

ACORN News April 8, 2003

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[ed: this is one of the regular ACORN updates.]

From: "David Swanson" <[acornnews at acorn.org](mailto:acornnews@acorn.org)>

ACORN News
April 8, 2003

If you are subscribed to the plain text version of ACORN News and would like to begin receiving an HTML version that includes photographs and graphics, please click here: <http://acorn.org/acornupdatesplus/>

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TAKE ACTION: Pass the Dream Act / Student Investment Act

TAKE ACTION: Block Proposed Tax Cuts for Millionaires

1. ACORN HOLDS 11th ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL CONFERENCE - From March 22 to 26, 100 ACORN leaders from around the country participated in ACORN's 11th annual legislative and political conference in Washington, D.C., taking part in workshops, rallies, lobby visits, and meetings with allies and with Administration officials. ACORN members lobbied 42 Senators and 73 Representatives. On March 24, another 400 ACORN members joined the conference for a series of public rallies and actions. In the morning Senator Ted Kennedy and presidential candidate Reverend Al Sharpton delivered rousing speeches to the crowd packing a church on Capitol Hill. Then flag-waving chanting ACORN members marched to the Capitol to speak out against Bush's latest proposal for tax cuts for billionaires. Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO Richard Trumka was a featured speaker at the rally, along with ACORN National President Maude Hurd. ACORN leaders spoke about the importance of funding for schools, Medicaid, housing, and many other needs more pressing than yet another giant giveaway to the most greedy. The event was well covered by the media and may have helped push the Senate to cut the tax cut proposal from \$726 billion to \$350 billion,

which is still \$350 billion too high! Following the rally, 500 ACORN members boarded busses and traveled across town to the offices of the American Financial Services Association, the trade group of subprime and predatory lenders. Members in shark costumes carried a giant Shark of the Year award and chanted "AFSA, How Many Homes Did You Steal Today?" as they filled the building's lobby.

The next day, ACORN members visited their Senators and Representatives, urging them to:

- Oppose the Bush tax cut and any "compromise" that drains away hundreds of billions of dollars largely for the extremely wealthy;
- Increase federal Medicaid funding to help states meet critical health care needs;
- Support full funding for the No Child Left Behind Act;
- Cosponsor the DREAM Act/Student Adjustment Act to allow immigrant students to pay in-state college tuition;
- Support a legalization bill like the one introduced last year by Rep. Gephardt;
- Support a restoration of benefits in TANF reauthorization for legal immigrants;
- Oppose HR 833 by Rep. Bob Ney. Despite the claims of its backers, HR 833's entire purpose is to preempt state and local laws on predatory lending;
- Co-sponsor anti-predatory lending legislation to be introduced by Sen. Sarbanes and Rep. Frank.

Speakers who addressed the conference included Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D., Md.), Rep. Barney Frank (D., Mass.), Rep. George Miller (D., Calif.), AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and Vice President Linda Chavez Thompson, NEA President Reg Weaver, SEIU President Andy Stern, La Raza Vice President Cecilia Munoz, National Newspaper Publishers News Service Editor-in-Chief George Curry, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Executive Director Wade Henderson, AFL-CIO Assistant Political Director David Boundy, NAACP National Voter Fund Executive Director Greg Moore, National Immigration Law Center Senior Policy Analyst Josh Bernstein, House Financial Services Committee staffer Dean Sagar, National Priorities Project Executive Director Greg Speeter, Center for Community Change Director of Public Policy Stephanie Robinson, Fannie Mae Senior Vice President Barry Zigas, HERE Assistant to the President Tom Snyder, AFSCME Legislative Director Chuck Loveless, and Freddie Mac Vice President Craig Nickerson. In addition, a group of ACORN members, including four predatory lending victims from around the country who are active in state and local campaigns against predatory lending, met with the Comptroller of the Currency to express opposition to federal preemption of state and local laws on predatory lending. For more information, link to

<http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/otheracornwork/legcon.htm> or contact Mildred Brown at alac@acorn.org or 202-547-2500.

PHOTO (Left): Senator Ted Kennedy addressed ACORN's conference.

<http://www.acorn.org/photos/gallery.php?p=511>

PHOTO (Center): ACORN members rallied at the U.S. Capitol during ACORN's conference.

<http://www.acorn.org/photos/gallery.php?p=408>

PHOTO (Right): ACORN members protested against predatory lending at AFSA.

<http://www.acorn.org/photos/gallery.php?p=417>

2. ARKANSAS ANTI-PREDATORY LENDING BILL PASSES HOUSE - On March 24, a bill to place some basic restrictions on predatory lending abuses (HB 2598) was unanimously passed by the Arkansas House with the strong support of the Attorney General. The bill, which was sponsored in the House by

Representative Sam Ledbetter, has also been passed by the Senate Committee on Insurance and Commerce with a recommendation that the full Senate pass it. The bill is expected to pass the Senate this month. The bill's protections are more limited than those passed by some other states and contain some loopholes that will need to be closed, but do limit prepayment penalties, ensure that borrowers talk to a loan counselor before taking out a high cost loan, and ban the financing of credit insurance policies. ACORN members attended four House committee hearings and successfully lobbied a conservative committee to bring the bill this far. In a separate approach to encourage fair lending, Arkansas ACORN recently held a bank fair with about 200 people in attendance, including Sen. Blanche Lincoln. For more information, link to <http://www.acorn.org/campaigns/pc.php?p=2127> or contact Neil Sealy at aracorn@acorn.org or 501-376-7151.

3. ARKANSAS PUSHES TAXATION TO PAY FOR MEDICAID - Arkansas's budget, like most states', is in a crisis. Public employees face layoffs, children face loss of health insurance, and home care faces cuts. The Department of Human Services is short \$117 million, most of it in the Medicaid budget. The Governor has proposed a sales tax increase. ACORN and allies, including SEIU Local 100 and Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, are pushing more progressive tax proposals to raise the revenue. This coalition held a 100-person rally on April 2 at which ACORN leaders Hattie Daniels and John Percy spoke. The following day, ACORN held a legislative forum in Pine Bluff attended by three state representatives. ACORN has also been moving petitions at worksites supporting raising taxes or "Sharing the Pain," with breaks for low-income people, as well as increased income taxes on the Waltons, Rockefellers, and Tysons, and on the oil companies. For more information, contact Neil Sealy at aracorn@acorn.org or 501-376-7151.

4. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ON PREDATORY LENDING - Today in room HC-6 of the U.S. Capitol from 3 to 5 p.m., Congressman William Lacy Clay and Congresswoman Barbara Lee held a hearing on predatory lending. Participating were victims of predatory lending brought in through ACORN's chapters in Paterson, N.J., and Washington, D.C. Also testifying was ACORN Legislative Representative Greg Jefferson. Congress Members Jan Schakowsky, Stephanie Tubbs Jones, Harold Ford, and Sheila Jackson Lee all stopped by and spoke. The following organizations also participated: NAACP, La Raza, Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago, National Community Reinvestment Coalition, and Congressional Research Service. Testimony and photos from the event will be on ACORN's website. For more information, link to <http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/predatorylending/plreleases/ch.htm> or contact Greg Jefferson at gjefferson@acorn.org or 202-547-2500.

5. NEW YORK WINS COMMITMENT ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING -- On April 2, over 250 ACORN members marched through Franklin Square, Nassau County, NY, and converged around the home of the owner of Densan Enterprises. The landholder owns over 30 vacant tax lots, many of them acquired through New York City's Public Auction. ACORN members from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Upper Manhattan, and Nassau County walked through the town chanting and flyering in protest of the owner's failure to clean up and build on most of the vacant lots in a timely fashion. In the few cases where the owner has built housing, the sale prices have ranged from \$250,000 to \$400,000 per unit, putting them out of reach for moderate-income families. The landholder agreed to come out of his home to hear the demands of ACORN leaders. In meetings with ACORN the following day, the developer agreed to collaborate with ACORN to eradicate blight and create more housing for low- to moderate-income families. For more information, link to <http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/affordablehousing/ahreleases/amd.htm> or contact Ann Sullivan at nyacornliro@acorn.org or 516-481-6769.

6. MASSACHUSETTS PUSHES IMMIGRANTS RIGHTS BILL - On April 2, Boston ACORN

and allies in the Safe Driver Coalition held a 500-person forum to promote a state bill (HB 2292, sponsored by Rep. Eugene O'Flaherty) that would allow immigrants to obtain a driver's license without a Social Security number, using other documentation such as the IRS Tax Identification Number. Four state legislators, one City Council Member, and an excited crowd, including many Brazilian-Americans and Spanish speakers, turned out in the rain for this event. The meeting was conducted in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. For more information, contact Lisa Clauson at [maacorn at acorn.org](mailto:maacorn@acorn.org) or 617-436-7100.

7. ILLINOIS BUILDS MOMENTUM FOR MINIMUM WAGE - On March 30, over 100 ACORN members joined 300 allies and the Governor for a rally in support of a minimum wage increase, which is expected to pass the Senate today. The increase will be in two stages, moving from \$5.15 to \$6.00 on Labor Day 2003, and to \$6.50 on Labor Day 2004. ACORN mounted a huge campaign over the past weeks to sway nine recalcitrant senators, knocking on doors and asking people to call their senators on the spot. Five senators were brought around to ACORN's position. For more information, contact Madeline Talbott at [ilacorn at acorn.org](mailto:ilacorn@acorn.org) or 312-939-7488.

PHOTO: Over 100 Illinois ACORN members joined 300 allies at a rally with the Governor for a minimum wage increase on March 30, 2003.
<http://www.acorn.org/photos/gallery.php?p=516>

8. CALIFORNIA CREATING MORE RENTERS' RIGHTS - On April 1, the California Assembly Judiciary Committee voted 14 to 0 to pass a bill (AB 647) that would dramatically strengthen the hand of tenants when faced with slum landlords who refuse to make major repairs. When major code violations have been cited but go unremedied, it would be illegal for the landlord to demand rent, collect rent, increase rent, or issue a 3-day notice for failure to pay rent. For the first time a tenant would be able to withhold rent when major code violations persist, and would be protected from eviction. The bill faces a vote of the full Assembly before moving on to a Senate committee and the full Senate. AB 647 is authored by Assembly Member Fabian Nunez, and is co-sponsored by ACORN, SEIU, and the Western Center on Law and Poverty. ACORN leaders testified in the Senate committee hearing. For more information, link to <http://www.acorn.org> or contact me at 202-547-2500, or contact Amy Schur at [caacorn at acorn.org](mailto:caacorn@acorn.org) or 213-747-4211.

9. PATERSON WINS LOCAL HIRING -- On March 31, Paterson, N.J., ACORN members and allies from the Passaic County Building Trades Council picketed at a public school and won an agreement from a general contractor to hire local workers for his next school project. Austin Helle Co. Inc. is working on a \$10 million project for health and safety repairs at three schools: Helle agreed to hire only local union subcontractors on his next job. The state, contractors, and unions and ACORN are putting the finishing touches on an agreement that would require every major school construction project to hire union workers and provide job training for local residents. For more information, link to <http://www.acorn.org/campaigns/pc.php?p=2137> or contact Julie Roberts at [njacornparo at acorn.org](mailto:njacornparo@acorn.org) or 973-684-8880.

10. PATERSON TURNS TABLE ON PROPERTY FLIPPERS - On April 1, Paterson, N.J., ACORN members protested at AMS Mortgage and Commonwealth United Mortgage, winning commitments from the two companies no longer to do business with a real estate partnership operating under at least four names - Roselynd 2000, Major Trading, Rosma, and Brucha Homes. Roselynd 2000 engages in property flipping, typically buying houses in foreclosure and then quickly reselling them at much higher prices to first-time home buyers. Roselynd encourages buyers to inflate their assets to appear more creditworthy and directs them to a particular predatory lender. ACORN has filed complaints with the New

Jersey Banking Commissioner. For more information, link to <http://www.acorn.org/campaigns/pc.php?p=2083> or contact Julie Roberts at [njacornparo at acorn.org](mailto:njacornparo@acorn.org) or 973-684-8880.

PHOTO: ACORN members protested at AMS Mortgage and Commonwealth United Mortgage.
<http://www.acorn.org/photos/gallery.php?p=518>

11. PHILLY GETS STATE TO INVESTIGATE CHECK-CASHING SCAMS -- On March 20, Philadelphia ACORN released a report entitled "License to Steal: How Philadelphia's Largest Check-Cashing Chain Is Using its State-Issued License to Siphon Millions of Dollars From Low-Income Households." The report focused on Currency One as an example of a check casher that has taken the place of banks as the provider of financial services to the poor. The report faulted the Pennsylvania Department of Banking for failure to enforce state law. In response to ACORN's report, all 23 members of Philadelphia's state House delegation sent a letter to A. William Schenck III, Pennsylvania's acting bank secretary, demanding "immediate action" by the Department of Banking. On April 1, Schenck committed to a thorough investigation and enforcement, calling the abuses by check-cashing chains "disturbing." As another result of ACORN's efforts, the Philadelphia Daily News ceased accepting advertisements from Currency One. For more information, link to: <http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/predatorylending/plreports/PhillyReport.pdf> or contact Ali Kronley at [paacorn at acorn.org](mailto:paacorn@acorn.org) or 215-765-0042.

12. OAKLAND CAMPAIGNS TO KEEP TEACHERS - On March 26, members of ACORN and the Oakland Education Association (OEA) marched into a School Board meeting chanting "No Cuts! No Layoffs!" in opposition to proposed layoffs of 1,056 teachers. ACORN has most vehemently opposed any layoffs in the low-income area of Flatland. ACORN and OEA members asked School Board members to sign on to their demands. Only four of 10 signed, but the next evening the Board decided to ask for a \$100 million state loan - the largest in state history. ACORN and OEA have staged many other actions in recent days and have planned a press conference for today to keep up the pressure against layoffs. For more information, contact Doug Bloch at [caacornsc at acorn.org](mailto:caacornsc@acorn.org) or 510-436-5690.

PHOTO: Oakland ACORN members oppose cuts to schools.
<http://www.acorn.org/photos/gallery.php?p=445>

13. SAN DIEGO WANTS CATERING CUT, NOT TEACHING - On March 25, ACORN members took cookies to a School Board meeting, offering to provide the Board with cookies in order to help avoid layoffs of teachers. The School Board had recently approved a payment of \$32,000 for catering of cookies and coffee, and at this meeting it was laying off about 300 classified employees. The Board had just sent out layoff notices to about 1,400 teachers. But the Board has apparently not cut much in the area of administration. ACORN is demanding that the District prove that it has cut all the fat out of the budget before cutting a single teacher. ACORN members testified at the Board meeting and brought cookies up to the Board Members, offering to have parents provide the cookies to their meetings instead of them spending money that should be used on school staff or classroom materials. For more information, contact Clare Crawford at [caacornsdro at acorn.org](mailto:caacornsdro@acorn.org) or 619-235-9593.

14. MASSACHUSETTS FIGHTS SCHOOL BUDGET CUTS -- At a March 11 Massachusetts ACORN schools meeting of approximately 125 parents and community members ACORN leaders presented information on the state budget crisis. Audience members were shocked to find that the state's budget crisis was caused by approximately 42 tax cuts that mainly included benefits to the wealthy, corporate tax loopholes, and corporate tax avoidance schemes. ACORN leaders proposed ways to close loopholes and generate revenue for the state in order

to avoid \$119 million in schools cuts. The proposed cuts have since been reduced to \$81 million. ACORN members have also started a campaign to increase teacher retention in Boston. For more information, contact [maacorn at acorn.org](mailto:maacorn@acorn.org) or 617-436-7100.

15. NEW ORLEANS HELPS SAVE HOSPITAL -- After six months of debate and campaigning by a coalition that included Save Our Slidell Memorial Hospital (SOSMH), the Military Road Association, and ACORN, voters on April 5 crushed a proposal to sell financially ailing Slidell Memorial Hospital to Tenet Healthcare Corp. for \$130 million. For more information, contact Beth Butler at [laacorn at acorn.org](mailto:laacorn@acorn.org) or 504-943-0044.

16. FORMER CHICAGO PRESIDENT RE-ELECTED TO THE CITY COUNCIL -- Former Chicago ACORN president Ted Thomas of Newsday won re-election to Chicago City Council on April 1 with 54 percent of the vote. For more information, contact Madeline Talbott at [ilacorn at acorn.org](mailto:ilacorn@acorn.org) or 312-939-7488.

17. THREE NEW NY CHAPTERS OPEN - With chapters already in Nassau County, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, ACORN has now opened chapters in Yonkers, Buffalo, and Suffolk County. For more information, contact Bertha Lewis at [nyacornbkro at acorn.org](mailto:nyacornbkro@acorn.org) or 718-246-7900.

TAKE ACTION: PASS THE DREAM ACT / STUDENT INVESTMENT ACT - Each year, a number of immigrant students, who have been raised in the U.S., graduate from high schools and are filled with uncertainty. These immigrant youth have a limited future so long as they cannot regularize their immigration status. Bipartisan legislation about to be introduced would allow these students to pay in-state tuition.

<http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/takeaction.htm>

TAKE ACTION: BLOCK PROPOSED TAX CUTS FOR MILLIONAIRES - Families, communities, and states are in trouble. Budgets are being slashed for health care, education, and housing. But the President has proposed over a trillion dollars in new tax cuts, the bulk of which would go to millionaires. Click here to Email your Congress Members to oppose tax cuts for the rich at the expense of programs like Medicaid, Unemployment Insurance, and LIHEAP.

<http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/takeaction.htm>

ORGANIZER TRAINING PLANNED -- ACORN is currently accepting applications for a three-day academy in Toledo, Ohio, May 2 to 4. Training will include seminars on community organizing, fundraising, & leadership development, breakout groups focusing on campaign planning and implementation, readings from Alinsky, Chavez, and others, guest instructors from local labor, community and activist organizations, participation in community organizing campaigns and actions. Lodging is provided. Spaces are limited. Applicants should be seeking full-time jobs as activist, community, labor, or political organizers. For more information and to apply, link to

<http://acorn.org/getinvolved/organizer.html>.

DONATE TO ACORN -- Membership dues and chapter-based fundraising programs pay for 75 percent of ACORN's budget. But ACORN also needs financial support from non-member allies, people who do not live in neighborhoods with ACORN chapters but who support the work ACORN is doing. For more information, link to

<http://acorn.org/donate> or contact Steve Kest at [natexdirect at acorn.org](mailto:natexdirect@acorn.org) or (718) 246-7900.

LINK TO PAST POSTINGS TO THIS LIST AT

<http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/pastpostings>

ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, is the

nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 150,000 member families organized into 700 neighborhood chapters in 51 cities across the country. Since 1970 ACORN has taken action and won victories on issues of concern to our members. Our priorities include: better housing for first time homebuyers and tenants, living wages for low-wage workers, more investment in our communities from banks and governments, and better public schools. We achieve these goals by building community organizations that have the power to win changes -- through direct action, negotiation, legislation, and voter participation.

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