

Agenda for the Common Good

June 2008

Over the past year, the Sound Alliance has engaged thousands of people in conversations about the most pressing issues impacting their families and the dreams they have for themselves and their communities. The problems that were felt most passionately and surfaced most consistently revolved around: health care, education, jobs & the environment, housing, and immigration & civil rights.

Research-Action Teams – comprised of leaders from a diverse mix of faith, education, labor and other nonprofit institutions – developed the following proposals after hundreds of hours of discernment and research in each area. The Vision statements and Action Proposals that follow were adopted by the Alliance’s Strategy Team and will guide the organization’s action agenda in the coming months. (The Analysis and Opportunity sections are works in progress and are included to provide background information that the Action Teams consider useful.) The Strategy Team will set priorities among these options, coordinate campaigns and focus the organization’s energy as appropriate.

Three of the issue areas are also priorities for our sister organization, the Spokane Alliance. Some of our State Action Proposals listed under those categories were jointly developed by Spokane and Sound Alliance leaders, and will be pursued in partnership.

Health Care

Vision

To provide access to affordable, secure and comprehensive health care for all residents and to control costs and promote good health through an emphasis on wellness and prevention.

Analysis & Opportunities

Health care reform is one of the most important challenges facing the United States. In the past, policymakers have failed to address the unnecessary structural barriers our current system poses to providing care for everyone. An employer-based health insurance system has proven inadequate for employees and burdensome or impossible for employers. Those entities which benefit from the current system have resisted any regulation or reform which impacts their benefits. Polling shows that people recognize the need for reform but their support declines when concerns about “*what will happen to me?*” - fear tactics - are raised by reform opponents. There is a belief that the changes needed to truly reform the system are so huge that it is an impossible task – but we believe change *is* not only possible, but necessary.

- Lack of access to care has serious health and financial consequences. In Washington state 11% (700,000) of the population is uninsured. Of those, over 70% are members of working families.
- Lack of insurance can mean life or death. If you are diagnosed with cancer, you are twice as likely to die if you have no insurance. Every 30 seconds, someone in the U.S. files for bankruptcy in the aftermath of a serious health problem.
- Wellness and prevention programs have been shown to both improve individuals' well-being and reduce costs to the health care system.¹
- Recently passed legislation (ESSB 6333) directs the legislature to hire an independent consultant to evaluate five comprehensive health care reform proposals:
 - 1) a proposal that modifies insurance regulations to address specific groups that have lower rates of coverage such as small employers and young adults;
 - 2) a proposal that includes the components of the Massachusetts legislation that establishes a health insurance connector;
 - 3) a proposal to provide a comprehensive, standardized benefit package for all residents;
 - 4) a proposal to establish a single-payer system similar to the health care system in Canada; and
 - 5) a proposal for a guaranteed benefit plan (WA State Insurance Commissioner).
- The results of the evaluation are due to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Work Group by December 15, 2008. The legislation then requires the Governor to make appointments to the Washington Citizens' Work Group on Health Care Reform (after January 30, 2009) including nine citizens and four legislators to review the analysis of the five health reform proposals and other relevant studies, engage in a public process and submit a final report by November 1, 2009 with a summary of the public engagement process and the Work Group recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature.

State Action Proposal

- Pursue comprehensive statewide health care reform in 2009 or 2010 – based on a thorough education and discernment process within Alliance member institutions and in conjunction with the Washington Citizens' Work Group on Health Care Reform process that is evaluating 5 major reform options – that is consistent with Alliance member institutions' values and interests.

Local Action Proposal

- Work with local health care providers to develop wellness and prevention programs that can be implemented in conjunction with Alliance member institutions.

¹ Several sources are cited in "Yes, Prevention is Cheaper Than Treatment", Newsweek, April 24th, 2008. See also, "Prevention Makes Common Cents" US Department of Health and Human Services.

Education

Vision

To meet the high demands of educating our students in the 21st century, we promote an amply funded quality education that engages the talents and interests of all students, reduces dropout rates, cultivates lifelong learning, prepares students for a wide range of career paths, and supports high standards using a variety of assessments.

Analysis & Opportunities

Education is a critical pathway to opportunity and to lifelong learning. We believe there are particular opportunities right now to improve our state's education system in the areas of early learning, high school, and college access.

Early Learning

The critical importance of brain development before the age of 6 for future success in school, career and community life has become increasingly understood and accepted. Parents are increasingly partnering with childcare and pre-school teachers to prepare children for K-12 and beyond. We are hearing from political leaders that there is bi-partisan support for enhancing early childhood education as a cost effective way of improving school readiness and graduation rates.

- Research shows that high-quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs, particularly for at-risk children, produce substantial public and private benefits (Barnett 2003; Brooks-Gunn, Mc Lanahan, and Rouse 2005).
- Childcare teachers have low preparation requirements and high turnover rates largely because of poor wages and benefits.
- Care provided via child care centers needs to be expanded and, in many places, improved.²

High School Graduation Rate

- According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 26% of all students statewide fail to finish high school on time, with a vast majority of those dropping out and never receiving a diploma or GED. Drop-out rates for Hispanic, African American, American Indian and low-income students average 40%.
- Of those who do graduate, around 28% go immediately to a 4 year college, with a similar percentage attending a 2-year college.
- The Student Pipeline:³ For every 100 ninth graders in Washington State high schools: 82% do not graduate from college; 29% drop out of high school; 39% graduate high school and enter the workforce; 14% drop out of college; and, 18% graduate from college.

² See www.ets.org for *The Family: America's Smallest School* — An Educational Testing Service (ETS) Report

- In 2007 the state legislature established the Building Bridges grant program to create partnerships of schools, families, and communities to build a comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention and retrieval system. These grants serve at-risk middle and high school students. Targeted student populations to be identified include youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system, special education students and kids who have already dropped out of school.

High School Graduation Pathways

There is a need to create multiple pathways to high school graduation appropriate for students planning on attending college, entering the workforce, or starting internships and apprenticeships. We are hearing from political leaders that there is bipartisan state legislator support for diversifying graduation pathways.

- Diagnostic tests can be a barrier to varied and appropriate graduation pathways. A multiple diagnostic system would be cost effective and equitable. It would meet reporting requirement of the state and federal accountability standards. With multiple pathways, high school graduation would not be based on a single assessment or type of assessment.
- Currently eleven states have federally accepted assessments which are diagnostic and provide educators and families with data on a wider variety of skills, such as work readiness, career and technical skills, and college readiness. These exams⁴ are not only diagnostic but cost effective as well, costing approximately \$12 - 20 per student. By comparison, Washington's present assessment system costs \$80 to \$100 per student and it provides little, if any, useful feedback to students, parents, or teachers.

College Costs

- “College costs are increasing, students are having a tougher time borrowing money, and therefore poorer students are having a harder time attending.”⁵
- The Washington State College Bound Scholarship offers hope and an incentive for students and families who otherwise might not consider college an option because of the cost. The scholarship covers college tuition, fees and books for students in low-income families who sign a pledge in 7th or 8th grade promising to graduate from high school and demonstrate good citizenship.

State Action Proposals

- Make investments in early childhood education that will expand access for at-risk populations, improve provider training and retention (pay & benefits) and increase accountability through the Quality Rating and Improvement Standards.⁶

³ Overview of K-12 Funding in Washington: Presentation to Shoreline School District community by Mary Kenfield, Education Policy Analyst, House of Representatives Democratic Caucus

⁴ Some examples of diagnostic assessments include, ACT’s WorkKeys, and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP).

⁵ April 9, 2008, Chronicle of Higher Education

⁶ Details can be found at Schools Out Washington website: <http://schoolsoutwashington.org>) The following is copied from that site: “A QRIS is a method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early learning care and education settings. It builds on a foundation of licensing, and adds do-able steps between

- Require public K-12 systems to provide multiple pathways to graduation – with high standards appropriate to the student’s career or higher education interests – and to utilize multiple diagnostic and assessment tools suitable to those pathways.
- Extend funding for Building Bridges grants aimed at reducing drop out rates.
- Participate in efforts to recruit students from all communities into the College Bound scholarship program and distribute marketing materials about the program in Spanish and other commonly used languages.⁷

Local Action Proposal

- Participate in recruitment efforts for the Washington State College Bound scholarship program that provides strong incentives for low income students to attend college.

Sustainable Jobs & Environment

Vision

To address major environmental and economic challenges – such as rising energy prices, global climate change, water quality and conservation, etc. – in ways that are equitable for low and moderate income people *and* that create large numbers of sustainable living wage jobs.

Analysis & Opportunities

Environmental Policies

Major policy initiatives aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions are moving forward at the local and state levels.

- Most area cities have signed the Mayors’ Climate Protection Agreement which calls for participating cities to “inventory global warming emissions in city operations and in the community, set reduction targets and create an action plan.”
- Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels has called for a 20% reduction in energy use in all buildings in the city within five years.
- At the state level, Washington is participating in the Western Climate Initiative (WCI) where the “greenhouse gas emission reduction goal is an aggregate reduction of 15% below 2005 levels by 2020”
- The states and provinces participating in the WCI are currently developing recommendations – that will set the framework for legislation at the state level –

licensing standards and higher quality criteria (e.g. accreditation). A QRIS supports incentives for reaching higher levels. It includes easily recognized symbols for higher levels.”

⁷ The Department of Social and Health Services, Washington Courts or other agencies have identified 11 commonly-used languages in Washington State.

regarding the structure of a carbon cap and trade system⁸ to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the region.

Equity Considerations

There are costs associated with efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that will be passed onto consumers in the form of higher energy prices or borne by taxpayers. The distribution of these costs should be equitable and not create undue hardships on low and moderate income people.

- The design of the cap and trade system will impact who pays these costs.
- If the carbon credits are auctioned (rather than given away to emitters), some or all of that income could be used to mitigate the burden on low and moderate income families & individuals through rebates, reductions in the sales tax, or distributed through other revenue shifting mechanisms.

Job Creation

Efforts to reduce carbon emissions will create jobs.

- In Washington state, some of the greatest environmental benefits will be gained from changes in building energy use (retrofits of existing building and high performance standards in new construction) and in transportation (expansion of public transit, etc.).
- According to state and local officials, one of the biggest challenges in transforming our state's building and transportation infrastructure is finding and training enough workers to do the work.
- Regionally, the Sound Alliance is part of a network of affiliated organizations (IAF Northwest) that has sponsored a Spokane-based project called SustainableWorks to create living wage jobs, provide apprentices training opportunities and cut carbon emissions by conducting energy efficiency retrofits in small commercial and non-profit owned buildings.
- IAF Northwest is in the process of securing a market analysis and business plan for the expansion of SustainableWorks into a regional network of local Enterprises that will directly employ targeted constituencies (lower income people, minorities, at risk youth, etc.) in the work of small commercial and residential retrofits.

⁸ These systems draw on the power of the marketplace to reduce emissions in a cost-effective and flexible manner. In practice, cap-and-trade systems create a financial incentive for emission reductions by assigning a cost to polluting. First, an environmental regulator establishes a "cap" that limits emissions from a designated group of polluters, such as power plants, to a level lower than their current emissions. The emissions allowed under the new cap are then divided up into individual permits—usually equal to one ton of pollution—that represent the right to emit that amount. Because the emissions cap restricts the amount of pollution allowed, permits that give a company the right to pollute take on financial value. Companies are free to buy and sell permits in order to continue operating in the most profitable manner available to them. So, those that are able to reduce emissions at a low cost can sell their extra permits to companies facing high costs (which will generally prefer to buy permits rather than make costly reductions themselves). A key advantage of a cap-and-trade system compared with other emission reduction strategies is that it gives companies flexibility in the manner in which they may achieve their emission targets. Another advantage is that it sets a clear limit on emissions." Source: Union of Concerned Scientists

State Action Proposals

- Shape the state's cap and trade program to effectively reduce carbon emissions and generate funds (through an auction of carbon credits) that are used to:
 - Offset higher costs for low- and moderate-income people (rebates or tax breaks);
 - Provide incentives or support for energy efficiency retrofit projects in the residential and small business markets – targeting high needs areas first (lower-income neighborhoods, older housing stock, etc);
 - Create direct pathways to jobs in retrofits and public transportation projects for immigrants and other targeted populations, including funding for pre-apprenticeship programs.
- Develop residential energy efficiency retrofit standards and certification requirements to protect homeowners and taxpayers on state funded projects.
- Require state-funded higher education new construction and large remodeling projects – already required to meet Green Building Standards – to:
 - Provide internship and job shadowing opportunities for college students interested in Green Building design, architecture, engineering, etc;
 - Expand on-the-job training opportunities in Green Building construction practices by adopting 15% apprentice utilization standards.

Local Action Proposals

Create a *SustainableWorks Enterprise* demonstration project in the Puget Sound area to directly employ targeted constituencies in living wage jobs doing energy efficiency retrofits in small commercial and residential buildings.⁹

Recruit apprentices from targeted and/or underrepresented constituencies (at risk youth, women, immigrants, etc.) through Alliance member institutions, schools, and other venues to address concerns about having an adequate workforce and open up the pipeline to living wage green jobs.¹⁰

Negotiate with cities, utilities and school districts to employ significant numbers of people in building retrofit projects that include living wage expectations, apprentice utilization requirements, hiring from targeted constituencies and/or contracts with the local *SustainableWorks Enterprise*.¹¹

⁹ Working with local unions to increase productivity on these smaller scale jobs through a cross trained workforce.

¹⁰ This builds on and expands *OpportunityWorks NW* – the project created by the Alliance in 2006 that started with commitments from the Seattle, Tacoma, Bethel and Clover Park school districts to train teachers & counselors in the career opportunities available in the skilled trades as a means to encouraging non-college bound students to stay in school.

¹¹ Campaign possibilities include: working with school districts to develop retrofits that combine addressing deferred maintenance backlogs with energy efficiency upgrades, solar panel installations and use or expansion of skills centers and direct entry programs; engaging local municipalities in similar retrofit projects; and, negotiating with utilities around major residential and small commercial retrofit projects – such as churches, synagogues and other non-profit owned buildings.

Housing

Vision

To achieve access for all to housing that is safe, decent and obtainable to all income levels, recognizing adequate housing as a fundamental right essential to the well-being and security of individuals, families and communities.

Analysis & Opportunities

Housing pressures in the Puget Sound region are vast and complex. One of the most immediate opportunities to address these pressures is in the shaping of the Seattle Housing Levy.¹²

The passage and content of the Seattle Housing Levy is critical to the provision of housing for low-income residents of Seattle, and will have far-reaching impacts on the Puget Sound region as a whole in the form of additional strain on housing and transportation.

Local Action Proposal

- Shape the development of the Seattle housing levy as it moves to the City Council (June 2009) to ensure a focus on those most in need and work for its passage (Sept 2009).

Immigration & Civil Rights

Vision

To challenge all forms of discrimination and promote equitable access for all residents to the resources needed for a full and dignified life, including compassionate and hospitable immigration policies.

Analysis and Opportunities

American immigration policies were in need of overhaul long before September 11th brought the need for immigration relief into much sharper focus. It is undeniable that true immigration reform must be addressed by Congress, but there are many opportunities for action on local, regional and state-wide levels that can counteract anti-immigrant sentiments, address some of the

¹² According to the Seattle Office of Housing, the Seattle Housing Levy provides funds to create and preserve affordable housing through Rental Preservation and Production, Neighborhood Housing Opportunity Program, Homebuyer Assistance, Rental Assistance, and Operating & Maintenance Programs. In 2002, the voters of Seattle passed a 7-year, \$86 million property tax levy to provide affordable housing opportunities for low-income Seattle residents.

harmful effects federal immigration policies are having on local families, and provide opportunities for immigrants to become thriving and engaged members of our communities.

Citizenship

- In February 2008, Governor Gregoire signed an Executive Order establishing Washington's New Americans Policy Council on immigrant integration. The goal of the New Americans Initiative (NAI) is to take a more systematic approach to helping immigrants succeed and become productive citizens.
- The legislature appropriated \$344,000 in the state's 2009 budget to fund the Policy Council for two years to determine how the State can more effectively integrate immigrants into communities across Washington.
- With full funding of the New Americans Initiative, 135,000 eligible immigrants in Washington State will have a chance to get the kind of assistance they need to become American citizens. These supports may include increased support for community-based naturalization services and increased availability of neighborhood English-language classes.

Educational Opportunities

- As was highlighted above in the Education section, the College Bound scholarship program covers college tuition, fees and books for students in low-income families who sign a pledge in 7th or 8th grade promising to graduate from high school and demonstrate good citizenship.

Law Enforcement / Racial Profiling

Federal immigration law is complicated and constantly changing. Understanding it requires extensive training and expertise; federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents require a 17-week basic training. Local law enforcement is trained to solve crimes, not determine immigration status.

- We know that police enforcement of civil immigration laws leads to improper detentions. This has resulted in lawsuits in other jurisdictions. For instance, Chandler, Arizona faced a \$35 million dollar suit for harassment and detention of citizens who "looked Mexican".
- Because of this problem, many jurisdictions throughout the United States now have ordinances or policies in place that prohibit law enforcement officers and other employees from inquiring into a person's immigration status or otherwise enforcing federal immigration law unless otherwise required by law or court order. As of April 2008, there were 73 of these jurisdictions -- cities, counties and states from Alaska to Florida, California to Maine.¹³
- Elected officials of both major political parties and numerous chiefs of police across the country¹⁴ support such policies because they make their communities safer by

¹³ See April 2008 National Immigration Law Center chart at: www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/LocalLaw/locallaw_limiting_tbl_2007-10-11.pdf

¹⁴ Some of these include: Rudy Giuliani (R), Dick Gephardt (D), Richard Riordan (R), Richard Daly (D), and the Police Departments & Associations in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Denver, Sacramento, San Diego,

encouraging both victims and witnesses to come forward to report crimes and to seek the help they need from law enforcement, public health agencies, domestic violence and sexual assault services, and other public and private service providers. These laws have been shown to be an effective way to guide public officials and employees to adhere to federal law while helping to protect the safety and health of all residents.

- The Seattle Police Department issued a Directive in 2002 clarifying that officers may not request specific documents for the sole purpose of determining a person's civil immigration status, and may not initiate police action based solely on a person's civil immigration status. These policies are now the cornerstone of the city's Immigrant and Refugee Action Plan as well as the Seattle Ordinance prohibiting inquiry into a person's immigration status unless the officer has reasonable suspicion to believe that the person has previously been deported from the United States, is again present in the United States and is committing or has committed a felony.¹⁵

Banking & Financial Services

- Research on the “unbanked” is abundant, and estimates are that potentially 56 million U.S. adults, or 22.2 million households¹⁶ – the vast majority of them low-income – have no checking or savings account. Nonwhite families are four times more likely to be unbanked than white families;¹⁷ 35 percent of all Latinos in the U. S. are unbanked;¹⁸ and 53 percent of Mexican immigrants are unbanked.¹⁹
- Immigrants rely heavily on payday loan companies, high-fee money transfer entities, pawn shops, and check cashing businesses. The fees charged by check cashing services are high, and payday loans come with very high interest rates. Reliance on alternative financial services creates three fundamental problems for individuals and families.
 1. The ability to save money, even at a modest level, plays a significant role in helping people and families achieve economic self-sufficiency.
 2. Access to financial services without high fees is necessary to avoid chronic debt.
 3. Unbanked people often need financial literacy training to navigate the U.S. commercial economy.
- ShoreBank Cascadia, Plaza Bank, and other financial institutions with a track record of providing services to immigrant communities have helped identify specific goals,

Washington DC, Hillsboro OR, Miami & Lake County FL, Nashville, Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, and Whatcom County WA. See also *Major Cities Chiefs Immigration Committee Recommendation for Enforcement of Immigration Laws by Local Police Agencies*, Adopted by Chiefs of Police of Los Angeles, Detroit, New York, Seattle, Tucson, Miami-Dade, El Paso and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Dept. at:

http://www.majorcitieschiefs.org/pdfpublic/mcc_position_statement_revised_cef.pdf

¹⁵ <http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~scripts/nph->

[brs.exe?d=CBOR&s1=121063.ordn.&Sect6=HITOFF&l=20&p=1&u=/~public/cbor2.htm&r=1&f=G](http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~scripts/nph-brs.exe?d=CBOR&s1=121063.ordn.&Sect6=HITOFF&l=20&p=1&u=/~public/cbor2.htm&r=1&f=G)

¹⁶ Government Accountability Office, “Electronic Transfers: Use by Federal Payment Recipients Has Increased but Obstacles to Greater Participation Remain” September 2002. pg 54

¹⁷ Survey of Consumer Finances, Federal Reserve: 2004

¹⁸ National Survey of Latinos, Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002

¹⁹ US Survey of Income Program Participation, 2000

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products and services that can help put immigrants on the road to financial security. Some of these products include: guaranteed car and home loans; CDs that accept ongoing deposits in order to encourage regular savings; home loans based on Individual Tax Identification Numbers; broader acceptance of Matricula identification cards from home countries; and financial literacy programs and materials in Washington's commonly spoken languages. It is also critical to increase the understanding of financial rights and responsibilities to reduce victimization by predatory lenders.

- Major banks could promote broader access to banking services and financial security for immigrant communities in the Puget Sound region by increasing the number of bilingual tellers and other staff and providing all materials in Spanish and other commonly used languages.

State Action Proposal

- Support full funding for three years for the New Americans Initiative to improve pathways to citizenship.

Local Action Proposals

- Participate in efforts to recruit students from all immigrant communities into the College Bound scholarship program and distribute marketing materials about the program in commonly used languages.²⁰
- Work with county and municipal officials to clarify protocols for inquiry into a person's immigration status by law enforcement officers and other government employees so as to reduce all types of racial and ethnic profiling.
- Promote financial services and products that address immigrant needs and can help put immigrants on the road to financial security.

²⁰ The Department of Social and Health Services, Washington Courts or other agencies have identified 11 commonly-used languages in Washington State.