



# Virginia Organizing Project

MARCH 2010

ISSUE TWO



*VOP held bake sales for the budget statewide*

## News From the Grassroots

**\$921.01 Down, Only \$3,999,999,078.99 to Go**

The Virginia Organizing Project held **“Bake Sales For the Budget”** statewide to send the message that a cuts-only approach to the budget shortfall is irresponsible and will hurt public systems at a time when Virginians need them most. Teachers, social workers, police officers and other community leaders dropped off baked goods to support the effort. Proceeds were delivered to the Governor’s office in the form of a giant \$921.01 novelty check, in addition to a regular check in the

same amount to the state’s general fund.

### Flood Cars Dried Up

The Virginia Organizing Project joined with the Virginia Poverty Law Center and other consumer advocates to **defeat bad legislation that would have increased the threshold for water damaged vehicles** from \$1,000 to \$5,000. This increase would have resulted in water-damaged vehicles being sold to Virginia consumers without those consumers being informed of the past damage.

This was a huge victory in the face of intense lobbying by insurance lobbyists and others!

### Protecting Your Vote

VOP worked with the members of the Virginia Verified Voting Coalition to stop attempts to overturn legislation enacted three years ago that helps provide a “paper trail” for election voting results. **The General Assembly voted to keep the DRE ban intact**, helping to ensure that there will be paper backups for votes cast in future elections.

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Come visit! VOP opened a storefront office this month in Martinsville

To get more involved with the Virginia Organizing Project visit our website at: [www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org)

# Real People, Real Problems, Real Solutions

The General Assembly passed legislation that will enact reforms to car title lending that helps **protect consumers from the car title lending trap**. The legislation was not perfect due to the high interest rates permitted, but is considered a major victory because it includes time limits on the loans, interest rate caps, notices before cars can be repossessed, more information provided to borrowers and licensing requirements for lenders.

VOP supported bills by Delegate Adam Ebbin and Senator Donald McEachin to establish **non-discrimination** requirements for all state employees. Unfortunately, both bills were killed in subcommittee. VOP's Ben Greenberg joined numerous other speakers and organizations to testify on behalf of the measures: "The Virginia Organizing Project has as one of its founding principles non-discrimination for all Virginians. We represent tens of thousands of

Virginians throughout the state who care about this issue. It is time to act on this and to pass legislation to protect all Virginians. The fact that we have had to rely on an executive order from each administration to protect Virginians is a travesty and it is time to act."



VOP continues to fight for **health care reform**. Supporters in Virginia Beach held a mock bankruptcy trial outside of Anthem's office to highlight bankruptcy due to medical debt. Lobby visits and phone calls were made to Virginia's Congressional delegation in support of reform. Two VOP members testified before members of Congress at a health care forum in Washington.

## VOP Leader of the Month:

### Denise Smith



*Denise Smith is a VOP original. She has been with the organization from the start. Denise remembers vividly some of the first VOP campaigns. She recalls a strong community effort in Lee County to change the way juries are chosen. In 1996, an African-American man was going to be tried with an all white jury when community members, along with allies from across the region, descended on the courthouse and eventually were influential in changing the way that juries are chosen there.*

*"When I first started out in VOP we felt that it was important to look at who was not at the table. We were very concerned with how to bring people together and break down the barriers. Where we can agree, change can be made. Most of us don't have resources but we have a concern for our communities and our families. If we combine our resources and fight together, we will win."*

## **VIRGINIA ORGANIZING PROJECT**

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**Local Chapters** (call or visit the website for more information)

Danville  
Martinsville  
Fredericksburg  
Northern Virginia  
Newport News/Hampton Roads  
South Hampton Roads  
Williamsburg  
Shenandoah Valley  
Washington County & Lee County  
Petersburg  
Richmond  
**On Campus:** W&M, UMW, VSU,  
UVA, E&H, U of R

## **Local Campaigns**

Residents of Fredericksburg are working together to hold a large rail company responsible for the way they transport dangerous chemicals. In Hampton Roads, VOP and other partners continue the Providence Mobile Home Park Campaign to address the injustice of a 30-year-old trailer park community being replaced with 75 condo units in Chesapeake.

VOP held workshops across the state on the budget crisis and the need for progressive tax reform. VOP held racial profiling workshops in five communities called the Night of a Thousand Conversations which supported a national campaign through local involvement. VOP also held a community organizing skills training for 35 students at the University of Richmond. The Danville VOP Chapter partnered with the Danville Regional Foundation to hold a health forum on obesity.