

# NETWORK Connection

PEOPLE LOBBYING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE • FOURTH QUARTER 2014



# We the People, WE THE VOTERS



dear members

This is another special *Connection* issue devoted to NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus campaign, an amazing journey that has carried us across the country several times in the past two years.

We are now in the midst of another trip that began on September 17 in Des Moines and will conclude close to Election Day. The theme of this trip is "We the People, We the Voters," and our goal is to convince millions of people across our country to register and vote.

We know that we will lose our democracy if we cannot overcome the power of big money to distort our democratic process. What I say is that we need everyone at the table. I know from our business roundtable discussions that people with big money are fine people, but what I am urging is that they leave their moneybags outside the door and come sit at the table of democracy with us as equals. We need their voices and not their money. They cannot buy the table of democracy. If they buy our table, it is no longer democracy.

I invite you in this *Connection* to journey with us on the bus. We the People, We the Voters must show up in large numbers this November. Help us make that happen!

*Simone Campbell, SSS*

# "Voting is a civic sacrament."

—Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.



Buttons handed out by the Nuns on the Bus in Lexington, Kentucky

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A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

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Cover photos: Bus in Traverse City, Michigan (Bailey Dick photo); Michigan Nuns on the Bus with representatives of St. Luke's NEW Life Center in Flint, Michigan

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Sister Simone Campbell with representatives from ARISE Chicago

## Stories across Our Nation

BY SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL

September 30, 2014

I am writing this on our first day off after two weeks on the road doing Nuns on the Bus—**We the People, We the Voters**. On this 5,200-mile journey we have met many people and delighted in their stories. I want to share with you just a few that touched my heart.

At our Detroit Town Hall yesterday, Mary, an elderly woman, told us that a problem in voting is that some people have trouble reading and need help. It brought home to me that it is challenging for many voters in this (and every) election cycle to find someone they trust to read the ballot and actually do what they want.

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) also came to our Town Hall and talked about challenges people have just traveling to the polls. Their members are willing to help, but linking up with those who need transportation is complicated.

In Flint, Michigan, we met Rhonda, who just finished a three-year training program. Her self-esteem now leads her back to voting and caring about her neighborhood. She is coming to see herself as a leader, and she spoke of gaining the courage to speak up. What a gift she is to her community as she starts to use her voice.

Everywhere, we meet women and men striving to make a difference. But

we also find those who do not think that voting makes a bit of difference. At the United Church of Christ in Muskegon, Michigan, several people said they would not vote because it did not matter. I now wonder if maybe they were like Mary and not sure whom they could trust in the process. I talked with Tanya, the clerk in a local township, who said they have VERY low voter turnout. Even so, she has to get ballots printed as if 100% were going to vote. She worries about wasted paper and money for her cash-strapped township. She urged us to get voters to the polls if we were going to get people registered.

I talked with Sharon, who was staying in the evening shelter at the Dorothy Day Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, and working to reclaim her life after being in abusive relationships. She told me of her struggle growing up in foster care and never really knowing what a settled family life was. She was going to “try to vote,” but it was difficult because she was so focused on just surviving.

In Council Bluffs, Iowa, we had a table full of self-professed Republicans, but they were quick to explain they’re not “the crazy Republicans.” They had concerns about government spending, but agreed that something was amiss when people could work full time and still live

in poverty. They were worried that large campaign contributions on all sides were negatively impacting our democracy. They themselves were beginning to feel pushed out of the democratic process.

In Waterloo, Iowa, we talked with women who had been convicted of felonies. The governor had decided by executive order that people with felony convictions could not vote. But these highly engaged women had found the NETWORK website and the toolkit for nonvoters. They were so excited to be involved in this election. They are the engaged nonvoters.

Most provocative for me was a business roundtable in Chicago where six business owners and four sisters talked about business and the common good. I came away with new ideas, including the insight that people who start and/or run businesses are competitive and that the measure of success today is money. I wondered if we could change that measure so more money can be shared with workers actually making the wealth of companies and our nation.

People we have met have committed to vote and signed our bus. I urge you to join us on the bus and take our “I Am a Voter” pledge as we strive together to make this a more perfect union!

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Sister Simone Campbell is NETWORK's Executive Director and author of *A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community*.

# NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus on the Road for Democracy

BY STEPHANIE NIEDRINGHAUS AND NETWORK'S NUNS ON THE BUS

David Gibson, a journalist with Religion News Service, humorously described the current Nuns on the Bus journey this way: "This time it's the Catholic sisters versus the Koch brothers." A catchy description, but, of course, it doesn't really go to the heart of what our new bus trip is all about.

Earlier Nuns on the Bus trips focused on convincing elected officials to use **their** political power for justice. Reject a federal budget that harms people at the economic margins, we demanded. Vote for comprehensive immigration reform and Medicaid expansion!

But this year's trip is different in a fundamental way. We are now on the road to convince millions of people that **We the People** hold the real power—but only if we use it. It's all about democracy.

Understanding this basic truth has never been more important. We live at a time when income and wealth disparities are growing exponentially, and huge amounts of money are poured into elections. This deluge is more than simply an effort to fund candidates friendly to the interests of rich individuals, families and corporations giving the money. It's also a way to make many voters cynical and dispirited so they won't show up at the polls. Who wins then? Those with the most wealth and power.

And that is democracy turned on its head.

Emblazoned on our bus this year are the words "We the People, We the Voters." We want to convince millions of people that voting is the only way to ensure that the power of big money does not mangle our democracy. As we like to tell people, dollars can't actually vote. People can.

And while candidates fear a lack of money to run campaigns, their more intense fear is not being elected. Votes make the difference.

On the road, we are eager to promote a record turnout this November, and in elections to come. In order to reinforce this message, we

*A crowd awaits the Nuns on the Bus in Iowa  
INSET: Sister Jeanie Hagedorn with Vice President Joe Biden*



ask people to pledge to be voters. We even left two blank areas on the exterior of the bus for people to sign as another way to show their commitment to vote. Those spaces were laughably inadequate. Our entire bus is now covered with signatures!

## September 17: The First Day of our Bus Trip

This year's journey began in Iowa, just as our first trip two years ago. The sisters learned on that first bus trip that starting each day with communal prayer was vital. On those rare days it didn't happen, something always seemed to go amiss.

Following this practice, **Sister Jan Cebula, OSF**, wrote early in the morning on September 17, "We go now to begin our day together in prayer. To remain grounded. To keep connected. We'll pray for the grace to remain open to whatever happens and whomever we meet. To be able to listen and exchange our points of view. To work for the good of all. To have hope because we're all in this together."

That was the beginning of an amazing day. She wrote afterwards:

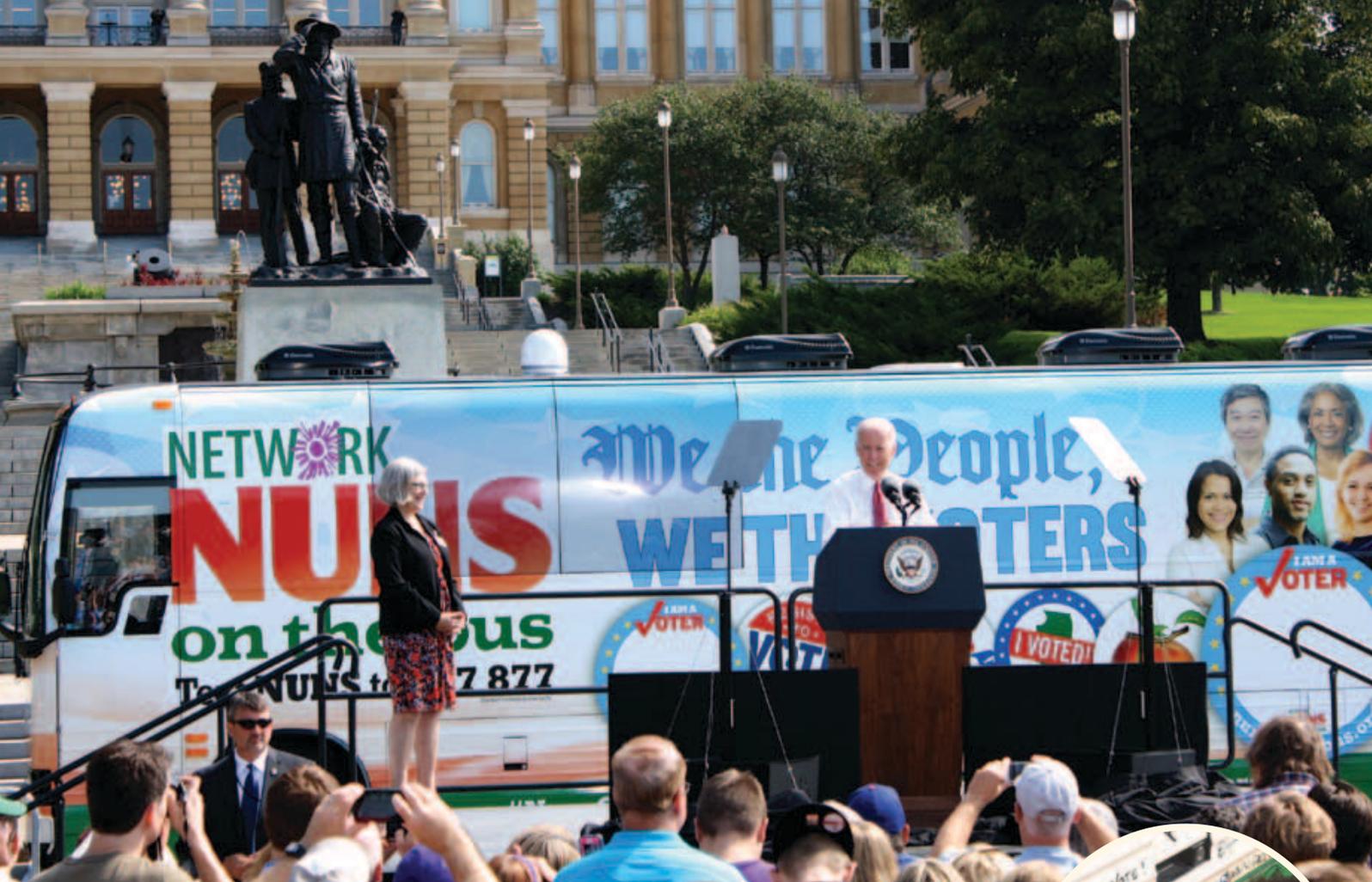
"Day One of Nuns on the Bus was one huge swoosh of energy! We were all swept up in the surge emanating from people passionate about what counts.

"And who could be any more passionate than Simone Campbell to get us going at the kick-off rally on the steps of the [Iowa] capitol! Moved by the stories of people she's met across the country, she ignited the energy and urged us on. Vote people first! Not money, not power, not politics. Vote people first! We the People. We the Voters.

"Vice President Joe Biden took the stage and addressed the crowd about the widening income gap and the danger this presents to democracy. And about the power released from people who combine conscience with passion. Energy swirled around.

"Afterward, he hopped on the bus and rode with us to the café where we had lunch. Along the way he continued to share with us his knowledge about world affairs, his passion for putting people first. At lunch we all sat around one table and he talked about his faith and the church, and shared personal stories about the important influence women religious had had in his life. As he left, he took time to greet everyone there, taking time to talk with each person. Another simple reminder to put people first.

"Then we joined the ICCI folks for an afternoon of door knocking, going out in pairs to talk with people about the importance of raising the minimum wage and voting. As soon as we mentioned raising the minimum wage, a connection was made. Stories poured out about people working hard and not being able to afford housing and food. 'Nobody can support themselves on the current minimum wage.' They all signed cards pledging to vote!



Vice President Joe Biden speaks at the Nuns on the Bus kick-off rally in Des Moines, while Sister Simone Campbell looks on  
 INSET: Signing the bus in Charlotte, NC



“All along the way, we’ll be asking people to declare ‘I am a voter!’ and sign a pledge to vote. If they take the pledge we’re inviting them to sign the bus. They’ll be riding along with us on the bus. All of us together declaring ‘Vote people first!’”

Other Nuns on the Bus were equally moved that first day:

**Sister Bea Snyder, CHM:** “Morning prayer: having come together less than 24 hours before our prayer time, I was moved by the strong sense of one-ness of community. How special it was to come together from our various communities and to feel so accepted and a part of the mission facing us.”

**Sister Gwen Hennessey, OSF:** “My highlight of the day was knocking on doors and hearing excitement for raising the minimum wage. This was in a poorer neighborhood; people were so grateful and happy! It was heartwarming that two new young voters signed the voter pledge and committed to supporting a raise to the minimum wage.”

**Sister Mary McCauley, BVM:** “How will I ever forget... the warmth, the ease, the message and affirmation of Vice President Joe Biden?! And then to have the honor of sitting next to him for lunch, what a joy!”

**Sister Simone Campbell, SSS:** “The first day of the Nuns on the Bus 2014 was amazing. We opened our rally with a bank of press and about 500 people, and 10 nuns all joining together to lift up the need for people to triumph over ‘big money’ by voting. There are so many moments that jump out

of my memory, but perhaps the one that stands out is Vice President Biden meeting with people in the crowd and hearing their stories, hugging and kissing them. It was politics up close and personal and all about the bus trip. We share a commitment to the people of our nation and need to do the hard work of democracy. I was touched when the Vice President said to us that we underestimate the impact that we have on people and our world. I realized it is so true. We are just trying to do our mission and have this amazing moment to lift up the hope of our nation. It made me so grateful to be used by the Spirit in this moment!”

**Sister Kathy Thornton, RSM:** “What a day!... My favorite activity was knocking on doors and meeting folks who instantly without hesitation supported the increase of the minimum wage and without hesitation said, ‘I am a voter!’ The wisdom of the workers can lead us to justice.”

### The Iowa Journey Continues

The Iowa leg of the trip lasted five days. A hectic schedule in communities across the state included Town Halls, visits to service sites, voter registration drives, rallies and more.

Tiring at times, but so much accomplished and so many connections made.

Two impressions from the Town Halls:

**Sister Jeanie Hagedorn, CHM** (Waterloo Town Hall): “The crowd of about 80 filled the room with enthusiasm and remarkable knowledge and commitment to their local community. The collapse of the middle class and the perception of an emerging ‘class system’ in our country seemed to resonate with many.”

**Sister Marge Staudt, OSF** (in Dubuque): “Topics raised at previous Town Hall sessions were again given voice. To list a few: develop the art of listening; seek the values that promote the common good; the problems of big money in politics; guns in our society. Making a difference in our world is a 24/7 and 365-day endeavor. A concluding statement from the state legislator in attendance: ‘Getting together is a START. Staying together is a PROCESS. Working together is SUCCESS.’”

As during previous Nuns on the Bus journeys, visiting community service sites and lifting up the work of Catholic sisters and others working there is an important part of this trip. At every stop, we hear stories that move us.

After visiting the Catherine McCauley Center in Cedar Rapids, **Sister Marge Clark, BVM**, wrote: “The transitional housing program supports women without children; many arrive directly from prison release. Those we heard from were open about their struggles, what led them to prison—and about their hurt and frustration about being unable to vote. Amy said, ‘As people required to follow the laws, we should have input into the system.’ How very true! It was shocking to learn that the previous two governors had allowed convicted felons to vote once they fulfilled their time in prison and parole [but] Governor Branstad reversed this, saying that they



Visit to Americana Community Center in Louisville, KY, which serves refugees and immigrants from 92 countries

had to provide regular monthly payments toward restitution before being allowed to vote. They are very hurt by this.”

Clearly, we need elected officials willing to act with compassion and conscience.

### On to Minnesota

Each time the bus enters another state, sisters from the new state climb on. This creates a vibrant, ever-changing community. And as each new sister arrives, her excited engagement is clear.

**Sister Maurita Bernet, OSF** (about the Rochester Town Hall): “Three young women at one table did not hesitate to start to list off real concerns: war, partisanship, media roaring to citizens wondering how to know the truth. What an inspiration, to be part of such eagerness to think and want to take action, for the common good of the 100%!”

**Sister Alice Zachmann, SSND** (Mankato rally): “It’s been exhilarating! Evidence of faith and hope has been shared in Mankato.”

Each state also presents new insights and exciting new connections.

In St. Paul, **Sister Kerry O’Reilly, OSB**, described a “day [that] began as no other, with an interfaith breakfast with Senator Al Franken and his wife, Franni Bryson. We nuns, Rev. Peg Chamberlin of Minnesota Council of Churches, Rev. Meg Riley, the social justice coordinator of the Unitarian Church, along with Doran Schrantz

from ISALAH, were gathered with Senator Franken. We met at the Daily Diner, a new enterprise of the Gospel Mission that provides opportunities for people dealing with poverty and addiction to work and learn skills. As a group of faith leaders and an elected official, we talked and listened and even analyzed a bit our present reality. A new definition from Senator Franken: ‘Hope is your prayers answered.’”

### Illinois

In Chicago, another Nuns on the Bus activity—a business roundtable—brought new insights. **Sister Simone Campbell, SSS:**

“From my perspective, the business roundtable was one of the most interesting and creative discussions I have had



Arriving in Detroit INSET: Senator Al Franken and his wife Franni Bryson with Sister Simone Campbell in St. Paul, MN



LEFT: Sister Julie Driscoll, a Nun on the Bus RIGHT: Sister Carol Coston, a NETWORK founder and first executive director; signs the bus in Detroit

about the common good. We met with six successful business leaders (one woman and five men) to talk about their experiences.

“We came to realize that the reason the CEOs keep wanting more in salary is not because of needing more money. Rather, we realized that entrepreneurs are very competitive and money becomes the measure of success. We discussed what could be a new measure of success so that we could distribute more of the money to those who are being left out.

“We also talked about the complexity of regulation for business and how challenging it is to follow all of the rules. The business folk said they wanted less regulation. But as we talked I realized that these laws and regulations start out very simple but get more complex in the lobbying process as industries have their lobbyists advocate for special consideration. It is all of these special considerations that add volume to the regulations. So if business complains, we need to explain to them how they are part of the problem.

“In short, when we have curious conversations with people we do not usually talk to we can get new insights. This is the way we work for the 100%.”

Chicago voter registration efforts focused on young people, including students at the University of Illinois-Chicago:

**Sister Nancy McCarthy, BVM:** “I tried to imagine how I’d react if I were approached by a ‘Nun-on-the-Bus’ and asked if I’d registered to vote! Most of the students I spoke with actually said they had (and sounded proud of it). They were very happy to receive our materials and willing to fill out voting pledge cards. The informational flyer about candidates was very helpful in getting them to talk.”

At a Chicago rally, **Sister Bernadine Karge, OB** also heard the stories of workers “who suffer disrespect, discrimination and wage theft on the job,” including one who works fulltime earning \$9.25 an hour, which is insufficient to support his 16-year-old daughter and himself.

And at ARISE Chicago we met with Governor Pat Quinn and heard personal stories that “break open your heart.”

**Sister Kris Vorenkamp, SLW**, was particularly moved by stories from “a Hispanic couple working for 13 years at a car-wash unbelievably only receiving tips—no daily wage—because the owner said they were immigrants and didn’t deserve it [and] a brave striker from [a company that] requires extra hours but never pays the workers for those hours.”

## Michigan

The next stop was Michigan, where two of NETWORK’s first leaders—**Sister Carol Coston, OB**, a founder and first executive director, and **Sister Nancy Sylvester, IHM**—boarded the bus. The sisters continued to hear themes similar to those in other states—concern about inequality, homelessness, raising the minimum wage, climate change and various forms of injustice. And they also felt the same energy and hope.

**Sister Nancy Sylvester, IHM:** “...what was energizing and hopeful were the multiple voices who raised up the need to find new ways to approach the problems; thinking outside the box; sitting down and conversing with those who think differently... What cannot be captured that well in words is the hope that the ‘Nuns on the Bus’ engenders among those gathered. There is something magical about that ‘Bus.’ When



Illinois Governor Pat Quinn with the Nuns on the Bus and representatives of ARISE Chicago at Low-wage Worker Roundtable



LEFT: Town Hall in Rochester, MN  
BELOW: Sister Mary Ellen Gondeck at  
Town Hall in Ann Arbor, MI



people sign their names to the bus they know they are joining with so many others who believe in democracy and are willing even with the current dysfunction of our political system to commit themselves to strengthen our government by the people, with the people and for the people.”

At a service site in Flint, **Sister Mary Ellen Gondeck, CSJ**, heard “from a young man whose mother died when he was 14, leaving him the eldest of four siblings and how he has coped with that loss and responsibility of raising his siblings. Another young man spoke about the program saving his life as he returned to the community twice after being released from prison.”

So many needs. So many stories. And, of course, recognition in every community that our nation is desperately in need of elected officials who will work for everyone, not just the rich and powerful.

At a Town Hall at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, participants offered ideas on how to strengthen the democratic process:

**Sister Linda Werthman, RSM:** “[T]he strongest call was for campaign reform and removing barriers to voting. Why not open to all early voting? Why should students on campus have to wait 3 hours to vote because of the lack of voting options? Why cannot a person register to vote when they come to cast their ballot?”

### Kentucky

**K**entucky sisters joined the bus in Louisville, traveling together to service centers in Lexington and Owingsville. We heard stories of people without jobs losing their homes, immigrants working hard to learn English and care for their children, and people willing to stand with them.



LEFT: Father John Rausch signs the bus in Lexington, KY  
RIGHT: Kirsten Sikkelee, CEO of YWCA Central Carolinas, with Sisters Simone Campbell, Mary Beth Hamm, Margie Hosch and Phyllis Tierney



**Sister Loretta Spotila, CSA**, after a Lexington labor forum: “Some concerns mentioned were the low minimum wage, the Kentucky Right to Work bill, wages without benefits, corporate exploitation of the worker and company greed, and lack of skilled trades people to fill jobs. Also mentioned were today’s declining connections among families and neighbors, and between company workers and executives. Of interest to me was that almost everyone referred to these as moral issues! As a Catholic Sister who grew up in a family of union workers, I grew up hearing about many of these issues and knew several had been resolved in the past, thanks to interventions by the unions. And yet, today we are still discussing them!”

### West Virginia

Arriving in West Virginia, we visited a women’s shelter and then conducted a Town Hall in Charleston.

**Sister Pat Murray, CSJ**, reported that some traveled more than an hour to attend the Town Hall, which included some drama. “As the discussion hit the usual concerns of ‘big money’ politics, polarization of parties, and ‘information silos,’ a real life example of how easily well-intentioned conversations can lead to misunderstandings occurred. Two participants felt disrespected by each other as they expressed their differing opinions. Sadly, one of the participants chose to leave rather than continue the discussion. I was struck by how often that seems to happen. I was also struck by the realization that I too can be tempted to walk away from the challenging conversations rather than to stay at the table seeking mutual understanding. After the gentleman left, an amazing shift happened in the conversation as people began talking about building relationships.”

Building relationships and strengthening the power of community have been recurrent themes throughout the journey.

### North Carolina

The next stops were in North Carolina, beginning with a civil rights remembrance in Greensboro and rally at the state capitol in Raleigh. There was also a stirring multicultural festival at Immaculate Conception Church in Durham.

**Sister Phyllis Tierney, SSJ**, wrote about the hectic but exhilarating travel schedule: “We were warned ahead of time that we would have a long day ahead of us on Sunday [October 5]. We were in Raleigh and Greenville, and would arrive in Asheville later in the evening. What we experienced was high energy, southern hospitality, and the desire to make a difference.”

A public housing residence in Asheville provided us with some of our most rewarding experiences.

**Sister Mary Beth Hamm, SSJ**: “With my partner, Ruth, we canvassed the 4th floor where we knocked on doors, rang bells and distributed sample voting ballots, ‘Absentee Ballot Applications,’ and ‘Early Voting’ handouts ... One of the residents who welcomed Ruth and me was Derek, who was very surprised to find a nun at his door! He explained that he is disabled but definitely wanted to vote so a success story



Signing the bus in Flint, MI

for us was that he gladly registered and then filled out an absentee ballot.”

After convincing another man to register to vote for the first time in his life, she added, “My experience canvassing Aston Park Tower lasted less than a half hour, but in that short time and with that little effort at least two more people will have the opportunity to vote on November 4. I continue to be amazed at the warm and gracious welcome I have received from EVERY person I have met here in North Carolina and their belief that together, We the People, we can create a future full of HOPE in these United States of America for the 100%.”

### And the Journey Continues!

As this issue of *Connection* goes to press, NETWORK’s Nuns on the Bus are just concluding our stay in North Carolina. We invite everyone to follow the journey as it continues to Georgia, Louisiana and Colorado at [www.nunsonthebus.org](http://www.nunsonthebus.org). The energy and commitment to strengthen our democracy have not abated, and we trust that EVERYONE reading this article will vote this November and be voters in all elections to come. Together, We the People, We the Voters will make a difference!

*Stephanie Niedringhaus is NETWORK’s Communications Coordinator.*

# Why Your Vote Matters!

BY THE NETWORK ISSUE STAFF

The 113th Congress has been among the most ineffective in years. Despite growing gender and racial inequality, widespread economic and social injustice, recurring conflicts in the Middle East, and a humanitarian crisis on the U.S.-Mexico border, our current legislators have failed to take decisive action on almost any issue.

As a result, the midterm elections in November take on added importance. We desperately need elected leaders willing to take bipartisan, definitive action for the good of our nation. We must support and elect senators, representatives and others who will address the needs of the 100%.

Sadly, less than half of all eligible voters in the U.S. vote in midterm elections. We have to change that statistic. Civic participation has never been more important, and it is vital that each and every person get out the vote. It is equally important that those who are not eligible to vote participate in our democracy by encouraging and helping those who are able to vote to show up at the polls.

Below is a spotlight on just some of the critically important issues that hang in the balance, based on what happens this November.

## **The Federal Budget and Domestic Human Needs**

When Congress returns on November 12, they must pass legislation that keeps the federal government operating past December 11. This means they must approve an omnibus budget, extend the Continuing Resolution (CR) into the new Congress, or pass a CR to cover the remainder of this fiscal year, which ends on September 30, 2015.

If they choose none of these options, they will repeat last year's disastrous government shutdown. The agreement that ended the shutdown last year determined the overall spending levels for the 2015 fiscal year. While an omnibus budget would allow for a reevaluation of spending priorities, a CR would not permit that same flexibility.

How will decisions made by Congress impact our lives in other ways? Here is a long list of issues and legislation they will consider that is by no means complete. The list makes it clear, however, that we will all be affected in some way by how our legislators vote.

For example, there are safety-net programs such as LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program) that are woefully underfunded. Might our members of Congress be willing to increase these types of programs at the expense of something less vital?

Over almost the past four-and-a-half years, we have been told of lower unemployment rates and ever-increasing job creation. A deeper look at the statistics reveals a less rosy picture. Despite a lower unemployment rate, the workforce participation rate dropped from 62.8% to 62.7% and the number of long-term unemployed (27 weeks or longer without work) remains very high. Will Congress do something to help?

While raising the minimum wage awaits a vote in both chambers of Congress, wages remain stagnant for most hourly workers.

And on a related note, additional jobs must be created in the public sector. This would help make our roads safer, provide for adequate resources in schools and other public buildings, and increase the number of Social Security office staff and caseworkers.

Women continue to fare less well than men in the workplace. On average, a woman earns \$0.78 to every dollar a man earns in a comparable position at the same level. This remains true despite the fact that most women work out of necessity to provide for their families. Several pay-equity bills are currently pending in Congress, including the Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R.377). One-hundred ninety-seven of the required 218 members have signed a discharge

petition to force Speaker John Boehner to bring the act to the floor.

Women make up less than 25% of the current workforce in high-wage, high-demand occupations. As a result, several legislative proposals exist to provide apprenticeship training, employment and counseling for low-income women to help them move into nontraditional occupations. Many such proposals remain stuck in committee, including the Women and Workforce Investment for Nontraditional Jobs Act (H.R.951).

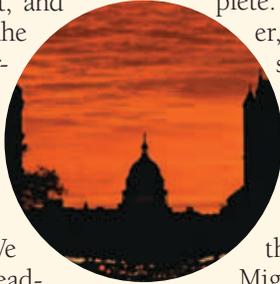
Legislation has also been proposed to make it safer for mothers to support their families. The Supporting Working Moms Act of 2013 (H.R.1941) and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (H.R.1975) would make reasonable accommodations for pregnant women and new mothers in the workforce.

Experts and politicians from both parties are beginning to view early childhood education as key to future educational success. The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (S.1086), passed by the House and the Senate this year, provides low-income families with financial assistance to help them enroll their children in pre-K educational programs. Prior to becoming law, the bill needs final Senate approval and the president's signature.

Budgeting for 100% of our people means ensuring, via legislation, that workers, women, children, the elderly, and all others can live in dignity. In the year ahead, we will continue to urge Congress to consider the impact of their decisions on everyone in our nation.

## **Tax Policy**

Members of the 114th Congress will probably attempt to pass some type of tax reform, particularly if the Republican Party takes control of the Senate. House Speaker John Boehner and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell have both identified tax reform as a top priority, and leaders of both parties have long sought to change the tax code. The



problem is significant disagreement regarding the goals of such reform and the best way to achieve said goals.

Leaders in Washington agree that the U.S. needs more economic growth, particularly for those struggling to make ends meet, and that the best way to address the issue is through tax and spending policies. The difference is that while Republicans want to cut taxes on businesses and the wealthy, Democrats want to increase public investment in infrastructure. Another conflict surrounds whether tax reform should increase revenue to pay for expected increases in spending on entitlement programs (e.g., Social Security and school lunch programs), be tax-neutral by changing who pays, or should simply cut taxes and reduce spending on government programs. Democrats continue to ask that the wealthy pay more to support key programs, while Republicans urge budget cuts instead of raising taxes.

Wealth disparities in our country disproportionately affect children and have a lasting effect on the economic wellbeing of future generations.

In this year's Census report, the percent of children living in poverty (19.9%) was significantly larger than the percentage of adults (15.4%). The Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit help lift families out of poverty and must be protected. Since improvements to these credits expire in 2017, we look to our legislators to either extend these improved credits or make them permanent.



NETWORK believes that revenues raised through our tax system should pay for the public needs of society and set us on a sustainable path to economic growth and stability.

**Immigration**

Following the passage of comprehensive immigration legislation by the Senate on June 27, 2013, many believed there was a good chance that a similar proposal—either as one piece of legislation or as a series of smaller bills—would clear the House of Representatives, finally fixing America's broken immigration system.

Advocates, in particular, hoped that momentum created by the passage of the Senate bill would stimulate action in the House. During the remainder of 2013 and through the early summer of 2014, NETWORK and our allies advocated strongly for reform.

In mid-June, however, Speaker Boehner said he would not bring any immigration bill to the House floor for consideration, effectively killing immigration reform for the year.

Nevertheless, the rapid rise in child migration from Central America this year led to debate over how to respond to the tens of thousands of children fleeing violence in their home countries. Surprisingly, at the request of the Tea Party, Speaker Boehner brought two immigration-related bills to the floor prior to the pre-election recess.

The first bill, H.R.5230, which passed with overwhelming Republican support, reduces legal protections for unaccompanied minors fleeing violence in Central America. The second unjust bill, once again passed with Republican support, prohibited President Obama from implementing Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a program that allows hundreds of thousands of young people brought to the U.S. by their parents to receive work permits and avoid deportation.

President Obama has promised to create additional protections for immi-



grants via executive action following the November elections. While these measures will help some people, they cannot fix our broken immigration system. Unless Speaker Boehner, who has supported immigration reform in the past, stands up to the radical elements in the Republican Party, comprehensive immigration reform cannot pass.

We at NETWORK will do everything possible to convince Congress that it must take action on this critically important issue. Our nation needs legislators willing to make that happen.

**Trade**

The Obama Administration, through the U.S. Trade Representative's (USTR) Office, is currently negotiating two significant trade agreements: the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) with the European Union and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with 11 Asian-Pacific countries, including Japan.

As with previous trade agreements, U.S. negotiators continue to promote a corporate trade agenda that privileges corporate profits over the promotion of the common good and strong environmental, health, safety and consumer protection regulations. Trade negotiations are carried out behind closed doors, and only corporate lobbyists can engage in the discussions.

Within T-TIP and the TPP, there are a number of potential provisions that could severely impact health, safety, environmental, and consumer protection programs in the U.S. and abroad. One example is an Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) process. The ISDS process includes non-transparent trade tribunals that companies can use to challenge government-administered health programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. These tribunals operate outside the U.S. system of checks and balances and are not required to track or abide by U.S. law. Moreover, their decisions cannot be appealed. In 2012, corporations initiated 58 cases chal-



**VOTE!**  
 According to a recent Bloomberg analysis, as few as 10.8 million votes will decide which party controls the Senate in the 114th Congress. That is only 3.4% of the total population!  
 To prevent a few special interests from buying our democracy, *We the People* must become *We the Voters!*

lenging domestic protections, claiming they negatively impacted profits.

Advocates for a fair trade system that puts people at the center of trade policy have been working to prevent the inclusion of the most dangerous elements of T-TIP and TPP while urging negotiators to push for strong labor, health and consumer protection standards. Because standards are often higher in the European Union than in the U.S. and since the T-TIP will likely be the basis of other agreements, including World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements, advocates' work holds significant importance.

Additionally, Congress, at the president's request, will likely seek to pass a trade promotion authority generally referred to as "Fast Track." Under this procedure, trade agreements negotiated by the president are sent to Congress for an up-or-down vote within 90 days of submission, and Congress has no recourse to change the underlying agreement. Republican Finance Minority Chair Orrin Hatch and Speaker Boehner have promised that this authority is a priority and could be passed as early as the lame-duck session in December.

### Healthcare

The Affordable Care Act remains controversial in some quarters. Democrats, especially those in tight elections, are only beginning to publicly tout the benefits of the law to voters. Meanwhile, Republicans routinely campaign against the ACA. In fact, House Republicans have already voted 54 times to repeal or revamp the law since they took control of the House in 2011. The ACA remains at risk. While an outright repeal is unlikely, significant modifications to the program could happen.

So far, 27 states and the District of Columbia have expanded Medicaid, ensuring their most vulnerable residents now have healthcare. Twenty



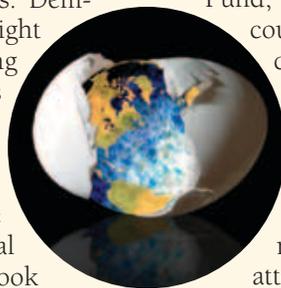
states have refused to expand Medicaid, and another three are considering expansion. Refusing to expand Medicaid leaves millions of impoverished Americans uninsured.

Breast cancer forces many women out of the workforce for weeks or months at a time, often leading to a loss of employment. Several bills that protect women with breast cancer currently reside in the House. Protecting these women's jobs would help them continue to provide for their own needs and those of their families.

### Climate Change

The Obama administration, under the guidance of John Podesta, Counselor to President Obama overseeing climate change and energy policy, is finally beginning to pay serious attention to global climate change. During the recent U.N. Summit on Climate Change in New York City, the president announced a number of new initiatives, including requiring federal agencies to systematically consider climate change. He argued that developing and developed nations alike must cut greenhouse gas emissions. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently drafted a new rule that, if finalized, will curb carbon emissions from existing power plants by 30% from 2005 levels by 2030. The president also continues to promote the Global Climate Fund, which assists developing countries in fighting climate change.

The president's actions have drawn the ire of many members of Congress who deny the science of climate change. In response to the president's attempt to combat greenhouse gases and other pollutants, Republican leaders in the House and Senate attempted to defund the EPA. Proposals remain on Capitol Hill to further restrict the president's executive authority, already making global climate change a significant area of controversy for the 114th Congress.



### Non-violent Solutions to Conflict

NETWORK believes in the power of non-violence in cultivating peace. Sadly, this fiscal year, the U.S. spent more money supporting military efforts than it did supporting human efforts. Military spending accounted for 55% of discretionary spending, while foreign aid received a mere 3%. Central America perfectly demonstrates the failure of the U.S. to understand the full impact of an extended military presence in a region. Many of the people who flee their home countries, especially children, are coming to the U.S. to escape violence in their own communities. Nevertheless, the U.S. continues to train Central American military personnel in the torture, execution and urban guerilla warfare at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly known as the School of the Americas.

At the forefront of our minds these days is the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria, who face genocide, brutality and a humanitarian crisis of horrendous proportions. While the reality on the ground cannot be ignored, war is not the answer. U.S. military actions in 2003 helped cause the current situation. Diplomacy, humanitarian efforts, and lasting non-violent solutions, if done in solidarity with regional and international partners to secure a lasting peace, are the true way forward.

However, an immediate response is needed to save countless lives in imminent danger. Such a response should be narrow and specific, helping to contain the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, sometimes known as ISIS) while forging a creative diplomatic response. We must jumpstart a conversation on the social and political realities that grant credibility to groups like ISIL. Dialogue among regional governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other influential actors will be critical in the struggle for peace.



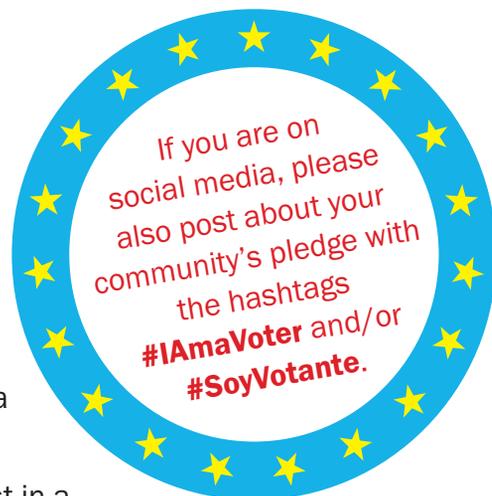
Want timely information about key issues in Congress? NETWORK members can sign up for our weekly email legislative updates. Send your name, zip code and email address to [networkupdate@networklobby.org](mailto:networkupdate@networklobby.org).

# Vote as a Community. We're in This Together.

***NETWORK challenges you to take  
a community pledge to be 100% Voting***

**W**hen your faith community or workplace makes a decision to set a 100% Voting goal, NETWORK will:

- ★ Provide resources in English and Spanish to challenge and support your community in the journey toward becoming 100% Voting
  - ✓ Materials to help your community members take the “I Am a Voter” pledge:  
**[www.networklobby.org/pledge](http://www.networklobby.org/pledge)**
  - ✓ Voter registration and reminder tools:  
**[www.networklobby.org/turbovote](http://www.networklobby.org/turbovote)**
  - ✓ Nonpartisan voter education resources:  
**[www.networklobby.org/votingresources](http://www.networklobby.org/votingresources)**
  - ✓ Detailed tips and tools for mobilizing your faith community and workplace to vote:  
**[www.networklobby.org/votingtoolkit](http://www.networklobby.org/votingtoolkit)**
  - ✓ Suggestions for engaging ineligible voters in the democratic process:  
**[www.networklobby.org/cantvote](http://www.networklobby.org/cantvote)**
- ★ Celebrate your community’s commitment by publicly recognizing you on our website and through social media
- ★ Email you a “2014 Commitment to Being a 100% Voting Community” certificate that you can print and post in a community space to remind everyone of your community’s pledge.



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



**NETWORK**—a Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace  
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# We the People, WE THE VOTERS

In order to form a more perfect union, we must:

- ★ **VOTE:** Strong voter turnout overpowers the influence of big money in politics. **Dollars can't vote, you can.**
- ★ **ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO VOTE:** When we encourage people to vote, we make sure that the voices of the 100% are heard. **Urge and help others to vote.**
- ★ **HOLD CANDIDATES RESPONSIBLE:** When we demand that candidates commit to policies that benefit the 100%, we can all hold them accountable when they are elected. **When the people vote, politicians listen.**

For information about voter registration and Election Day reminders:  
**Text NUNS to 877 877 or go to [nunsonthebus.org/vote](http://nunsonthebus.org/vote)**

When "We the People" vote, politicians will:

- ★ Mend the Wealth Gap ★ Enact a Living Wage ★ Craft a Faithful Budget that Benefits the 100% ★
- ★ Secure Healthcare for All ★ Protect Immigrant Rights ★ Promote Nonviolent Solutions to Conflict ★

# We the People,

# We the People, NOSOTROS LOS VOTANTES

Nosotros el Pueblo, para formar una unión más perfecta, tenemos que:

- ★ **VOTAR:** Cuando el pueblo vote, pudiere superar la influencia de dinero en las políticas. **Los dólares no votan; Usted vota.**
- ★ **ANIMAR A OTROS A VOTAR:** Cuando alentemos al pueblo a votar, aseguremo que las voces del 100% sean escuchados. **Anime y ayude a otros a votar.**
- ★ **EXIGIR RESPONSABILIDAD DE LOS CANDIDATOS HACIA EL PUEBLO:** Cuando el pueblo mande que los candidatos se comprometen a las políticas que benefician el 100%, podemos exigir responsabilidad de los candidatos cuando sean elegidos. **Cuando el pueblo vote, los políticos escucharán.**

Para información sobre registración de votantes y recuerdos para el día de las elecciones,  
**escriba "NUNS" en un texto al 877 877 o vaya a [nunsonthebus.org/vote](http://nunsonthebus.org/vote)**

Cuando el pueblo vote, los políticos vayan a:

- ★ Reducir la brecha en la desigualdad económica ★ Establecer un sueldo que alcance para vivir ★
- ★ Crear un "Presupuesto Fiel" que beneficie el 100% ★ Ganar cuida de salud para todos ★
- ★ Proteger los derechos de los inmigrantes ★ Promover soluciones no violentas al conflicto ★

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The Sisters of Mercy Institute staff in Silver Spring, Maryland, show their pride in having taken the 100% Voting pledge. They shared this photo on Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness in their community about the importance of voting. Find the link to the Sisters of Mercy voter education resource at [www.networklobby.org/votingresources](http://www.networklobby.org/votingresources)

## Become a 100% Voting Faith Community or Workplace

BY SHANTHA READY ALONSO

At our weekly Monday morning staff meeting, the NETWORK team sat down in our conference room with our notepads and cups of coffee, ready to rattle off our to-do lists for the week. I was happily surprised when Paul Marchione, our Managing Director, made an unusual announcement:

*As you may remember, we as a staff came to consensus last month that we would take the **100% Voting Pledge**. It is now less than one month out from Election Day. I don't want to hear any excuses on Election Day about not being registered or not knowing where to vote. You can get all that info by signing up at [www.networklobby.org/turbovote](http://www.networklobby.org/turbovote). Be sure to remind all your friends and family to do so also. We need 100% Voting participation among all the staff members. Don't be left out!*

Although the 100% Voting pledge was my idea, the announcement caught me off guard. In the midst of making sure thousands of NETWORK activists across the country are equipped to register, motivate and mobilize voters, I stopped to wonder if my own spouse and housemates had the voting information they needed. I made a note to myself to ask them.

I share this example because com-

munity pledges and peer reminders are the most powerful, proven strategies for voter awareness, motivation and participation. On Election Day, we cast our ballots alone behind a curtain or in a booth, but our identity as a voter is formed among our friends, family and community. We're more likely to act on our shared identity as a community of voters if we are encouraged by and accountable to each other.

Our faith communities and workplaces are important places where we work toward becoming our best selves. When I am at church and work, I want others to perceive me as a reliable woman of integrity, and I behave accordingly. Our 100% Voting pledge at the NETWORK office has set up an expectation that part of being responsible to my community includes voting and urging others to vote.

We can exert healthy and positive peer pressure to encourage civic participation with the 100% Voting community pledge. Some of the early adopters of the 100% Voting community pledge include Progress Iowa, the Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, the Sisters of Mercy Institute office in Silver Spring, Maryland, the Xavier University Center for Faith and Justice, the United Church of Christ Washington, DC office, and

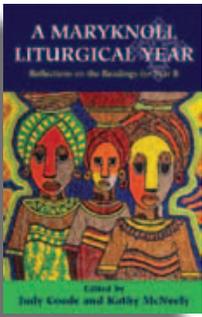
the Kelly Residence for retired priests in Caldwell, New Jersey. **Join us, and let us know of your commitment at [www.networklobby.org/100percent](http://www.networklobby.org/100percent).**

Making a community pledge to be a 100% voting faith community, organization or workplace means:

- Your community helps facilitate a voter-friendly environment where voter education and motivation are encouraged.
- Every eligible member of your community is registered to vote.
- Every registered voter in your community votes early or gets to the polls on Election Day.
- Every person in your community who is ineligible to vote due to age, citizenship status, or criminal record is invited to actively participate in the democratic process and in encouraging others to vote.

The goal is not to get a specific party or candidate elected. The goal is to engage everyone to be active in our democracy. We're in this together for the 100%, not just the 47%, the 99%, or the 1%; but 100% of us must vote for our democracy to work.

*Shantha Ready Alonso is NETWORK's Field Organizing Manager.*



**A Maryknoll Liturgical Year: Reflections on the Readings for Year B**, edited by Judy Coode and Kathy McNeely, Orbis. [www.orbisbooks.com/a-maryknoll-liturgical-year.html](http://www.orbisbooks.com/a-maryknoll-liturgical-year.html)

**Witnessing Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom**, edited by Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella, Orbis. [www.orbisbooks.com/witnessing.html](http://www.orbisbooks.com/witnessing.html)

# NETWORK

A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

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## NETWORK Associate Program Now Accepting Applications for 2015!

NETWORK's Associate Program is an 11-month intensive educational and professional development experience in legislative advocacy rooted in Catholic principles of social justice.

Associates will develop practical, translatable skills in advocacy, politics and nonprofit management.

To apply, please visit our website: [www.networklobby.org/about-us/staff/associates-program](http://www.networklobby.org/about-us/staff/associates-program)

APPLICATION DEADLINE:  
**January 31, 2015**



## Bring friends and family "on board" to NETWORK's ministry of justice!

NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus project completes its physical journey in October, but we still need your support to keep our lobbyists on the Hill, our education materials and workshops relevant, and our field organizing team equipped with the tools to inform and engage you, our members and activists!

A great way to increase the impact of our mission is to give a

NETWORK membership to a loved one this upcoming holiday season. We will send your recipient a welcome package introducing them to our movement for social justice, as well as issues of *Connection* through 2015 (including this one).

You can order gift memberships by filling out the enclosed envelope, by calling Megan Dominy at (202) 601-7866, or by going online at [www.networklobby.org/gift](http://www.networklobby.org/gift).

**Act before December 12 for a special rate of \$35 for each gift membership!**