

History

Two hundred supporters gathered on August 16th, 2008 to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the Arkansas Public Policy Panel and the 10th anniversary of the Citizens First Congress.

Former Senator Dale Bumpers spoke at the banquet, and the Panel and Congress recognized outstanding activists and leaders around the state.

See the awards, the Panel's history and more in the program book!

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A Brief History Of The Panel

1963 - Sara Murphy organized The Panel of American Women, 30 to 35 volunteers, mothers of Public School children, to tell their personal stories championing racial and religious diversity before social, civic and religious groups. They spoke in groups of 5; 3 white and one African American, who were Jewish, Catholic, protestant and sometimes Chinese or Japanese American, with a moderator. They stimulated dialogue with audiences all over Arkansas. Many of them were active in local civil rights organizations: Council on Community Affairs, AR Council on Human Relations, AR Conference on Religion and Race as well as school board elections.
celebration

1970's - Panel incorporated as a nonprofit organization and worked in public school classrooms, developing and presenting multicultural curricula for teachers and students plus forums for parent meetings. Annual federal grants expanded their work until 1980.

1980's - Panelists began to connect with related issues: economic and social justice, formed coalitions (one becomes the AR Fairness Council) to work on legislative reapportionment to increase African American representation. Panel received a grant from the Ford Foundation to complete revenue and tax studies then advocating more effective services for low income citizens. By mid eighties, broadened their purpose and added Public Policy to their name.

Panelists raised funding for and enlisted 4 UALR history professors to write and publish an AR history text of primary sources to provide less racially biased and more accurate approach to state history. Organized additional nonprofit organizations to work with welfare recipients and policy, to deal with peace issues, women's issues economic justice issues, consumer and environmental issues.

1990's - the Panel Board took formal action to add agriculture and environment to their issues of tax fairness and civil rights. Staff began organizing and training grassroots and community groups. Thirty representatives of those groups convened to chart a more structured approach to building a statewide, multi-issue alliance of citizen groups to increase citizen involvement in public policy.

November 19-22, 1998 – The first Arkansas Citizens First Congress convened in Hot Springs. Ninety delegates from 43 organizations set a broad citizen agenda, formed a Citizen Lobby Corps, turned out over 100 citizen lobbyists for the '99 legislative session and was on its way to becoming a significant voice in Arkansas policymaking.

The front of the Progressive House.

2000 - Panel purchased a house at 1308 W. 2nd St. to house Panel offices, organizations and rent space to other non-profit organizations working on related Arkansas issues.

Behind the Progressive House, with the State Capitol in the background.

2006 – The Panel continues to organize and provide training to grassroots citizens all over Arkansas. Deep organizing in the south has resulted in a network of rural community groups who are working locally on their school and city issues and at the Capitol on state policy issues. The Citizens First Congress coalition has a diverse membership of community groups, nonprofits and institutions. The coalition has built a track record of progressive policy gains for

education, public health and the environment, civil rights, agriculture, economic justice and election reform.