

Vision & Voices

NEVADA WOMEN'S LOBBY A VOICE FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES

The Organization Dealing with Issues Concerning Women, Children and Families

BUDGET CUTS !!!



Nevada Women's Lobby participates in rally protesting cuts in Nevada's human services: Louise Bayard de Volo, Vicki LoSasso, Diane Loper, Patty Elzy (left to right).

By now, you are all aware that Governor Gibbons has laid out his plan for budget cuts, many of which affect programs and issues that the NWL has long supported. After various iterations, we are currently looking at budget cuts of 4.5 % vs. the 8% cuts we and others had feared. However, while the larger decrease was not realized, we did see severe funding decreases in areas that are critical to women, children and families in Nevada.

It should be noted that budget cuts have not yet been implemented, and there is ongoing discussion of ways to avert or lessen these cuts, including delaying specific construction projects and reconsidering proposed prison funding. And, as this news letter was going to press, the State Treasurer's office announced it had found \$40 million in unclaimed property and bond opportunities, providing the possibility of using some or all of this to restore funding to areas that saw significant cuts. Child welfare, healthcare and mental health saw large cuts, including staffing cuts in several areas, capping Nevada Checkup at 30,000 participants, no funding for the HIFA waiver (which would have provided assistance to small business owners for pregnant women's health insurance) and cuts to disability services. Details on the 2008-2009 budget cuts are at http://budget.state.nv.us/Budget_2007_09/budget_reserves.htm, and a letter from Assemblywoman Barbara Buckley noting broader impacts of the cuts is at www.nevadawomenslobby.org/Buckley.pdf. NWL is working with our partners to preserve access to services for those who most need them.

While NWL has state-level legislative action as its focus, we are aware of several federal funding issues that will affect state programs. Currently we

are following new federal requirements in targeted case management in therapeutic foster care and other settings. Because all the new requirements cannot be met by the March due date, Nevada and other states stand to lose millions in federal dollars, and children and families will lose critical services.

Additionally, the Lobby has been monitoring the recent economic stimulus bill and we supported additional language that would increase food stamp benefits, extend and improve unemployment benefits, provide a temporary, refundable tax rebate to people who paid payroll or income tax in 2007, increases in aid to state and local governments, funding for infrastructure repair or maintenance, and increases in home energy assistance.

Have the Cuts Impacted You or Someone You Know?

Budget cuts have far-reaching impact on Nevada lives. NWL is working with PLAN, the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, to collect stories on how budget cuts are affecting real people and families. You can help get these stories to the public by using PLAN's worksheet: www.nevadawomenslobby.org/budgetstories.htm. Over the next year, when you hear about or experience hardships due to reduced state and county funds, please send these stories to bfulkerson@planevada.org. Questions: (702)791-1965.

NWL MEMBERS SET TONE FOR 2008-2009

Along with the dues letters sent in January, we asked members to complete a survey so we could find out what is important to our members and help us plan for the future. Seventy-one surveys have been returned so far and we are pleased to report these preliminary results.

Respondents rated our activities and functions relative to their expectations of NWL. They indicated that hiring a lobbyist is the most important function of NWL, followed by Grassroots Lobby Days and News Alerts during the legislative session. The next most important activities are participation in interim committees, publishing documents about our issues, and our newsletters. The Women's Summit conference, sponsored by Nevada Women's Agenda, our educational affiliate, was next on the list and membership meetings were of least interest.

When asked which three issues you would like to see NWL focus on in 2008-2009, you ranked our issues as follows:

- 1) Health
- 2) Education
- 3) Equal rights
- 4) Youth-at-risk
- 5) Safety from violence
- 6) Self-sufficiency

We are encouraged by the responses regarding whether NWL has been effective in furthering our issues during the past few legislative sessions. Twenty-eight responded *very effective*; twenty-five responded *somewhat effective* and seventeen had no response to this question.

NWL's steering committee will continue to tally the responses as they come in. We encourage you to take a few minutes to complete your survey and give us your ideas.



NWL IN THE INTERIM

We have now been in the interim period between legislative sessions since June 2007, and will remain so until the 2009 Legislature opens on February 2. You know that NWL does a lot of our work during the session, but we want to alert you to the work we do between sessions. It is this activity that enables us to be the voice for women, children and families at the legislature.

Though our state legislature meets only every two years, meetings and interim studies continue between sessions. Many of these committees and studies are composed of only legislators, while others enlist the aid of citizens. For detail on members, assignments, agendas, minutes and schedules and how you can become involved, please go to www.leg.state.nv.us/74th/Interim. As with hearings during the session, you can always participate in person or by teleconference, or you can view the hearing online from the comfort of your computer.

NWL is monitoring committees that relate most directly to our core issues: Placement of Children in Foster Care, Committee on Health Care, Education Committee, Senior Citizens and Veterans, and Mortgage Lending. If you have expertise in these or related areas, please contact us. We would love to get your input as we work on building our agenda for 2009. In the interim we will continue to work with our member organizations and other partners on these issues.

Fall Lobbying Workshops

NWL is working on a fall lobbying workshop and preview of the Lobby's 2009 legislative agenda for current members and those who are considering joining NWL. Saturday dates are being considered, and we are hoping to host events in Las Vegas and in Reno. These morning workshops will be oriented toward grassroots lobbying and will be appropriate for those who are new to lobbying as well as those who are seasoned advocates. For details see NWL contacts, page 4.

PROGRESSIVES GATHER

By Lynda Savage

NWL Steering Committee members Vickie LoSasso and Lynda Savage represented Nevada at the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) 2007 Summit on the States in December. This annual event, entitled Leadership for America, invited progressive legislators and other leaders to celebrate progressive values, to honor longstanding leaders, and to collaboratively explore how to create state-based change and influence the national agenda.

Progressives "promote the ideals of a sound, fair and just America," stated CPA's Tim McFeely, while noting that progressives can be members of any political party. Speakers emphasized that this election year offers the opportunity for an enormous shift allowing progressive values to determine our political philosophy and policies -- a shift of a size not seen since the 1980 election when the religious right set the tone for the conservative agenda.

Summit workshops included issues such as election reform; building a pro-immigration agenda; reproductive choice; health care reform; predatory lending; stopping privatization of public assets; juvenile justice reform; promoting regional cooperation for economic development; and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality.

I left the conference feeling inspired, hopeful, and energized for 2008 -- the noted year of change. As I waited at the airport, I recalled the election of 1980 and the vast changes realized as the religious right overtook the Republican Party setting the stage for many of the problematic public policies of the last 28 years. As I looked up from my thoughts, I realized that I was sitting next to Walter Mondale, the former vice-president under Jimmy Carter whose 1980 loss to Ronald Reagan set the stage for the past three decades. We were at Reagan National Airport. I had an overwhelming feeling that the stage was set again, this time with different results.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS: WOMEN LOSE

If you are a low-wage working woman, you are nearly three times less likely to receive unemployment insurance (UI) than higher-wage workers. Some reasons: those seeking part-time work (67% are women) are not eligible; those working for lower wages (guess who) must work more hours to get the minimum earnings required for UI; quitting a job usually makes one ineligible for benefits even if it is required for family care reasons; women tend to have shorter job tenure and are penalized by a system which ignores recent earnings.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research pointed out these and other inequities in a new Fact Sheet calling for changes in state policies (www.iwpr.org). Authors V. Lovell and C. Williams state, "In an equitable, modern UI system, they would not be excluded by outdated rules and biases."

NO NEW COAL PLANTS

Global Warming isn't the only reason the three proposed coal burning power plants should not be built in eastern Nevada. These plants contribute to significant widespread health risks. For example, coal plants are our country's largest source of mercury pollution. Even small amounts of mercury can negatively affect children's language and motor skills development and learning ability. In adults, it can damage nervous, cardiovascular, immune and reproductive systems.

The enormous water requirement for these plants is also a major concern, along with the long-term costs to power users who will be stuck paying for expensive upgrades when stiffer EPA requirements go into effect after the plants are built.

NWL joined the 28 Nevada groups opposing these power plants. Initial stages are already approved; final approval awaits EPA air permits and further environmental review. As we all know Nevada is a prime area for the far cleaner solar, geothermal and wind generated power. For facts and for actions you can take: www.nevadawomenslobby.org/coal.htm.

DOMESTIC PARTNERS MAY GET BENEFITS

By next year some of Nevada's working families may have access to health insurance not available to them before. Nevada's Public Employees' Benefits Program (PEBP) board has voted to extend coverage to domestic partners of government employees. This means that partners of the opposite sex or the same sex, and their children, will be eligible for health insurance benefits. The PEBP covers state employees, some local government employees, and employees in the colleges and universities of the Nevada System of Higher Education.

This is a change sought by the university and college administrations. Extended benefits are now available to domestic partners in about 300 universities across the country, putting Nevada campuses at a disadvantage when making job offers to potential academic and administrative employees. In addition, 13 other states have extended benefits to partners of employees.

A few key provisions approved by the PEBP board make it difficult to estimate the full impact of this move. An affidavit will be required, showing that a sole partnership between non-related adults has existed for at least six months, and notice of its end must be provided within 31 days. Domestic partners will not be eligible if coverage for them and their children is available through their own employers. And the board voted to subsidize partners and their children at the same rate as other participants, requiring an allocation of state funds for the subsidies. All these provisions must be approved by the Legislative Commission, and funding will have to be provided by the Legislature.

It is estimated that about 1.7% of covered households would be affected by coverage for opposite-sex partners, and about 1% by coverage for same-sex partners. The total cost to the state is estimated at \$3 million per year.

Please join NWL in writing to the PEBP board commending their actions, and to the Legislative Commission encouraging approval of the new provisions.

BIRTH CONTROL ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK

As Nevada's state and counties stretch to cover their costs, a long-term standby which has helped thousands of low income teens and other women prevent pregnancy stands at the chopping block.



In Nevada, county and federal dollars fund the county's family planning clinics plus successful teen education programs. Those who can least afford birth control and disease screening could lose their only access to it.

Washoe County's Board of Health and its County Commissioners will meet jointly at 1:00 February 26 in County Building A at 1009 E. Ninth in Reno to consider a 90% cut in county funding of their family planning clinic and Teen Health Mall program. You can help by joining NWL and others speaking at the hearing and contacting commissioners. More facts: www.nevadawomenslobby.org/PP0208.htm.

An irony of this decision is that this investment is a bargain! It is estimated every dollar spent on publicly funding family planning services saves \$3.80 in pregnancy and newborn related Medicaid costs.

While these teen education programs may be disappearing, county school budget cuts also threaten to narrow Nevada's school sexuality education programs.

HMO monopoly?

NWL continues to watch uneasily as the merger between Nevada's Sierra Health Care and behemoth UnitedHealth moves closer. Opponents say this would give UnitedHealth a virtual monopoly on Nevada's HMO market.

NWL joined the many opponents to this takeover, with concern about UnitedHealth's record in other states which has resulted in several fines and a just-announced suit by New York's attorney general. Further hearings may be scheduled in Nevada and allow more consideration of their record before the merger gets final approval.

THANK YOU!

The Nevada Women's Lobby is grateful to all of the generous donors who contributed to its successful fall fundraiser. A special thanks to Edie Hofmeister for hosting the event, and to those who supported NWL by their attendance. All proceeds benefit the Lobby's efforts on behalf of Nevada's women, children and families.

NWL's Principles of Unity

Nevada Women's Lobby is a voice for women and children. We are dedicated to equity, non-violence and reproductive choice.

TIME TO JOIN IS NOW

Please join us and help strengthen the voice of Nevada Women's Lobby. NWL dues are based on the calendar year, with renewals due in January. That's why you recently received our letter inviting you to renew or join NWL now.

If your label shows Paid 2008, we thank you for your timely payment. If your label doesn't show paid, we hope the issues discussed in this newsletter prompt you to join us now.

Nevada Women's Lobby

A non-partisan statewide coalition presenting a strong voice on issues affecting Nevada's women and families

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PLEASE JOIN US

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*NWL strives to represent all women and families. Any contribution you are able to make entitles you to membership.

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