



4,200 people attend Town Hall Meeting for Children's Health in Sacramento, California in April 2005.

## Beyond Advocacy: The History & Vision of the PICO Network

By Gordon Whitman

Over the past three decades Americans have increasingly lost confidence in the willingness of the government to protect their interests. A *USA Today* poll found that 42 percent of American's believed that the Bush Administration had deliberately manipulated gas prices in order to influence the results of the 2006 mid-term elections. Harvard sociologist Theda Skocpol has documented a parallel decline in organizational structures that "link face-to-face groups into state and national networks." She argues that people have lost faith in government in part because these three-tier networks patterned on America's federal system of government have largely been replaced by DC-based "mailing list" organizations, groups that are staff-driven and require no more than a small donation from the rest of us to join.

Skocpol writes that "[i]f a new cause arises, people think of opening a national office, raising funds through direct mail, and hiring a media consultant." The result is that "ordinary citizens...feel themselves to be merely the manipulated objects of such efforts. They do not feel like

participating citizens or grassroots leaders active in broad efforts. And they are right!"

In contrast to the dominant advocacy model, PICO National Network, as part of the field of broad-based community organizing, has been rooted in face-to-face relationships since it was founded in 1973. Today, with 53 local and regional federations and one-thousand religious congregations in 150 cities and 17 states (as well as efforts in Rwanda and Central America), PICO is one of the largest and most diverse civic engagement efforts in the United States. PICO affiliates raise more than \$20 million annually in grassroots fundraising to support community organizing designed to improve neighborhoods and increase opportunities for working families and their children.

PICO is structured not as a unitary national organization but as a network of local and regional federations. PICO began as a California-based training institute but now has affiliates in a broad cross section of the nation, including in almost every region (Southeast, Delta, New England, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Mountain West and Alaska). PICO's

traditional strength has been at the local level in helping community leaders come together to build broad-based power organizations. PICO organizations are structured to engage ordinary people in solving local problems – from an absence of recreation options for youth to unsafe neighborhoods – while equipping them with the tools to influence broader public policy, at the local, state and now national level.

PICO has worked with Vanderbilt Professor Paul Speer over the past decade to study the impact of congregation-based community organizing on social networks, civic participation and public policy. This quantitative research shows that community organizing can overcome inequities in civic engagement and political influence. Speer's research identifies three important findings: (a) organizations that systematically use PICO's congregation-based organizing model engage large numbers of people in public and community life through individual face-to-face meetings, small group teams and large community events; (b) people who become involved in organizing develop much broader social networks that reach from their neighbors to government officials; and these participants are much more likely to become involved in other forms of civic engagement, such as voting, reading the newspaper, attending public meetings, and running for public positions; and (c) community organizing leverages millions of dollars of public and private investment in low and moderate-income communities.

Ultimately the social impact of community organizing depends not just on its influence within specific local communities or on particular people, but also its capacity to change the culture of social and political action in the United States. Despite rapid growth in PICO and the field of community organizing, broad-based organizing only touches a small fraction of people and communities in the nation; and community organizing has generated limited public awareness beyond communities with strong local organizations. The Populist, Labor and Civil Rights movements all began with ordinary people learning to negotiate their interests with powers that be at the local level and then ultimately reshaping social policy. Can modern community organizing claim a similar destiny?

This article is based on the premise that the sum of community organizing can be greater than its parts if organizing is able to be relevant and adaptable to the big changes taking place in American society. There is much to complain about in what Jacob Hacker calls the "Great Risk Shift" which is undermining working and middle class economic stability; in the massive transfer of wealth by Congress and the President over the past six years; and in the corrosive influence of money on both political parties. And there is some hope in a recent upturn in voting rates and other indicators of civic involvement. Yet the lack of accountability that many of us feel over government and corporate decisions depends not just on what the powers

that be do, but also on how we decide to organize ourselves to negotiate our interests. On the big questions of how people can systematically hold large institutions accountable, how America can live up to its promise as a nation, community organizing has important experience and wisdom to offer. This article reviews thinking and experimentation by staff and leaders within the PICO network designed to increase the social impact of community organizing while keeping this grassroots movement firmly rooted in the values and control of local communities.

### **Seeds of Systemic Change**

Some people refer disparagingly to congregation-based community organizing as "stop-sign organizing" because of the willingness of organizations to take on seemingly small issues that come up when you put ordinary people in a room and ask them what they'd like to see change in their community. But what PICO has learned as a network over the past thirty years is that the best way to build deeply rooted organizations is to start with

people where they are at, not where you want them to be. If an organization wants to engage large numbers of people in significant long-term social change, it has to go out and build honest relationships; connect with people around their values not just their anger; listen to what people think and want; and then walk with them to find solutions to the problems and issues about which they feel most strongly.

Beginning with people where they are, not where you want them to be also means taking religion seriously.

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Religion, of course, is now front and center in American political warfare. Both political parties are divided internally over the role of faith in politics. Republicans have been skilled at using religion and religious coalitions to speak to people's deeper values while dividing the Democratic base. But many Republicans are worried that this strategy has gone too far, that it holds the risk of consigning the party to minority status beholden to a radical religious fringe. The Democrats have worked hard recently to address their own tone-deafness on religion, but remain divided over whether they want to frame their agenda in religious values or primarily fight to keep faith out of public life.

These political debates over religion, while important, are not the questions that matter most to organizing aimed at expanding opportunity for working families. Community organizing does not have a dog in the fight over the role of religion in public life. Religion is not a strategy or a tactic or a position. It is a reality in the lives of most Americans. Most people in this country continue to draw on religion and faith values to make sense of the aspirations they have for their own lives, their communities and the broader society. Never entirely separate from society, religious institutions provide a unique space that is at least partially insulated

from market culture for people to build community and a bigger vision of what is possible.

History suggests that purely secular social change efforts are unlikely to succeed in the United States. To engage a broad cross section of working families in social change, community organizing needs to be rooted deeply in faith values and institutions. One of the strengths of congregation-based organizing is that it operates outside the current debate over faith-based politics, having been engaged in the complexity of religious experience in the United States for more than two decades. PICO, for example, brings together people and congregations from 50 different denominations and religious traditions, representing a broad range of theological and political perspectives. Congregation-based organizing can do this because the entry point for engagement and leadership is local community pressures — not ideological positioning.

For people rooted in the Judeo-Christian faith tradition, the Exodus story provides an important template for present day liberation from an unjust social structure, a template that follows the idea that before people can liberate themselves, they need to be engaged first in their own immediate reality. When Moses and Aaron first meet with Pharaoh to discuss



National Clergy Summit in New Orleans in March 2006 prepares 100 clergy to return home to press Congress to approve housing funding for the Gulf Coast.

God's intention to liberate the people of Israel from slavery, they make a simple actionable demand that the slaves be able to go out for three days to pray in the desert. Although Pharaoh rejects this request, Moses and Aaron have created a cycle of negotiation, leadership development and organizing that ultimately results in the exodus from Egypt. Yet even when the people physically leave slavery, we realize that they are just at the beginning of a journey, during which they will repeatedly question their own power and regret having left the certainty of Egypt. In the end, the Exodus story suggests that people find liberation and redemption not just by ending the oppressive structures, as important as that work is, but also in an unfolding understanding of their own power, a journey taken in relationship with others.

The Oakland, California school reform movement is an example of how starting with people where they are at rather than where you want them to be can create the foundation for long term structural change in the systems that serve a community. In the 1990's public schools in Oakland's Flatland neighborhoods – home to the city's working class families – were so overcrowded that many ran on a multi-track schedule that had students attending school every other month during the year. Oakland Community Organizations (OCO), a federation of 40 religious congregations and a founding member of PICO, began bringing parents together to talk about what could be done

to relieve overcrowding. OCO helped parents to press for immediate solutions, such as portable classrooms; but the organization also began to help parents think together about why their schools were overcrowded and what else could be done to improve the quality of education for their children. Matt Hammer, an OCO community organizer handed out copies of Debra Meier's *The Power of Their Ideas* to parents; parents collected data on school size and school outcomes in Oakland; and they took a study trip to New York City to visit new small schools.

By 2000, OCO parents and clergy had pushed Oakland to pass the first Autonomous Small Schools policy in the country. OCO succeeded in making inequity in school

size and school outcomes a rallying cry in working class neighborhoods in the city. The organization went beyond its traditional base in African-American and Latino neighborhoods by crafting a city-wide vision of a successful school system made up of a network of small high-quality public schools where children would not be lost in the cracks. By the opening of the 2006 school year, Oakland had 39 new small autonomous public schools, serving more than one-quarter of the students in the public school system. With six more schools scheduled to open in 2007, Oakland is well on its way toward reaching a tipping point in the number of students attending small autonomous schools, a goal that has been at the center of OCO's strategy to use small school development as a tool for systemic reform.

Initial research has found that the new small schools, which are developed by school design teams made up of teachers and parents, are outperforming traditional schools in Oakland serving similar students, making the OCO Small Autonomous Schools Movement one of the most significant examples of bottom-up urban school reform in the United States.

The Oakland story illustrates how social innovation can result from grassroots problem solving and sustained public pressure. In *The Economy of Cities*, Jane Jacobs writes that “[p]eople who run government activities, the world over, tend to seek sweeping answers to problems; that is, answers capable of being

applied wholesale the instant they are adopted.” She argues that what policy-makers and government officials do not do enough (and what PICO specializes in) is “bring their minds to bear on a particular and often seemingly small problem in one particular place. And yet that is how innovations of any sort are apt to begin.”

Other PICO examples of system reform growing out of grassroots civic engagement include the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project, a successful parent engagement program that was created by parents and teachers in Sacramento and now operates in more than 600 schools nation-wide; passage of the first state legislation in Missouri regulating pay-day lending; a \$175 million state recovery

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plan for Camden, New Jersey; implementation of a new student weighted funding program in the Denver public schools; and the Santa Clara Children's Health Initiative, which provides seamless access to health coverage to all children up to 300 percent of poverty and has been replicated in dozens of counties in California.

## The Need for Power: Local, State and National

National elites often neglect the importance of local action for social justice. In the U.S. federal system, many of the most important public decisions about housing, education, criminal justice and other fundamental family needs are made by local government based on local political and economic interests. Significant changes in federal policy and the nature of the global economy have not negated the need for working families to be organized effectively in cities and regions so that they can run successful tax and bond campaigns, influence who manages their school systems and shape the flow of resources to build more equitable communities.

Yet while the field of broad-based organizing has built increasingly strong local (and in some cases, regional) organizations, it has been slow to engage power at a state and especially national level. It has left these larger arenas to top-down advocacy organizations with little connection to the ordinary people. Growing economic inequality, driven in part by federal tax and spending policy; the end of any meaningful federal urban policy; and economic globalization have combined to swamp many low-income neighborhoods in cities across the United States. Ironically, it was these broader economic and political forces that in the 1980's influenced many neighborhood organizers to embrace faith institutions as a more durable and powerful base from which to advance community interests in a global economy. Yet the growth of more sophisticated congregation-based community organizations has not translated into community power at the national level, let alone international level.

In *Faith in Action*, his 2002 book about PICO, Richard Wood draws on the urban sociologist Manuel Castells to ask whether grassroots urban organizing has the ability to function as more than noble resistance to the broader economic and social forces restructuring urban life. Wood quotes from Castells' famous book *The City and the Grassroots*:

When people find themselves unable to control the world, they simply shrink the world down to the size of their community. Thus urban movements do address the real issues of our time, although neither on the scale nor terms that are adequate to the task.

Wood is ultimately more optimistic than Castells that innovations in structure and method can enable organizing to escape this box and put itself in a place to reshape the broader society. Harvard political scientist Marshall Ganz has questioned whether broad-based organizing, at least as practiced by the Industrial Areas Foundation, can honor its claims to democratic and participatory decision-making as it grows.

Over the past decade, staff and leaders in PICO have been wrestling with these questions of how community organizing can have a broader social impact, while sustaining its underlying value in giving low and moderate-income people a say over local community decisions. In 1994, PICO established a state wide organizational effort in California with the goal of developing the capacity of grassroots leaders to influence state policy in Sacramento. PICO California represented a test of at least three important questions facing the field of community organizing: (a) whether it was possible to aggregate strong local organizations and a local organizing culture into a permanent statewide power base; (b) whether statewide



PICO LIFT director Jennifer Jones Bridgett meets with displaced Vietnamese residents from New Orleans East in September 2005.

work would stimulate or undermine local organizational activity and leadership development; and (c) how much constituency an organizing effort needed to represent to successfully influence policy at the state (or national) level.

Over the past 14 years PICO California has won a string of policy victories, including gaining hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for after-school initiatives, safety net health clinic, parent-teacher home visit program, small schools development and children's health. Repeatedly, local organizations have been able to leverage local political relationships and presence in key regions of the state to influence state policy decisions, without needing to work in every legislative district in California. Today, PICO California is widely respected as an effective voice

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for working families in education, health care and housing policy in the state. It has also expanded into many new areas of the state and now has 19 affiliates stretching across Southern California, the Central Valley and the Bay Area. PICO is viewed as one of the leading California health care organizations, embedded in overlapping coalitions of health advocacy and research organizations.

Health care has been a prime example of the statewide impact of community organizing in California. Working closely with health care and children's advocacy organizations, PICO California has played a highly visible role in pressing Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to take leadership on health care for children and adults. In April 2005, PICO California gathered 4,200 people and state health care and legislative leaders to press California to provide affordable health coverage to every child in the state. In 2006, organizing led to legislation that extended health coverage to 94,000 low-income children. The Governor's recently announced plan – which puts universal coverage for children at the center of an ambitious plan to cover the uninsured in the state – still needs to make its way through a complex legislative process, but illustrates how grassroots organizing and advocacy can help prime the environment for large-scale policy change.

Key to PICO's ability to build a statewide organizing presence in California while maintaining local ownership has been consistently bringing grassroots leaders together to build relationships and develop strategy. Several times a year over the past decade hundreds of clergy and lay leaders from across the state have gathered for face-to-face planning and training meetings. The investment in relationship building and leadership development has helped create the conditions for volunteer leaders, rather than just paid staff, to lead social change campaigns. Paul Speer's evaluation of PICO California's work has found that participation expands the civic engagement of leaders in other areas,

including local involvement in their communities, a finding consistent with Skocpol's argument that civic engagement at different levels of government is reinforcing.

For PICO's nineteen local and regional federations in California state-level work has created many new opportunities, including providing veteran leaders with a larger stage for their leadership aspirations; building alliances with advocacy and policy organizations; increasing foundation funding for organizing, particularly among from funding programs focused on systemic policy change in health care and education; and increasing recognition and credibility of PICO federations within their local communities. PICO organizations are designed in large part to negotiate community interests with local officials. State work has added an important new dimension, making it possible for organizations to sit on the same side of the table with local officials in advocating for resources and policy change at the state level. This has helped staff and leaders learn to untangle the ways in which local and state (and federal) decisions shape conditions in a community. PICO California has most often worked on policy campaigns that have grown out of local issue work. For example the Sacramento Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project, Oakland's small schools work and the Santa Clara Children's Health Initiative all provided templates for innovative state legislation. The relationship between local and state work has often been symbiotic, with state campaigns helping to spread successful local work, such as small schools strategy, across communities in the state.

Organizing at the state level has also created tension for local organizations. PICO federations are multi-issue organizations that are working simultaneously on issue campaigns within local communities and at a city or county level. An organization may be working to pass a city inclusionary zoning ordinance to expand affordable housing or a county policy to provide safety-net health services

to the uninsured, while at the same time committees at individual congregations are working on local campaigns to implement community policing in a neighborhood or bring new leadership into a local school.

PICO California adds another ball for organizations to juggle. It raises questions of how groups prioritize local and state work, and how they respond when the state network chooses an issue that their organization might not be actively working on at the time. In the early years, federations wrestled with whether they should sit out the fight because they had not yet developed a local connection to the issue, or decide to pitch in with the realization that the next issue might be closer to its core agenda. Over time, PICO organizations in California forged a shared agenda, focused primarily on education reform, expanding health coverage to the uninsured and affordable housing, and came to see the long term power in the acting together. After 14 years there is relative consensus, particularly among volunteer leaders, that while state work should not supplant local organizing, it should be seen as having equal value. Yet organizing with an eye toward local and state policy-making is more complex, and requires more work and more flexibility from directors and community organizers, and therefore more systematic staff development and support.

The success of statewide organizing in California has stimulated PICO organizations to begin state-level efforts in other states, most notably Louisiana and Colorado, and has also brought about an important shift in how organizers, clergy and leaders in PICO think about what it means to be a network of organizations. PICO began as a regional institute designed to promote the development of grassroots community organizations. The heart of PICO's work as a network continues to focus on providing affiliate organizations with leadership training, board development, organizational assessment and consultation and staff professional development. PICO has developed a model of peer consultation in which highly experienced executive directors serve as coaches and mentors to other

PICO organizations and are able to advance professionally without leaving their local organizations. This consultation system, which includes intensive three-day organizational assessments, as well as a systematic training process for staff and leaders, represents much of the work of PICO. Yet over the past decade PICO has developed a second mission to enable grassroots organizations that are widely dispersed across the U.S. to work together on common issues that affect their communities.

## National Power Lives Locally

PICO created a national strategy in 2004 based on three core ideas: that federal power and policy live within local communities rather than just in distant Washington, DC; that PICO would have the greatest long-term influence if it reinforced its network structure rather than creating a national organization; and that building national power was a matter of necessity, and therefore should as much as possible grow out existing issue campaigns at the local and state level.

These ideas dictated a significant shift in how organizers and leaders thought about their work in PICO. One of the most basic changes was for organizations to systematically build relationships with their federal elected officials. PICO organizes in 100 congressional districts, split roughly 55 percent Democratic, 45 percent Republican; and 17 states. With influence over the flow of federal dollars and party relationships, Senators and Congresspersons are often important local and state power-brokers, with strong ties to city, county and state officials and indirect influence over policy-making beyond Congress. Yet when PICO began its national work, most PICO federations, including many of its most established groups, had little or no relationship with their members of Congress. Organizations had a long history of holding their mayors, city managers, policy commissioners, school superintendents and city council members accountable, but, with some important exceptions,

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did not look at their federal officials as decision-makers with whom they needed to be in relationship.

When PICO organizations did begin engaging members of Congress and their staff in their local issue work, they discovered a host of opportunities. For example, the PICO federation in Gainesville, ACTION Network, was able to obtain \$3 million in the federal transportation bill to pave streets and build infrastructure in a long-neglected African-American community in the city. Other PICO organizations won funding for small schools initiatives,

As part of PICO's national strategy, local organizations decided to look more consistently for federal policy dimensions in their local issue work. Rather than ignoring federal policy as something over which they had little influence, local organizations began to look more closely at the strings that come with federal funds and at the ways in which federal policies influence local problems. For example, FOCUS, the PICO affiliate in Orlando, Florida, had been working with Head Start parents to improve educational opportunities for low-income children in their



8,000 leaders from PICO affiliate San Diego Organizing Project participate in immigration rights rally.

community policing programs and federally qualified health clinics as a result of federal relationships. Unlike earmarks tucked in bills to reward campaign contributors, organizations have used the appropriations process to build connections between low-income communities and members of Congress around local community priorities. The goal – although still not thoroughly tested – has been that this local engagement, which exists for more influential business and civic interests within Congressional Districts, would ultimately help increase the influence of low-income communities in broader national policy issues.

county. FOCUS learned that Congress was considering stripping Head Start Parent Committees of their decision-making authority as part of the reauthorization of the program. Parents and many others have felt that these committees were an important part of the success of Head Start in engaging parents much more effectively than the K-12 education system. Head Start parents involved in FOCUS were able to persuade their Representative Ric Keller (R-FL) to reverse his position on parent participation in Head Start and lead an effort to reverse the policy on the House Floor. Amid the many national education organizations working on Head Start Reauthorization,

parents in Orlando were able to exercise influence over the legislative process on an issue that they cared deeply about, although Congress ultimately postponed reauthorization of the program.

PICO has developed a working model for understanding the influence of federal, state and local decisions on families and the need for working families to be organized at each of these levels. Most people do not experience the multiple layers of decision-making in a federal system that influence the quality of education available in their neighborhood school or their ability to obtain health coverage for their children; but to change these conditions we need to understand the interconnection between local, state and federal policies. Federal policy operates both directly on families through programs like Medicare and Social Security, and indirectly through funding to states and local governments and from states to local governments. These are basic structures of American federalism, but they require a new way of thinking about how communities need to organize themselves to be able to influence the full range of policy decisions that affect their lives and communities.

PICO federations are structured as local networks of institutions, each with its own local organizing team of volunteer community leaders. This structure reflects the reality that important decisions are made at the community level. Member institutions come together to work on common problems at a city or regional level. Even when not every local institution is actively working on a particular issue, most will pitch into campaigns, with the understanding that success will ultimately increase the power of the organization to address future issues. This process helps forge consensus around a common agenda among a diverse set of communities and constituencies. The federated structure replays itself at the state and national level. Organizations rooted in their own local reality come together based on need and common interest, broadly defined, but do not stop their local work. While the network metaphor of federated action on common issues has been a powerful tool for adding a state and national agenda, it does not resolve the challenges created by the high level of partisan polarization in national policy-making and the physical distance that make it hard (and costly) to build face-to-face relationships among volunteer leaders and between those leaders and decision-makers in Washington, DC.

## Learning to Operate Nationally

Since 2004, PICO's national-level work has focused on federal health care policy and Gulf Coast rebuilding in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. New Orleans has long had a unique place within PICO, having been one of the first places outside California where PICO organized, beginning in the 1980s. Louisiana hosts one of PICO's annual week-long national training sessions. In 2002, PICO leaders and staff met in New Orleans at a hotel that was later destroyed by Katrina to lay the ground work for PICO's national work.

Katrina was an object lesson in how our lives depend on the federal government being engaged in the welfare of local communities. Within PICO, the catastrophic failure of the federal response gave reality to what had been a more abstract discussion about the need

for community organizing to take federal power and policy more seriously. The staffing and communications infrastructure and organizational learning that PICO had developed to support national work helped the network respond to Katrina. For example, on September 12<sup>th</sup>, just two weeks after Katrina hit, PICO clergy and leaders from Louisiana and five other states held a press conference at the National Press Club to press for a comprehensive federal relief and recovery plan. The event, which was covered by C-SPAN, was possible in large part because PICO had spent the previous year building a national infrastructure and had already planned to be in Washington to release a report on the impact Medicaid cuts on low-income children and families.

In late September, 30 PICO organizers and leaders traveled to Louisiana to work with local staff to organize displaced families, helping plan a 800 person public meeting in Baton Rouge with Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco to frame out state policies needed to support the right of all families, both renters and homeowners, to return to their homes and communities. During the following year, PICO federations worked to put pressure on their members of Congress to support housing and coastal restoration aid to the Gulf Coast. In December, leading up to passage of the first rebuilding funding, PICO leaders delivered hour glasses to the offices of 65 members of Congress to press for action on Gulf Coast aid before Christmas. In spring 2006, as part of an effort by the State of Louisiana and many organizations to persuade Congress to fully fund

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the state's \$9 billion housing plan, PICO clergy and lay leaders met face-to-face with members of Congressional appropriation committees, including Congressman Jerry Lewis (R-CA), who at the time chaired the powerful House Appropriations Committee. As part of efforts by many organizations, PICO played an important role in building support for Congress' ultimate decision to fully fund Louisiana's Road Home plan.

As with the lack of a coherent strategy for rebuilding the Gulf Coast, federal health care policy reflects a profound disconnect between the federal government and the needs of ordinary families. As businesses shift rising health care costs onto employees or stop offering coverage at all, it is becoming increasingly difficult for working families to obtain affordable coverage at work. The dominant employer-based health care system is at a point of collapse. The National Academy of Sciences estimates that 18,000 people die prematurely each year because of lack of health coverage. Yet, Congress and the President are so beholden to powerful health care interests that Washington has been unable to take even minimal steps to respond to the increasing number of uninsured people in the country.

PICO organizations have been working at the local and state level for the past decade to expand access to health coverage. Health care is a relatively new issue for community organizing, reflecting a shift from a neighborhood-based model of change which traditionally focused on place-based issues like housing and public safety, to a family-centric model where organizations take on the multiple pressures that affect working families, from education, to health to affordable housing. In 2005 PICO participated in efforts to limit Medicaid cuts and prevent new access fees on low-income children and families. While Congress ultimately approved significant new fees and benefit reductions, pressure from many groups, including PICO helped preserve \$3.34 billion in funding for low-income health care over five years and protected lower-income families from the worst access fee proposals.

In 2006, PICO built on the experience working to protect Medicaid to launch a campaign to win federal policies that would cover the more than nine million uninsured children in the United States. PICO is now working to bring the voice of faith communities and families to what is expected to be a central health policy debate over reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program in 2007.

## Conclusion

Revitalization of American civic life today will take more than efforts by self-appointed professional advocates operating out of Washington, DC or New York City, and more than the disconnected efforts of small groups operating apart from national politics and translocal movements

-Theda Skocpol, Marshal Ganz and Ziad Munson, "A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Volunteerism in the United States," *American Political Science Review*, 2000

The new mailing list organization is online, with membership a click away. Give truth serum to the online advocacy directors of national advocacy organizations and they will admit that most e-advocacy campaigns are designed primarily to build membership lists. Thoughtful internet activists puzzle over how to use online tools to get people organizing "offline." With people increasingly getting their news online, diversification of information sources is a good trend. But new media and the growth of the internet as a method of political communication do not change the underlying disconnect between people, particularly working people, and elected officials.

Perhaps the most hopeful sign for working families in the United States is the creative destruction taking place in the labor movement, with the promise of new labor organizations that are more populist, and more committed to organizing.

Yet the dominant pattern of advocacy on behalf of working families – on issues of health care, housing, education, economic policy and other domestic issues – remains in the hands of Washington-based organizations and consultants without constituency. In the last several election cycles wealthy donors have poured millions of dollars into largely transactional voter outreach, without building lasting organization. Missing are durable organizational structures that can effectively translate the needs and passions of working families and their communities into political action. Moving beyond advocacy to build organizations that authentically engage real people in social relationships and political action at the local, state and national level is not easy. It takes talented organizers, money, creativity and political patience. To paraphrase Frederick Douglas, those who want change in national priorities without investing in organization-building want crops without plowing up the ground; rain without thunder and lightning; the ocean without the roar of its many waters.

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