

**Report to National Voice of the Poor  
Western Region  
August 30, 2007**

There are currently **24 Western Region VOP committees** /contacts on the list compiled by Hilmar Rosenast of L.A. There are an **additional 7 contacts** on Lucy's Western Region network who have been asked to report back their activities.

**Billings, MT: Randy Heinz, Billings Diocesan Council**

Since we were **hosting the Western Regional Meeting** this past June our VOP committee has been on sabbatical for a few months until we can catch our breath. I am looking forward to resuming regular meetings in September and continuing with the agenda we had set out in the April report.

**Oregon: Maureen Sloan, Portland Diocesan Council (4/07)**

The Archdiocesan Council of Portland Oregon has a small VOP Committee. Since early in 2006 we have been active in the **fight against predatory lenders** in our State. Working with "Our Oregon" (a coalition of union and faith-based organizations) we helped to get legislation passed at an emergency legislative session in April 2006 which placed limits on fees and interest rates charged by payday loan lenders. However the regulations were not to go into effect until July 2007, so it was anticipated that the lenders would mount an attack on the legislation at our biennial session in 2007.

Our 2007 legislative session opened in January. On February 5th 12 members of St. Vincent de Paul attended an **Interfaith Advocacy Day** at our State Capitol in Salem. Sponsored by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, it brought together about 300 members of faith communities for a day of spiritual renewal and faith based advocacy, culminating in visits to legislators. The issues were: health care, affordable housing, hunger prevention, and payday lending, and where possible specific legislative proposals were identified to achieve these aims. Also, in late January, our VOP committee met with the lobbyists for the Portland Archdiocese and we exchanged ideas and objectives for our work during this session.

Payday loan legislation has moved quickly this session, and to date with remarkable success (we now have Democratic majorities in both houses). Several bills have passed the House; a bill requiring a **36 per cent cap on such loans** has been voted out of the House Consumer Affairs committee with a favorable vote ( I gave testimony before the committee on behalf of VOP). No action so far in the Senate, but we are hopeful.

Other State committees might want to take notice of a tactic employed by payday lenders in Oregon: they presented themselves as the saviors of the poor, by providing them with access to loans to get themselves out of a crisis situation. They claimed to get people out of trouble with overdue rent, utility bills, and even prescriptions for needed drugs. **In my testimony, I tried to show how SVPD works on just these issues, and should be the first place to go when in crisis. I had figures which showed very impressive amounts of dollar and food aid distributed in the past year.**

**Some notes on strategy:** I was unsuccessful in obtaining a vote from Portland Council board to support "Our Oregon" in their work on payday loan legislation; the reason: lack of full knowledge of their agenda on other issues, which might conflict with Catholic beliefs. However, I was able to get a 100per cent vote in favor of the payday/title loan bills moving through the legislature. I

believe this shows that we can more easily work with other organizations rather than through them.

Other issues which were identified by the Interfaith Advocacy Day are moving more slowly, but we will hope to take action on them when appropriate.

**It is difficult to motivate SVDP members to take legislative action.** The best results seem to come when we can present them with a petition, or postcard to sign at a district or council meeting. I have not seen much success in sending messages and information to conferences or board members via email or snail mail, asking them to take action. Working with other groups on specific legislation can provide the organization( petitions, postcards, lobbyists) needed for SVDP to be effective in getting their message out. It is very difficult to achieve similar results acting in isolation.

### **San Diego, CA: Linda Palmer, San Diego Diocesan Council**

The VOP in San Diego has been very involved in the **PICO California efforts to get all children healthcare coverage**--even non citizens.The San Diego group--SDOP(San Diego Organizing Project)--is going to join other PICO affiliate groups tomorrow in Sacramento to visit the Governor, and the key legislative officials who still need convincing to do this for all our kids. I'm part of this group. On Friday, we'll have a follow up city-wide interfaith action at one of parishes, that will continue the pressure at the county level to insure the nearly 200,000 uninsured children.

Other issues include pressuring the state to pass a **comprehensive health plan** that will insure all Californians with a plan that doesn't involve the insurance companies.

**Immigration is still a hot-button issue**, but the momentum to do something about it this year has died down after the federal government failed to pass an immigration bill we could all accept.I attended a labor action in front of our city administration building 3 weeks ago in which workers(mostly Spanish-speaking residents) reported that the city **failed to enforce the Living Wage Ordinance**(passed last year). Workers are still being paid \$8.00 per hour even though they have been employed for over 20 years. These are the most menial jobs in the city. The new ordinance required that they pay a minimum of \$10.00 plus health benefits, and make their work environments more safe. None of this has happened. This action got very little press or media attention.

### **Los Angeles, CA: Hilmar Rosenast, Los Angeles Archdiocesan Council**

Due to some other significant issues, little has happened in Los Angeles since April. We are **about to change chairs in September** and get a new one who hopefully will become very active. We need someone who is close to the source in the city, not someone living outside the city and has little contact with what is happening in LA. Also, the response from the conferences has been poor at best. I would suggest that when a new VOP chair is appointed that he or she spend some time with you in Phoenix and get the indoctrination needed to be a VOP chair.

### **Seattle, WA: Jim Bloss, Seattle Archdiocesan Council**

1. **State Legislative Agenda.** We have been following our Council's "big 3" issues of: affordable housing/homelessness, health care and just/living wage. We took count at the end of our WA. state legislative session in April and found that many pieces of legislation were passed which will positively impact our issues. Major pieces of health care legislation were passed including mandating mental health care insurance coverage for small businesses and providing basic health care coverage for most of the rest of the uncovered children in the state. Increases in programs for the homeless and low income were enacted including raising the state's Housing

Trust Fund from \$100mil. To \$140 mil.! Our efforts continue to raise awareness of each Conference member's ability to become involved in and actually make a difference in Catholic social justice issues, particularly those that impact the people we serve.

**2. Formation Training and VOP.** Practically every member of the Archdiocesan Council is involved in either planning for or actually performing "hands on" Formation Training, using the newly developed materials from National SVdP. We are making a concerted effort to reinforce Catholic Social Teaching in every training and, in particular, attempting to relate that teaching to National's Voice of the Poor program, reminding every Vincentian who attends the training sessions that the VOP program is the Society's way of providing an opportunity for every Vincentian to actively participate in faithful citizenship activities by advocating for the poor and vulnerable people we serve.

**3. We are continuing to actively collaborate at the higher advocacy levels** with our WA. State Catholic Conference and other Catholic groups involved with what our area calls the Catholic Advocacy Network (WSCC, the International Peace and Justice Center, Catholic Community Services, reps. from the 3 Chancery/Diocesan offices in WA. state, and misc. other groups). Individually, many of us are also involved with statewide groups that are involved with the homelessness issue; i.e., I'm currently on the Sky Valley Homeless Task Force (based out of/near where I live) and also attend meetings of the Snohomish County Homeless Policy Task Force, among others; and I know at least a couple of other members of the Archdiocesan Council level are similarly involved in their Diocesan areas in Western WA. We have plans for closer collaboration with the Archdiocesan Peace & Justice/social Concerns office, through perhaps closer collaboration with Archdiocesan Social Concerns Committees/Conferences and JustFaith groups.

4. Some of our Council members have been involved **in building relationships** with local, county, state and congressional officials and their staff members. This is an ongoing process as we all are aware of the importance of this kind of personal approach to our cause(s). In these contacts we of course follow USCCB and National SVdP guidelines for this kind of activity, and are sure, whenever we "go public", that we're advocating for "issues", not for specific political parties or individuals.

**5. Local VOP – oriented activities.** We are encouraging District Councils to encourage their Conferences to become involved locally in some facet of community social justice/VOP – oriented activity. Some suggestions made: (a) become involved in the periodic Point-in-Time Counts of homeless people that takes place in communities all over the U.S. (on the same day for everyone, everywhere; (b) take part in the annual statewide Catholic Advocacy Day in our state capitol of Olympia – we get a chance at that time to support/advocate for legislation that can positively impact our "big 3" issues; (c) take part in "other" advocacy days in Olympia related to our "big 3" issues – Housing Advocacy Day, for instance, is one of these; (4) every County in WA. state is involved in some form of effort at Ending Homelessness – these efforts often involve workgroups in which our Vincentians could become involved.

## **Phoenix, AZ Lucy Howell, Phoenix Diocesan Council**

Phoenix VOP has a core committee of 8-10 members with 250 members on the VOPNET. We have **assigned issues/legislation to various members** to follow during the legislative session – payday loans, homelessness and low income housing, healthcare, immigration. A **Legislative Report** for this past session is attached.

One member recently accompanied a delegation to Washington led by a Phoenix City Councilman to ask for a **fair share of federal dollars** for such programs as Section 8, LIHEAP,

Head Start and CBDG, programs that generally favor older Eastern cities to the detriment of newer fast growing cities like Phoenix. **VOP continues to collaborate** with the AZ Catholic Conference, Catholic Charities, the Basic Needs Coalition and the AZ Coalition to End Homelessness. A spokesman for VOP will present a talk on the Society's advocacy efforts at a **Poverty Conference** hosted by Catholic Charities in October. Members of VOP are meeting with various community representatives and members of the legislature regarding **Housing First**, the plan that has been successful in ending homelessness in many cities across the U.S. by housing chronic homeless disabled single adults and providing supportive services on site.

The VOP Core Committee meets monthly and is in the process of finalizing an **annual questionnaire** for Conferences to prioritize VOP issues as part of the **2008 legislative agenda** prepared for the Phoenix Diocesan Council.

# Voice of the Poor

Legislative Report Card  
September, 2007

For the first time in years, the legislative leadership in the Senate worked on a bipartisan basis and produced a budget that the governor was happy to sign. Weeks of wrangling between House and Senate leadership over the size of a tax cut preceded this agreement. Ultimately, the budget contained \$10 million in tax cuts along with funding for a number of bills supported by Voice of the Poor.

The voting record for HB 2789 (health and welfare; budget reconciliation) is provided at the bottom for your information. If your legislators supported this portion of the State budget, be sure and thank them! Thank you for your help!

Included in the State budget and supported by Voice of the Poor:

- Restored funding for KidsCare (low income healthcare) outreach to enroll eligible children who are not currently insured. *Sponsor: State Senator Carolyn Allen. KidsCare is Arizona's version of the federal block grant program, SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program). The Legislature allocated \$10 million from the General Fund to match \$48 million in federal SCHIP funding.*
- Continued eligibility of parents for KidsCare healthcare with monthly-tiered premiums based on household income.
- Raised the income level for AHCCCS eligibility for pregnant women to 150% from 133% of the FPL(federal poverty level). *General Fund allocation of \$1.8 million to match \$3.5 in federal funds. Bill sponsors: Senators Leff, Burton Cahill, O'Halleran, Konopnicki, McCune Davis.*
- Provided for the use of up to \$1 million in unclaimed lottery proceeds for homeless services and shelter. *Original bill sponsors: Groe, Ableser, Barnes, Burges, Kirkpatrick, Mason, Sinema, Miranda, Farley, Ulmer, Aboud, Blendu, Flake, Garcia, Gray C., Johnson and Soltero. Representative Robert Meza worked hard to keep this funding in the final budget.*
- **A 5% increase (\$9 million) in childcare subsidy funding for affordable care for low income working parents.** *Original bill sponsors: Representatives Lopez, Garcia, M., Hershberger and Senator Allen.*

These bills supported by Voice of the Poor are now Arizona law:

- **HB 2247 (TANF; diversion program; sanctions) allows applicants to receive cash assistance as temporary short-term aid while using employment services.** *Bill sponsors: Representative Hershberger, Alvarez, Anderson et.al.)*

**HB 2681 (utility assistance; qualified fuel fund) requires unclaimed utility deposits to be transferred to a private community-based nonprofit entity whose purpose is to provide utility assistance to low income Arizonans.** *Bill sponsors: Representatives Groe, Ableser, Barnes, Burges, Kirkpatrick, Mason, Sinema, Miranda, and Farley.*

**These bills supported by Voice of the Poor were NOT passed:**

- **HB 2380 (charitable organizations; tax credit)**  
*Bill sponsors: Anderson, Barnes, Biggs et. al. This bill would simplify the Arizona charitable tax credit for the working poor by eliminating the baseline year requirement. (VOP is working with legislators to introduce this bill again next session.)*
- **SB 1448 (strike everything: deferred presentment transactions; verification)**  
*This bill was the last of several bills introduced calling for additional consumer protection for predatory loans (payday loans, title loans, etc.) The bill died due to lack of agreement between House and Senate versions. Representatives Chad Campbell, Steve Gallardo, Marian McClure and Senator Debbie McCune Davis will continue to work toward effective legislation*

**HOW THEY VOTED! HB 2789 (Health and welfare; budget reconciliation)**

**HOUSE: Ayes 41, Nays 18 (in bold), Not voting 1**

Ableser Y	Brown Y	Farley Y	Lopez Y	Nelson Y	Schapira Y
<b>Adams N</b>	<b>Burges N</b>	<b>Farnsworth N</b>	Lujan Y	<b>Nichols N</b>	Sinema Y
Alvarez Y	Burns, J. Y	Gallardo Y	Mason Y	Pancrazi Y	Stump Y
Anderson Y	Campbell, Ch Y	Garcia, M. Y	McClure Y	Paton Y	Thrasher Y
<b>Barnes N</b>	Campbell, CI NV	<b>Groe N</b>	McComish Y	<b>Pearce N</b>	Tobin Y
<b>Barto N</b>	<b>Clark N</b>	Hershberger Y	McGuire Y	Prezelski Y	Tom Y
Bedford Y	<b>Crandall N</b>	<b>Kavanaugh N</b>	<b>McLain N</b>	Reagan Y	Ulmer Y
<b>Biggs N</b>	<b>Crump N</b>	Kirkpatrick Y	Meza Y	Rios, P. Y	<b>Weiers, Jerry N</b>
Boone Y	DeSimone Y	Konopnicki Y	Miranda, B. Y	Robson Y	Yarbrough N
Bradley Y	<b>Driggs N</b>	Lopes Y	<b>Murphy, N</b>	Saradnik Y	Weiers, Jim Y

**SENATE: Ayes 22, Nays 6 (in bold), Not voting 2**

Aboud Y	Burns, B. Y	<b>Gorman N</b>	Harper NV	McCune Davis Y	Soltero Y
Aguirre Y	Cahill NV	<b>Gould N</b>	Huppenthal Y	Miranda, R. Y	<b>Tibshraeny N</b>
Allen Y	Cheuvront Y	<b>Gray, C. N</b>	<b>Johnson N</b>	O'Halleran Y	Verschoor Y
Arzberger Y	<b>Flake N</b>	Gray, L. Y	Taylor Y	Pesquiera Y	Waring Y
Blendu Y	Garcia, J. Y	Hale Y	Leff Y	Rios, R. Y	Bee Y

**Voice of the Poor will next meet on Wednesday, September 19 at 3:30 p.m. in Vincentian Support Services.** The agenda will include discussion of the VOP Legislative Agenda for 2008 to be submitted to the Phoenix Diocesan Board in November. A questionnaire for Conferences from Voice of the Poor will also be on the agenda. For information or to submit an agenda item, please call Lucy Howell at (602) 695-1604 or e-mail her at [Howishome@aol.com](mailto:Howishome@aol.com)

**VOP meetings are open to all who are interested.**

[www.voiceofthepoor.org](http://www.voiceofthepoor.org)  
National VOP website

[www.stvincentdepaul.net](http://www.stvincentdepaul.net)  
AZ VOP website

