

## Seize the Day Initiative Weekly Update April 8, 2009

The following are recent updates from OSPC and OSI on operational activities related to the Seize the Day initiative.

### OPEN SOCIETY POLICY CENTER Updates

#### *Federal Budget*

On Thursday, April 2, the House and Senate passed – in slightly varied forms – President Obama’s budget for the fiscal year beginning on October 1. The House voted for a \$3.6 trillion budget by a 233- 196 margin, with all 176 Republicans and 20 Democrats opposing. Obama and the House leadership were able to hold many, but not all of the more conservative Democrats. The Senate voted for a \$3.5 trillion version by a 55- 43 margin with all 41 Republicans and two Democrats, Evan Bayh (IN) and Ben Nelson (NE), opposing. Bayh stated that the budget was too large even as he likely will support rolling back the estate tax that would further grow the budget deficit. Next steps for the budget process will be to reconcile the two versions before moving forward on upcoming fights on health care, energy, and education policy priorities. (Bill Vandenberg, Democracy and Power Fund Director, OSI)

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

OSPC and many of OSI’s grantees are working collaboratively to educate policy makers, the press, and the public on issues surrounding the Dawn Johnsen and Harold Koh nominations. The Johnsen nomination has generated stronger opposition due to her position against torture and her work to defend reproductive freedom. In close coordination with OSPC staff, the **Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund** (LCCR) has compiled a package of materials supportive of the Johnsen nomination and will be presenting it to editorial boards this week. The package includes a memo signed by more than 30 organizations (many of them OSI grantees) that details how Johnsen’s opposition to torture is in the mainstream while the Bush administration’s position on torture stands out as radical and in contravention to established US and international law. Among the many OSI grantees that are working to support Johnsen are the **Constitution Project, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, Government Accountability Project, National Women’s Law Center, Alliance for Justice and People for the American Way.**

Between Ted Olsen’s recent endorsement of the Koh nomination, the strong showing of support by other high level conservative validators, and support from both sides of the Senate, advocates are hopeful that Koh will be confirmed without difficulty. The Senate is expected to act quickly on both nominations when it returns from recess next week. In the event of a filibuster, OSPC stands prepared to retain lobbyists to approach Senators Collins and Snowe from Maine, Senator Specter from Pennsylvania, and Senator McCain from Arizona. (Nancy Chang, Campaign Manager, NSHR Campaign; Tom Hilbink, Program Officer, Transparency and Integrity Fund; Wendy Patten, Senior Policy Analyst, OSPC; Mort Halperin, Senior Consultant, OSPC)

### ***Advancing the Hardest Issues: Climate Change***

House Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Henry Waxman and Energy and Environment Subcommittee Chair Ed Markey unveiled draft green economy legislation last week that would set national standards for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and global warming pollution. It would create a cap and trade program to cut greenhouse gas emissions but also leaves open questions about how revenues from the program would be distributed and whether polluters would be subsidized to meet the standards. The **Center for American Progress Action Fund** has given the plan a “B+” grade and OSI partner Tom Heller, who is launching the **Climate Policy Initiative** with OSI support, had an initial favorable impression of the legislation and is planning to do a more careful analysis in the coming days. The bill is on a fast-track to get to the House floor in less than two months. (Nancy Youman, U.S. Programs Deputy Director, OSI)

### **OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE Updates**

#### ***Expanding Public Participation***

After a lengthy wait that has produced concern among those seeking to ensure a complete count in the 2010 U.S. Census, President Obama has nominated Dr. Robert Groves as Director of the U.S. Census Bureau. Groves is a former Census Bureau associate director of statistical design and currently the director of the University of Michigan’s Survey Research Center. With this appointment, and that of former Washington Governor Gary Locke as Commerce Secretary, civil rights advocates are encouraged about the direction of the 2010 Census.

On April 1, a coalition of prominent Latina/ o organizations and national Spanish-language media outlets announced a new campaign to motivate the Latina/ o community to participate in the 2010 Census. Partners in the campaign include the **National Council of La Raza**, **National Association of Latino Elected Officials**, **League of United Latin American Citizens**, and **Univision Communications, Inc.**, among others. During the last two censuses, the Census Bureau missed counting millions of people – mostly people of color, immigrants, and low-income people. Latina/os, now the largest minority group in the nation, were missed at a higher rate than other racial and ethnic groups. Cristóbal Josh Alex, a program officer with the Democracy and Power Fund, represents OSI in a new Funders’ Census Initiative that includes the Ford, Hagedorn, and Joyce Foundations, among others. (Raquiba LaBrie, Equality and Opportunity Fund Director, and Bill Vandenberg, Democracy and Power Fund Director, OSI)

#### ***Expanding Public Participation***

For those monitoring the post-election power of the Obama campaign machine, a Monday, April 6 *Washington Post* story cited the less than promising launch and limited impact that Organizing for America had on the budget fight. OFA – the Obama campaign’s 13.5 million person email list now housed at the Democratic National Committee – gathered only 214,000 petition signatures nationwide through a canvass and email appeal to its supporters and is soon to hire a sizable number of organizers in the states. Many budget observers do cite that the congressional fight was impacted by

strong field operations that were led by independent advocacy groups in the states. These groups, like the **Virginia Organizing Project**, a **Center for Community Change** partner, along with state affiliates of **USAction Education Fund** and many others, held public events, built broad and diverse coalitions, garnered earned media, and organized targeted canvassing operations in key districts across the nation. This state based field force will be an important factor on issues ranging from transparency in the stimulus package to upcoming fights on health care, immigration, and energy policy. OSI funding for the organizations listed above provides support for public education, coalition building, and issue research and analysis. OSI does not provide funding for lobbying related efforts. (Bill Vandenberg, Democracy and Power Fund Director, OSI)