



**2006 Epistle
To Friends Everywhere
From the Friends Committee on National Legislation
To Pacific Yearly Meeting**

“Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?” I Corinthians 5:6

Our very small community of Friends – only a few hundred thousand in a nation of 300 million – may be called today to an historic role in a world where the number of armed conflicts has declined, but in which our government has become increasingly militarized; in which the structures of economic and social violence increase the gap between rich and poor; in which national and global policies relegate masses of people to a category we might as well call “expendable”; and in which the ice caps are melting due to human activity.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is a nonpartisan Quaker lobby in the public interest, founded in 1943. Twenty-six yearly meetings of the Religious Society of Friends in the United States participate in the governance of FCNL by sending representatives to FCNL’s General Committee. In its work with Congress and the Executive branch, FCNL labors to bring the spiritual values of Friends to bear on national public policy decisions. FCNL is devoted to international peace and social justice at home and abroad. Volunteers around the country join with FCNL to give voice to the priority concerns identified by FCNL’s General Committee, communicating those to Members of Congress and the President.

We live in an exceptional moment in U.S. and world history. At a time when so many here and abroad look to the barrel of a gun for security, we have adopted the theme “*War is Not the Answer*”, and we endeavor to persuade others that “*peace is possible through peaceful means.*”

These times challenge FCNL to work effectively, by carefully crafting *change strategies* on key issues. As a nonpartisan organization that is firmly committed to nonviolence and to the Gospels’ good news of love and compassion, we feel bound in truth to offer prophetic perspectives on the actions and decisions of our nation’s sitting government. FCNL’s nonpartisan approach is more vital today than at almost any other moment in history, and we work daily to bridge the gap between Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, rich and poor, and the powerful and the powerless. We know that our nonpartisan reputation – something few lobbyist or lobby organizations can claim – opens many doors, and this approach softens hearts and opens eyes and ears.

FCNL plays a role in balancing the prophetic with the practical. This brief epistle describes some of our attempts to achieve the practical in 2006. You will not read about every issue on which FCNL worked in 2006, but these stories illustrate what your Quaker lobby has accomplished. The work of FCNL lobbyists in Washington, DC combines with the active engagement of the FCNL General Committee members, local volunteers, and thousands of citizen lobbyists around the country to persuade and influence Congress. Our successes are your successes. In this past year, we have much for which to be thankful.

We Seek a World Free of War and the Threat of War Iraq: FCNL’s Iraq Peace Campaign focused on building a bipartisan consensus in Congress to question the administration’s Iraq policy. After an 18 month FCNL effort, Congress approved provisions barring funding for permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq.

Darfur: FCNL’s Darfur Legislative Updates have become a key tool for coalitions in efforts to focus policymakers’ attention on stopping genocide in Darfur. These weekly email update

messages provided hundreds of groups with information on Congressional activities, served as a clearing house for groups working on Darfur to share information and plan strategies, and allowed a broad coalition of groups to cooperate with each other on a regular basis.

We Seek a Society with Equity and Justice for All Saying No to Torture: The administration's efforts to undermine the Geneva Conventions and win congressional authorization to torture people in some categories of detainees who were captured in the so-called "war on terror" have provoked resistance across the country. FCNL offered a religious perspective and a grassroots network ready to work against U.S. sponsored torture. FCNL staff also helped launch the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) in early 2006. NRCAT brings together people of faith committed to stopping U.S. sponsored torture.

Domestic Spying: FCNL lobbying against domestic spying focused on mobilizing constituent support for members of Congress who spoke out against the president's spying program and on urging Congress to investigate this program. A peaceful counter-recruitment group gathered at the Palm Beach (FL) Friends Meetinghouse and was infiltrated and spied on by the Department of Defense (DoD). DoD classified the group as a "credible threat" to military recruitment. FCNL sought to support Florida Friends through mailing their minute of concern to all monthly meetings and posting information about the situation on www.fcnl.org, FCNL's website. FCNL helped to persuade a small group of senators to block proposed legislation that would have rubber-stamped the president's domestic spying program.

Continuing Advocacy on Native American Concerns: FCNL is the only non-native organization with a full-time staff person lobbying in support of Native American concerns on Capitol Hill. Working with tribal communities, other faith-based organizations and advocacy groups, FCNL continued this year to support justice for individual Indian Trust Fund Account Holders in the case that has been championed by Elouise Cobell and supported the reauthorization of the Indian health program.

In March FCNL brought together media representatives with native and non-native leaders to discuss strategies for monitoring and influencing the media and its coverage of national native American issues. "Hear Our Story: Communications and Contemporary Native Americans" was a conference of over 200 Native and non-Native participants. They came together to start a dialogue, build networks, and design strategies for how Native and non-Native people can address the biased, misinformed, and missing coverage of Native Americans in the mainstream media and to counteract negative images and portrayals of Native Americans in popular culture.

We Seek a Community in which Every Person's Potential May be Fulfilled Budget Priorities: For every \$1 spent on diplomacy, international cooperation, and humanitarian and development aid, the U.S. government spends more than \$20 on wars and preparing for war. Lobbying to challenge these federal budget priorities is a key focus of FCNL's work and an increasingly important mechanism for addressing the structural violence of poverty and lack of health care. FCNL continued this year to focus attention on the hefty portion of the federal budget that goes to war through articles in the FCNL Washington Newsletter, a budget priorities flyer, and an online advertisement just before the 2006 tax day, headlined "42 percent of your tax dollars go to war." Participants in the FCNL network wrote more messages to Congress on budget priorities than on any other issue except Iraq.

Immigration: The congressional debate on immigration reform leaned toward regressive, anti-immigrant policies. FCNL felt called to respond with policies to welcome the strangers. We

recalled that Joseph and Mary once took Jesus to a strange land for his safety. We sought to soften the harsh House bill by working with the Senate to develop and support sensible alternatives. FCNL worked with immigrant rights coalitions in Washington and around the country to identify core elements of a bill that should define any effort to frame new immigration laws in this country, including paths to citizenship for people who come to the United States to work and people already living in this country. Our touchstones were the dignity of every person and our view that no person can be “illegal,” because we are all children of God.

We Seek an Earth Restored After visiting FCNL’s newly renovated green building on Capitol Hill, Sen. Jim Jeffords (VT) introduced legislation that would require the federal government to set green environmental and energy efficiency standards for the thousands of federal buildings across the country. The bill gained 11 bipartisan cosponsors before Congress adjourned at the end of September. Though this bill did not pass this Congress, it highlighted the debate on energy dependence and the government’s ability to lead the initiative for “earth-friendly” changes.

Many members of Congress on both sides of the aisle recognize the potential threat posed by climate change, and many are acting individually. However, they still have a long way to go to build a consensus on whether and how to act together. FCNL’s expanded environmental program focuses on ending U.S. oil dependence and mitigating harmful climate change. A variety of bills was introduced on these issues – an important step in furthering the legislative conversation. Grassroots action will help push these issues higher on the Congressional agenda.

Working Together with Friends FCNL continues to rely on and benefit from our roots in the Religious Society of Friends. In the year before a new Congress convenes, FCNL sets its legislative priorities for the next two years. Our grounding in the Religious Society of Friends and our Quaker decision making process of discernment through worship strengthens FCNL’s program. Hundreds of Friends around the country participated in FCNL’s legislative priority setting process in 2006, through yearly meeting appointments to the General Committee and our network of over 700 FCNL contacts in Friends Churches and Quaker meetings around the country. This web of interconnections with Quakers and others also facilitates the sending of tens of thousands of messages to members of Congress every year. FCNL established a Futures Working Group, which is being asked to prayerfully consider how FCNL might envision its witness for the coming decade(s) and how we might strengthen FCNL’s ability to empower a Quaker witness on Capitol Hill.

In 2006, the Friends Committee on National Legislation continued its effective and vigorous advocacy in the nation’s capital for peace and justice. The sustained support of Friends Churches and Quaker meetings, yearly meetings, and tens of thousands of individuals has enabled FCNL’s Quaker witness for over 60 years. Then, as now, Friends have a light to shine in a world of darkness. If we shine our light in the right places, others may see what we have come to know: that love is the first motion; that we can rely on the power of love and the force of truth; that right and just relationships create common security; that every person is a holy place; and that the Earth is a living planet whose survival depends on us, and our fate, on it.

– Joe Volk, Executive Secretary