



Election 2012 and the Needs of our Nation

dear members

Here in the office we keep thinking that our adventure of Nuns on the Bus is finished, and then it pops up again in the most innovative ways! That is a tribute to our members' creativity and passion to keep it alive in new ways. We must lift up the needs of those who live at the margins of our society. We are grateful for everyone's energy in keeping this key message alive!

In the office, this has created a little challenge. We are still our same small staff and are trying valiantly to respond to all of the member requests and messages. Just know that the volume has increased 1000%. We are doing the best we can to respond to all, but there are times when we just won't be able to do it. We worry about that incapacity and are working to bring on some more staff and volunteers, but that is not as fast as the requests come in. We'll do our best to respond to these challenges as quickly and efficiently as possible.

In the midst of our limitations, we want to express our great gratitude for your commitment, support and enthusiasm for the 40-year-old mission of NETWORK. Together we can be the world that we seek.

Simone Campbell, SSJ

VOTE on Tuesday November 6!



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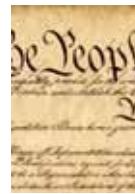
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Please help us connect with you.

We recently converted our membership database to a new system that includes a new email system. We know that we do not have current/correct email addresses for a lot of our members. Please send your current email address to NETWORK Field Associate Ashley Wilson at awilson@networklobby.org so we can update our database and make sure you don't miss anything.



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Touching the Hunger

By SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

II continue to be stunned by the sustained response to Nuns on the Bus! We thought it was "over" in July when we came back from our 2700-mile pilgrimage, and yet the energy continues. Many members around the country have done their own "Nuns on the Bus" trips, including those in Missouri, New York and Ohio, to name a few. These are the formal extensions of our work that have been amazing.

And I have discovered something else. Everywhere I go, people have powerful stories to tell of their struggles in this challenging economy to make a liv-

ing and care for their families. Our Nuns on the Bus project has amplified the voice of many of them. They share their stories with us as we try to recover who we are as "We the People." Let me share some of these stories with you.

In St. Louis, during the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) Assembly, I had to go to a TV station to do a political interview. The program sent a car and driver to get me there. In the car I talked with the driver who explained his own situation. His wife was about to give birth to their surprise fourth child. They had decided a couple of years ago

that they could improve their family's economic situation if his wife went back to school for more training. There are a lot of medical facilities in St. Louis, so they decided that she could get training as a medical technician. They took out a \$25,000 loan so that she could go to a for-profit educational institution. She did well in class and graduated from the program ready to work, but the only job she could find was at \$10.50 an hour! This is not enough to even make the payments on her loan and to pay for child care. So the husband has to work extra hours as a driver to try to make



Loaves and Fish

I always joked
 that the miracle of loaves
 and fish was: sharing.
 The women always knew this.
 But in this moment of need
 and notoriety, I ache, tremble
 almost weep at folks so
 hungry, malnourished,
 faced with spiritual famine
 of epic proportions. My heart
 aches with their need.
 Apostle like, I whine:
 "What are we among so many?"
 The consistent 2000-year-old
 ever-new response is:
 "Blessed and broken, you are
 enough." I savor the blessed,
 cower at the broken and
 pray to be enough.

*Written by Sister Simone Campbell,
 July 2012*

are filled with equal courage?

On the train coming back from filming the Bill Moyers show in New York, I was again struck by the power of whatever we touched with the bus trip. The conductor, as she was taking tickets in the "quiet car," asked if I was "on the bus." When I nodded yes, she said that she was so glad I could ride "my train." Then, just before we got to DC, she brought me one of those seat markers folded in half and asked me if I would put it in my prayer book! Inside she had written a little note with her name and the date, along with a request for prayers for special intentions. So I put it in my Bible where I keep the picture I received on the bus trip of Margaret,

ends meet. It seems that the only one who benefited in this is the for-profit educational facility that got the \$25,000!

Who are we as a nation when corporations have as their business plan taking advantage of people who are struggling to improve the situations of their families?

Another story is of Brittany, who is in her freshman year at a Catholic college here on the East Coast. I gave an evening talk there recently and she asked to talk to me afterwards. When we had a chance to chat, she told me her story. During the summer, as she was getting ready to go to college, her mother was arrested and is still incarcerated. Brittany, an almost 18-year-old, was left alone to try to pay the family bills and take care of everything. She was evicted and homeless for a few days before school opened. She is struggling so hard to do well in class and was worried about a B+ she had received instead of a hoped-for A. And then she started to cry because I was only the second person that she had told. So after holding her and crying with her, I asked her for her autograph so that I could carry it in my Bible and remember her. We carefully tore the paper I had autographed for her at her request, and she signed her name for me, and then she added her mother's name so that I would remember her too.

For me this underscores how no one should be left out of our care and concern. Brittany is striving to contribute to our society. How many other people have their stories hidden from view but

who died because she did not have healthcare. When I left the train, I told her it was in my Bible and I would remember her in my prayer. After expressing her gratitude, she encouraged me to keep up the work. "Don't stop, we need you!!" she called after me. It made me think that our nation is so hungry for the experience of community and hope.

We need to stand together even when we disagree—and search for solutions that include everyone, not just the people with power and money.

I am so awed and humbled by all of these responses. Our little adventure has touched a deep hunger in our nation. Only together can we possibly meet this huge need.

It is clear to me that we are called to speak with candor about the reality in our society. The challenge is to move beyond sound bites to the complex truth that solving our problems requires all of us participating. We need everyone: individuals, business, nonprofits, government.

And when we gather, we need to touch the truth of the anguish of our time and release the hope that community brings. Coming together can build bridges, reduce fear, and make the Gospel live in our midst.

Nuns on the Bus have many more miles to go to liberate all of these stories of striving, courage and caring that live in each one of us. But if this is what is called for in our time, we will continue to lead civil conversations that can indeed lift up "We the People" in order to form "a more perfect union."

*Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, is
 NETWORK's Executive Director.*

O'Connor House and the Movement for Civility in Arizona

BY MICHELLE R. REID

What began as a project to move a house has become an effort to move a state.

In 2006, the Arizona home of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor faced demolition. Knowing the history and heritage of the adobe house, a few community leaders rallied to save and relocate it. Little did they realize that the O'Connor House would become part of a movement to rebuild the way Arizona solves its pressing political, economic and social issues.

In a state celebrating its centennial and history of fast-paced cultural, social and economic change, critical issues are abundant and complex. Perhaps one of the most pressing issues, and one with great potential, is the overwhelming need to improve Arizona's civic health. Studies show that while Arizonans agree more than they disagree and feel connected to their communities, the majority do not actively participate in government, nor do they feel strongly connected to one another.

When Justice O'Connor was an Arizona state legislator in the 1970s, she was no stranger to tackling contentious issues. On days when bickering on the Senate floor left lawmakers gridlocked, she would invite her fellow legislators to gather for dinner at her home. She did the cooking herself, and offered indigenous Mexican food along with cold beer to her colleagues on both sides of the aisle. In that environment over food and conversation, lawmakers listened to one another, shared their viewpoints, and reached greater understanding and often consensus, allowing them to go back to the state capital and make progress with needed legislation.

Where Civil Talk Leads To Civic Action

It is in this spirit of civil discourse that O'Connor House continues the legacy of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. With programmatic areas including Civic Engagement, Public Policy, Women and Justice, and Public History, O'Connor House has framed the conversations toward a more productive method of problem-solving.

Since its inception, O'Connor House has drawn inspiration from the life and example of Justice O'Connor, and has been in a unique position to help solve problems. With a mission to create an Arizona where important policy decisions are made through a process of civil discussion, critical analysis of facts, and informed participation of all citizens, O'Connor House utilizes a process to "Convene, Collaborate and Catalyze" in finding solutions.

O'Connor House and its Civic Engagement Program, "Speak Out AZ," have created a partnership network of nearly 200 nonprofits, schools, cities, faith groups and agencies. Under the O'Connor House banner, "Where Civil Talk Leads To Civic Action," these organizations have joined to improve Arizona's civic health through key initiatives:

1) Vote. Experts agree that a major cause of the dramatic decline in civility involves political polarization between the two major political parties. Henry Brady, Dean of UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy, says that "incivility...seems to



have its roots in the growing inequality in America." Taking an active role in deciding who governs is key to ensuring that your views are represented when it comes to civility and willingness to compromise.

2) Take Personal Responsibility. Practicing civility begins at home. When someone disagrees with you, don't take it personally. Refuse to allow confrontation to descend into personal attacks. Model this behavior for your children, whether you are dealing with an aggressive driver or a disrespectful coworker.

"My hope is to re-create a place that will be a center for problem-solving and for bringing together groups with divergent views."

—Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

3) Beware of the comforts of anonymity.

There is an increasing temptation to lash out in uncharacteristic ways when our identities are undisclosed, like when commenting online or responding to newspaper editorials. According to an article by L. Gordon Crovitz, these “unmoderated, anonymous comments on websites create more noise than wisdom,” and many forums “have become wastelands of attacks and insults.”

4) Listen respectfully.

Pay attention at the next meeting you attend, especially if a hot topic is being discussed. Listen without formulating your rebuttal while others are speaking. In most cases, Americans are drawn exclusively to those with opinions that favor their own—leaving a huge gap in understanding about other sides of any given issue. In the end, you may not change your mind, but respectful listening provides an opportunity to learn.

5) Reject the temptation to demonize those who oppose you politically.

One of the comments we hear most often is about horrible (ad hominem) television smear ads that dominate the airwaves during the election cycle. So what can you do? When watching the ads, take notes and then check the facts. There are many credible sources for nonpartisan information on candidates and their views. Judge for yourself if the ad is accurate, and hold your local media outlets accountable. Some speculate that smear ads are particularly effective on those who are less educated about the issues. Become a more informed citizen.

6) Recognize the importance of compromise.

Political civility requires more than listening and speaking thoughtfully. It also requires that we acknowledge that ultimately we must find common ground if society is to

move forward. Blogger Tami Winfrey Harris writes that “diversity done correctly is almost always uncomfortable—at least a little. Living or socializing or working around people who are different—racially, ethnically, politically, religiously, etc.—requires compromise, requires empathy, requires withholding judgment, requires being open to learning. The discomfort of diversity yields better people and better communities.”



Michelle R. Reid, Project Manager for the O'Connor House Civic Engagement Project, is a public historian and nonprofit expert. She has been promoting civic engagement through the statewide efforts of O'Connor House since April 2012.

O'Connor House has created a growing network of strategic partners across the state. Groups like the Girl Scouts, 4-H, community management companies, cities and corporations have come together to start a statewide conversation promoting civic renewal. Here are a few examples. (To see more, visit the Speak Out Arizona website at <http://speakoutaz.org>.)

- **National Institute for Civil Discourse at the University of Arizona** is a nonpartisan center for advocacy, research and policy regarding civil discourse consistent with First Amendment principles.
<http://nicd.arizona.edu>

- **Arizona Humanities Council Project Civil Discourse** is a special initiative of the Arizona Humanities Council working in collaboration with organizations from around the state to provide opportunities for the public to participate in trainings, forums and special events that share, model and provide insight on collaborative problem-solving skills. The program's goal is to widely share proven skills that can enhance and improve debate and discussion about the important issues that affect our future.
www.projectcivildiscourse.org



- **Arizona Town Hall** is an independent nonprofit membership organization that identifies critical issues facing Arizona, creates the forum for education and exploration of the topic, and fosters leadership development.
www.aztownhall.org

- **The Maricopa Community Colleges' Center for Civic Participation** seeks to enrich public life and public discourse on Maricopa Community College campuses and in our communities. The Center also serves to promote effective practices that support Maricopa's mission relating to community education and civic responsibility.
www.maricopa.edu/employees/divisions/publicaffairs/ccp/

- **Northern Arizona University's Philosophy in the Public Interest Hot Topics Cafe** is a program that creates a forum for civil discourse about matters of significance to our communities. Unbiased information sheets present arguments on competing sides of a question, and give legislative histories or other relevant factual data. Members of the community are then invited to voice their views on the topic. Participants learn about the issues, and about alternative viewpoints in the community.
<http://nau.edu/CAL/Philosophy/PPI/Hot-Topics-Cafe/>

Election 2012: A Critical Vote

NETWORK believes that the 2012 presidential election presents voters with critical decisions regarding the moral vision and future of our nation. There are major differences in the visions that President Obama and Governor Romney have put forth, and the next president will make key policy decisions that will affect all of us. This chart is meant to be neither comprehensive nor definitive. Rather, it is a tool for placing the candidates' positions within a broad framework of Catholic Social Teaching, so that together we may faithfully decide a course for our nation.

JOHNNY WAGNER



Human Dignity and a Consistent Ethic of Life

ISSUE	NETWORK	GOVERNOR ROMNEY (R)	PRESIDENT OBAMA (D)
EDUCATION	Education is essential for both personal fulfillment and the common good. Equal access to early-childhood through higher education should be available to all, no matter their economic status.	Endorsed Representative Paul Ryan's budget, which calls for decreasing funding for Head Start. Will tie federal funds to reforms such as school choice, including vouchers. Has stated that "we need to get the federal government out of education." Wants to increase the role of the private sector in student loans.	Doubled funding for Pell Grants, adding 3 million recipients since 2008. Created and extended the American Opportunity Tax Credit that is worth as much as \$10,000 over four years of school. Signed law ensuring college students will pay no more than 10 percent of their disposable income toward federal student loan payments.
HEALTHCARE	Healthcare is both a human right and a social good. In order to respect human dignity, all people should have access to affordable, quality healthcare.	Will work with Congress to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Proposes that future Medicare beneficiaries receive defined contribution to put towards purchasing an insurance plan. Wants Medicaid to be a block grant program.	Signed ACA, which improves access to affordable coverage and protects consumers. The ACA expands access to preventative services, ends discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, and allows young adults to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26.



Human Dignity and a Consistent Ethic of Life, continued

ISSUE	NETWORK	GOVERNOR ROMNEY (R)	PRESIDENT OBAMA (D)
HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS	A home impacts the wellbeing of both family and community. We must ensure access to safe, affordable housing for all.	Believes regulations passed under President Obama give banks less flexibility to lend to credit-worthy borrowers. Says he will "facilitate foreclosure alternatives," but has not yet put forward specific plans.	Provided foreclosure relief to millions of struggling homeowners, and refinance opportunities to 1.5 million underwater borrowers. Seeking legislation to extend refinancing to millions whose mortgages exceed their homes' value.
HUNGER	All people should be free of hunger and have access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods. SNAP (formerly called food stamps) should be funded to meet the needs of those struggling.	Wants to move people off government programs (like SNAP) by growing the economy. Endorsed Ryan budget, which calls for deep spending cuts. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities says this would result in some combination of millions losing their SNAP benefits or having their benefits significantly reduced.	Supports increased funding for SNAP, food banks and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Plans to end childhood hunger and improve child nutrition in the U.S. by 2015. Launched Feed the Future, a \$3.5-billion pledge to alleviate global hunger by investing in agricultural development in developing countries.
PROTECTING LIFE	The dignity of all human beings needs to be upheld, and all human life must be protected.	Believes that life begins at conception and wants the laws of our nation to reflect that view. As Governor of Massachusetts, Romney tried to reinstate the death penalty.	Supports women's right to choose. Committed to policies to prevent unintended pregnancies. Believes capital punishment should be reserved only for heinous crimes.
WEALTH INEQUALITY	It is unacceptable to cut programs that help people at the economic margins while calling for tax cuts for the wealthy.	Has referred to concerns of income inequality as "envy" and has accused President Obama of waging class warfare. Believes that wealthy people/entrepreneurs create jobs.	Believes U.S. tax code benefits wealthy and well-connected at the expense of most Americans. Wants to close tax loopholes for wealthy, cut taxes for middle-class families/small businesses.

Global Solidarity and Stewardship

ISSUE	NETWORK	GOVERNOR ROMNEY (R)	PRESIDENT OBAMA (D)
ECOLOGY	God's creation must be protected, including natural resources and the environment. Government investment in transportation, construction, and infrastructure should "go green."	Believes that Environmental Protection Agency is "out of control" and wants to evaluate environmental regulations based on their financial impact. Promises to establish "the most robust five-year offshore lease plan in history." Would transfer control of oil, natural gas and coal extraction on public lands to the states.	Doubled production of renewable energy and fuel efficiency standards. Refers to his energy plan as "all of the above," indicating his support for all sources of energy. Set a 10-year goal to develop and deploy cost-effective clean-coal technology, and to begin several commercial demonstration projects within four years.
IMMIGRATION	Gospel teachings about welcoming the stranger call for comprehensive immigration reform with path to citizenship. This will also protect vulnerable people and build stronger communities.	Supports completion of fence along the border. As governor, vetoed in-state tuition and drivers' licenses for undocumented immigrants, in order to not provide a "magnet" for unauthorized immigration. Pledges to establish tamper-proof employment verification system, like E-Verify, that will enable employers to hire only those legally permitted to work.	Committed to passing comprehensive reform. Continues to support the DREAM Act to provide a pathway to citizenship for immigrants brought to the U.S. as children. Began implementation of administrative policies, including: deferred action for young undocumented immigrants, family unity waivers for the 3- and 10-year bars, and prosecutorial discretion in deportation proceedings.
PEACEBUILDING & DEVELOPMENT	Alternatives to military force must be a priority in order to create lasting peace. International development also critical to ending poverty abroad, which is essential for global justice/peace.	Committed to robust national ballistic-missile defense system to deter and defend against nuclear attacks on the U.S. and its allies. Critical of START treaty signed by President Obama. Proposes linking U.S. aid to the opening up of a country's markets to U.S. companies. Wants to cut foreign aid by \$100 million.	Created the Atrocity Prevention Board to develop government strategies to respond to and prevent genocide throughout the world. Withdrew American troops from Iraq, effectively ending the decade-long war. Transitioning U.S. security forces in Afghanistan to NATO and local control. Signed new START treaty with Russia.
TRADE & INVESTMENT	Trade and investment should advance the common good and be evaluated in light of the impact on the most vulnerable persons and ecosystems.	Believes free trade is essential to restoring economic growth and creating jobs. Wants to create "Reagan Economic Zone" that would codify existing free trade rules and would be open to any nation willing to play by these rules.	Signed free trade agreements with South Korea, Panama, and Colombia. Announced a Trade Enforcement Unit to investigate "unfair" trade practices that harm U.S. workers. Has brought several trade cases against China to the World Trade Organization.





Preference for People who are Poor and Vulnerable

ISSUE	NETWORK	GOVERNOR ROMNEY (R)	PRESIDENT OBAMA (D)
FEDERAL BUDGET PRIORITIES	A faithful budget reflects the need for reasonable revenue for responsible programs in order to uphold the dignity of all persons and to care especially for those who are poor and vulnerable.	Endorsed Ryan's budget, which the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops criticized for not protecting programs for those in poverty while supporting tax cuts for the wealthy. Promises to cut non-defense discretionary spending by 5% "across the board" and cap total spending at 20% of GDP, while still increasing defense spending.	Advocated for a "balanced approach" to reduce the deficit, through both spending cuts and increased revenues, including asking the wealthiest Americans to "pay their fair share." Committed to investing in education, manufacturing, and infrastructure. Plans to reduce the deficit by \$4 trillion over the next decade.
LABOR	A person's work contributes to the common good and wages must adequately sustain the individual and the family. Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the rights of workers.	Believes unions drive up costs, reduce innovation, and lead to slower job growth. Promised to repeal Davis-Bacon Act, which protects against bringing in cheap, outside labor and requires companies bidding on public projects to pay their workers prevailing minimum wage.	Plans to extend tax credits to low-wage workers. Believes unions are essential to restore the middle class and raise the minimum wage. Rescued the auto industry and has proposed tax incentives for businesses to bring jobs back to the U.S., while ending tax credits for companies that outsource jobs.
SOCIAL SAFETY NET	The risk of economic insecurity must be shared communally. No person should be forced to face conditions such as hunger, homelessness or deprivation.	Has referred to safety-net programs as "web of dependency." To cover cost of new tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, the Ryan budget makes big changes and cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, and many other safety-net programs. Wants to increase the retirement age for Social Security benefits.	Increased the Community Services Block Grant by \$1 billion, increased and expanded unemployment insurance, and provided new resources for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Committed to the expansion of affordable housing and revitalization of struggling communities.
TAXES	The tax system should raise reasonable revenue for responsible programs. We are all responsible for contributing to the common good.	Wants marginal rates lowered to stimulate job creation/investment. Wants to eliminate loopholes, but doesn't specify which. Wants to implement tax system where federal taxes on U.S. corporations' foreign profits are eliminated.	Believes it unfair for the wealthy to pay smaller share of their income in taxes than the middle class. Supports the Buffet Rule, which will increase taxes on those with incomes over \$1 million. Wants to close excessive tax breaks and loopholes.

The Right to Vote: Still under Attack in 2012

"A law that forces poorer citizens to choose between their wages and their franchise unquestionably denies or abridges their right to vote."

—Circuit Judge Tatel, in writing the court's majority opinion that recently blocked the Texas voter ID law.

We know that voting is a crucial exercise in the American political system, and we have seen the impact of citizens choosing to exercise their right to vote. High youth voter turnout in 2008 played a significant role in electing President Barack Obama, and in the 2000 election, a mere 527 votes were decisive in determining which candidate won Florida.

Voting is such a vital right in our democracy that throughout our nation's history there have been massive movements to expand suffrage to all citizens.

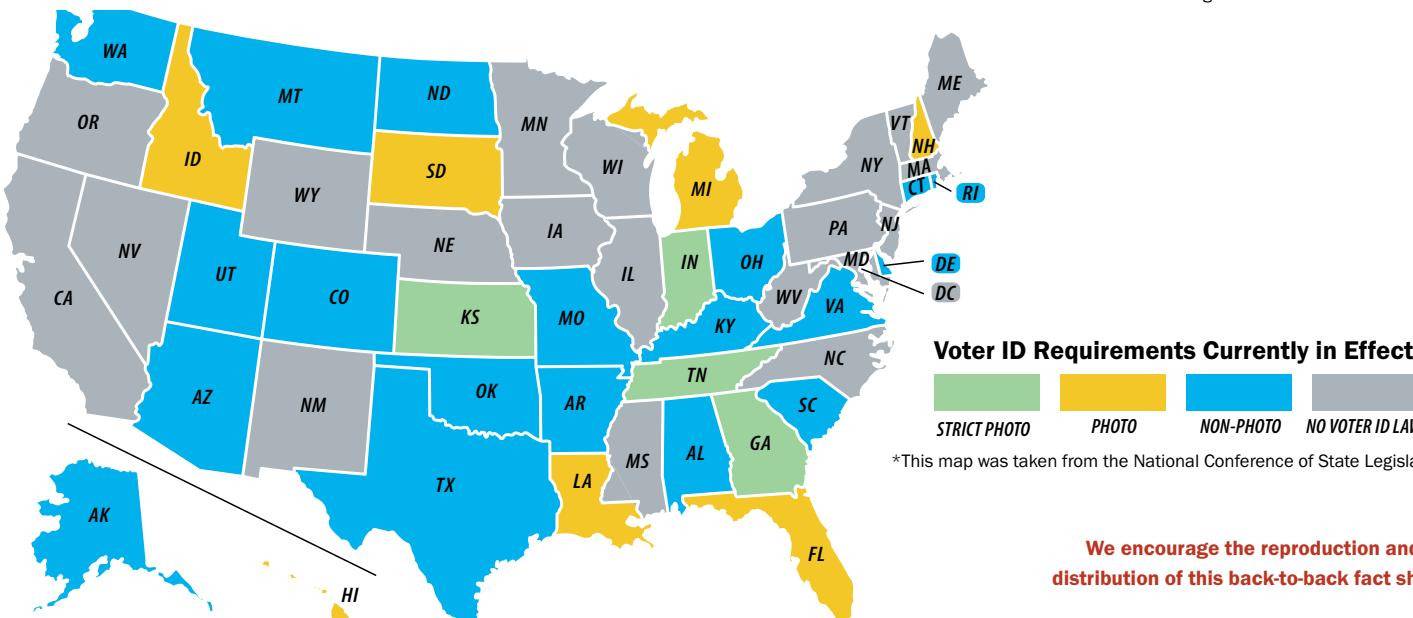
In the past few years, legislators in many states have been passing laws requiring new forms of voter ID that will make it much harder for millions of Americans to vote. Their argument is that

these laws are necessary to protect against voter fraud.

But just how many instances of voter fraud are there in the states that have passed these laws?

State	Instances of Confirmed Voter Fraud, Since 2000	Registered Voters in 2010
Alabama	5	2,221,380
Georgia	80	4,057,830
Indiana	1	2,866,200
Kansas	97	1,358,940
Mississippi	9	1,542,490
New Hampshire	20	665,600
Pennsylvania	5	6,067,530
Rhode Island	5	511,560
South Carolina	0	2,313,510
Tennessee	10	2,847,000
Texas	37	9,458,910
Virginia	32	3,523,800
Wisconsin	45	2,917,880
Total	346	40,352,630

*Data for this table was taken from census.gov and slate.com



We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.

Who Is Affected by Voter ID Laws?

Among those without a proper ID is 84-year-old Nadine Marsh of Pennsylvania. Nadine is one of the petitioners involved in the lawsuit, Applewhite v. the Commonwealth. She has never driven, nor does she possess a Pennsylvania ID. In order for her to obtain an ID so she can vote on November 6, she needs her birth certificate, Social Security card, and two proofs of residency. However, Nadine does not possess her birth certificate and her utility bills come in under her daughter's name, not hers. After three trips to the DMV with the help of her granddaughter, she still does not have a photo ID.

Twenty-one million, or 11%, of voting-age Americans do not currently have a government-issued ID. However, this percentage is higher for certain groups of people:

- People with lower incomes (Obtaining an ID often requires a fee, as does obtaining documents needed to get an ID.)
- Both students and seniors
- People of color
- People with disabilities
- People in rural areas (Many rural counties do not have a DMV or other office where an ID can be obtained.)

Push-back against Voter Suppression

Fortunately, there has been pushback against many of these voter ID laws, as well as against the other laws states have enacted that would suppress voting:

- A Pennsylvania judge ruled that the Pennsylvania voter ID law will not be in effect for the 2012 election. The law will take effect in 2013.
- Courts have also nullified voter ID laws in Wisconsin and Texas.
- A Florida court overruled new restrictions on voter registration drives.
- Ohio repealed its legislation restricting early voting.

Check out <http://thinkprogress.org/progress-report/un-suppressing-the-vote/> for a full list.

How You Can Make a Difference

- **Go to www.canivote.org** to find out how to register, where your polling place is located, and what kind of ID you need to bring on Election Day.
- **Check with your family, friends and neighbors** to see if they have the necessary IDs, and help them get an ID if they need it. Also, offer your assistance to groups that are helping people get their IDs.
- **Take action!** There are still many laws in place that make it harder for some Americans to vote, and new laws are still being promoted by many elected officials. Let your governor and state legislators know that you do not support any law that blocks people from exercising their right to vote.

Written by Rachael Travis

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Lame Duck Congress

BY MARGE CLARK, BVM

LJesus spoke to the people about their communal responsibilities to care for each other. This mandate was addressed not only to individuals, but also to the leadership. Not everything can be accomplished person-to-person; rather, it must be codified. Our nation, through Congress and the administration, is facing this as we determine our budget priorities.

After months of spinning its wheels and accomplishing little, Congress will reconvene on November 13 for a "lame duck" session with a daunting agenda. The most serious question is whether they will attempt to work through this agenda or again kick it into the future. Of course, the answer to this will depend heavily on the outcome of the November 6 election. Currently, there are bipartisan groups and individual members trying to develop plans, while other members of both the House and the Senate are intent on continuing to block progress.

The most contentious set of issues facing Congress involve whether to:

- Go over the "fiscal cliff" (which some economic experts hold is a rather steep slope)
- Suspend sequestration (across-the-board budget cuts mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011) for six months or a year
- Design a "Grand Bargain" (to secure savings of \$4 trillion over 10 years), or
- Try to make a "down payment" on deficit reduction.

Elements being considered include:

- Further cuts to non-defense discretionary funding (already cut \$1.5 trillion in 2011 and 2012)
- Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 (most contentious)
- Middle-class tax credits and other "tax extenders"
- Cuts or increases to Pentagon spending
- Cuts and restructuring of mandated



programs such as farm subsidies, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and Medicare.

A number of House members hope to restructure the mandated safety-net programs to become block grants, making them subject to annual appropriations



with likely reductions and providing states the flexibility to divert funding from these programs for other purposes.

Virtually everyone wants the sequester to go away. This across-the-board cut would be devastating to safety-net programs, which have already given up

\$1.5 trillion in the last 18 months.

Pentagon supporters are also working hard to eliminate cuts in defense programs.

The two most significant groups working in Congress to provide savings without the across-the-board cuts are bipartisan groups: The Gang of Eight and the Gang of Six. The Gang

of Eight is trying to develop an adaptation of the Bowles-Simpson recommendations of 2011, which protect anti-poverty programs such as Medicaid, Medicare and SNAP (food stamps), while severely cutting other programs. There is a danger that a Gang of Eight adaptation would not adequately protect the safety net.

The Gang of Six is working to protect Pentagon funding within any agreement.

A variety of members of Congress are working at a "down-payment" on deficit reduction. Plans include differing changes to taxation and budget cuts—none as drastic and immediate as what sequestration would produce. Tax options are described in an article from the Center for Tax Justice. (http://ctj.org/ctjreports/2012/03/policy_options_to_raise_revenue.php).

The Inter-Religious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs, of which NETWORK is an active partner, has developed "Faithful Alternatives to Sequestration," about which we briefed Hill staff this summer www.networklobby.org/legislation/fiscal_cliff

In addition to sequestration, two other significant issues are looming. The Farm Bill has not been reauthorized, and this legislation will control what happens to SNAP (food stamps). The current bill was extended to the end of March through the Continuing Resolution (CR).

Also, the Unemployment Insurance benefit extension expires at the end of December.

Serious issues await action by a "lame duck" Congress. Will they live up to the task, for the sake of the people of this nation—particularly those with the greatest economic insecurity?

Marge Clark, BVM is a NETWORK Lobbyist.

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Dream of Democracy in Taiwan and the U.S.

BY ESTHER HU (HU YUNG TING) 胡詠婷

I feel very grateful for having had an opportunity to be a summer intern at NETWORK in Washington, D.C. this summer. It helped me to observe the political environment and find some similarities and differences between Taiwan and America. Comparing my homeland Taiwan with the United States, my homeland is much smaller. However, both places are democracies, in whichever form that now takes.

Democracy, what a wonderful term! What a wonderful idea, to build a nation according to the different voices and needs of all its citizens! Once, Taiwan's presidential election was a pride of our people, a "hurray" of all non-communist countries.

As time went by, civic participation was expected to rise, but this does not seem to be the case. The younger generation in Taiwan tends to be more indifferent to politics, due to the government's failure to respond to people's needs, as well as the inflaming approach of the media, which generates negative feelings from the people. However, democracy without public participation of all citizens becomes merely a "play on the stage" by the powerful and the wealthy.

Like in the United States, there are also two main parties in Taiwan, KMT and DPP. Sometimes, owing to partisanship, the two main parties cannot come to a general agreement. The parties' "communication" often turns out to be a fight to win since the winner is viewed as being righteous.

This contributes to the division and indifference in the whole society. In Taiwan, politicians as well as citizens tend to be relatively irrational when speaking about politics. Because of the miserable 2/28 Incident in 1947, some of our citizens allow their personal emotions to decide their position on certain policies, especially economic and diplomatic policies. The 2/28 Incident was an anti-government uprising in Taiwan that was violently suppressed by the Kuomintang (KMT)-led government of the Republic of China and resulted in the massacre of numerous civilians.

Evaluating public policy from such a wounded or emotional perspective makes it difficult to have a sincere, open and rational dialogue about public issues between the two parties.

From the U.S. we can learn to discuss public issues according to their possible impacts on citizens, instead of according to one's own preference for the person or party that submits the policy.

For example, NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus campaign wanted to educate people about the possible negative effects of the Ryan budget on poor people and the whole American society. They put forward an alternative plan—the Faithful Budget. The nuns were against the Ryan budget, but not against Congressman Paul Ryan himself.

If this bus campaign took place in Taiwan, our people would need to build up civil discourse in order to have conversations on the budget itself instead of on the person. I believe that our democracy would become more efficient if our people could really "watch the ball, but not the player."

My Observations about the U.S.

As for America, things tend to get stuck in partisanship. Due to the vastness of the land, most peoples' beliefs and view-

points seem to be determined by their own selected experiences, and it is hard to break or to challenge these stereotypes. Because most people tend to hang around with those who are similar to themselves in family background, ethnic group, ideology, socioeconomic status or even appearance, one's own experiences of the world are inevitably limited.

Therefore, if one does not have a chance to go beyond their world, he or she could be very stubborn and narrow, without even noticing it. This means there is less opportunity to rethink one's beliefs or to be open to another way of thinking.

For example, a Chinese man in the U.S. could work in a Chinese restaurant, eat traditional Chinese food, speak



UGO ORTOLANO



Esther Hu in front of Taichung city government building. TOP: Chiang Kai Shek Memorial in Taipei.



The busy commercial district of Ximending in Taipei, Taiwan.

Mandarin, and only make friends with Chinese people. Since there are few people from different ethnic groups in his daily life, he could hold on to his own stereotypes about white people, black people, Jewish people, Latin American people, Korean people, etc. because he did not build up an environment that includes interaction with different groups of people.

So it can be for Democrats or Republicans. If a Republican knows someone who works two jobs every day and still has to decide between putting a meal on the table or having a roof overhead, “You didn’t build that” would not sound so insulting or ridiculous. He would know that his success is the consequence of the collective effort of the nation since everything is interconnected. Therefore, if American people are more willing to put aside those labels and try not to speak, but to listen first, there would be some relief for the partisan situation.

Media and Money

Besides civil discourse and moving beyond one’s own experiences, there are two other factors that are crucial to the success of democracy. One is media, and the other is money.

Media shape the viewers’ opinions, so it is crucial that the media stay neutral when reporting news or events. Even though Fox News is now more Republican and MSNBC is now more Democratic, America’s media have been famous for their fairness.

In Taiwan, almost every media company has its own political preference, so it is hard to have audiences exposed to “a different tune.” Therefore, it is harder to build up a fair conversation without prejudice. This is something that Taiwan could learn from the U.S. So please, maintain fair media in the U.S.

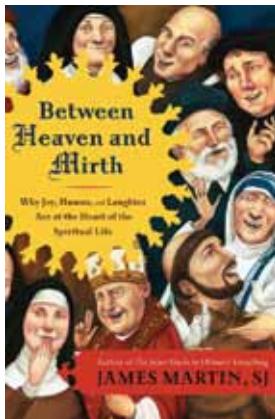
As for money, it can both establish and ruin almost every political party and every country. Both in Taiwan and the United States, money plus power created our beloved democracies, and at the same time, abandoned them. There is no need to reemphasize the danger of holding supreme power and huge money.

Congress should not be a corporation. If it is, the wonderful idea of democracy, instead of being people’s relief, would change. After all we have gone through, it would only serve to manipulate the masses in order to realize a few people’s desires. It would just be another form of dictatorship.

Pursuing the Dream

In summary, because of the indifference and lack of civil discourse about public issues, stereotypes and prejudice from the limited experience of individuals, the media’s bias, and also the corruption of money and power, our beloved democracy seems to face big challenges. Did we get lost in pursuing it? Did we abandon it and shift to embrace another system? Or did it simply get lost in the changing will of the people? Though we have still a long way to go in reaching our dream of democracy, now that we have started, why don’t we fulfill it?

Esther Hu is a student majoring in social work and English literature in Taiwan. She believes that good and bad coexist in everything, so there is no need to judge others by any kind of superficial standards or categories which men have conceived. However, she admits that she sometimes forgets her own ignorance. She also believes in the goodness of God and her relationship with God, and she prays to God to make her a humble, gentle and wise person who would be able to embrace any kind of human condition and to live fearlessly, generously, freely and with joy.



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