

# Alinskyian organizing linked to abortion movement

*The Catholic Church is a supporter of Alinskyian community organizing. Why?*

By Stephanie Block  
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Tuesday, August 18,

If you happen to be in a congregation that's part of an Alinskyian community organization – an increasingly common phenomena under the Obama administration (coincidence? I don't think so) – there will be “house meetings.”

The organizer running the show will [ask] attendees what concerns they have for their neighborhood. They're looking for specific answers: unemployment, lack of adequate healthcare insurance, school issues...something like that.

Every once and a while, the organizer will get someone in the crowd who wants to do something about abortion. He will be told, “that's too divisive an issue. We only get involved with issues we can all agree on.”

Universal healthcare – we all agree on universal healthcare, regardless of abortion provisions buried within them. Right? Well, that's what the Alinskyian community organizing networks contend.

There are several primary Alinskyian community organizing networks across the country. The PICO National Network, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Gamaliel, and DART are the four largest organizing among religious congregations.

The PICO National Network – PICO, for short – has been the most aggressively active in touting health care issues with abortion components. In California, PICO successfully pushed the state legislature to fund a mobile medical van providing school-based health care and Planned Parenthood referrals. Furthermore, some California PICO congregations are sites for Healthy Families, providing elective abortion and family planning coverage.

Their latest efforts are directed toward support of national health “reform.” To this end, PICO and several other organizations will be running a TV ad campaign – one under the moniker of “People of Faith for Health Reform” – organizing nationwide prayer events, and recommending a “health care sermon weekend.” “The message, said PICO spokesman Gordon Whitman, is this: ‘Religious voters support health-care reform, and you can't take them for granted. We're not going to allow people who stand up for health reform to be attacked on religious grounds. If you are in a district or state that is culturally conservative, there is support for health reform.’ In August, paid organizers will meet with pastors to help them organize their congregations, develop talking points for meetings with members of Congress and coordinate with other groups and individuals -- religious and secular.” [PICO National Network, “Pulling Together on Health Care,” Washington Post, July 25, 2009]

Abortion provisions are no obstacle to PICO's support for healthcare reform. “To hold together their diverse memberships,” the above PICO statement continues, “the coalitions are moving carefully around controversial issues. For example... PICO [is] supporting the ‘status quo’ on abortion – neither requiring nor banning insurers from covering the procedure as long as federal funds are not used.”

The Gamaliel Network has also been pushing health care. Its website carries the gleeful information: “Barack H. Obama, former GAMALIEL ORGANIZER is the 44th President of the United States!” and announces that on June 22-25, 2009, it bussed in hundreds of clergy and leaders from across the country to Washington DC for visits to congressional representatives to discuss health care. “The Gamaliel National Clergy Caucus is leading Gamaliel's newest national issue: Health Care. They invite you and your spiritual community to discuss and then act on their latest theological statement.”

Gamaliel is part of the Health Care for America Now coalition that includes several other Alinskyian organizing networks, such as ACORN, as well as some pro-abortion groups like the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and Planned Parenthood Federation of America. And DART – the Direct Action and Research Training Center – website claims that its local affiliates have won accessible health care reform in several major metropolitan cities.

The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), as a national body, has kept a lower profile on its support of universal health care than the other Alinskyian networks. However, it is among the “allies” of Jobs with Justice, a project of another Alinskyian network, Interfaith Worker Justice. Jobs with Justice runs a national “Health Care for All” campaign, which means the IAF also supports universal health care, with its abortion-friendly elements.

Several IAF affiliates, on the other hand, are right in the middle of the health care fracas. United Power for Action and Justice, a Chicago monster-organization with hundreds of institutional members, has been fighting for universal healthcare in Illinois. “Because of a relationship that was built with Illinois Governor Rod Blagoiavich, UPAJ was in a good position to work with him to achieve affordable, quality healthcare for all Illinois residents,” writes Lynn Wax, an UPAJ leader. [“Making a Difference on Healthcare,” Prophetic Voices, Jewish Funds for Justice newsletter, Summer 2007.]

BUILD, the IAF local of Baltimore, is part of Health Care for All coalition pushing for universal health care in Maryland, organized specifically to support Maryland Citizens’ Health Initiative...which is, in turn, part of the abortion-inclusive Health Care for America Now coalition.

For Catholics, there’s a particular irony to all this. The Catholic Church is a tremendous supporter of Alinskyian community organizing. Its multi-million dollar annual collection gives the various networks a sizeable percentage of its grants. Hundreds of Catholic congregations are members of the various local affiliates, paying dues and sending parishioners for training in Alinskyian “civic education.”

On the other hand, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops says it “is working to ensure that needed health reform is not undermined by abandoning longstanding and widely supported policies against abortion funding and mandates and in favor of conscience protection.” [USCCB News Release, “Cardinal Rigali Urges House Committee to Support Pro-Life Amendments to Health Care Reform Bill,” July 30, 2009]

What’s wrong with this picture?

# Alinskyian Organizing and Activism – II: The IAF

*Alinskyian organizations such as the California Industrial Areas Foundation and PICO utilize the power of the pews to put into place contraception as a hallmark of health reform.*

By Stephanie Block

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As my mother used to say, “One swallow doth not a summer make.” It’s all very well to give an example of one Alinskyian local – or, more to the point, one regional engaged in inappropriate political activism, but unfair to draw too broad a generalization from it. Perhaps the aggressive, progressive political mischief of Representative Loretta Sanchez, the California PICO, and the California Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) networks was an anomaly. [See: [“The Shenanigans of Alinskyian Organizing,” Spero News, 8-25-09](#)]

The only way to ascertain the truth of our thesis – that the faith-based Alinskyian organizing networks are highly political and of a scandalously different fundamental perspective than many of the religious bodies among its membership – is to examine other examples. To that end, let’s visit another IAF local in Massachusetts.

Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) claims to have 70 institutional members [www.gbio.org/aboutus.html - though it actually only lists 59(www.gbio.org/maint/members.pdf)], most of which are churches and synagogues. Healthcare is an important issue for the group. “GBIO and the Affordable Care Today Coalition have played a critical role in making health care reform in Massachusetts a reality,” the GBIO website states. “We will continue to make sure that this historic reform is implemented fairly and completely.”

The “historic reform” under discussion is the Massachusetts Health Reform Law that GBIO fought to implement and it has several interesting components. One is that family planning services are universally provided throughout the state. [Families USA Report, “Massachusetts Health Reform of 2006,” pp 6-7]

“Family planning” is catch-all phrase that, at a minimum refers to contraception – many forms of which are abortifacient – and often includes abortion “services.” Mike Huckabee, former governor of Arkansas, says, “The Massachusetts model [of universal health care provision] has been a total disaster. It’s been a disaster from a financial standpoint, [and is] about to bankrupt that state....It gives people the opportunity to have an abortion for a \$50 co-pay, so that’s all that a human life is worth now in Massachusetts - \$50.” [Steven Ertelt, “Mike Huckabee Calls Barack Obama Most Pro-Abortion President in History,” Life News, 8-6-09]

Yet this is what the GBIO – including its Catholic members – has proudly promoted. “[T]he push for the new law and the debate over its implementation have provided a chance to prove that religious groups can be marshaled behind liberal issues at a time when faith is more commonly associated with conservative social causes, such as the campaign against same-sex marriage. ‘It’s a tremendous story about the power of the pews to organize for justice — and particularly, the Jewish pews,’ said Rabbi Jonah Pesner, who helped head the interfaith coalition [GBIO] from his post as a religious leader of Temple Israel, a Reform synagogue in Boston. Pesner recently assumed leadership of the Union for Reform Judaism’s new Just Congregations initiative, which aims to replicate the successes achieved in Boston.” [Jennifer Siegel, “Religious Liberals Take Lead in Massachusetts Health Debate, The Jewish Daily Forward, July 21, 2006]

This “power of the pews to organize” rests in the hands of the organizers. “Hamilton and Pesner, of Temple Israel in Boston, are leaders of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, which has

used moral suasion to become an influential force in Beacon Hill's healthcare debate. Inside the velvet glove, though, is a real threat: If legislators don't pass a healthcare bill to their liking, the group and its allies will push a 2006 ballot measure that would force the state to cover everybody. Backers of the ballot effort have collected more than 112,000 signatures." [Scott S. Greenberger, "Interfaith leaders invoke morality in healthcare debate, Boston Globe, 12-29-05]

In the words of one enamored blogger, "Forget about the symbolic politics on the religious right and the religious left for a minute. Here's a story about a local coalition of religious organizations that crosses denominational, theological, and political lines and that is exerting real political pressure on the Massachusetts legislature to bring healthcare to more people." [Philocrites, "'Coalition of compassion' has clout on Beacon Hill," 1-4-06, [www.philocrites.com/archives/002445.html](http://www.philocrites.com/archives/002445.html)]

"Exerting real political pressure" makes GBIO a real political organization with a real political agenda. The Jewish Daily Forward article quoted above described a speech of then-Illinois Democratic Senator Barack Obama "at a conference of the liberal religious group Call to Renewal. Obama chastised fellow Democrats for failing to 'acknowledge the power of faith in the lives of the American people' and insisted that the party compete for the support of religiously observant Americans. He also called for liberals to moderate their opposition to faith-based initiatives and to some expressions of religion in public life....'I cannot overplay the extent to which the Obama speech is still on people's minds,' said Mik Moore, director of communications of the anti-poverty organization Jewish Funds for Justice."

Real progressive political pressure, leveraged with the support of religious bodies, while vitiating their core moral values...now that's Alinskyian organizing for you.

# Alinskyian Health Care Push, Part III

*Key players supporting President Obama's healthcare plan are several religious groupings including Sojourners and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. They invest themselves with "moral garments" to achieve their political goals.*

By Stephanie Block

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With only a little more than a month to counter growing public sentiment against federal health care plans, many of the key players of the We Believe Together - Health Care for All coalition – [PICO National Network](#), Sojourners, [Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good](#), and Gamaliel among them – have begun a special campaign, 40 Days for Health Reform.

To understand the work of [We Believe Together](#) - Health Care for All and 40 Days for Health Reform, one must understand that PICO and Gamaliel are community-organizing networks built on the theories of Saul Alinsky. They organize primarily among religious institutions – particularly Christian and Jewish congregations – ostensibly for neighborhood-enhancement projects, such as after-school programs or improved infrastructure. Local projects, however, are only a means to an end. PICO, Gamaliel and their ilk are after bigger game, building a base of people around the country to support progressive policies on a national scale. [See, for example, [Wendy Cadge, "Mobilizing Religious Progressives on Health Care," Religious Dispatches, 9-1-09](#)]

Religious institutions, as opposed to organized schools or unions, are particularly useful to Alinskyian organizing networks, as it is a prime Alinskyian strategy is to “do what you can with what you have and clothe it with moral garments. ....Moral rationalization is indispensable at all times of action whether to justify the selection or the use of ends or means.” [Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, 10th Rule, p 43.]

In order to clothe health care “reforms” in moral clothing, 40 Days for Health Reform sponsored a highly publicized conference call (Sojourners called it a national “call in”) between President Obama and the “people of faith” within its networks to discuss the issue. It has also run a nationwide TV ad, featuring clergy, to support health care reform. It has prepared printed material that misapplies scripture verses, such as the Matthew 25’s warning that people will “be judged by how they treat the least of these” as a spiritual mandate for health care reform. “Healing is God’s desire for every person because everyone is created in the divine image.” [Sojourners’ Health Care Toolkit, [www.sojo.net/action/alerts/health\\_care\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.sojo.net/action/alerts/health_care_toolkit.pdf)]

Last but not least, it mobilized a “National Day of Action for Health Insurance Reform,” coordinated by PICO. On August 11, 2009, various PICO locals (and a few other groups) held “prayer rallies” or “vigils” and in-district meetings to influence members of Congress about federal health care legislation. Many of the politically-motivated “prayer vigils” were scheduled together with press conferences – no taking these prayers into the closet.

To give some idea of the scope of these “vigils,” here is a partial listing:  
In Alabama, the PICO local, Birmingham Area Interfaith Sponsoring Committee, targeted the Birmingham Congressional delegation.

In California, the PICO locals – Faith In Action, Contra Costa Interfaith Sponsoring Committee (CCISCO), OCCCO, LA Voice, Congregations Building Community, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO), Faith Works, Peninsula Interfaith Action (PIA), Inland Congregations United for Change, San Diego Organizing Project (SDOP), People Acting in Community Together (PACT), Congregations Organizing for Renewal (COR), targeted legislators in their respective

areas. Among the legislators listed were: Rep. Jim Costa, House Labor and Education Chair George Miller, Rep. Loretta Sanchez, Rep. Xavier Becerra, Rep. Diane Watson, and Rep. Dennis Cardoza, Rep. Barbara Lee, Rep. Darrell Issa, Rep. Brian Bilbray, Sen. Diane Feinstein, Sen. Barbara Boxer, Rep. Anna Eshoo, Rep. Joe Baca, Rep. Mary Bono Mack, Rep. Ken Calvert, Rep. Susan Davis, Rep. Bob Filner, Rep. Duncan Hunter, Rep. Susan Davis, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Rep. Zoe Lofgren, Rep. Mike Honda, Rep. Jackie Speier, House Ways & Means Committee Chairman Pete Stark, and Rep. Jerry McNerney.

In Colorado, the PICO local, Metro Organizations for People, targeted Rep. Betsy Markey.

In Florida, the PICO locals ACTION Network, Congregations for Community Action (CCA), FOCUS, and Orlando Diocese targeted Rep. Corrine Brown, Rep. Cliff Stearns, Senator Mel Martinez, Senator Bill Nelson, Rep. Bill Posey, Sen. Mel Martinez, Sen. Bill Nelson, Rep. Suzanne Kosmas, Rep. John Mica, Rep. Alan Grayson, and Rep. Corrine Brown.

In Georgia the Industrial Areas Foundation local A.B.L.E. targeted Rep. John Lewis and Rep. Hank Johnson.

In Kansas, the PICO local Communities Creating Opportunity targeted Rep. Dennis Moore, Senator Sam Brownback, and Senator Pat Roberts.

In Louisiana, PICO Louisiana targeted Sen. Landrieu, Sen. Vitter, and Rep. Bill Cassidy. PICO locals MICAH, Faith United for Empowerment and Leadership (FUEL), and Congregations Organizing People for Equality (COPE) targeted Sen. Mary Landrieu, Sen. David Vitter, Rep. Anh Cao, and Rep. Steve Scalise, Sen. Mary Landrieu, Sen. David Vitter, Rep. Rodney Alexander, Rep. Bill Cassidy, and Rep. Charlie Melancon.

In Maine, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good targeted Sen. Olympia Snowe, Sen. Susan Collins, and Rep. Chellie Pingree.

In Massachusetts, the PICO local Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN) met with Rep. Michael Capuano and with Senator Edward Kennedy's staff. The IAF local Brockton Interfaith Community met with Rep. Stephen Lynch and the PICO local United Interfaith Action met with Rep. James McGovern, Senator John Kerry's staff, and Rep. Barney Frank's staff.

In Michigan, the PICO local Flint Area Congregations Together (FACT) targeted Rep. Dale Kildee, Sen. Debbie Stabenow, and Sen. Carl Levin.

In Missouri, the PICO local Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO) targeted Senator Claire McCaskill and Congressman Emanuel Cleaver.

In New Jersey, the PICO local Camden Churches Organized for People targeted Sen. Frank Lautenberg, Sen. Robert Menendez, and Rep. Robert Andrews.

In New York, the PICO local Queens Congregations United for Action (QCUA) targeted Congressman Gary Ackerman and Congressman Joseph Crowley. Brooklyn Congregations United (BCU) targeted Sen. Charles Schumer and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand. The PICO local Interfaith Action of Rochester targeted Rep. Louise Slaughter.

In Pennsylvania, the PICO local Congregations United for Neighborhood Action targeted Rep. Charlie Dent.

In Vermont, the PICO local Vermont Interfaith Action targeted Rep. Peter Welch, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and Sen. Patrick Leahy. [The complete listing is at [www.coverallfamilies.org/act?id07](http://www.coverallfamilies.org/act?id07)]

UHCAN Ohio (Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio) is another organization working for national health care legislation among religious populations and blogger Ed Morrissey reproduced a job description UHCAN posted recently, looking for individual to “reach out to forty faith congregations in the Cincinnati area and its suburbs, asking their faith leader to communicate to his/her congregation about federal health care reform in a religious/moral context. .... asking them to preach on the subject, or to carry out a discussion within the congregation, or to sign on to a letter to policymakers. We need a success rate of at least 33 percent. It will also involve providing them with the materials that will fit their situation.” [[“Astroturfing churches?” Hot Air, 9-1-09](#)]

Morrissey comments, “In other words, UHCAN wants to pressure churches into transforming themselves into campaign rallies. That kind of contact could risk their tax-exempt status (and should), but the moral problem goes beyond that. Will pastors who agree to this disclose that they’ve been lobbied and pressured by ObamaCare advocates? If they do, it would undermine the credibility of the sermons, but if they don’t, it undermines the credibility of the minister and the church itself.”

One might say the same about the Alinskyian organizing networks. An organizer who attempts to reassure congregations that a local PICO, IAF or Gamaliel organization “isn’t political” is playing with words. To quote IAF organizer Arnold Graf, “In places like San Antonio and Baltimore, we are as close to being a political party as anybody is. We go around organizing people, getting them to agree on an agenda, registering them to vote, interviewing candidates on whether they support our agenda. We’re not a political party, but that’s what political parties do.” [[William Greider, \*Who Will Tell the People\*, p. 224](#)]

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