



Virginia Organizing leaders pose outside the East Room of the White House with U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi after hearing President Barack Obama talk about the small business benefits of the Affordable Care Act.



We held small group break out sessions at the annual Grassroots Gathering in Richmond on August 10. Participants in this session were creating a "spider web" to demonstrate the connections we have across the state.



The Harrisonburg Chapter held an immigration reform gathering featuring U.S. Representative Luis Gutierrez on August 26, 2013. More than 400 people attended.

News From the Grassroots

What a Summer!

With the fall season quickly approaching, it is exciting to look back at all the great things that have happened this summer at Virginia Organizing.

In South Hampton Roads, the community gathered once a month to hold a candlelight vigil in support of comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship. These vigils were full of prayers and stories from local people who are directly affected by the immigration policies in the U.S. Maria Fornella, one of the Chapter leaders who helped organize these vigils, emphasized the importance of local immigrants being offered an opportunity to share their own stories.

"More people are willing to tell their stories and show themselves for who they are and what kind of citizens they will be once they become totally included in American society," Fornella said.

In Harrisonburg, Chapter leaders have been very active in the immigration debate. The Chapter held their third rally to support immigration reform and more than 400 people came out to show support and hear U.S. Representative Luis Gutierrez, an immigration advocate who serves on the House Judiciary Committee with Representative Bob Goodlatte.

Shenandoah Valley area leaders have also been active in attending meetings where Representative Goodlatte speaks to make sure they can ask questions about immigration reform. Representative Goodlatte is an important player in the immigration debate because he serves as House Judiciary Chairperson and controls which bills will be heard by the committee.

The Richmond Chapter also held an immigration rally this summer and had more than 100 attendees. They wanted to send a message to Representative Eric Cantor: support comprehensive immigration reform. Like Representative Goodlatte, Representative Cantor also holds a powerful position in the U.S. House of Representatives; he is the Majority Leader and has significant influence in his party.

In contrast, anti-immigration rallies are getting little attention across the nation. The one held in Richmond that featured controversial anti-immigrant Representative Steve King was attended by only about 15 local residents.

Virginia Organizing Chapters have also been working to make sure Congress knows that corporations should pay their fair share and Social Security should be off the table for debt and deficit solution negotiations.

In Charlottesville and Danville, local Chapter leaders performed a skit that showed the needs of the people should be valued over the needs of the few wealthy corporations. Watch the Danville Chapter perform the skit in a local barber shop by visiting: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0na7gvRCJH0&feature=share&list=UUFvPoUKLH4vLDBXEixZM0dg>.

Semaje Smith of Charlottesville said, "Local schools, children, and families are having to pay the price so big corporations can keep money from the U.S. government by shifting profits to offshore accounts. We need to stop making cuts and start making sure that big corporations are paying their fair share."

Currently, lawmakers are debating the way Social Security cost-of-living increases are calculated, which could reduce payments to people who rely on the program for their survival. Meanwhile, the U.S. government rewards corporations who take jobs and profits overseas and allows those corporations to take advantage of special tax loopholes. You can read more about the loopholes that corporations and wealthy individuals receive by visiting this link: <http://virginia-organizing.org/sites/default/files/Americans%20for%20Tax%20Fairness-%20High%20Price%20of%20Loopholes.pdf>.

It has been a truly eventful summer and we are looking forward to the rest of the year!

Real people. Real change.

Annual Grassroots Gathering: Success!

On August 10, about 125 Virginia Organizing members and leaders met in Richmond for our annual Grassroots Gathering. After a morning session focused on Medicaid expansion in Virginia and important elements of the Affordable Care Act being implemented this year, members attended workshops on a range of topics including Virginia Organizing 101, speaking to the media, tax fairness, and more. U.S. Senator Mark Warner could not make it, but he did record a special video message just for the event.

In the closing session, Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth Jennifer Aulgur spoke about the recent changes in the restoration of civil rights process for former felons and thanked Virginia Organizing for our hard work and leadership on this issue. From health care reform to restoration of rights, the Grassroots Gathering underlined some of our most important issues and demonstrated the power of real people working together for real change.

Virginia Organizing Takes Group to White House Press Conference on Health Care

Toan Nguyen, owner of C'ville Coffee in Charlottesville, stood behind President Barack Obama as he gave a speech about the benefits of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) at the White House on July 18. Virginia

Organizing took 20 leaders to the White House that day and heard the President speak on how parts of the ACA like the medical loss ratio and tax credits for businesses are helping small business owners provide coverage for their employees.

Nguyen said, "It was wonderful to be invited to the White House to support the Affordable Care Act. This law supports my small business and I'm glad to return the favor."

Health Care Reform Presentations All Across Virginia

The new Health Insurance Marketplace (previously called the Exchange) open enrollment period will begin on October 1. The Marketplace is designed to offer coverage to those who do not currently have coverage through their employers or whose employers charge too much for that coverage. Joanne Grossi returned to Virginia to present the facts of the Marketplace in Richmond and there are other presentations happening across the state thanks to Virginia Organizing, the Virginia Poverty Law Center, and several other organizations. Virginia Organizing has created a special section on our website for health care information, including flyers and fact sheets to help you understand the Marketplace and answer your questions. You can find those resources by visiting <http://virginia-organizing.org/resources/50>. We'll be posting more information as it is available!

Leader of the Month Wendy Jimenez



Wendy Jimenez is a Fredericksburg Chapter leader who has been very active on immigration issues with Virginia Organizing and other organizations.

"I met [Fredericksburg Organizer] Addie Alexander in March when I was helping to organize the [immigration] rally of April 10," said Wendy. From that point, she became an active leader. While she is very interested in immigration reform, Wendy also supports Virginia Organizing because of the work the organization does in health care and education and many other issues.

Immigration will always be a social justice issue close to Wendy's heart for personal reasons. "I am an immigrant and I know all the different situations this community has to deal with every day," Wendy explained.

The Fredericksburg Chapter has been working to gain community support for comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship by holding community forums and meeting with U.S. Representative Rob Wittman.

Wendy is proud of the work she does with Virginia Organizing. Thanks for your work, Wendy!

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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Local Chapters

Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro
Charlottesville-Albemarle County
Danville
Harrisonburg
Fredericksburg
Lee County
Martinsville-Henry County
South Hampton Roads
Washington County
Tri-Cities/Petersburg
Richmond
On Campus: UMW, VSU, CNU, UVA, E&H, U of R

News in Brief

- We hired two new organizers this summer! Isabel Castillo is the new Shenandoah Valley Organizer and Laura Castro has been hired as a second organizer in South Hampton Roads! Welcome!
- Please consider Virginia Organizing in your estate planning. For more information, please contact Michele Mattioli at mattioli@virginia-organizing.org.
- The Harrisonburg Chapter worked hard to have the City Council rename a street after Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and won that campaign! Great work!
- In Southwest Virginia, companies that wanted to use the process of hydrofracking to remove natural gas from the land have given up and gone home because of the work of Virginia Organizing and other groups! Congratulations to our Lee and Washington County Chapters!
- The developing Petersburg Chapter registered 40 new voters in July! Way to go!

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