

June 2006

## YEO Frontline News

Dear YEO Network,

We are pleased to bring you another edition of YEO Frontline News. We hope that you enjoy the information and articles that we share with you on a monthly basis. We thank each of you for your continued support of the Network and most certainly for your entries in the newsletter.

We are proud to highlight a number of exciting accomplishments in this fourth edition paper, including the personal accomplishments of several YEOs and the successful launch of our Front Line Leaders Campaign Training Academy. We appreciate all of the contributions that YEOs make to improving and supporting this awesome Network.

The YEO Network is in the early planning stages of launching a summer **policy academy** for interested YEOs. This academy will bring together policy organizations, think tanks, community practitioners and elected officials to discuss solutions to a specific policy issue. We plan to host our first of two YEO Policy Academies this summer. Please e-mail me at [agillum@pfaw.org](mailto:agillum@pfaw.org) if you are interested in participating in our academies.

We are also very excited to host our **monthly telebrief** focused on **No Child Left Behind and the 65% Plan**. Please join us on **Tuesday, June 29<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm (EST)** for what I know will be an intriguing discussion. Learn strategies on how you can fight the rights' attempts to thwart real public education improvements.

Remember that this network exists to assist you in your growth and development as an elected official and policy maker. Please take advantage of the energy and time that the YEO staff places in providing you the most current and meaningful assistance possible. **We also want to hear from you!** If you have suggestions or feedback on how we can better serve you, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Very Best,

Andrew D. Gillum

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Right Wing Watch p 2
- Issue of the Month: Healthcare p 3
- FLLA Phoenix p 4
- YEO of the Month: James Walls p 5
- YEO Feature: School Board p 6
- Highlight: CLASP p 7
- Tips: Time Management Part II p 7

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Join the YEO Telebrief on:

The Truth About

No Child Left Behind

and the

65% ~~Plan~~

Deception

Learn about best practices from those that successfully made it happen!

Join Damien Filer, Founder of political strategies firm 50+1, and Greg Speed of Communities for Quality Education as we explore effective policies and strategies to strengthen our public education systems.

**When:** June 29, 2006 at 2:00 p.m.

**How:** Call 1-641-297-7245 and enter 445566#

To join online visit [www.instantlyglobal.com/YEONetwork2](http://www.instantlyglobal.com/YEONetwork2)

RSVP to [dwhite@pfaw.org](mailto:dwhite@pfaw.org)

1 2 3

### ANNOUNCEMENTS!



**Oscar Braynon II, Vice Mayor for the City of Miami Gardens**, recently drew top honors from Success South Florida Magazine as a Community Service Awards recipient. The bi-monthly publication serves the greater South Florida black professional community, and annually names its South

Florida's 40 most influential black business professionals under the age of 40.

Congratulations, Oscar!

*Please see Announcement on Page 2*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Continued from page 1*

**Missouri Representative Cathy Jolly** received a "Defenders of Patient Safety" award from Missouri Watch, a Jefferson City-based coalition that advocates issues to protect patients and workers. Jolly was among several legislators honored for protecting the rights of Missourians through important legislative efforts.



Congratulations, Cathy!



Five of our Young Elected Officials were awarded scholarships by the Center for Policy Alternatives to attend the **Take Back America 2006** conference, June 12-14 in Washington D.C. The conference brings together thousands of progressive activists, thinkers and leaders to discuss ideas, hone messages, train organizers, and build the infrastructure progressives need for success in 2006 and beyond.

Congratulations to the following scholarship recipients:

**Carl Sciortino, Massachusetts State Representative**  
**Neva Walker, Minnesota State Representative**  
**John Lesch, Minnesota State Representative**  
**Leonard (Jonas) Hughes, Missouri State Representative**

•If you would like to submit an announcement item for the newsletter, please send ideas to [dwhite@pfaw.org](mailto:dwhite@pfaw.org) by the last day of each month.



### YEO NEWS

#### Submit Articles to YEO Frontline News

Are you actively serving your constituents in unique ways? Have you recently received an award or honor? Are you working on an issue that you would like to share with the YEO Network?

Please submit any pictures, stories or policy articles to us at Frontline News. We are eager to hear from you so we may better serve you.

You may email [dwhite@pfaw.org](mailto:dwhite@pfaw.org), or for questions call Andrew Gillum at 850-877-0307.

## RIGHT WING WATCH

### Attacks on Public Education Never Stop

Despite sound defeats in a number of legislatures this year on vouchers, the enemies of public education are taking a new approach in their war on public schools.

The so-called "65 percent solution" is a scheme targeted in a number of states to require school districts to spend 65 percent of their funds on "classroom instruction." Versions have already passed in Kansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Georgia, and the idea is being promoted in Colorado, Oklahoma, Oregon, Florida and Ohio. Its proponents argue that the measure will improve student performance, without requiring any increase in taxes or spending.

Of course, it sounds too good to be true and it is. These claims fall apart when the definition of "classroom instruction" is examined: it only includes the cost of teachers and classroom supplies. Funding for a wide range of services would fall outside this standard – guidance counselors, school nurses, libraries, nutrition programs, maintenance staff, student transportation, security, and professional development for teachers would all be excluded. The "65 percent solution" is an inflexible rule that doesn't allow schools to set spending priorities according to their own needs.

Furthermore, these proposals do not set a minimum level of overall funding. Right-wing governors and legislators would still be free to push for cuts in overall education spending, as long as 65 percent of the remaining funds go to classroom instruction. The proposals do not set any quantitative goals to increase student achievement, nor do they set any standard for reassessing the law if the promised gains do not materialize. (In fact, a 2005 Standard & Poor's report found "no significant relationship" between 65 percent spending and improved student performance) [http://www.schoolmatters.com/pdf/65\\_paper\\_schoolmatters.pdf](http://www.schoolmatters.com/pdf/65_paper_schoolmatters.pdf)

The "65 percent solution" is no solution at all - it's a one-size-fits-all gimmick that looks good on paper, but actually does great harm to students.

*Provided by Kristin Nabers, Senior Organizer in the Field  
Department of People For the American Way Foundation*

**\*\*For more information on the 65% Plan and successful policy to protect public education, join our telebrief this month, Thursday, June 29 at 2:00 p.m. (EST). See the announcement in the newsletter or email [dwhite@pfaw.org](mailto:dwhite@pfaw.org) for more information.\*\***

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## **ISSUE OF THE MONTH:** ***Health Care Coverage***

***By Joaquin Castro, Texas State Representative***

*State Representative Joaquin Castro comments on his efforts to promote an informed debate on health care coverage in his home state of Texas.*

Texas has struggled for years with the nation's highest number of uninsured citizens. Efforts have been made in the past, but rates are still too high while wages are too low. People have trouble qualifying and waiting periods are too long.

This was the first real opportunity I had to do something about an issue I've always cared about. Under my amendment, any company employing more than 100,000 Texans must report how many employees participate in the Federal Medicaid or the Texas Children's Health Insurance Program. Gathering these numbers provides an increased awareness of the issue and a good snapshot of Texas' problem. It is a way for us to encourage employers to make health coverage more accessible.

After I spoke with representatives from one such organization, Wal-Mart, I noticed that they are sincerely making attempts to make health care more accessible.

Texas needs to be more aggressive in order to solve this problem. A lot of good changes are being made because of positive pressure from the government. This is not government being heavy handed, or dropping the hammer; this is just government nudging in the right direction.

Health care professionals, doctors, health agencies, and Texas lawyers who go the extra mile to provide health care to their employees support the amendment. Many Texas employers are trying to do the right thing, but they're competing with people who sometimes don't.

Unfortunately, Wal-Mart felt like they were being singled out and thus did not support the bill. When I originally thought of this plan, and when I selected the number of 100,000, I had no intention of singling out any specific employer; Wal-Mart just turned out to be the only one with that many employees.



Representative Joaquin Castro addresses the audience at a public hearing in May at Leon Valley Community Center.

I plan to continue to monitor the situation. The governor just signed the legislation and it should take effect early next year. We're getting a new tax system in Texas that really affects businesses, and I'm going to be watching to see how it affects health coverage. I'm hopeful, but watchful.

I think Texas has a lot of potential, but we have to improve the infrastructure of opportunity in this state. That includes improving schools as well as health care. It's difficult to live up to our potential if our folks are unhealthy in Texas.

For more information please visit Joaquin's legislative page at <http://www.house.state.tx.us/members/dist125/castro.htm>.





*A Project of Young Elected Officials Network and Young People For*

The Front Line Leaders Academy (FLLA), a project of Young Elected Officials Network and Young People For, held its inaugural training last month in Phoenix, Ariz. The six-month program provides a wide range of leadership development and political skills training. Candidacy issues were the focus of the first installment of the program. Trainings on field operations, civic engagement, voter registration and turnout, finance, management and retention, and media relations are soon to follow. Our 20 FLLA fellows received top-of-the-line training from campaign professionals and Young Elected Officials, including Phoenix State Representative Kyrsten Sinema, Georgia State Representative Alisha Morgan, Former San Antonio City Commissioner Julián Castro, and Hoboken School Board President Carmelo Garcia.

Both the trainers and fellows had a great time during the conference, learning about public service and personal responsibility, and asking candid questions about being a young elected official. Below, YEOs Kyrsten Sinema and Carmelo Garcia give some additional advice and speak about the importance of the Front Line Leaders Academy.

*"I think there are two really important things to do before you run. First, grow thick skin. You don't want to be the young candidate or officeholder who cries every time someone says something negative about you. That's politics, deal with it. Second, learn the issues. Learn them really well. You will be at a disadvantage already because you're young. People will assume that you're inexperienced and don't know anything. You have to work twice as hard as other candidates to prove that you're knowledgeable and the right person for the job. So know your stuff, and know it better than anyone else. Also, don't take yourself too seriously. Learn to laugh and make fun of yourself, and enjoy what you're doing."*



**-Kyrsten Sinema, Phoenix State Representative**

(Pictured above helping FLLA Fellow Jeremy Waechter work through his political platform, a workshop she led during the conference.)

*"I strongly believe this training will have a huge impact on the Fellows and on their way of thinking, which will bring them much confidence and progress. They received invaluable knowledge, tools and a powerful education that many of us have acquired through our personal experiences as elected officials and research, so that should empower them to be great. They will have access to resources that provide opportunities for them to capitalize on as they grow and change. They will be better planners, know how to channel their enthusiasm and cultivate their sense of perseverance."*



*"I was inspired by this group's energy, intellect and appetite for learning. They were very radiant and supportive to each other in recognizing that amongst them there is a common thread— which is their passion to pursue public service. It was a great experience for me and I appreciated them as trainees."*

**-Carmelo Garcia, Hoboken School Board Pres., NJ**

(Pictured above with FLLA Fellow Robert Reyes during his training workshop.)

We thank all the trainers who helped make Phoenix such a success. If you are interested in helping us with the upcoming training in Detroit, please contact Alisha Morgan at [amorgan@pfaw.org](mailto:amorgan@pfaw.org).

## YEO Q & A

*In our recent YEO survey, young elected officials were asked various questions about themselves and their experiences in office.*

**Question: What three political issues concern you the most, personally?**

“Protecting social support services for working families; opening doors to education; and preparing my community for increasing diversity.”

*Henry Beck,  
Waterville City Councilman,  
Maine*



“Criminal justice reform (alternatives to corrections, offender re-entry programs, reducing racial disparities, juvenile justice); welfare reform; and voter ID”

*Tamara Grigsby,  
State Representative,  
Wisconsin*



“The quality of education for our kids; imprisonment of the young black male; and the achievement gap between black and white kids.”

*Rodney Hubbard,  
State Representative,  
Missouri*



“Young people leaving Maine; coastal areas getting bought by rich people; and healthcare access and cost”

*Hannah Pingree,  
State Representative,  
Maine*



**Overall, the top five issues listed were education (28%), health care (20%), economic development (11%), jobs (9%), and the economy (7%). Other top answers included environment, foreign policy, tax reform and race issues.**

## YOUNG ELECTED OFFICIAL OF THE MONTH

### James Walls

*Mayor  
District Heights, MD*



The youngest person in the history of the District Heights, Md. elected to the city council, newly elected Mayor James Walls has made history again as the youngest serving mayor in the state of Maryland.

Walls put together a team of candidates to run for city council seats as he ran for mayor. Despite the incumbent mayor's suggestion that Walls' youth would work against him, Walls won with 92 percent of the vote, and every one of his team of council candidates succeeded.

His victory illustrates how a young candidate can run based on his record and message, rather than age. Walls' vision for District Heights is to “move the city forward,” focus on economic development, expand the police department for public safety, and code enforcement. He also envisions building a new mall in the heart of the city where his constituents will have access to goods and services.

Mayor Walls cites his age as his biggest hurdle. His biggest challenge was “getting people to know that I am a capable candidate, not just because of my age but because I know what I am doing. People say ‘yes, I see you are well-educated, involved in the community, but how old are you again?’ ” He continues to overcome that mindset through his work and accomplishments during his first month of service.

Walls focused on the budget during his first two weeks as mayor. He brought a previously-divided city council together to agree on capital improvement projects. He created a team to work on revitalization efforts in the downtown area. Walls is most proud of his decision to hire a new city manager, who was previously the city clerk— an accomplished person just 26 years old.

An ordained Baptist minister, James Walls holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Bowie State University, a Master's Degree in Theology and a Ph.D. in Pastoral Counseling. He has also studied and earned certificates in Leadership Development from Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, and the University of Maryland Institute of Local Governance.

*Please see Mayor James Walls on page 8*

## SPECIAL FEATURE BY A YEO: *Serving on the School Board*

**By Yolanda Everett,**  
*Clayton County, Georgia School Board Member*



I am a huge advocate for education and the needs of our children, and I figured the biggest platform to promote this would be on the local school board. I want to be the voice for the many children and parents who are unable to speak for themselves. I've accomplished some of the things I set forth to do, but there is a long way to go.

I am part of a nine-member elected Board of Education in Clayton County, which governs the fifth-largest school district in Georgia, serving 52,700 students and employing more than 7,000 individuals. Clayton County Public Schools is the largest employer in the county and among the top 25 in Metro Atlanta.

As an elected official, I believe nothing is more important than public engagement. Whether in a semi-formal setting of a forum or committee meeting, or the more formal setting of a full Board meeting, contact with the public (my constituents) lets me know what key issues need attention and how our actions as elected officials will impact our taxpaying citizens.

This is perhaps the most important work I have done. By gathering information through public events, I believe that my decisions are keeping with the will of my constituents. I also believe that through this engagement, the people of our community become better, more responsible citizens.

One such public engagement initiative has been our Citizen's Budget Committee. Now in its second year, the committee offers representatives from each board member's district an opportunity to learn firsthand about the funding structure for public schools, the types of materials and supplies that are purchased with school funds and how a school district budget is put together.

Another initiative used to engage the public are community forums. Four forums are held every two years. In our most recent series of forums, about 400 to 500 people attended, most of whom were parents with their children. These events serve a dual purpose. First, they update our residents about the work that has been accomplished thus far – work that was initiated through community forums that were held two years ago. Second, they offer an opportunity for input on the issues that are of concern today, such as discipline, safety, and dress codes.

Through these forums, I heard the voices of our parents and guardians as they commented on their key concerns. It is my hope that we will be able to make use of these comments to formulate future plans of action for our students, our employees, and our residents.

These public engagement activities have given me the crucial opportunity to consider all sides of an issue. This additional perspective offers invaluable insight as I join my fellow board members in working to support our superintendent's management of our school district.



YEO Yolanda Everett (second from left) works with her fellow School Board members on issues concerning Clayton County's public education.



## TIPS:

### PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL

#### Time Management- Part II

**Learn to say “no”** – Politely, and constructively. If you find it difficult to say no, you'll find it easier by using business reasons to justify your position. Politely saying no frees up time for the things that are most important.

**Concentrate** – At the heart of time management is an important shift in focus: Concentrate on results, not on being busy. Many people spend their days in a frenzy of activity, but achieve very little because they are not concentrating on the right things. By leaving contingency space in your schedule, you give yourself the flexibility to rearrange your schedule to react to issues as they arise.

**Work with a clean desk** – “Out of sight, out of mind.” What's in sight is in mind, and we cannot help but be distracted. Studies have shown that a person working with a messy desk will spend, on average, an hour and a half a day being distracted by things in their view or looking for things. That's seven and a half hours per week.

**Perfect is the enemy of good** – Some tasks have to be done as close to perfectly as possible. But some don't. Avoid “gift-wrapping the garbage,” that is giving a task more time and energy than it deserves. Ask yourself “what percent of quality do I need for this task?” or “what do I have time for?”

**Work on a task or project for a certain amount of time** – Instead of trying to complete a task at one time, say to yourself, “I'll work on this for 15 minutes and see how much I can get done.” Stay focused and challenge yourself to really get as much done as possible.

#### Sources:

<http://www.businessballs.com/>

<http://www.tsuccess.dircon.co.uk/timemanagementtips.htm>

*If you have tips or advice that will make our lives easier, send them to us at [dwhite@pfaw.org](mailto:dwhite@pfaw.org)*

## PROGRESSIVE PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

### Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)



The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national nonprofit whose mission is to improve the economic security, educational and workforce prospects, and stability of low-income families and to secure equal justice for all. To meet this mission, CLASP conducts cutting-edge research, provides insightful policy analysis, advocates on the federal and state level, and offers targeted technical assistance to states and localities on a range of family policy and equal justice issues.

A nonpartisan organization, CLASP works with governors, legislators and staff, state attorneys general, administrators and agency staff, mayors, and community leaders and organizations. At the federal level, CLASP works with and advises members of Congress and agency staff and administrators.

#### Resources:

Reports, policy briefs, testimony, and other resources are available online at [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org). Free online audio conferences covering a range of issues, publications, and policy briefs are also available at the web site.

#### Contact Information:

[www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org) or 202-906-8000

## Summer Intern Requests

Do you think your office might provide a powerful learning experience for a young person? Do you need a summer intern? YEO and Young People For are teaming up to provide our Young Elected Officials with smart, progressive young leaders as interns.

## Mayor James Walls

*Continued from page 5*

### **Advice to YEOs**

"Do the best that you can in what the community has entrusted in you. Represent the people well so when the time comes to run for higher office, they can't focus on your age. They can focus on your record and know that you have accomplished things. Show people that you can do what you say you can do."

### **Little-Known Fact**

One thing that most people don't know about Mayor Walls is that while in elementary school, his teacher said he was dyslexic, a slow learner, and would not be able to do well in college. She predicted that he would be in remedial classes throughout his education. Now several degrees and honors later, Mayor Walls is well on his way to providing new direction for District Heights and for the progressive movement in this country.

### **Constituent Tip**

"Always follow up with constituents with a letter recapping your discussion and the outcome. This helps them know you care and it's a way to keep good records."



James Walls signs his Oath of Office and receives his gavel as the new Mayor of District Heights, Maryland. He is the youngest serving Mayor in the state.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **The Council of State Governments**

<http://www.csg.com>

- 7/29- 8/2 Southern Legislative Council Annual Meeting, Louisville, KY  
7/30- 8/2 Eastern Regional Conference Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA  
8/10- 8/13 Western Annual Conference Breckenridge, CO

### **NAACP**

<http://www.naACP.org>

- 7/15- 7/20 97th Annual Convention Washington, DC

### **National Education Association**

<http://www.nea.org>

- 6/30- 7/5 2006 Annual Meeting Orlando, FL

### **National Council of La Raza**

<http://www.nclr.org>

- 7/8- 7/11 2006 Annual Conference Los Angeles, CA

### **National Conference of Insurance Legislators**

<http://www.ncoil.org>

- 7/20- 7/23 2006 Summer Meeting Boston, MA

### **National Conference of State Legislators**

<http://www.ncsl.org>

- 8/15- 8/18 2006 Annual Conference Nashville, TN



## YOUNG ELECTED OFFICIALS NETWORK STAFF

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*A program of People For the American Way Foundation*

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