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Working Women Build Power

SARAH SPAIN

9to5, National Association of Working Women – Colorado Chapter is a diverse and inclusive grassroots organization of Colorado women directly affected by welfare, low-income child care, low-wage jobs, contingent work, unemployment and workplace discrimination. Founded in January 1996, our goals are to improve the workplace for women and strengthen the ability of low-wage women in Colorado to win economic justice. We are dedicated to anti-oppression in all areas of our work, improved employment and welfare policies, creation and retention of family-supporting jobs, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and oppression.

The goals of 9to5 Colorado’s 2004 Election Connection project are to increase the participation of low-wage and low-income Colorado women in the electoral process, and to recruit women we meet through Election Connection to join 9to5. These women can become involved in our leadership development program and our organizing campaigns to improve the workplace and win economic justice for low-wage / low-income Colorado women.

Colorado’s state and federal elected officials are voting on bills dealing with issues like fair pay, health insurance, child care, education, affirmative action and reproductive rights—and far too often, they’re voting the wrong way for working women. If more low-wage / low-income Colorado women register and vote, we can have a say in who our elected officials are and what the political agenda looks like. If we act together this November on

the electoral process, the biggest being feeling disconnected, or disenfranchised, from the system. 9to5 works to overcome that feeling by doing outreach to women where they are, working to eliminate other obstacles to their participation, and making the connection between what is going on in everyday life and the decisions that elected officials make.

We’ll be conducting voter registration at welfare offices, low-income housing, job training programs, child care centers and shelters and other places where we are already familiar to the participants. While we register women to vote, we’ll also encourage them to complete an absentee ballot request form. Absentee ballots work well for 9to5’s constituency by removing challenging variables, such as taking care of sick children or traveling in bad weather. Working women can vote when it is convenient for them, in the comfort of their homes where they can access information and help.

We’ll be distributing thousands of English and Spanish Working Women Vote for Change voter guides that highlight issues important to women and working families, make the connection between real life and public policy, and facilitate figuring

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out if a candidate supports our issues. We’ll conduct phonebanking to overcome obstacles to voter participation—whether it’s answering questions about the process, the issues, or the candidates, or identifying someone who needs a ride to the polls or help with translation. Then we will remind our members and those we’ve registered to cast their votes.

While we’re registering and mobilizing low-wage / low-income women to vote, we’re also collecting postcards to create a visual representation of how many people care about 9to5’s issues of balancing work and family, fairness and respect on the job, and the creation of an effective safety net for families. We’ll use the postcards to increase outreach to our constituents, illustrate support for our agenda, and insert our issues into the agenda being discussed by voters and candidates. We’ll involve women we meet through Election Conne-

“Until I got involved in 9to5, I didn’t vote. I didn’t make the connection between what’s going on in my life and elections. Now I know that elected officials make decisions every day that affect me. So I make sure that I vote and I get other women to vote.” — Ruth, a low-income Latina lesbian, member of 9to5 Colorado

is one we send together, thousands of personal stories woven into a single voice: Working Women Vote for Change!

Sarah Spain is an organizer with 9to5 — Colorado. 9to5 received a grant from RESIST this year for their Election Connection campaign. For more information, contact 9 to 5 Colorado, 655 Broadway #400, Denver, CO 80203; www.9to5colorado.org.

Working for Maine-stream Rights

Maine Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance Fights for Civil Rights

ROBERT R. O’BRIEN

The political climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people is very different today than even just a few months ago. Who knows how the landscape will have changed by the time this article is printed. At the beginning of 2004, there were no married same-sex couples. Now thousands of gay and lesbian couples have been issued marriage licenses, and more wed every day. At the beginning of the year, only a handful of states faced anti-gay referendum campaigns. As of March, 23 states have become battlegrounds. Nationally, President-Select Bush has called for an amendment to the US Constitution to ban same-sex marriage.

Here in Maine, the issue of same-sex marriage was hardly on the radar until recently. Maine is the only state in New England without a law protecting LGBT people from discrimination in housing, employment, credit, and accommodations. The Maine Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance (MLGPA) has been working to pass LD 1579, a bill that would give survivors’ benefits and inheritance rights to legally defined domestic partners.

Legal Battles and “Outing” Threats

Since March 2004, MLGPA has faced—and defeated—two attempts to amend the state constitution to ban same-sex marriage. It should be noted that Maine already has a Defense of Marriage Act stating that marriage is legal only between a man and a woman. As the rhetoric and tactics of anti-rights forces have heated up, Michael Heath, head of the right-wing Maine Christian Civic League, recently called for “tips, hints, rumors, and facts” to be sent in about the sexual orientation of political leaders, with the stated purpose of “outing” legislators, their aides, and state workers suspected of being gay or lesbian.

The response to Heath’s outrageous call was swift and dramatic. Political leaders on both sides of the aisle vigorously condemned Heath. Pink triangles appeared on the lapels of even the most conservative legislators, and rainbow stickers soon followed. Leaders of both parties called Heath’s comments “a new low in Maine politics.”

Heath soon apologized and retracted the information from his website, and the Christian Civic League subsequently suspended...
him for a month. But the damage to his group’s credibility is massive, and possibly fatal to their lobbying efforts against LD 1579. Most importantly, it pointed out the discrepancy between the rhetoric about these issues, and about how people feel personally. The most remarkable statement came from Rep. Brian Duprey, a Republican who sponsored the bills to ban same-sex marriage: “It matters how people vote, not what their private lifestyle is.”

Who would have imagined that one of the most vigorous opponents of LGBT rights would so succinctly articulate our very arguments? Who would have thought that Michael Heath would unwittingly do so much to help our efforts? The House passed LD 1579 in mid-March. The legislation now faces difficult battles in the state Senate, with momentum shifting toward the pro-civil rights forces.

Taking it to the Streets

This is the climate in which activists struggle for LGBT rights in Maine. It is exhilarating, and challenging.

After two divisive equal rights referendum campaigns, both of which narrowly lost, the LGBT community was exhausted, emotionally and financially. The biggest factors in both campaigns were the shortage of time to mount an adequate voter identification effort, and the shortage of money to run an adequate campaign.

The single biggest challenge was to identify enough pro-LGBT voters and get them to the polls. Both referendum campaigns lost by miniscule margins, partly due to the GOTV network that right-wing religious groups had developed. MLGPA wanted to develop its own network of supporters, independent of a specific campaign structure, to deliver as a fait accompli to whatever campaign might be created.

In order to make an impact, MLGPA is working to recruit, train, and manage the volunteer force to identify between 50,000 and 100,000 (or more) pro-LGBT voters by November of 2005. The goal is twofold: to defeat any anti-gay referendum that Mr. Heath and his allies might throw at us; and to pass any referendum that we put forth. Toward that end, we are bringing approximately 30 volunteers from Maine to Boston for training by the National Gay/Lesbian Task Force. The training will develop the message and teach strategies and tactics that have worked in other states.

As with any grassroots campaign, the basic building block is face to face, one-on-one identification and education. By putting a human face on the issue, connecting people to their neighbors who are affected by the outcome of a vote, MLGPA will educate undecided voters and recruit supportive voters as volunteers.

This tactic has particular challenges in more rural areas of the state. Rural towns typically are politically more conservative, and frequently more religiously conservative. It can be a scary proposition for an LGBT person to face his or her neighbors. Even straight allies on this issue can be threatened. Yet it is a powerful and persuasive statement when someone who is oppositional to the issue realizes that somebody they respect, or even a relative, has chosen to stand up with friends and other neighbors to support LGBT rights.

Cross-Issue Organizing

In addition to meeting and mobilizing people by going door-to-door, MLGPA is also reaching out to other groups who have organized around other peace and justice issues, recruiting their support. Most progressive groups are supportive in spirit and in their votes, but it can be difficult to get people to take time from organizing around their issues and stand with and for us. The reverse is also true. Members of the LGBT community in Maine are asked for help on a broad variety of issues, to develop a spirit of mutual support. Keeping the air clean and preventing nuclear proliferation are important to LGBT folks, too.

Although this is a work-in-progress, we have already learned some lessons. One lesson that applies in Maine, and elsewhere, is that sometimes the most radical thing you can do is to remain civil and cordial in your dealings with the opposition. When the vote comes up on our bill, many of the fence-sitters will drop our way, in opposition to the egregious behavior of our political opponent—in this case Michael Heath and the Christian Civic League. Just by being direct, honest, yet fair with people, we have supported our case, and undermined his.

It is ironic that those who accuse us of radically redefining societal standards are the ones who seem to oppose that other group of radicals, those who wrote the Constitution which, in theory, grants equal rights to all citizens. If it is a radical notion that the promise of that document be finally realized, then I guess I am a radical.

Robert O’Brien is the volunteer coordinator for Maine Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance. MLGPA received a grant from RESIST last year. For more information, contact MLGPA, PO Box 1951, Portland, ME, 04104; robrien@mlgpa.org.
Left Think Tanks a Powerful Idea

Policy Institute Mobilizes Values in Ideological Battleground

GREG HAEGELE AND KEN TOOLE

Right-wing policy proposals originating in and promoted by right-wing think tanks have dominated public discourse in the Rocky Mountain West. Proposals have included state’s rights, private property “takings” initiatives, welfare reform and a host of economic and tax proposals grounded in extreme free market ideology. Recently, however, the Montana Human Rights Network formed the Policy Institute in Montana, patterned on the state-based, ideologically driven think tanks of the Right. The Policy Institute is working to counter the recent dominance of the Right and reframe debate and policy toward a progressive view.

Montana and the Rocky Mountain West moved far to the Right over the past 20 years. The causes of this shift are numerous, but central among them is the progressive movement’s failure to actively engage the public in the ideological battle with the Right for public support. Right-wing organizations effectively offered policy solutions that have allowed them to define issues for public debate as well as the terms on which debate about them is carried out. At the same time, progressive activists failed to develop an extensive network of think tanks and media centers comparable to that created by the conservative movement.

Narrow Thinking for Narrow Interests

The right-wing has systematically developed a network of “think tanks” whose function in the broader conservative movement is highly specialized. They are not think tanks in the old mold, i.e. collections of scholars who study public policy problems and proposals in a genuine search for the best policies. Instead, they are designed to develop policies, data, and “experts” to give legitimacy to rigid ideological stances. These think tanks test and promote their proposals through a wide range of media outlets, from newspapers and magazines, to talk radio, television appearances, speaking tours, and conferences. The think tanks are seamlessly integrated into the broader right-wing network. They feed their policies, supporting evidence, and “expertise” to right-wing lobbying and education groups, activists, and politicians.

Think tanks have played a crucial role in allowing the Right to take the initiative and control the terms of public debate. And because the right-wing has taken the initiative in defining the terms of debate, progressives are too often put in the politically difficult position of trying to defend the status quo when the current system is plagued by serious problems. The role of right-wing think tanks in this process is crucial. They identify issues, develop policy proposals that are both politically expedient and effectively advanced the ideological Right’s agenda, and they promoted the policies and provided the evidence and experts to give their arguments legitimacy.

In general, progressives have failed to match the Right’s ability to effectively introduce and promote new policy solutions which promote progressive themes, essentially ceding the initiative in public policy debate to the Right. As a result, progressives have increasingly been forced to use resources to fight purely defensive battles. Moreover, in an effort to maintain credibility in “centrist” institutions, many progressive groups have been fearful of policy stances that the right has defined as outside the political mainstream. Defensive postures and support for the status quo do not engage citizens in discussions about public policy. The result has been the erosion and atrophy of the progressive political base and a migration of the political center to the right.

Fighting Back with the Left Hook

Based on these concerns, the Montana Human Rights Network began working to create a viable “think tank” for the Left. The result was the Policy Institute. The Policy Institute was consciously not a constituent-based coalition of labor, conservation, low-income, women’s and gay rights groups, etc., though individual board members had extensive experience in numerous progressive groups. It was intended to be much more flexible and patterned on the state-based think tanks of the Right.

Given the economic downturn and patterns of progressive funding, the Policy Institute has done its work with very limited resources by piggy backing with other groups and agencies, often using existing research to develop proposals.

The Policy Institute is based on the premise that the chief source of the decline of progressive power in Montana stems from the progressives failure to engage in the ideological battle for public sentiment. At the heart of right-wing state activity is a relentless ideological onslaught. Progressives have failed to offer any countervailing force, most often preferring to stick to strategic maneuvering while ceding the ideological ground. As a result, they have lost the fundamental contest about which ideas and values—conservative or progressive—will define the terms of public debate and decision making. New models for progressive activism are needed.

The focus on issue- and constituent-based organizing, at the expense of broader forms of movement-building grounded in deeper shared values, means that Montana’s progressives have lost access to important sources of power. It contributes to our failure to set the agenda and control the terms of debate. We have become extremely vulnerable to New Right strategies pitting progressive constituencies against each other. The Wise Use movement, for example, has been very successful at driving wedges between labor and environmentalists.

Taking the Initiative

In the 2002 election, The Policy Institute developed a ballot initiative which called for public ownership of electric generators in Montana (see RESIST Newsletter Vol. 12 #10). Although the initiative failed in the election, it succeeded in focusing the public debate on progressive populist themes, hopefully setting the stage for future initiatives. Currently, a coalition of Montana cities and towns is putting together a public power proposal in Montana.

In the last session of the legislature, Policy Institute Chair (and state senator) continued on page five
Ken Toole introduced legislation designed to implement a gross receipts tax on Big Box stores. Much to everyone’s surprise, the bill almost passed the state senate, before dying on a tie vote after a frenzied lobbying effort by the Big Box retailers. State Representative Christine Kaufmann, vice chair of the Policy Institute, subsequently moved to amend another bill in the house to include the Big Box tax. Naturally, the testimony on the bill and subsequent floor debates received extensive coverage in the media, generated numerous letters to the editors, and once again provided progressives and opportunity to advocate themes like economic fairness, community responsibility, and the public good. Since that legislative session, the Policy Institute has been working with others in a group called the Fair Share Coalition to develop a comprehensive progressive tax reform agenda. In addition, the Policy Institute is convening local meetings to discuss progressive tax reform.

The Intersection with Electoral Politics

Montana is 93% white. It is ranked 49th in the nation in per capita income. It has experienced 16 years of conservative Republican domination of the political arena. The Christian Coalition (now Family Coalition), Eagle Forum, and a host of conservative political groups have been extremely active since the early 1990s. Single-issue voting can dominate political perspectives, particularly where gun rights are concerned. Voter turn out has traditionally been very high In sum, Montana is much like the rural west and much like almost any rural, white and poor community in the country. And that means something for political strategy.

Clearly, national progressive political groups are focused on beating Bush. By and large, that focus is driving money toward voter mobilization strategies. But in places like Montana where right-wing ideology is predominant, that should be done only through extremely focused targeting. More importantly, it cannot be the only approach to electoral activity if we are to begin addressing the underlying causes of New Right hegemony over politics in Montana. Mobilization strategies must be augmented by the kind of ideological engagement the Policy Institute advocates.

In many states, turnout strategies focus on increasing base turnout as the most cost-effective way to influence election results. But in Montana and states with similarly high voter turnout, base turnout strategies are more expensive to implement. General election turnout in Montana ranges from 75% to over 80%. As such, each dollar or hour spent on increasing base turnout will produce far less than the same dollar or hour spent in states with voter participation near the 50% norm. Of course, we should continue to improve Native American participation, but even if we were to perform the amazing feat of improving Indian country turnout by 25%, the statewide affect would be less than 2% of the total vote.

Progressives face another problem. The overwhelming emphasis progressive organizing puts on issue-based advocacy has had costly, unintended consequences. Progressive organizations, particularly environmental groups, repeatedly run issue-based mobilization campaigns with good results—for the single issue on their agenda. Unfortunately, at the same time these voters have been in the booth casting a good vote for an environmental initiative, they’ve also been casting votes for conservative candidates.

A number of progressive activists have recognized the problem, but in general our response has been calls for better voter education. Whether or not this is likely to succeed depends on what one means by “education.” The New Right understands that “education” entails far more than the mere presentation of facts to citizens. For conservative activists, education is fundamentally an education in ideas—i.e. values—not the presentation of policy or issue “facts.” In this sense, education is most importantly the process of persuading citizens to adopt conservative values—conservative ideas about the nature of democracy, justice, and the proper role of individuals, business, government, religion, and other social groups in society. We believe that while there are exceptions, in general progressives simply have not engaged the New Right in this battle over ideas.

The Battle for the Public Mind

The final barrier citizen mobilization strategies must overcome is Montana’s conservative populism. In this context, mobilization alone simply turns out more conservative votes. Obviously, this points to the need for greater emphasis on the ideological citizen education component of these strategies. Of course the simple answer is to make sure that progressive mobilization strategies do not register and turn out conservative voters. But, particularly where tax-exempt money (foundation or large donors) is being used, that kind of targeting can be problematic.

In the final analysis we will not build public support for progressive ideas and values unless our conception of “education” includes publicly articulating and defending those values. The ideas and values citizens embrace are the ideas and values they hear articulated and defended in the context of specific public debate. The New Right has intentionally engaged citizens in this ideological battle—i.e. “battle of ideas.” Progressives have not. The key to rebuilding Montana’s progressive movement is to integrate carefully planned citizen mobilization strategies with new activities that persuasively articulate progressive ideas and the values they embody.

Greg Haefele is the former Director of the Policy Institute. Ken Toole is currently Chair of the Policy Institute and a Montana state senator. The Policy Institute received a grant from RESIST last year. For more information, contact the Policy Institute, PO Box 1362, Helena, MT 59601.
Felon Voting Disenfranchisement
A Policy Whose Time Has Passed?

MARC MAUER

Reverend Tommy Waites of Montgomery, Alabama, is considered one of his city’s exemplary citizens. A longtime pastor with a particular focus on prison ministry, he was recently named Citizen of the Year by the Montgomery Bar Association. But Reverend Waites was not always held in such high esteem. Originally sentenced to a life prison term, he served eight years in Alabama prisons before earning his release. As a result of his service to the community, he eventually received a pardon from the state, a time-consuming and difficult process to negotiate. He now can vote with fellow citizens and claim other civil rights.

Until last year, the story of Reverend Waites was the exception to the rule. For more than a century, all persons convicted of a felony in Alabama lost their voting rights for life, with only a relative handful able to gain pardons. But as a result of legislation signed into law in 2003 by Governor Bob Riley, most individuals who have completed their sentence are now eligible to apply to have their voting rights restored.

By enacting this legislation, Alabama joined eight other states that since 1996 have adopted reforms of their disenfranchisement laws. The reforms have enfranchised an estimated half-million potential voters and in many respects represent one of the emerging frontiers of the modern-day civil rights movement.

American disenfranchisement policies are extremely broad and can be traced back to the nation’s founding, when the Founders carried over the concept of “civil death”—the deprivation of all rights, dating from medieval times—to people convicted of a felony. When the new nation was formed as an experiment in democracy, it was in fact a very limited experiment—a group of wealthy white males granting themselves the right to vote. Among the excluded groups in the population were women, African Americans, illiterates, poor people, and felons. Current estimates suggest that only 6 percent of the population at that time was granted the right to vote. During the ensuing 200 years, the vote has been extended to all the excluded groups but felons, and we now look back on those exclusionary past practices with a great deal of national embarrassment.

Rooted in Racism

Disenfranchisement policies have served various political purposes, most notably racial exclusion. In the post-Reconstruction period, coincident with the advent of poll taxes and literacy requirements, legislators in a number of southern states tailored their disenfranchisement statutes with the specific intent of excluding the newly freed black voters. They accomplished this by tying the loss of voting rights to crimes alleged to be committed primarily by blacks while excluding offenses held to be committed by whites. Such laws were in place for 100 years before being struck down.

Today, 48 states and the District of Columbia prohibit felons in prison from voting, and 33 states ban people on probation and/or parole as well. In 13 states a felony offense can result in the loss of voting rights even after the sentence has been completed, and often for life. Although these laws have been in place for many years, their impact is now greater than at any point in US history, given the six fold increase in the number of people entering the criminal justice system during the past three decades. Overall, some four million Americans—two percent of the adult population—cannot vote as a result of a felony conviction; the rate for African-American males is a staggering 13 percent.

Unpaid Debt

Regarding individuals who complete their sentence, it is difficult to develop a compelling argument for the denial of voting rights. Americans long have professed that once you “pay your debt to society,” you are free to rejoin the community. But a felony conviction may continue to deny these rights of citizenship decades after a sentence has been completed, even for a one-time, nonviolent offense. (Regrettably, policymakers in recent years enacted a series of collateral consequences of conviction, many tied specifically to drug offenses, that also extend after sentence. These include bans on receiving welfare assistance, living in public housing, and obtaining financial aid for higher education.)

But serious questions can be raised as well regarding the loss of fundamental rights for people currently serving a felony sentence, whether in prison or on probation or parole. Our legal system generally makes a distinction between punishment—the loss of liberty whether in prison or on probation—and the loss of rights. The only exceptions generally conceded by law and policy are those exercises of speech that might conflict with public safety concerns.

If we think of voting more broadly, as a fundamental expression of speech, then disenfranchisement becomes an even greater challenge for a democratic society. Suppose, for example, a legislator proposed a bill to make it unlawful for a probationer to write a letter to the editor or to participate in a protest rally. Surely few policymakers or citizens would find this an appropriate consequence of a conviction. Yet in the 29 states that currently prohibit probationers from voting, such restrictions on political expression are firmly in place.

The traditional goals of sentencing also leave little justification for disenfranchisement and most other collateral consequences of conviction. Other than serving a retributive function, disenfranchisement certainly does not meet the goals of incapacitation or deterrence. Individuals who are not already deterred from crime by the threat of incarceration are unlikely to be swayed by the prospect of losing their right to vote.

Placing a character test on voting eligibility also is reminiscent of past practices that run counter to modern notions of democratic procedure. Once we begin to impose character requirements, voting slips back from being a right for all Americans to a privilege granted by the powerful.

The racial impact of disenfranchisement policies is sometimes justified as an inevitable if unfortunate aspect of a race-neutral criminal justice system: if members of a... continued on page seven
Felon Voting Disenfranchisement

continued from page six

particular racial or ethnic group are more involved in crime, the consequent disproportionate loss of voting rights is merely a result of their activity. Such an argument, though, ignores the compelling evidence of discriminatory racial dynamics in the criminal justice system—racial profiling by law enforcement agencies, the racially disparate prosecution of the war on drugs, and glaring inequities in adequacy of counsel as a function of both race and class.

Fostering Involvement

In a more positive vein, the restoration of voting rights can be seen as being in harmony with the rehabilitative goal of sentencing. If an objective of sentencing is to encourage offenders to become less antisocial, then it is in society's interest to engage offenders in productive relationships with the community. Voting is clearly one means of doing so.

Such a rationale is employed by the many nations (and the states of Maine and Vermont) that do not relate voting rights to criminal punishment and permit even prisoners to vote. By the standards of most democratic nations, American disenfranchisement policies are extreme, as is our excessive use of imprisonment. No other democratic nation disenfranchises former offenders for life; some countries deny voting rights to citizens after they have completed a prison sentence, but this generally is for a limited period of time and for specific offenses. During the past decade, constitutional courts in Canada, Israel, and South Africa have affirmed the fundamental right of all citizens, including prisoners, to be part of the electorate. The Israeli case is particularly intriguing because it resulted from a challenge to the voting rights of Yigal Amir, the man convicted of killing former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

In recent years renewed attention has been drawn to the issue of felony disenfranchisement. This was spurred by the publication of a 1998 report by Human Rights Watch and The Sentencing Project that provided the first state-based estimates of the impact of disenfranchisement: Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States. On its heels came the historic 2000 presidential election results in Florida. Florida is among the most restrictive states with regard to disenfranchisement; on that Election Day, an estimated 600,000 former offenders were legally ineligible to vote. Clearly, the outcome of a national election may have been shaped by these policies.

Challenges to disenfranchisement policies have emerged at several levels. Key litigation includes the Brennan Center's challenge to Florida's disenfranchisement law based on its racial origins and racial impact. Johnson v. Bush, 214 F. Supp. 2d1333 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 2002). The federal district court upheld the law, and an appeal is now pending in the Eleventh Circuit. Although disenfranchisement laws in New York State are less restrictive than some—only prisoners and parolees are disenfranchised—litigants led by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund are challenging the statute in Hayden v. Pataki, Civ. No. 00-8586 (S.D.N.Y.). The plaintiffs in New York are also raising an argument of voter dilution because large-scale disenfranchisement of minority voters causes communities of color to lose political saliency even though most residents of the communities have not been convicted of a felony offense.

In recent years a broad base of advocates in a number of states has achieved success in enacting legislation to scale back or repeal various aspects of disenfranchisement policy. Much of this activity centers on the states with the most extreme policies: those that disenfranchise various categories of felons even after they have completed their sentences. Since 2000, legislation to substantially expand voting rights to many former offenders has been signed into law in Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, and New Mexico. Connecticut legislators enacted a bill to expand voting rights to felons currently on probation, and several other states have eased the restoration process by which former offenders can apply to regain their rights. Notably, these various bills have been signed into law by both Democratic and Republican governors.

National attention to this issue is also growing among policymakers and within the legal community. Following the presidential election results from Florida, the National Commission on Federal Election Reform chaired by former Presidents Ford and Carter unanimously recommended that states not prohibit voting by people who have completed their sentences. And in 2003 the American Bar Association approved a new set of standards relating to the collateral consequences of a felony conviction that oppose any restrictions on voting rights for non-incarcerated felons.

Interest in disenfranchisement has led to increased activity within the civil rights community as well. The National Campaign to Restore Voting Rights, a collaborative of eight leading national civil rights and civil liberties organizations, is engaged in a multi-year project to support education and advocacy work at both state and national levels.

Disenfranchisement is but one of the many consequences of a felony conviction in most states. Policymakers and practitioners are becoming increasingly aware of the broad range of effects such policies have on the lives and prospects of offenders returning to the community. A reconsideration of disenfranchisement policies forces us to focus on both these practical issues and the fundamental meaning of a democratic society in the modern era. That reconsideration is long overdue.

Marc Mauer is the assistant director of The Sentencing Project. He is author of Race to Incarcerate (1999) and co-editor of Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment (2002). This article is reprinted with the author's permission and originally appeared in Human Rights (Volume 31, No.1, Winter 2004) by the American Bar Association. For more information, contact The Sentencing Project, 514 Tenth Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington DC 20004; www.sentencingproject.org.
GRANTS

Resist awards grants six times a year to groups throughout the United States engaged in activism for social and economic justice. In this issue of the Newsletter we list a few grant recipients from our February 2004 allocation cycle. For information, contact the groups at the addresses below.

9 to 5 Colorado
655 Broadway, #400
Denver, CO 80203
wrkingwom@aol.com
www.9to5colorado.org

9to5 Colorado, founded in 1996, is a grassroots membership-based organization of women directly affected by welfare, low-income child care, low-wage jobs, contingent work, unemployment, and workplace discrimination. Their goals are to improve the workplace for women and strengthen the ability of low-wage/low-income women in Colorado to win economic justice. 9to5’s work aims at the root causes of poverty among women and their families, and focuses on the links between different types of oppression.

A Resist grant of $3,000 will provide funding for the Election Connection project (see page 1) which will increase the participation of low-wage/low-income Colorado women in the electoral process.

Alaska Youth for Environmental Action
750 West 2nd Avenue, #200
Anchorage, AK 99501
www.nwf.org/earthomorrow/alaska

Sixteen girls from Kodiak and Anchorage founded AYEA in 1998 at the Alaska Women’s Environmental Network conference. Today, AYEA boasts over 400 student members and 50 adult volunteers working in 15 communities throughout Alaska. AYEA now builds bridges between youth from diverse communities and cultures in addition to teaching young people about the environment. AYEA has created a “Building Relationships Among Alaskans” program which will be held during the summer of 2004. A $2,500 Resist grant will fund the Civic and Conservation Summit, an intensive training event for emerging student environmental leaders which will provide the skills needed to navigate the government process and take an active role in the environmental decisions affecting Alaska.

A Slice of Rice
93 Massachusetts Avenue, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02115
www.asliceofrice.org

A Slice of Rice was started in 1996 in response to a lack of supportive programming for Asian Pacific Islander youth and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. A Slice of Rice is determined to increase the visibility of API queer youth and bring their struggles to the larger communities. A $3,000 grant from Resist will be used to increase the visibility of API queer youth and to engage youth in a political analysis which links the issues of race, sexuality, class and gender.

Athens Living Wage Coalition
PO Box 1225
Athens, GA 30603-0365

The Athens Living Wage Coalition was started by a group of University of Georgia students and local community members, many of whom were working below the living wage standard. The activists who came together felt that a minimum wage should equal a living wage—and that before economic justice is possible, the two must be synonymous. As a result, the Coalition has developed a campaign to ensure that local county government does not maintain poverty-level wages either in its payroll to its own employees or by awarding contracts to businesses that manipulate bid prices by paying poverty-level wages.

A Resist grant of $3,000 will be used for a public education campaign on the need for a living wage in Athens-Clarke County and to mobilize low-wage workers and their allies to push for passage of a living wage ordinance.