Fighting for housing

The National Affordable Housing Act of 1990 forces cities and states to develop five-year blueprints for the use of city, state and federal housing funds. Citizen participation is supposed to be a key part of the process of designing the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS). But in city after city ACORN members have found that provisions for public input are little more than a farce.

Fed up with the cities' disregard for community involvement ACORN staged its own hearings in nine cities, which in every case had three to ten times as many participants as the official city hearings. In most places, ACORN's efforts have produced commitments to increase funding for programs the organization supported. In Dallas, for instance, over 200 people turned out for the ACORN hearing which convinced city officials to negotiate. In the end, the Dallas CHAS included more funds to board up vacant building, money for loan counseling and increased funding for housing rehabilitation.

Another 200 people in Detroit convinced the city to allocate adequate funds to implement its long stalled homesteading program. Similar results followed large turnouts in St. Louis, Little Rock and elsewhere.

In Washington, D.C., however, nearly 100 participants in the ACORN-sponsored hearing could not convince the city to sit down and talk about their proposals. As a result, ACORN is going straight to HUD demanding that the federal agency force the city to comply with the law.

For information, contact Steuart Pittman, 202-547-2500.

ACORN political action: Insurgent candidates get support

It may be an off-year for politics but ACORN members across the country are working on a number of heated campaign.

MISSOURI

In Jennings, a suburb on the north side of St. Louis, ACORN members have organized North County United to run a slate of three independent candidates in the April 6 municipal election. Previously, ACORN collected more than enough signatures on a petition to recall the mayor but the City Council refused to put it on the ballot. Added to numerous incidents of mayoral abuse of power, the Council's intransigence fueled the drive to elect independent Council members.

Despite the mayor's efforts in his role as city Housing Director to keep Blacks out, Jennings has a rapidly growing African American community. Although Blacks now comprise nearly half the population of 16,000, there has never been a Black elected official in the town. With 1,000 Black residents newly registered to vote by ACORN that could change come election day.

Meawhile, in St. Louis, the ACORN Political Action Committee endorsed African American Freeman Bosley, Jr. for mayor and is running his campaign in the Fourth Ward.

DETROIT

In Detroit, the ACORN Political Action Committee voted to endorse insurgent mayoral candiate Dennis Archer, running to unseat 20-year incumbent Coleman Young. APAC is building a core of 200 neighborhood captains to activate the community and turn out a big vote. Detroit ACORN is also involved in building a coalition to work on reforming the city charter and electing progressives to a proposed City Charter Revision Commission.

NEW YORK

Brooklyn and Queens ACORN members are developing a strategy to elect progressives to the New York City Council from their neighborhoods as part of a broad-based coalition effort.

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