

January 2010

As we prepare for a new year – and a new decade – the accomplishments and the challenges of the past are an important reminder of how critical our advocacy work is today, tomorrow, and for future generations. In 2009, we saw the inauguration of our nation's first black president, the enactment of expanded federal hate crimes protections, and heated health care debates in town halls across the country as well as in the halls of Congress. In Texas, the 81st Legislature met. They elected a new Speaker of the House, Representative Joe Straus. During a slowdown in the House during the final days of session, many bills died due to the lack of time. This prevented some good and some bad bills from passing; in particular, the Voter ID bill died. Education Works and Prevention Works bills that promoted medically accurate sex education did not garner the necessary legislative support. An early childhood bill had bi-partisan support, but the Governor vetoed it. The good news is that in spite of the veto there will be an additional investment of \$25 million to the current pre-k program. The State Board of Education reviewed the science curriculum, and bold attempts to insert intelligent design into our students' curriculum were defeated. Rest assured that 2010 promises to be just as exciting and even more challenging. The State Board of Education will review social studies curriculum, health care reform is unfinished, women's reproductive rights are threatened, and immigration reform is on the horizon, NCJW will need to build upon our strengths in the coming year, and you are a significant source of that strength. We look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Happy New Year!

Marlene Cohen and Janet Neuenschwander
Texas State Public Affairs Co-Chairs

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Action Needed

State Board of Education Social Studies Curriculum January Public Hearing

The process of revising social studies curriculum standards for Texas public schools is moving into a critical stage. The final drafts of the proposed standards prepared by writing teams made up of teachers, academics and other community members are reflective of mainstream academic scholarship in the various subject areas. It is clear that members of these writing teams largely resisted intense political pressure from far right, rejecting attempts to remove key civil rights figures and make other politically motivated revisions. But as with science and language arts, far-right SBOE members are already plotting to undo the work of the writing teams of social studies.

A public hearing the board has scheduled for January may be the only opportunity for you to speak out against the far right's efforts to corrupt standards for history, government and other social studies classes. We must ensure that the board adopts curriculum standards that reflect mainstream academic scholarship in social studies. This is vitally important because the results of this decision will be reflected in the next generation of social studies textbooks around the country. The hearing is likely to occur either on January 13 or January 14 in Austin.

Act Now: If you are interested in speaking at the hearing, please contact the Texas Freedom Network (www.tfn.org). TFN will help you register to speak before the board and be an effective voice against efforts to politicize our children's classrooms.

If you cannot or do not want to testify in person, send the State Board of Education an email, fax, or letter before January 13. If we are to prevent far-right SBOE members from turning social studies classrooms into tools for promoting political agendas, then it's critical that the board hears from people like you! The key points include having students learn about diverse people students, no whitewashing of McCarthyism, and students should learn that the Founders created a nation in which all people are free to worship – or not – as they choose without coercion or interference by government.

The State Board of Education can be reached at: Texas Education Agency, 1701 N. Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas 78701-1494, Fax: 512-463.9838, sboeteks@tea.state.tx.us.

Jobs Bill

On December 15, 2009, the House passed the Jobs for Main Street Act (HR 2847), legislation that aims to address our nation's soaring jobless rate. The House-passed bill includes just under \$50 billion for infrastructure projects and, provides some relief – though not enough – for states struggling to balance their budgets. Additionally, it would make the refundable Child Tax Credit available to families starting with their first dollar of earnings and would ensure that these increased refunds do not count in determining eligibility for programs such as SNAP (food stamps) or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program.

NCJW is pleased that the House has taken this important step and is committed to ensuring that all individuals have access to services and income that meet basic human needs while encouraging self-sufficiency.

Act Now: Jobs for Main Street is a good start, but more direct job creation is necessary to address the high levels of unemployment our nation is facing. Urge your senators to make a robust jobs bill a top priority in 2010.

Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA)

It is still legal to fire workers or deny them a promotion or job for being gay in 29 states and for being transgender in 38 states. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) would remedy this injustice by bringing federal protections for LGBT Americans in line with the protections for other minority groups. The House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee each held a hearing where the majority of witnesses supported the legislation, including members of the administration.

NCJW believes that all people deserve to be judged on the merit of their work and should not be discriminated against based on immutable characteristics.

Act Now: Contact your senators and representative to ask them to cosponsor ENDA. In addition, the national ENDA coalition will be organizing in-district meetings for ENDA in the coming weeks. Please let us know if you are interested in setting up a visit in your state, participating in one, or if you need talking points and additional details.

Comprehensive, Humane Immigration Reform

On December 15, 2009, Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) introduced HR 4321, Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity (CIR ASAP). This bill creates reform in a holistic way and meets many of the challenges that the current system presents. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) is expected to introduce a companion bill early in 2010. Based on comments by the administration and congressional leaders, immigration reform is considered to be the next big issue that Congress will tackle after health reform. NCJW is currently working in coalition with a diverse group of organizations for comprehensive and humane immigration reforms. In Texas, we are involved with the **DREAM Act Coalition** (a part of immigration reform that addresses children who were brought here by their parents and have graduated from Texas high schools) and the **Reform Immigration for Texas Alliance**, a multi-sector statewide network dedicated to building support for fair, humane and sensible immigration policies.

NCJW supports comprehensive and humane immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship for those in the country without legal status. We oppose dangerous punitive measures like raids and deportations that harm communities and tear families apart.

Act Now: Contact your senators and representative and ask them to resolve to take action to fix our broken immigration system in 2010. Urge them to co-sponsor HR 4321. To participate or take the lead in scheduling an in-district meeting to urge your representative to take an active role supporting this legislation, please contact us. We also have information about joining local groups of the DREAM Act Coalition and Reform Immigration for Texas Alliance.

In Texas

Healthy Women, Healthy Families Releases Results of Year-long Survey

The *Healthy Women, Healthy Families* coalition, made up of over 20 grassroots and nonprofit organizations (including NCJW) from across the state, announces the release of **Healthy Women, Healthy Families First Year In Review: Trends and Results**. This report highlights the healthcare needs and priorities of 758 women from 60 Texas counties surveyed over the course of a year by the coalition. Women were asked to rank 20 health and family services based on the level of need where they live.

The complete report, including over 30 excerpts from personal stories shared by survey respondents, is available at www.HealthyWomenHealthyFamilies.org.

On the Hill

DC Abortion Ban

The fiscal year 2010 omnibus spending bill, signed into law on December 16, 2009, lifts a ban that had prevented Washington, DC, from using its own, locally raised funds to pay for abortion services.

NCJW believes that this is an important step forward and will continue working to eliminate other restrictions on access to abortion care.

Health Care Reform

On December 24, 2009, the Senate passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (HR 3590) by a vote of 60-39, setting the stage for the final step toward health reform: a conference committee effort to merge the House- and Senate-passed bills. In many ways, the Senate bill is weaker than the House bill as it does not include a public option or provide strong enough premium subsidies and out-of-pocket affordability protections. However, HR 3590 does contain a number of incredibly important reforms.

Unfortunately, the Senate-passed health care reform bill includes language that would deprive millions of women of access to abortion care and impose onerous restrictions on millions more. This provision would require women and men to write a separate check for abortion coverage and has no other purpose than to stigmatize abortion. Further, women in states that exercise the Senate's "opt out" provision will lose access to abortion coverage under the plan altogether. The House and the Senate are holding ongoing negotiations on the abortion-related provisions in the bills. NCJW opposes the Senate language on abortion coverage as well as the Stupak amendment now part of the House bill which would bar women from even using their own funds to purchase abortion coverage in the new Exchange.

NCJW supports quality, comprehensive, confidential, nondiscriminatory health-care coverage and services that are affordable and accessible to all and is continuing to work with leaders in Congress to ensure that the best possible bill is enacted early in 2010.

Human Needs Appropriations

In early December 2009, Congress passed the final six appropriations bills which annually fund federal discretionary programs. The \$447 billion funds a number of critical human needs programs for fiscal year 2010. Specifically, it includes funding to extend through February 2010 emergency unemployment benefits and subsidies for unemployed workers to continue receiving health insurance from their previous employer, known as COBRA. In addition, it includes critical money for programs that reduce and respond to domestic violence. Funds to implement the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) and funding for programs funded through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) increased over last year's appropriated level. \$400 million is provided to administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp program) whose enrollment has escalated to 36 million in recent months.

Plan A Campaign

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding

The fiscal year 2010 omnibus spending bill that the President signed into law on December 16, 2009 eliminated all existing funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, programs that have proven ineffective and dangerous. In addition, the spending bill allocated \$114 million for a new, evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention initiative that will be implemented by the newly authorized Office of Adolescent Health in the Department of Health and Human Services.

NCJW is pleased that funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs was eliminated and will continue to work with the Obama administration to ensure that both teen pregnancy and disease prevention programs will be prioritized under this new initiative.

International Family Planning

Another positive feature of the 2010 omnibus appropriations bill signed on December 16, 2009 was \$648.5 million for international family planning programs, an increase of more than \$103 million. The funding bill also includes \$55 million for the United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA), the international body that works to ensure universal access to reproductive health care and information. **NCJW is committed to ensuring that comprehensive, confidential family planning and reproductive health services, regardless of age or ability to pay, are accessible to all.**

NCJW News

Washington Institute 2010

Mark your calendars for March 21- 23, 2010 for NCJW's premiere advocacy event.

Registration is now open for Washington Institute 2010 (WIX), both online at www.ncjw.org and via the Call Section Presidents received.