

Omaha Together One Community

Founded 1995

OTOC exists to recreate community. In our fragmented society, people are disconnected and conversations about important issues are often difficult. OTOC seeks to reweave the frayed social fabric and connect people across the lines that tend to divide them: race, economics, religion, geography.

OTOC is broad-based, multiethnic and interfaith. Members are institutions, mostly congregations, although civic organizations, such as neighborhood groups, Home Town Associations and PTAs also participate.

We teach people to become effective leaders, explore their legitimate interests, do solid research, engage in sometimes tough (but always respectful) public discourse, hold elected officials accountable and create positive change through collective action. Through the practice of these skills, people build relationships of trust and, by acting collaboratively, become part of solving their own problems rather than expecting someone else to take care of them.

This is OTOC's "Iron Rule," never, **ever**, do for others what people can do for themselves. Community organizing demands time, talent, discipline and commitment. Those willing to do the work experience personal growth and transformation. Leaders trained by OTOC have witnessed the impact OTOC has made on their congregations and the community at large.

Shaping a Community that Works for All Agenda 2006

Education

Grounded in thousands of people's input during hundreds of house meetings organized through OTOC, the OTOC Education Committee articulated three criteria for resolution of the metro-Omaha school district controversy.

- A. All Taxpayers in metro area share responsibility to fund all students
- B. Promoted policies should achieve equity in opportunity for all students (provide pre-kindergarten classes on an equitable basis based on need, high quality professional development across district lines.)
- C. Public education should be organized in a manner that fosters integration along racial, ethnic and socio-economic status.

OTOC supports the "Learning Community" concept articulated in LB 1024, approved by the Nebraska Unicameral. This concept has the potential to achieve all three criteria. As currently encoded in law it includes several measures that OTOC opposes. The segregation of central city school districts along racial and socio-economic lines into two new districts with a majority of low-income students must be challenged. The bill also fails to provide the funds needed to achieve OTOC's second criteria (policies that promote equity in opportunity for all students).

OTOC will hold house meetings and community forums on the issues related to implementation of LB 1024. It will prepare hundreds of parents and taxpayers to be an active voice in

future public debates on this issue at all levels—local schoolhouse, district board and unicameral. We will be actively involved in monitoring and providing feedback to the Learning Community Council.

Health Care

The system that delivers health care in our country is on a course that is not sustainable in terms of cost, accessibility or quality. The OTOC Healthcare Committee has found that members of our congregations as well as businesses are experiencing double digit increases in pharmaceutical prices due to the collusion between Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) and drug manufacturers. Rebates from drug manufacturers which drive formulary placement are not disclosed to businesses. The price for medications billed to employers, paid out of employee premiums and employer contributions, is dramatically higher than what is paid to local pharmacies. Prescribing information is sold to drug manufacturers to be used by drug reps to influence physician prescribing habits.

OTOC has met with several businesses that voice frustration with this lack of transparency. In the coming months OTOC will continue to meet with businesses with a goal toward organizing a coalition of business and congregations to call for transparent practices for PBMs.

Douglas County has a prescription drug card with Caremark RX. Caremark is one of the largest PBMs in the country. This card offers citizens of Douglas County up to 20% off the cash price of medications. The cash price for medications is the highest price charged by the local pharmacy. This card is free to Douglas County because Caremark keeps 100% of the rebates from drug manufacturers. Douglas County does not know how much in rebates Caremark is receiving when Douglas County's uninsured citizens use this card, due to the language of the contract. As this is a contract made with a public entity, OTOC will hold research actions with county officials to promote transparency and full disclosure of rebates

Immigration

For over a decade OTOC has provided the means for institutions in the immigrant community to develop leaders and connect their interests to the community at-large. OTOC action exposed the inadequacy of the regional federal immigration facilities (which eventually led to new immigration offices on the riverfront); assisted hundreds of families seeking legal representation to correct irregularities in their status and is presently providing leadership to the broad-based move for comprehensive reform of laws that impact the status of immigrants at both the state and federal level.

Public Safety: Until a few years ago, any person residing in Nebraska could study the laws and take the test to earn a driver's license, enabling them to purchase auto insurance and drive legally on our streets and highways. Federal legislation forced all states to require a current social security number in order to obtain a drivers license, leaving many recent immigrants (both documented and undocumented) without the ability to drive legally or purchase insurance. As each year passes, more undocumented immigrants are without a license, as their past valid driver license expires and they are unable to renew it (or their insurance). This presents a huge challenge to the large immigrant work force which helps to keep our Omaha economy running, as they have difficulty driving legally to their jobs and their children to school, and are exposed to more harassment from law enforcement. It becomes a safety issue on our streets with larger numbers of unlicensed drivers, and increases the "uninsured motorist" premium on everyone else's auto insurance rates.

Certainly the U.S. immigration laws are in need of overhaul; it will take federal action to do this, and we have a stake in the outcome. However, in the meantime, our state can address this motor safety issue with state law, just as states like Washington, and New Mexico already have: by issuing a "Driver's Certificate" to residents without social security number who pass the testing requirements. This certificate cannot be used as an identification document, but allows legal driving and purchase of automobile insurance.

The benefit to all Nebraskans in terms of safety on our highways and fair insurance premiums is clear. The benefit to all the corporations who rely on immigrant labor is huge. To the workers and their families, this is a critical issue of justice.

In 2005-2006, OTOC's efforts led to the Unicameral's approval of an interim study on the matter (Resolution 355) and the Judiciary Committee chaired by Senator Pat Bourne and the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee of the Legislature will hold a public hearing on the issue this fall.

Just and Comprehensive Immigration Reform: OTOC has provided leadership in two massive rallies of immigrants and like-minded supporters this spring. The second rally included meetings with the congressional representatives from Nebraska and launched a drive to garner signatures of registered voters who support *just and comprehensive immigration reform* that (1) does not criminalize immigrants or those that help them and (2) permanent legal residency for immigrants currently in the U.S. (Legislation needs to include easier family reunification, elimination of the backlog in processing visa applications and restoring of due process to immigration proceedings.) . The OTOC Immigration Committee is currently holding forums in congregations that provide an opportunity to become informed about the current reality, hear stories from immigrants today, engage people in meaningful conversation, and provide a plan for action.

Nebraska Constitutional Amendment to Limit State Spending

See attached documents highlighting information leading to the recommendation to oppose the proposed constitutional amendment which will be on the ballot on November 7, 2006.

October 8, 2006