



NETWORK CONNECTION

SECOND QUARTER 2020

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2019 ANNUAL REPORTS!



WORKING TO END POVERTY

Building Community and Raising Our Voices



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ON THE COVER

Antonio Trujillo, a participant from the New Mexico Rural Roundtable, speaks at the launch of NETWORK's *Raising Rural Voices* report.

Photo by: Rachel Couch

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Responding to the Need Laid Bare

Working to Mend the Gaps in a Time of Crisis

SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL

When I testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform at the beginning of February, our world was a very different place than it is today. However, the issues that I spoke of at that time are more urgent than ever. While you can read the details of the testimony in this issue of *Connection*, the substance boils down to a simple fact: the Trump administration's attempt to define people out of poverty is a cruel hoax to prop up conservative economic talking points.

In the COVID-19 crisis, we have quickly learned how tattered our safety net is. Now, even Republicans are beginning to see that we need to care for all of our people in order to protect the common good. COVID-19 is demonstrating that we are all vulnerable. The virus respects neither economic privilege nor zip codes. Some who were previously hostile to the idea of a safety net now see that we are connected and my concern for another is a concern for my family and friends also.

One example of this is the Community Health Centers whose long term funding has been held up in Congress as a “bargaining chip” in the effort to reduce drug costs. Some of these centers, which serve the most vulnerable uninsured people in our country, have had to close their doors because of a lack of funding. Now, they have received emergency funding.

We have heard of people who have lost their jobs and have no income with a rent payment due. They are receiving increased unemployment benefits as quickly as states can do it.

We have heard of a farmer who was going to sell some machinery to pay the loan that they took out last year to get through a “hard patch.” Now the loan is due, but there is no market to sell the machinery. There are provisions for cash-strapped farmers as they begin planting season.

The stories go on and on. I find myself often on the point of tears. These tears led me to realize that the response to this crisis in many ways is up to us. Will we continue to



Stacked rocks seen in Kentucky during a Rural Roundtable visit

use this moment to reclaim the fact that we are based in community and end the unpatriotic lie of individualism? This is our moment. This is our chance. We have Members of Congress listening who never listened before.

We must minister to our people. We need to lift up the stories of solidarity (even though we are socially distancing). The truth is that we are interconnected, as this invisible virus has demonstrated. There are no national boundaries when it comes to our care. There is no Republican virus or Democratic virus. Our legislation needs to reflect this deep truth: we are one body.

So how can we respond when we might feel frightened, paralyzed, ineffective?

We do as Jesus described in the parable of the persistent friend. We go to the door and knock... and knock... and knock. We will not take no for an answer. We must create a more perfect union! Now is the opportunity to notice and improve the failing structures in our society! Now is the time for paid sick leave for all workers! Now is the time for paid family leave for all workers! Now is the time to forgive burdensome student debt! Now is the time for health care for all who need it!

In the face of our tattered safety net, we can make structural changes because the needs are so apparent. Even those Members of Congress who asked demeaning questions following my testimony (illustrating their own lack of experience with the lived reality of low-income families) now must admit that their self-interest is linked to everyone else's. We indeed are in this together.

In this moment of fear and vulnerability, let us keep knocking on the door of our elected officials so that we achieve structural changes that care for our people now, and save our democracy for the future. This is our moment to respond to the needs of our nation. Let us remember: we were made for times such as these. ☀️

Notable Quotables

What justice-seekers have been saying this quarter

"Poverty rolls off the backs of parents right onto the shoulders of our children, despite how hard we try"

Amy Jo Hutchison testifying about child poverty to the House Oversight Committee

"Let us be governed by people of our own collective choosing, people who will lead our nation righteously and strengthen our democracy for years to come."

Prayer written by Maggie Siddiqi and published in NETWORK's Lenten toolkit

"This rule is un-American & flies in the face of our most basic values of equality & opportunity for all."

Congressional Hispanic Caucus Chair Rep. Joaquin Castro (TX-20) responding to the Public Charge rule

"In 2019 there were NO Senate votes on income and wealth disparity OR caring for marginalized. This is not for the common good!"

Tweet from Sister Simone Campbell (@Sr_Simone) about NETWORK's 2020 Voting Record

"For ten years we have lived with the idolatry of corporations being given the right of free speech."

Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey marks the 10-year anniversary of the Citizens United Supreme Court ruling

"In America, our diversity makes us stronger — it is what uplifts all voices and makes us an inclusive, dynamic country."

Rep. Veronica Escobar (TX-16) giving the Spanish State of the Union response

"I believe this is a time to love without limit. This is a time to see no stranger."

Tweet from Valarie Kaur (@valariekaur) in light of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic

"I'm sick of the stereotyping, criminalizing, and villainizing of the poor. Hardship does not discriminate — it's transcendent."

Rep. Ayanna Pressley (MA-07) speaking at a House Oversight Committee hearing on SNAP

"Dear POTUS, still praying for you and all leaders, that you may seek to build peace rather than sow divisions."

Tweet from Sister Susan Francois, CSJP (@susanfrancois) of her daily prayer for President Trump

"The Supreme Court DACA decision isn't just about 800,000 people. It's also about their families and our community."

Tweet from Moms Rising (@MomsRising) about the upcoming Supreme Court decision on DACA

"Suppressing the vote is a form of political and theological idolatry and sin!"

Rev. William Barber, III speaking about Congress's failure to renew the Voting Right Act

"When the President says the economy is strong, my question is, strong for whom?"

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer's response to the 2020 State of the Union Address

Bearing Witness to Harmful Policies on Capitol Hill

Child Poverty Would Worsen Under Trump Administration Proposals

In February, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform held a series of four hearings over two days to examine the negative effects of regulations proposed by the Trump administration on children. The Oversight Committee invited Sister Simone Campbell, SSS to testify at the first hearing in the series, about how President Trump's proposed change to calculating the federal poverty would harm children and families if it goes into effect. The remaining three hearings focused on: the Trump administration's proposal to gut Fair Housing Accountability, proposed changes to Categorical Eligibility for SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and the Trump administration's proposal to undermine protections from Mercury Air Toxics Standards.

NETWORK was honored to participate and applauds the House Oversight Committee for holding these hearings. Using Chained CPI (Consumer Price Index) instead of regular CPI to calculate the poverty line — the proposed change that Sister Simone discussed — has been criticized by people of faith, advocates for children, and social justice organizations across the country. This hearing allowed Members of Congress to hear and discuss these concerns with experts, including Mr. Indivar Dutta-Gupta, the Co-Executive Director of the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Ms. Amy Jo Hutchison, an organizer with the Healthy Kids and Families Coalition, West Virginia, as well as Sister Simone.



Amy Jo Hutchison, Indi Dutta-Gupta, and Sister Simone Campbell before their testimonies.

While Mr. Dutta-Gupta offered an economic argument and Ms. Hutchinson shared her lived experiences of raising children in a low-income family, Sister Simone's testimony provided a moral perspective on this change, with an emphasis on how it would affect our nation's most vulnerable children.

Here is a portion of Sister Simone's testimony to the Committee:

Protecting children is about caring for the common good — today and into the future. Thanks to modern understanding of human development, we have a heightened awareness of how children are uniquely vulnerable to a variety of factors — physically, emotionally, psychologically. Grave, potentially lifelong impacts can result from malnutrition as children grow. Exposure to chemicals and stressors as children develop inhibit their health. Traumatic experiences and encounters early childhood can create lifelong scars. Children are also intensely responsive to the emotional well-being of their caretakers and are formed by their living situation and immediate surroundings. In so many ways, children are more susceptible to physical and psychological stressors and less able to respond or understand their experiences.

The Role of Government

The Trump administration's choices — reflected in the regulatory rule-changes under scrutiny in these oversight hearings — make it harder for families to survive and to support thriving children. While the rules under review in this series of oversight hearings may seem like technical decisions, they are, at their core, moral decisions and must be treated as such. This proposed change in the calculation of the Consumer Price Index is based on the middle and upper class experience of "shopping around" to find the best price. It also is based on the capacity of wealthier families to buy in bulk. Lower income families have neither the extra money to buy a large quantity nor the space in cramped rental residences to store extra supplies. Creating a rule that incorrectly assumes those experiencing poverty have the same experiences as wealthier people betrays the Constitutional mandate to promote the general welfare.

(continued on page 6)



The OMB's proposal to change how poverty is measured is not only misguided, but is immoral. I am here to emphasize the lived reality of people in poverty and how this rule change not only ignores their reality, but would further sideline working families and the children they struggle to care for. Choosing to apply the Chained CPI for setting poverty thresholds would not only further skew known shortfalls of the official CPI, but also would increasingly mask the extent to which families in the United States — and particularly children — suffer in poverty.

Poverty, the Lived Reality

It is tempting to lump together all kinds of people to frame “poverty” in stereotypes. But people living in poverty are diverse and the challenges they face are varied. In 2019, NETWORK held 17 roundtables in rural communities in 16 states. What we learned was that these rural communities have no options for shopping.

In Tutwiler, Mississippi we were told that there was only the Dollar General and it had no fresh fruits and vegetables. If

you wanted something else, there were no restaurants, fast food places, or farmers markets. There was only “gas station chicken” — fried chicken prepared at the gas station. There were no options or choices. Outside of Tiffin, Ohio, the story was the same. The rural residents referred to their Dollar General as the “shopping mall” because it carried a bit of everything and was their only option. In rural northern California, we learned that the casino was even beginning to stock food items for surrounding residents since the casino provided the only transportation option in several surrounding counties. It was the only way for many families to get somewhere they could purchase food. These rural residents had no store, no choice.

Conclusion

We will never address these families’ struggles by masking the true extent of poverty in our nation. My faith tells me that both individuals and our governments have a responsibility to act for the common good. Central to this responsibility is protecting and supporting the most marginalized in our society. We should be investing in our nation’s children, not amplifying the crushing socioeconomic burdens of so many who are pushed into poverty.

NETWORK RESPONDS TO THE COMMITTEE’S QUESTIONS

Following Sister Simone’s testimony, NETWORK submitted the answers below to the Oversight Committee in response to questions asked during the hearing. These questions and responses provide a look into how our nation’s elected officials are thinking about child poverty in the U.S.

Question: The 2020 poverty guideline issued by the Department of Health and Human Services is \$26,200 for a family of four. Is this amount sufficient to meet families’ needs? Why or why not?

Answer: Under no circumstances is this income sufficient — at least not in the U.S. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology developed the Living Wage Calculator to estimate the cost of living in a community or region based on typical expenses. The tool helps determine a local wage rate that allows residents to meet minimum standards of living for their basic needs.

In 2019, Yahoo! Finance rated the top 25 least expensive cities to live in the U.S. and rated the Texas city of Harlingen as the cheapest place, overall.¹ According to the MIT Living Wage calculator, a single parent with three children living in Cameron County (where Harlingen is located) would need to earn \$65,291 before taxes to cover their basic expenses.² A family of three with both parents working would need to earn \$50,509

to cover their expenses. This example alone demonstrates how out-of-sync our federal measures have become in light of the reality of living costs.



Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14) joined the NETWORK staff for a photo following the hearing

Question: In your testimony, you focused on the long-term effects that poverty has on children. How do children experience poverty differently from adults?

Answer: The contextual factors of poverty amplify the experience of children growing up poor. The neighborhoods in which children grow up shape many aspects of their adult lives, including life expectancy, how healthy they will be, and how much money they will earn.³ Nearly 10 million U.S. children live in low-opportunity neighborhoods, with limited access to good schools, parks, and healthy food and often experience discrimination as a result. Simply being born in these pockets of poverty puts these kids at a stark disadvantage. While adults may move through periods of hardship and bounce back, the experience for children can be formative.

The well-being of a child cannot be separated from the well-being of their household and their family unit. Children develop in an environment of relationships that begin in the home and they are uniquely sensitive to instability, disruption, and the emotional well-being of those around them. I practiced family law for 18 years in Oakland California serving most of the low-income, high-conflict clients in our county. As such I learned that the single biggest cause of the breakup of a marriage is economics. Financial stress and the inability to pay the bills on time puts tremendous stress, guilt, and anger into any relationship. One poll from the Harvard School of Public Health found that more than 4 in 10 people “under a great deal of stress in the last month” reported that this stress made it harder to get along with family members (45%) and prevented them from spending time with family members (44%).⁴ For children growing up in a low-income home or neighborhood, caretakers with chronic or acute financial anxiety can further destabilize the environment and give rise to toxic stress, which can have lifelong impacts on children.⁵

Question: You have travelled across this country and seen poverty in different areas. What would you say are ways that poverty is different or similar across the nation?

Answer: Regardless of where they live, families living in poverty have something in common: their lives are regularly afflicted by obvious hardships and by invisible barriers. Across the board, U.S. families experience poverty as a relentless, crushing reality and a constant state of anxiety. People living in poverty in the U.S. share in their lack of access to needed goods and services and lack of options in decision-making. Nevertheless, rural and urban realities of poverty differ in their manifestations. Rural poverty has the added burden of isolation and loneliness and lack of internet access. Childcare — and especially affordable childcare — is even less available in rural communities than in urban settings. Health care is challenging in both settings,



but access to a pediatrician in rural communities is unheard of. Finally, mental health practitioners are simply absent in most rural communities.

Question: The Trump administration’s proposal to apply the Chained CPI to the Poverty Line would cut many individuals from government programs, but some Republican members have touted it as helping to curb an ‘expansion of the welfare system.’ How would you respond?

Answer: This false narrative is tired and dangerously misleading. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) passed in 1996 as welfare reform and basically did away with cash assistance for struggling families. The amount appropriated in 1996 is approximately the same dollar amount appropriated today. There has been no increase for inflation or increase in amount to reflect the needs of struggling families, even during the Great Recession.

TANF was meant to have many supports for parents to go to work. There was to be funding for education, childcare, transportation, and much more. None of this materialized because Congress never fully funded their promise. The only thing that was done was cutting cash aid.

Any expansion of the “welfare system” in recent years is the result of formula-based programs responding to flat wages and growing income inequality. SNAP and Medicaid have become the actual safety net for allowing children to eat and get needed health care as their parents struggle in an increasingly perilous low wage labor market. The real spending value of SNAP bene-

(continued on page 8)



“I’ve pulled myself up by the bootstraps so many times that I ripped them off.”

—Ms. Amy Jo Hutchison

Amy Jo Hutchison of West Virginia spoke at the same hearing as Sister Simone, and parts of her testimony have gone viral, with over two million views on Facebook. Watch her full testimony online to see the power and passion she brings to advocating for low income families: www.networklobby.org/hutchison.

fits has actually decreased in the past several years, so claiming “expansion” of the program is disingenuous and misrepresents the root cause of more need.

The short answer is that if we care about our future as a nation, we will ensure that our children eat and that they have access to health care. It is the least that we can do.

Question: How common is abuse by adult family members of programs like Free and Reduced Lunch programs or SNAP that are intended for children? Are there ways that we can better ensure these programs benefit children in need?

Answer: I am shocked by this question from Ranking Member Meadows. It evidences his disconnect from the actual lived reality of children participating in the Lunch programs. His willingness to focus on a hypothetical scenario and the judgement built into that scenario is deeply disturbing. Rather than prioritize and lift up the benefits to children, he is focused on a misguided narrative that demonizes poor parents as prone to taking advantage of or neglecting their children. Any instance of this type of abuse of benefits in which a parent funnels food assistance away from their hungry child clearly could not stand.

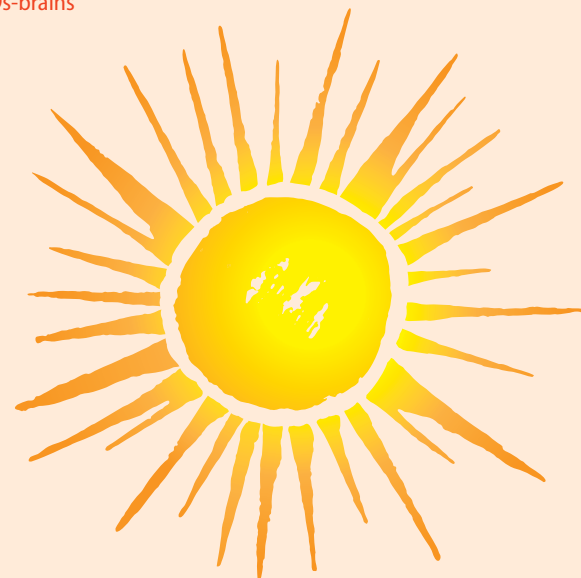
I was told by a father in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that it might be okay for a parent to eat once or twice a day, but growing children (especially his 14-year-old boy) needed much more than that. I have also talked with parents in rural Iowa who shared the same concern and were so grateful for the lunch program for their growing children. This is the *typical* response of parents and Representative Meadows would do well to talk with them.

Parents — even parents struggling financially — can be trusted to prioritize the well-being of their own children. This question is the quintessential example of how out-of-touch lawmakers make classist judgements about the motives and accountability of people — and parents — struggling in poverty. ☀️

Thank you to Sister Quincy Howard, OP for her contributions to writing this testimony and answering the Committee’s questions.

Endnotes

1. Swaminathan, Aarthi. “The 25 least expensive U.S. cities to live in” 12 August 2019. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/cheapest-us-cities-to-live-in-181331292.html>
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3. Acevedo-Garcia, Dolores, Clemens Noelke, Nancy McArdle. “The Geography of Child Opportunity: Why Neighborhoods Matter for Equity” Brandeis and The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Jan 2020. http://new.diversitydatakids.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/ddk_the-geography-of-child-opportunity_2020.pdf
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5. “Unequal Stress: How Poverty Is Toxic for Children’s Brains”, Poverty, the Brain, and Mental Health symposium co-presented by Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, 10 May 2016. <https://www.mailman.columbia.edu/public-health-now/news/unequal-stress-how-poverty-toxic-children%E2%80%99s-brains>



NETWORK Annual Report 2019

NETWORK educates, organizes, and lobbies for social and economic transformation. We are rooted in Catholic Social Justice and open to all who share our passion. We value women's leadership, welcome secular and religious backgrounds, affirm LGBTQ+ identities, and engage in ongoing racial justice work.



Dear NETWORK Supporters,

Who we elect matters. This was demonstrated in 2019 in the strongest possible way. While *all* of our Mend the Gap issues were taken up in some significant manner in the House of Representatives, the Senate did not have a floor vote on *any* of our issues.

But all is not lost. We still have this second session of the 116th Congress to make progress — and we have the 2020 election. Here at NETWORK we say that voting is the sacramental moment of democracy. It is this sacred privilege that can make a difference for our nation.



Off the Hill, we made commenting on proposed regulations a critical component of our efforts to protect immigrants and those at the economic margins. We also signed on to briefs that were filed in federal court to represent your concerns about vulnerable people in our nation and the abuse of power by this administration.

Finally, we got ready for the work of 2020 and beyond by holding 17 roundtables in rural communities in 16 different states. It has been an education and helped us understand the need to “mend the gaps” not just in economics but also in how we understand different communities in our nation.

All of this is thanks to you! You are the community that nourishes our commitment and makes our advocacy possible. Thank you for your support, passion, and engagement. Together we can form a “more perfect union.” You give us hope and energy for the long haul.

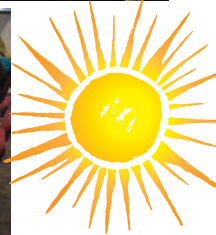
Thank you!

S. Simone Capbell 555



Over the past year, NETWORK held 17 rural roundtables in 16 states, meeting and listening to a diverse group of 250 people living in rural parts of the U.S.

Download the report, *Raising Rural Voices*: networklobby.org/raisingruralvoices

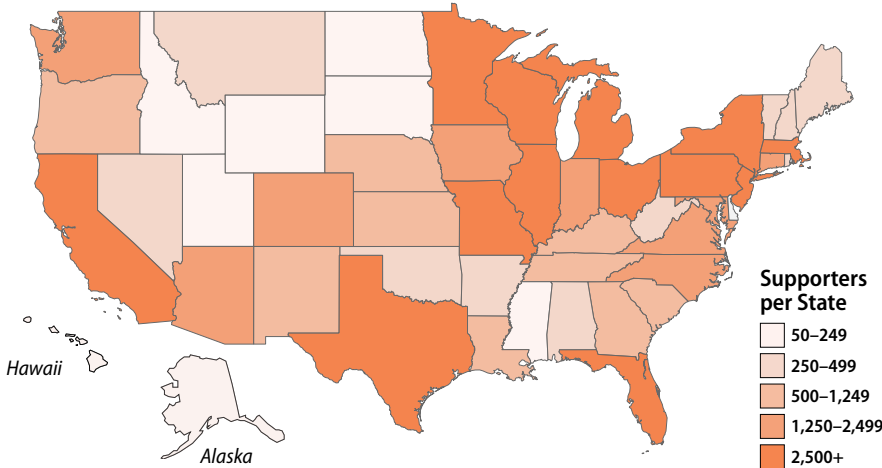


Rural Roundtables were held in: Albuquerque, NM; Wabasha, MN; Yolo County, CA; Adrian, MI; Tutwiler, MS; Poetry, TX; Amsterdam, NY; Clinton, IA; Springfield, IL; Columbia, MO; Tiffin, OH; Richmond, IN; Brownsville, TX; Oil City, PA; Union Hill, VA; Wantage, NJ; and Whitesburg, KY.

NETWORK is two organizations with one mission: NETWORK Advocates is a 501(c)(3) tax-deductible organization and NETWORK Lobby is a 501(c)(4) organization. The two sister organizations work closely together to further our movement for justice and peace.

OUR NETWORK Community

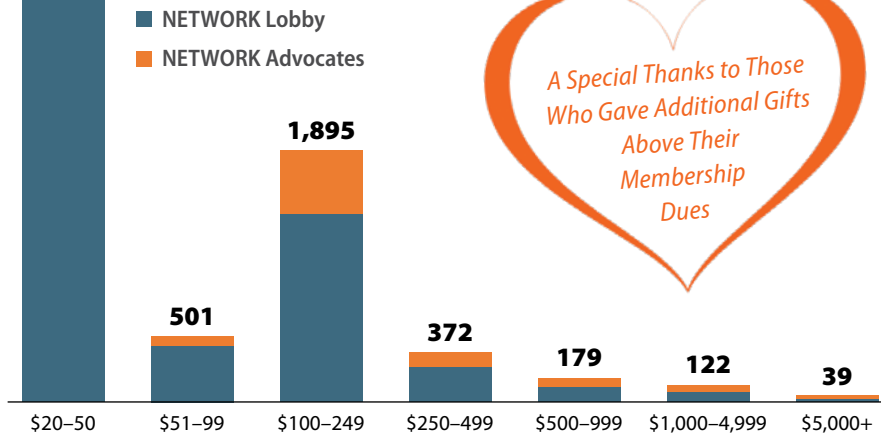
We were honored to have more than **85,000** supporters across the country in 2019



4,275

Thanks to our **7,383 members*** in 2019

*Basic Membership is \$50 (\$20 if senior, student, or limited income)



A Special Thanks to Those Who Gave Additional Gifts Above Their Membership Dues

2,054 first-time donors

A Sister-Spirit welcome to our newest members!

553 GEMs

People who participated in the Giving Every Month program

2,251 Loyalty Society

People who have given consecutively for five years or more

Our Work by the Numbers

3.15 million emails sent to NETWORK supporters in **162** email blasts

364,412 visits to the NETWORK websites by **112,979** visitors

189,338 NETWORK text messages sent to advocates

32,089 Connection issues mailed to NETWORK members

10,890 calls to Members of Congress by NETWORK activists

9,896 NETWORK activists took action on various engagements

3,181 new followers to NETWORK, Nuns on the Bus, and Sister Simone social media platforms

1,438 press hits highlighting NETWORK's work/positions

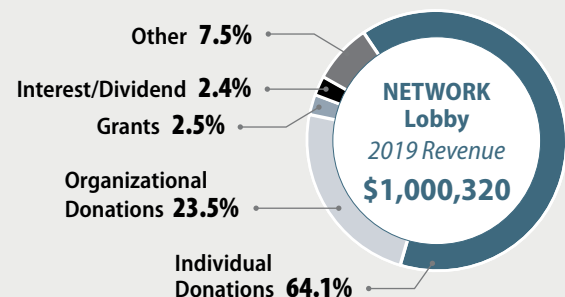
529 meetings with Congressional policymakers (**43** in-district by NETWORK activists)

400 high school and college students trained to lobby

105 blogs published on NETWORK's website

67 workshops, presentations, and webinars given by NETWORK staff

Where Our Financial



In 2019, NETWORK Lobby investments had \$103,489 in unrealized gain, not included in this chart

Bread & Roses

~ SOCIETY ~

Members of NETWORK's Bread and Roses Society play a vital role in building the justice movement for many years to come. By remembering NETWORK in their will or estate plans, members make a substantial, enduring commitment to our community's long-term work. For more information on how to make a planned gift to NETWORK, please contact us at development@networklobby.org.

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Alice and Robert Beezat | Dr. Norma LaSalle | Jean Sammon |
| Kim† and Stephen Benoit | Anne Laurance | Fr. Tony Schumacher |
| Margaret Betz | Sarah Marin | Imelda Smith |
| James Biechler | Rita Middendorf | Rev. Charles Topper |
| Carol Ann† and Lee J. Breyer | Elizabeth Morancy | Bernadette Tourtual |
| Susan Doherty | Rosemarie Pace | Carol Watchler |
| Albert Eisch | Suzanne Polen | Francine Wickes |
| Jean Hamann | Bernadette Powell | Amy and Stephen Zeder |
| Jane Houtman | Noraleen Renauer | Dr. Jerome Zurek |
| Mary and Calbert Hubbard | Linda Rich | |
| Alice Kitchen | Barbara and Brian Roos | † deceased |

IN MEMORIAM

We honor the memory of those whose estates supported NETWORK in 2019.

We also recognize those who were remembered in 2019 through gifts from relatives and friends.

We are honored to be entrusted with their legacies, which sustain our work for many years to come.

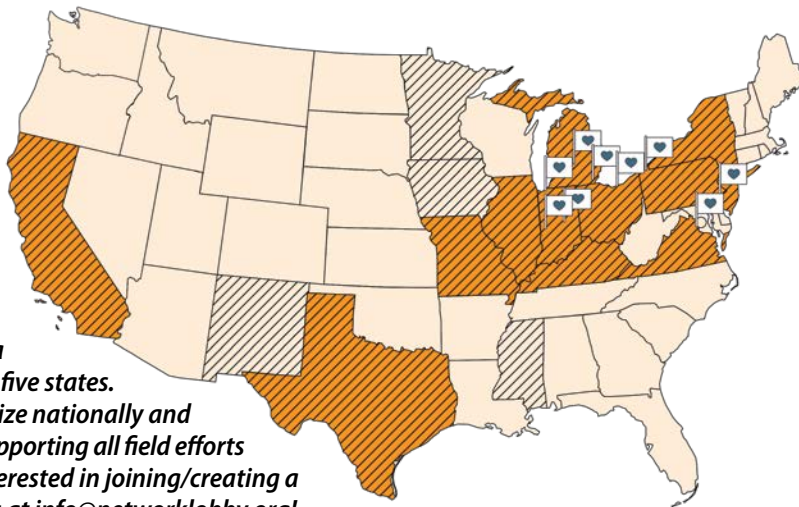
Estate Gifts

Therese Lynch
Marie Mocny

In Memory

Kim Benoit
Mary Ann DeLuca
Sr. Margaret Augustine Exworthy, OP
Mary Judge
John M. Kearney
Sr. Pat McNally, SC
Agnes McShea
Rev. Thomas McSherry
Mary Claire Meysenburg
Rev. Dr. Audrey Miller
Joan Panaro
Donald Shorter, Sr.

BUILDING OUR SPIRIT-FILLED NETWORK

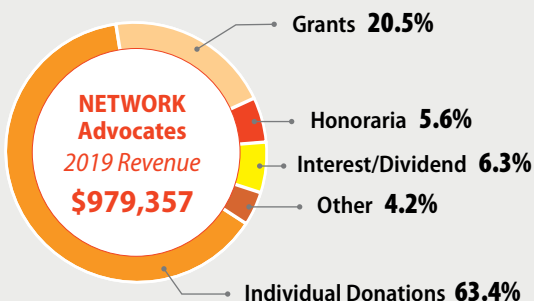


Key

- Building States
 - Mobilizing States
 - ▨ Rural Roundtable States
 - ♥ Grassroots Advocates Teams
- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| Indianapolis, IN | Cleveland, OH |
| South Bend, IN | Erie, PA |
| Terre Haute, IN | Philadelphia, PA |
| Ann Arbor, MI | Northern Virginia, VA |
| East Lansing, MI | |

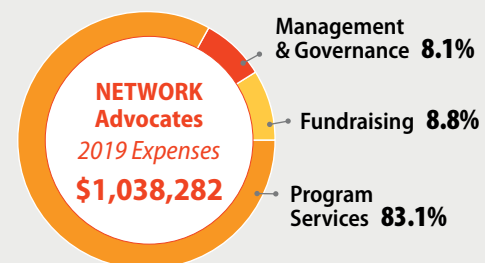
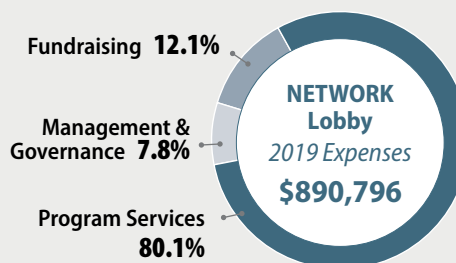
In 2019, we added six new Grassroots Advocates Teams for a total of nine teams in five states. We continue to mobilize nationally and we look forward to supporting all field efforts in 2020. If you are interested in joining/creating a team, please email us at info@networklobby.org!

Support Comes From



In 2019, NETWORK Advocates investments had \$312,912 in unrealized gain, not included in this chart

How Your Financial Support Impacts Our Mission



THE YEAR IN Photos



DACA Rosary Walk



Faith for Equality Prayer Vigil



Healthy Families Act Press Conference
(with Reps. Underwood and DeLauro)



Family Separation Prayer Vigil



Voting Record Certificate Delivery
(with Rep. Craig)



USMCA Rally (with Rep. Dingle)



DHS Funding Press Conference
(with Sen. Kaine)



Immigration "Nuns Letter" Delivery



NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
NETWORK Advocates for Catholic Social Justice

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Spirit-Filled Leaders on Capitol Hill

For Lent this year, NETWORK explored and reflected on what it means to be a Spirit-filled voter.

Senator Tom Udall (NM) and Representative Terri Sewell (AL-07) shared their visions for the future with us; visions that can only be achieved if we all do our part to prepare ourselves and our communities to vote on Election Day.

Download the full Lenten toolkit, "Becoming Spirit-Filled Voters: Our Faith and Election Day" on NETWORK's website at www.networkadvocates.org/spiritfilledvoters.

Building a New Vision for Our Democracy

U.S. Senator Tom Udall

Democracy represents more than a system of government. It is the sacred affirmation that each voice matters equally in one nation — and that a representative government must be of, by, and for the people.

But today, the American people are losing faith in our democracy. They see the evidence with their own eyes as the wealthy purchase influence in political campaigns and drown out the voices of the people. Voting rights are under assault, foreign adversaries interfere in our elections, and so-called public servants use their offices to help themselves and their friends — instead of the people they are supposed to work for.

Our voices do count. Our voices count when we vote in each election, especially this year. And they count when we organize, march, and speak out about injustice.

But there is no doubt that our democracy is in a crisis. The influx of unlimited contributions and secret donations into campaigns has fueled the hyper-partisanship we see across the nation, including in Congress.

Special interests try to dominate the political agenda, to the detriment of the common good. This has obscured the fundamental values that should define our work. Values like social justice. Feeding the hungry. Helping the poor. Making peace. And caring for our earth.

We need to put an end to the idea that money equals speech and reign in an out-of-control campaign finance system. And the only way to do that is to exercise our most fundamental and sacred democratic right — the right to vote.

Our democracy cannot be fully realized unless we, the people, vote. We deserve a representative democracy, with elected leaders who understand our concerns and are committed to fight for all voices to be heard. For our common values. And for the future of our democracy in this election and all the elections to come.

Our Voice Is Our Vote

U.S. Representative Terri Sewell

As a proud daughter of Selma, Alabama, growing up I was surrounded by the heroes and sheroes of the civil and voting rights movements. My home church, Brown Chapel A.M.E., is where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. planned the Selma-to-Montgomery marches. I was reminded every day of the powerful change that ordinary Americans can achieve.

The history of Alabama's 7th Congressional District sets it apart, as one of our country's most potent testaments to the triumph of human courage; the power of grassroots, community organizing; and the resilience of our democracy.

Sadly, old battles have become new again. Modern-day barriers to the ballot box — strict voter ID, polling location closures, and voter roll purges — have prevented too many Americans from making their voices heard.

Since the Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision gutted the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 and halted federal preclearance, elections have taken place under laws that were later found in court to be intentionally discriminatory. In states across the country, new laws and voting procedures have diluted the voting rights of certain vulnerable communities — the elderly, disabled, minority groups and younger voters.

Since the *Shelby* decision, changes to state voting laws are leaving the voices of millions of citizens behind. The road to justice is long and winding, but no citizen deserves to be left in the rearview mirror.

We must double down on our commitment to the voting rights movement and elect candidates who are committed to restoring the protections of the Voting Rights Act and expanding voter access across the country.

The foot soldiers of the civil rights movement reminded us that every one of us can change the course of history. Our vote is our voice. We must use it this November!



NETWORK Activists Build Support for Mend the Gaps Agenda

By Alex Burnett

During Congress's February recess, more than 100 NETWORK members visited 85 Congressional offices in 28 states. The purpose of these visits was to discuss their Representative's performance on NETWORK's 2019 Congressional Voting Record. The 2019 Voting Record evaluated whether Members of Congress voted in accordance with Catholic Social Justice and NETWORK values. While we scored ten votes in the House, we were unable to score the Senate, which took no substantive votes on Mend the Gap issues in 2019.

Many NETWORK members met and spoke directly with their Representative about their score. These justice-seekers emphasized the importance of federal legislation in advancing racial, economic, and gender justice. Additionally, they highlighted NETWORK's work — in Washington, D.C. and across the country — to mend our nation's gaps. In-district meetings like these help NETWORK members build relationships with their Representatives, which are critically important for NETWORK's advocacy.

As a token of gratitude, Members of Congress who scored over 90% on our Voting Record received a congratulatory certificate. NETWORK members delivered these certificates to 72 Congressional offices in 27 states, marking the largest number of in-district visits organized by NETWORK in the past five years.

We are proud to celebrate elected officials who consistently demonstrated integrity in turbulent times. For Representatives with lower scores, NETWORK members urged them to prioritize their most marginalized constituents in 2020 and attempted to find common ground in our values moving forward.

Though NETWORK's inability to score the Senate was frustrating, I felt beyond grateful for our members' dedication and energy. I corresponded directly with many NETWORK activists and felt frequently moved by their moral clarity.

NETWORK members across the country understood the importance of Congressional action, spoke urgently about the need for change, and relished visiting their Representative's office. Your passion for justice gives me hope!

Alex Burnett is a 2019-2020 NETWORK Grassroots Mobilization Associate.



Photo Captions

(Clockwise beginning at the top)

100% voter Rep. Cindy Axne (IA-03) meets with Srs. Jeanie and Elaine Hagedorn, CHM and other constituents and justice-seekers

Sr. Phyllis Tierney, SSJ congratulates Rep. Joseph Morelle (NY-25) on his 100% voting score

Gloria Romero Roses presents a 100% certificate to Raul Martinez Jr., Deputy Chief of Staff for Rep. Donna Shalala (FL-27)

In Wisconsin, Margaret Wood presents Rep. Ron Kind (WI-03) with a 100% certificate

Sr. Bernadine Karge, OP and Sr. Benita Coffey, OSB with 100% voter, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (IL-09)

NETWORK member Karen Menzie spoke with Matthew Key, a staffer in Rep. John Carter's office (TX-31)

Sr. Johanna Rickl, CHM, Sr. Lynn Mousel, CHM, and Roberta Shadensack (CHM Associate) meet with Rep. Loeb sack (IA-02)





Bold Bills Aim to Mend the Gaps in Access to Housing

By Tralonne Shorter

In 2020, NETWORK started the year with an expanded focus on housing to address mending the gap between housing costs and stagnant wages. Our goal is clear: build a pathway from poverty to prosperity for families. To achieve this goal, NETWORK joined the Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign, a coalition working at the federal, state, and local level to improve housing affordability and end homelessness.

While our lobby efforts continue to include increasing federal funding for critical affordable housing programs, we are also supporting a growing list of critical bills that would make structural change by:

1. Bridging the growing gap between renter incomes and rising housing costs.
2. Providing aid to people experiencing job losses or other economic shocks to avert housing instability or homelessness.
3. Expanding the affordable housing stock for low-income renters.
4. Defending existing rental assistance and targeted housing resources from harmful cuts.

Eviction Crisis Act (S.3030): A bipartisan bill introduced by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Rob Portman (R-OH) that would establish a federal emergency housing assistance grant program that would provide aid to people experiencing housing insecurity to avert homelessness and would create a national database to track evictions.

Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act (S.3083): A bipartisan bill introduced by Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Todd Young (R-IN) that would create an additional 500,000 housing vouchers specifically designed for low-income families with young children under six to expand their access to neighborhoods of opportunity with high-performing schools, strong job prospects, and other resources.

Housing Is Infrastructure Act (H.R.5187/S.2961): A bicameral bill introduced by House Financial Services Committee Chairwoman Maxine Waters (D-CA-43) and Senator Kamila Harris (D-CA). This legislation would invest more than \$100 billion to improve our nation's housing infrastructure, build affordable rental homes, and create jobs.

Homes for All Act (H.R.5244): Introduced by Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN-05), a bill that would commit \$1 trillion to fund the construction of 12 million new homes in the U.S. over 10 years, mostly as public housing.

Rent Relief Act (H.R.2169/S.1106): Introduced by Representative Danny Davis (D-IL-07) and Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA), this bicameral bill aims to reduce rent burdens by creating a new, refundable tax credit for renter households paying more than 30% of their gross income for the taxable year on rent and utilities.

We applaud the authors of these bills for proposing solutions to the real problems facing too many families in the United States.

Tralonne Shorter is a NETWORK Senior Government Relations Advocate.



Housing Facts

- When families struggle to pay rent, they face greater risks of instability, eviction, and even homelessness, which research links to food insecurity, poor health, lower cognitive scores and academic achievement, and more frequent foster care placement among children.
- Our nation's continued legacy of racism can be found within generations of public policy that continue to segregate communities by race and income.
- On a single night in 2018, half a million people experienced homelessness in the United States.¹
- An estimated 1.3 million U.S. school children lived in unstable housing during the 2016-2017 school year.²
- 10.4 million people in 5.2 million U.S. households use federal rental assistance to afford modest housing. 68% are seniors, children, or people with disabilities.³
- 23 million low-income renters in the U.S. pay more than half their income for housing. Most do not receive rental assistance due to funding limitations.³

Who are they?

- 32% are children
- 34% are working adults
- 12% are seniors
- 18% have a disability
- 3% are veterans

Sources:

1. Department of Housing and Urban Development www.hudexchange.info/resource/5783/2018-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us
2. Department of Housing and Urban Development www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/Worst-Case-Housing-Needs.html
3. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities www.cbpp.org/research/housing/federal-rental-assistance-fact-sheets#US



Raising Rural Voices in Washington

Sharing the Hopes and Hardships of Rural Communities

After more than a year’s worth of Rural Roundtable conversations across the country, NETWORK launched our new report, *Raising Rural Voices: Listening to the Hopes and Hardships of Rural Communities*. To celebrate the report, NETWORK hosted a conversation in D.C. moderated by Lawrence O’Donnell with Sister Simone and four residents of rural areas. The launch event created the space for a robust discussion about rural life in the United States and what policymakers in Washington should be doing to mend the gaps in rural communities. This conversation was heard not only by those who attended the event in Washington, D.C., but also thousands of viewers watching the livestream all across the country

“I invite you to embrace a culture of encounter as you read this report,” said Sister Simone Campbell. “The report findings are based on Rural Roundtables we held in every region of the United States to listen to the lived realities of more than 250 people. We learned that rural communities are proud of where they live, close to nature and in strong relationship with their neighbors. But at every roundtable — from Poetry, Texas to Wabasha, Minnesota and Davis, California to Amsterdam, New York — participants carried with them the feeling that their perspectives simply do not matter. That’s why we’re releasing this report and bringing this conversation to Washington — to raise rural voices and continue our work to create a society that promotes justice and the dignity of all people.”

Lawrence O’Donnell, host of MSNBC’s *The Last Word with Lawrence O’Donnell*, said “In my freshman economics class, my professor’s solution to every rural problem was to move. That’s what the economist sees. People have for 100 years been making that choice. Sister Simone has been talking to the people who say ‘No, this is where I am. This is where we want to be.’ That’s a commitment to place.”



Panelists representing four different NETWORK Rural Roundtable discussions: Melanie Powell, Antonio Trujillo, Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF, and Kari Simpkins

Four participants from NETWORK’s Rural Roundtables in New Mexico, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Indiana joined the conversation in Washington: Antonio Trujillo, Melanie Powell, Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF, and Kari Simpkins.

“It has been a problem that industrial users, especially mining companies, use limited water resources for their benefit at the expense of local water users — first, the depletion of our water table and second, contamination,” said Antonio Trujillo, principal of St. Joseph Mission School in San Fidel, New Mexico. “Cibola County is ground zero to some major water contamination from uranium mining. Our school is not far from these sources of contamination.”



Melanie Powell speaks about her experiences living in Tutwiler, Mississippi

“We do not have wide access to health care,” said Melanie Powell, Executive Director of the Tutwiler Community Education Center in Tutwiler, Mississippi. “Our community has to drive two hours for specialists. We have health and wellness programs, but that isn’t enough when people need to see a doctor.”

“I just want my community to be heard, for the representatives to meet with our people, for them to come and see how most of the community is struggling to be re-employed,” said Sr. Robbie Pentecost, a Franciscan Sister who has been serving Central and Eastern Kentucky for over 25 years. “The community wants

(continued on page 13)



to work, but we need better access to jobs. The work I am doing at the New Opportunity School for Women can't solve all of our problems. We need support and real programs that address our unique challenges."

"Agriculture is not just a livelihood, it is a way of life," said Kari Simpkins, owner of Ag Environmental Systems, LLC, in Connersville, Indiana. "Understanding the art and science of the land and applying those principles is a crucial part of sustainable, prosperous farming."

The full report is based on the Rural Roundtables NETWORK hosted in 17 different rural communities, listening to and documenting the concerns of more than 250 people. From immigration to health care to transportation, the report findings showcase how rural problems need rural solutions, and all too often, how policymakers fail to adequately address these issues. NETWORK extends gratitude to everyone who helped organize or participated in rural roundtables.

Download the full report on NETWORK's website at www.networklobby.org/raisingruralvoices



Sister Simone shares a lesson she learned at a Rural Roundtable with the audience

Remaining Faithful in an Uncertain and Fearful World

As the coronavirus pandemic spreads through the United States and the world, we hold the NETWORK community and the global human family in our hearts and our minds. The importance of human dignity and relationships is made clear in this time. We continue advocating for our elected officials to respond with legislation that prioritizes our nation's most vulnerable families and those most affected by the crisis.

A Prayer to Face COVID-19 with Hope and Solidarity

Dear God,

In this time of uncertainty and fear, help us be love, mercy, and peace for ourselves and for others as we face coronavirus in the United States and around the world.

Help us hold close in our hearts those who have died, and their loved ones who mourn them.

Those who are sick or are trying to seek medical care.

Those who don't have paid sick leave, benefits, or job security.

Those whose schools have closed and don't have access to food, safe homes, or technology.

Those can't travel to be with loved ones who are ill or dying.

Those who are facing discrimination and harassment because of their ethnicity.

Those who are struggling with loneliness during this time of social isolation.

Those who are frightened and losing hope.

Help us find joy, however small it seems.

Help us remain hopeful.

Help us remember that "All shall be well, for there is a force of love moving through the universe that holds us fast and will never let us go."

Amen

Written by Meg Olson, NETWORK Grassroots Mobilization Manager

Prepare for the 2020 Election with NETWORK

In less than seven months, we will vote as a nation and who we elect matters now more than ever. We need political leaders who will put the common good first at every level of government.

NETWORK's 2020 Election Toolkit has many resources to help you get involved in this election, and we are still adding more. In the toolkit you will find: the 2020 Mend the Gaps Policy Platform, questions

to ask candidates at town halls, instructions for submitting a Letter to the Editor (LTE), and a DIY Candidate Side-By-Side.

Finally, join NETWORK in being a "Mend the Gaps Voter" this election year, and order a placard — or two — to share your commitment with others!

For more information, go to: www.networkadvocates.org/2020election



Worker Protections Succeed in the House, Pivotal DACA Decision Approaches

An update from D.C. on key votes held during the past quarter and social justice issues on the horizon



Key Vote: Workers' Rights

In early February, the House of Representatives passed the Protecting the Right to Organize Act (PRO Act) in a bipartisan vote of 224-194.

The PRO Act strengthens workers' ability to unionize and collectively bargain; imposes stronger remedies when employers interfere with workers' rights; and cracks down on employers' ability to mislabel their workers as independent contractors and therefore deny them the right to organize under federal law.

Unions have been pivotal in increasing wages and decreasing income inequality, but decades of attacks on labor laws have eroded union membership. Today, union members earn over 13% more than those with similar education, occupation, and experience in a nonunion workplace. However, weak labor laws exploited by employers have led to a drop in union membership from 33% in 1956 to just 10% in 2018.

The PRO Act would restore fairness to the labor market by strengthening federal laws that protect workers' right to organize and bargain for higher wages and better benefits.



On the Horizon: Immigration

For DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival) recipients, the future has never been more uncertain. In September 2017, the Trump administration announced it was ending the program. However, preliminary injunctions remained in place, allowing DACA recipients to renew their status. Then, the Supreme Court decided to take up three DACA cases and heard oral arguments last year.

The Supreme Court decision will be announced soon and they will either uphold the Trump administration's decision to terminate DACA, deny it, or decide they do not have the legal authority to review it (allowing the termination). Immigration advocates are also urging the Supreme Court to delay this decision in light of the COVID-19 global health crisis.

Last summer, the House passed the American Dream and Promise Act (H.R.6), but the Senate has failed to take up legislation on DACA in the three years since Trump's announcement. Ultimately, it is Congress's responsibility to pass a clean, permanent legislative solution for DACA recipients, without harmful provisions that would hurt immigrant communities.



ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE, INSPIRED BY CATHOLIC SISTERS

NETWORK—a Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace—educates, organizes, and lobbies for economic and social transformation.

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Make a Difference for Justice and Peace!

Help us in our work mending the gaps and bridging the divides by joining the NETWORK GEM (Give Every Month) Program. A small gift each month adds up and makes a huge difference for justice and peace all year round. Your faithful monthly giving provides a reliable, steady financial base that allows us to plan ahead more strategically and make room for new opportunities that increase our reach and impact.

Our GEMs are:

- Loyal Supporters,
- From All Income Backgrounds, and
- Integral to Our Mission!

Benefits of becoming a GEM:

- **Satisfaction:** You'll know that your support every month equips thousands of activists with the resources and tools they need to engage with elected officials and promote the common good. We will know that we can count on your support and will be able to plan ahead more effectively.
- **Convenience:** You may use the enclosed envelope to enroll with a credit card or check. You can sign up online at www.networklobby.org/GEM. Or you can call India-Grace at 202-601-7866 to donate via Electronic Funds Transfer (direct from your bank account). Once set up, you'll make regular, automatic contributions each month, and your NETWORK membership will be automatically renewed every year you're in the program.
- **Reduced paperwork and administrative expenses:** Automatic monthly payments mean no more membership renewal reminders, and more of your donation goes to where it is needed most.
- **Flexibility:** If for any reason you wish to change or discontinue your gifts, or the credit card being charged, just contact us at ikellogg@networklobby.org or call India-Grace Kellogg at (202) 601-7866, and we will gladly accommodate you.

Become a NETWORK GEM Today!

On the ten year anniversary of *Citizens United*, NETWORK joined interfaith advocacy partners and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) for a vigil to restore faithful democracy.

We call for an end to the outsized influence of money in our political system!

