

## **Seize the Day Initiative Weekly Update** **March 26, 2009**

The following are recent updates from OSPC and OSI on operational activities related to the Seize the Day initiative. A separate document lists recent OSI Seize the Day grantmaking.

### **OPEN SOCIETY POLICY CENTER Updates**

#### ***Advancing the Hardest Issues: Criminal Justice***

A number of criminal justice and drug policy grantees, including the **National Legal Aid and Defender Association, Legal Action Center, Drug Policy Alliance**, and the **Vera Institute of Justice**, recently met with OSPC/OSI staff to discuss key opportunities for reform related to the budget process. Funding for some programs of interest is included in President Obama's proposed budget plan, e.g. \$75 million for the Second Chance Act. Opportunities to influence programs through the budget process appear to be limited, however, due to a lack of capacity among advocates; the complexity of tracking items in multiple appropriations bills; and the fact that substantial federal dollars flow to states and localities through programs that difficult to influence, like the Community Oriented Policing (COPS) program and the Byrne Law Enforcement Block Grant Program. (Lenny Noisette, Program Director, Criminal Justice Fund)

The **National Legal Aid and Defender Association (NLADA)** has been working with House Judiciary Committee staff to hold federal hearings on indigent defense. The Crime Subcommittee announced today a hearing for Thursday, March 26, 2009 at 10:00a.m. in room Rayburn 2141. (Lenny Noisette, Program Director, Criminal Justice Fund)

#### ***Ensuring Transparency, Equity, and Accountability in Economic Recovery Efforts***

The **Center for Community Change** is mobilizing its Campaign for Community Values network to support the President's proposed budget, emphasizing the strong low-income provisions, health care money, and the need for revenue provisions, all areas where some members of the Democratic Caucus are rejecting the President's recommendations. CCC and its grassroots partners are focusing on increasing field pressure – through mass actions, phone calls, and outreach to 'influentials' – in key states, including Maine, Montana, North and South Dakota. CCC may also send staff to key states to augment the capacity of its local partner groups. (Bill Vandenberg, Program Director, Democracy and Power Fund)

As we learned on last week's Seize the Day call, the **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** is among the most active organizations in Washington promoting and defending Obama's 2010 budget. CBPP worked directly with the Administration to develop the budget, advocates for Administration budget proposals in Congress, promotes the plan in the media, and supports state and national organizations engaged in

the budget debate. CBPP is now responding to attacks on the budget with timely analyses showing that claims that the budget would harm small businesses, charities, and the housing market are either overblown or entirely unwarranted. CBPP is actively promoting Obama proposals that would pay for universal health coverage, measures to reduce poverty, and other initiatives, and is identifying new sources of revenue, including closing various tax loopholes and ending overpayments to private insurance companies in the Medicaid Advantage program.

CBPP is soon launching a collaborative national effort – with **Center for American Progress**, the **National Women’s Law Center**, and **USAction** – focused on increasing federal revenue, making the case for tax increases to finance new investments, and restraining further tax cuts. The OSI Democracy and Power Fund provided a planning grant for background research, coalition building, and early public education related to activities of this effort in the fall of 2008. (Bill Vandenberg, Program Director, Democracy and Power Fund)

### **OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE Updates**

#### ***Advancing the Hardest Issues: Drug Policy Reform***

OSI-DC staff recently attended a high-level meeting on drugs at the U.N. Administration officials said the timing of the meeting presented difficulties because key personnel are not yet in place. The US position is clearly not fully formulated, but there were some encouraging signs. The Political Declaration mentioned comprehensive HIV prevention and human rights, but did not otherwise forge new ground. Twenty-six countries, primarily from Europe, issued a statement declaring that they understood this language to include harm reduction. The US spoke in favor of needle exchange at the meeting, noting that its new national plan will embrace it, but rejected the term harm reduction as too vague. They did not comment on Latin American interventions, which included Bolivian President Evo Morales chewing a coca leaf at the rostrum.

Also of note is the nomination of former police chief Gil Kerlikowske, who appears to be moderate, and who comes from Seattle where OSI and partners have actively worked to support marijuana depenalization and needle exchange. The Administration underscored its commitment to demand reduction and public health strategies when it publicized this choice. Finally, we are greatly encouraged by the nomination of both Peggy Hamburg and Josh Sharfstein to head the FDA, as both are familiar with harm reduction and the public health aspects of drug policy. (Zoe Hudson, Senior Policy Analyst, OSI-DC; and Daniel Wolfe, Program Director, Public Health Program, IHRD)

#### ***Advancing the Hardest Issues: Confronting Structural Inequality***

**PolicyLink**’s executive director, Angela Glover Blackwell, will join the weekly Seize the Day call on March 26 to discuss multiple efforts underway to ensure equity in economic recovery and budget efforts. Through its broad network of hundreds of local and state partners across the nation, PolicyLink has developed a set of equity principles for

economic recovery and is issuing a report detailing 30 leverage points for equity with the federal government. PolicyLink will focus on equity in infrastructure investment and also ‘who gets left out?’ of economic recovery funds when the money moves quickly from the national to the state and local levels, where analytic and political capacity may be less favorable at present than at the national level. (Bill Vandenberg, Program Director, Democracy and Power Fund; and Raquiba LaBrie, Program Director, Equality & Opportunity Fund)

The **Center for Social Inclusion** (CSI) released a report on March 16 that finds communities of color, the fastest growing population of the New York metropolitan area, have not benefited from infrastructure development, job creation and other crucial services, and bear the heaviest burden in today's economic climate. The report, *One Region: Promoting Prosperity Across Race*, argues that New York state and local leaders must use federal stimulus funds to invest in jobs, infrastructure development, and foreclosure prevention in communities where unemployment and foreclosure are highest. Representative Nydia Velazquez and other congressional and community leaders are responding to the report and planning to hold town hall meetings in their districts. The Center for Social Inclusion plans to map the neighborhoods in the New York Metropolitan area with the greatest needs for stimulus aid and chart exactly what types of investment are needed, from low-income job creation to school improvement. CSI also plans to expand its analysis to other states beginning with Mississippi. (Raquiba LaBrie, Program Director, Equality & Opportunity Fund)

### ***Advancing the Hardest Issues: National Security and Human Rights***

The National Security and Human Rights Campaign recently made two rapid response grants to **Human Rights First** to promote the dual objectives of countering the right's message of fear-mongering and building a strong base of policymaker and public support for President Obama's executive orders. The grants support a communications firm that is promoting national security validators with high credibility (military officers, officials in the areas of intelligence, diplomacy, and defense, judges, prosecutors, and interrogators) who can speak with authority and knowledge on the need to abide by human rights principles in national security policy. The grants also support a series of media strategy calls that bring together communications experts, advocates, and issue experts. Hosted by Nancy Chang, NSHR Campaign Manager, the calls have addressed seeking accountability for acts of U.S.-sponsored torture; the ability of the American criminal justice system to try Guantanamo detainees fairly and without compromising the need for secrecy; and the ability of American jails and prisons to hold Guantanamo detainees without endangering the public safety. This media work complements OSI-DC's campaign to promote a high level, non-partisan commission to review and make recommendations relating to the detention, treatment, and transfer of detainees following the 9/11 attacks. Nancy Chang (Campaign Manager, National Security and Human Rights Campaign)

### ***Ensuring Transparency, Equity, and Accountability in Economic Recovery Efforts***

On March 20, fifty organizations (many of them OSI grantees) met with members of the Administration for two interactive dialogues on transparency. The first dialogue was hosted by the **Coalition for an Accountable Recovery**, a new coalition that is identifying ways to strengthen fiscal transparency and accountability around economic recovery efforts. The groups have already provided the Administration with an interim architecture for a state and national system that would ensure the best possible data through the Administration's Recovery.gov and federal agency websites. The dialogue focused on (1) who should have to report what concerning receipt and use of recovery funds; (2) specific issues pertaining to reporting jobs-related data; (3) technology issues related to reporting; (4) state sites' tracking of Recovery Act funds; (5) implementation of recovery.gov; and (6) refinement and future of recovery.gov beyond 2009. (Laleh Ispahani, Program Director, Transparency and Integrity Fund)

The second meeting was hosted by **OMB Watch**, attended by Beth Noveck of the White House office of Science & Technology Policy, and its goal was to discuss and develop recommendations for the President's Open Government Directive. Groups discussed how to ensure that the public would be able to access the data they need in a form they could understand and in a timely manner; how to create a culture of openness given the strong incentives to keep information secret and weak incentives to disclose; the proper management of electronic records; and creating consistency in openness throughout the agencies of the executive branch. (Laleh Ispahani, Program Director, Transparency and Integrity Fund)