



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

September/October 2019 Issue 87



Grassroots Gathering 2019!

Thank you to everyone who came out to Smith Mountain Lake September 20-22 for this year's Grassroots Gathering. It was the biggest three day conference we have ever held with more than 150 people! Members shared their enthusiasm about all the new offerings, and the Skelton 4H Center was as friendly and beautiful as always.

On Friday night, Joe Szakos, Jay Johnson, Ebony Guy, and other leaders presented the Grassroots Bowl. A combination of Jeopardy and the College Bowl, the game is a fun way to learn about the complex (and depressing) way the General Assembly gets its work done (or doesn't.) Then we acted out the progress of a bill to raise the minimum wage. (In our pretend General Assembly it passed, of course, but not before a serious wrestling match.)

On Saturday we heard about the campaign highlights of each of the chapters and then went off to workshops. Our friend and ally Libero Della Piana led "400 Years of Racism and Resistance in Virginia." The workshop took a deep look at the oppression of people of color throughout the history of the Commonwealth and celebrated the fight to survive and gain racial and economic justice. Video and further offerings of this workshop should be available soon.

Other new workshops included "Agents and Borders: Understanding the Immigration System," and "Affordable Housing for Everyone." We also held workshops on several of our major issues and campaigns and the skills we need to organize successfully.

At the mass meeting on Saturday afternoon, we were happy to have Delegate Sam Rasoul from Roanoke as our special guest. The first thing he said in his speech was, "This is one of the few groups I get in front of and say 'This is what Virginia looks like.'" He called for an end to the entire predatory lending industry, explained the goals of the Green New Deal in Virginia, and answered questions from our leaders.



The most important point he emphasized many times was that environmental justice and economic justice have to go together. We couldn't agree more!

Saturday evening we held our traditional talent show followed by s'mores by the campfire. On Sunday chapters developed an action to defend the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and practiced holding a rally outside the office of an unfriendly legislator.

Next year will be our 25th anniversary!!! Our Grassroots Gathering Committee will be planning many special events to celebrate the work you and all who are part of Virginia Organizing have accomplished. We hope to see you then!



Leader of the Month - Tyran Green of Portsmouth!



At the Grassroots Gathering this year, Tyran spoke about her experience over the summer as an intern for Virginia Organizing.

She and the other interns held a living wage rally at a Charlottesville Chick-fil-A. The police were called because the road they were standing on turned out to belong to the company.

Tyran didn't want to be banned from eating at one of her favorite restaurants.

"I like Chick-fil-A," she said in her speech. "But you all are my family. I have to come to this whether I like it or not because if you're affected by it then I'm affected by it."

As a mother of five in Portsmouth, Tyran became involved in the local Virginia Organizing chapter because her daughter was expelled from school three years ago. Her daughter had a disability, and the school system was breaking the law by treating her the way they had, but Tyran didn't know how to fight it.

In the chapter she was able to get advice about her own case and succeeded in getting her daughter through high school. She also began to speak out at school board meetings and with the superintendent.

"You just have to speak up and have a voice, and people will listen."

Now she's helping another member of the chapter with a similar court case. "Virginia Organizing really empowers you. It's like agape. There's no way you can receive it without empowering others, too," she says.

Tyran shows up for everything, whether she's directly affected or not, from dismantling racism workshops, to rallies for health care, to regional and statewide conferences.

In the spring she testified on Capitol Hill in Washington about the need for more federal funding of special education services in schools. Her testimony was published in the Virginian-Pilot as an op-ed.

About the summer internship, she says, "I feel honored to have learned all that I learned." We're honored you give so much to Virginia Organizing, Tyran!



Lower Drug Prices Now!

On August 20 leaders from Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Newport News held a rally outside Senator Mark Warner's office to ask him and Rep. Elaine Luria to take action to lower the cost of prescription drugs. Senator Warner expressed his support for the action with a statement.

On October 10, the Harrisonburg Chapter will hold a rally to call on Rep. Ben Cline to support lowering drug costs. Congress now has the opportunity to pass H.R. 3, the Lower Drug Costs Now act, which gives the government authority to negotiate with Big Pharma. It also holds drug companies accountable for price gouging.

To ask your representative to support H.R. 3, call the Congressional switchboard at 202-224-3121.

Take Action: Environmental Justice

You can make a difference! Call Governor Ralph Northam at 804-786-2211 and tell him to...

- Stop the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Mountain Valley Pipeline.
- Oppose Dominion's influence in Richmond.
- Provide resources to communities to fight climate change and transition from dirty energy.

Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro, Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Hampton/Newport News, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Washington County

On Campus: UMW, UVA, E&H, EMU, U of R, ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU

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