bring community voices to the table on important issues affecting Virginians.

Health Care: January was a roller coaster ride for those working on health care reform in Virginia. VOP members continued the push to improve the U.S. Senate legislation, especially concerning affordability. That is why VOP members headed to Washington to attend the Health Care Affordability Summit. VOP member Shokoufeh Dianat presented Representative Tom Perriello with a "key" to thank him for his support for health care reform.



Member Shokoufeh Dianat fighting for affordable health care for Virginia.

With all of the shuffling in Washington around health care reform, VOP's efforts have remained strong and consistent. Members and other groups spoke out in local radio interviews, wrote dozens of letters to the editor and made hundreds of calls to their members of Congress. The message remained loud and crystal clear: "647,000 Virginians go to work every day without health insurance. We need reform now!" VOP members also continued to hold the health insurance companies accountable by exposing that the health insurance lobby (AHIP) had funneled money through the Chamber of Commerce to put anti-health care reform ads on TV stations statewide.

OUCH! Budget Cuts Hurt Virginians

With the state budget crisis looming, VOP organized against massive cuts and for creating more revenue as a solution to the state's budget woes. VOP's Tax Reform Committee released its Virginia Tax Reform Blueprint which calls for reforming the state's antiquated, regressive tax system. Virginia's heaviest tax burden is on the poor and middle class, creating a less prosperous economy for everyone. The blueprint makes five key recommendations to reform the tax structure with progressive changes to provide additional revenue. VOP also gave testimony on progressive tax reform at several state budget hearings this month. While the budget can be complicated, the impact on our communities is significant. VOP will be holding budget and tax reform workshops all over the state to give residents the information to understand the workings of the state budget and the tools to speak out.

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING PROJECT

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Local Chapters (call or visit the website for more info.)

Danville
Martinsville
Fredericksburg/NOVA
South Hampton Roads
Newport News/Williamsburg
Shenandoah Valley
Southwest
Petersburg
Richmond
On Campus: W&M,UMW,
VSU,UVA, E&H, U of R

www.virginia-organizing.org

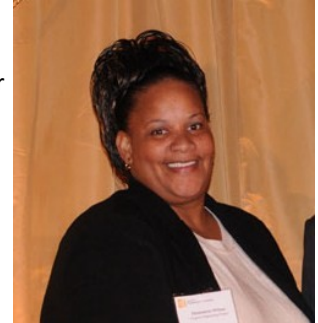
VOP in the national spotlight: VOP members were featured in the final installment of Pam Fessler's spotlight on community organizing for NPR. Reflecting on the changes that have occurred since the Obama administration took office, VOP members shared their realistic expectations of the long, complicated process of real social and economic change.



VOP Community Leader Profile: Thomasine Wilson

Thomasine Wilson of Albemarle County has worked hard as a community leader and as a member of the VOP State Governing Board. Thomasine found out about VOP through her local organizer, Harold Folley. In 2006, Harold was organizing around the issue of predatory lending. He asked Thomasine if she knew anyone who had been caught in the car title lending trap. Having been caught in a car title loan trap herself, Thomasine replied, "You are looking at someone now,"

What started with a chance encounter with Harold ended with Thomasine testifying at the General Assembly on predatory lending and sharing her story with the media. Thomasine continued to speak out on VOP issues including predatory lending, health care and the environment. As a full-time personal care assistant and a member of the VOP Health Care Reform Committee, Thomasine has been particularly passionate about health care reform. She has headed lobby meetings with members of Congress in Washington, has spoken in front of large crowds and has performed hours of thankless phone-banking.



Thomasine reflects on her three years of work with VOP: "I like working with VOP because it is hands-on and face-to-face. We work on the issues that matter at the moment, when people are hurting. When people want to be heard we give them a voice."

Local Campaigns

The **South Hampton Roads VOP Chapter** became engaged in a local campaign to support Providence Mobile Home Park residents as they organize against a property owner who is seeking city rezoning approval to replace this thirty year old community with condo units. The **Lee County VOP Chapter** has been working on bringing a local drug court to their community. This month chapter members met with the three local Judges who've committed to a regional drug court. This is a great step forward. The **Washington County VOP Chapter** is continuing to work on open government issues and had a feature editorial in the *Bristol Herald Courier* concerning a back room deal to buy a county office building for \$8 million while the school system has to cut \$4.5 million. The

chapter is also planning to attend local public comment periods to speak on the issue and is also working on a letter to the editor drive.



The **Fredericksburg VOP Chapter** is beginning to work on solutions to the lack of revenue in Virginia, and planning actions and lobbying to encourage the General Assembly to write a budget that works for all Virginians. The **University of Mary Washington VOP Chapter** is working to get students

connected with VOP's campaigns by lobbying, phone banking, tabling, and writing letters. The **Hampton/Newport News VOP Chapter** is hard at work putting together a workshop titled Sexual Orientation and Oppression. They are currently recruiting other organizations to co-sponsor the workshop, planned for March 20 in Hampton. The chapter has also been involved in planning the VOP budget workshops. The **Shenandoah Valley VOP Chapters** are working on a campaign to end racial profiling and will be holding "A Night of a Thousand Conversations" to discuss the issues of racial profiling. The **Danville VOP Chapter** will be holding Health and Wellness Forums to share ways to improve local health while building community.