



2003
Annual Report

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DC Vote 2003 Annual Report

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
DC Vote’s 2003 Successes by the Numbers	4
I. Outreach and Coalition Building	5
1. Engaging DC Vote’s Coalition Partners	5
2. Reaching Out to Different Communities in the Region	6
II. Communications	7
1. Revamping DC Vote’s Website and Database.....	7
2. Educating the Public through “Earned Media”	7
3. Communicating with Our Supporters and the Public	8
III. Advocacy	8
1. Advocating for the Removal of the ‘Lobby’ Prohibition Rider	8
2. Promoting the <i>No Taxation Without Representation Act</i> and Responding to the Davis Proposal	9
3. Promoting a New DC Flag Design.....	10
IV. Financial Support	10
1. Developing and Launching the DC Vote Membership Program	10
2. Connecting with Private Foundations.....	10
3. Honoring DC Vote’s 2003 Champions of Democracy	11
V. Conclusion	12
DC Vote Board of Directors for 2003	13
DC Vote Staff for 2003	13
Special Thanks.....	13

Executive Summary

2003 was a banner year for DC Vote.

DC Vote continued to educate the general public through “earned media” opportunities. As a result of events that we hosted or efforts in which we participated, hundreds of media reports were generated about the DC voting rights issue – the most media coverage in over a generation. DC Vote continued its efforts to engage area residents in the movement. Through our information tables at community events and direct outreach efforts, more than 3,000 people signed our petition and more than 600 joined DC Vote as members. We quadrupled the size of DC Vote’s coalition of organizations working with us on our issue. By the end of the year, twenty-four organizations, both locally and nationally focused, had joined DC Vote’s Coalition for DC Representation in Congress.

We improved considerably the ways in which we communicate with the media, the public, the Congress and our supporters. Our website underwent a complete revision, making it the most comprehensive Internet resource on the DC voting rights issue. Unique visits to our website averaged fewer than 1,000 per month early in the year, but jumped to more than 7,000 per month by the end of the year. In the fall, we integrated our database with our website allowing supporters and interested parties to have ownership of their contact information. This gives DC Vote the ability to assure the accuracy of the information in its database and more easily engage supporters in electronic advocacy campaigns.

With these organizations joining the struggle and with our expanded technological capabilities, DC Vote turned increasingly toward advocating for a solution to DC’s plight. We launched our first targeted, online advocacy effort in the fall. The campaign was designed to allow supporters to let targeted members of Congress know about their opposition to the ‘lobby’ prohibition rider on DC’s budget. We strongly believe District residents should be able to use their own money to advocate for full voting representation in Congress. Hundreds of supporters sent emails and letters to members of Congress and the targeted media outlets we suggested.

Our education and advocacy efforts have increasingly attracted local corporate support. Local restaurants, banks, unions, development companies, law firms, real estate associations, telephone and cable companies, and others supported our Third Annual Champions of Democracy Awards Reception. Individual support was the highest it has been in the three years that DC Vote has held the event. Our growing ties with local community businesses and organizations led to our first ever silent auction which we held at the Champions of Democracy Awards Reception.

In 2004, we will intensify our educational and advocacy campaigns.

Throughout 2003 and with the help of our coalition partners, DC Vote members, and the media, more Americans outside of DC heard news about the disenfranchisement of District residents than ever before. In 2004, DC’s first-in-the-nation presidential primary election proved to be an effective tool for furthering our educational goals. DC Vote proudly joined efforts to let District residents know that it was time for them to ‘Vote for Voting Rights.’ That effort helped to recruit more people to join us in demanding that Congress provide full voting representation for District residents.

Our greatest challenge in 2004 will be with the make-up and passage of a proposal by Representative Tom Davis (R-VA) to give the District a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. Having laid a strong foundation in 2003 and with the continuing help of our supporters, DC Vote will be fully prepared to meet that challenge.

DC Vote's 2003 Successes by the Numbers

- DC Vote's website averaged more than 7,000 unique visitors per month (nearly 300 per day)
- More than 3,000 new petition signers joined the ranks of DC Vote
- More than 600 members and donors contributed to DC Vote
- 15 new coalition partners were added to the DC Vote coalition
- More than 250 media reports were generated by DC Vote on radio, television, the Internet and in print
- 84 members of the House of Representatives and 15 Senators were added as co-sponsors of the *No Taxation Without Representation Act of 2003* (H.R. 1285 and S. 617)
- 12 private businesses and 2 unions joined DC Vote as donors and community partners
- 224 letters and emails were sent to members of Congress in response to our first online grass roots advocacy alert to remove a 'lobby' prohibition rider on the DC appropriations bill
- 17 foundations joined DC Vote for an informational forum in November 2003
- 17 organizations signed a letter to Congress calling for full voting representation for DC
- 1,200 pages of information were included in DC voting rights briefing book

I. Outreach and Coalition Building

1. Engaging DC Vote's Coalition Partners

DC Vote relies on the support of hundreds of volunteers and our coalition partners to pursue our mission – full congressional voting representation for the residents of the District of Columbia. We have been actively engaged with many of our existing partners for years on this issue. DC Vote is now working to re-engage and expand the Coalition for DC Representation in Congress, the group of organizations that we lead in raising awareness about DC's plight.

Four well-established, educational and advocacy organizations – Common Cause, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, and the League of Women Voters of the U.S. – hold seats on DC Vote's Board of Directors and have been important partners in our work since our founding in 1998. In 2002, a number of other organizations – People For the American Way (PFAW), the ACLU of the National Capital Area, and the NAACP – joined our coalition.

In 2003, an increasingly diverse group of organizations – both locally- and nationally-focused – joined DC Vote's Coalition. These groups are extending our reach beyond the District and strengthening our grassroots movement.

Over fifteen of our coalition partners worked with us in the struggle for democracy by signing onto letters sent to Congress by DC Vote urging support for the *No Taxation Without Representation Act of 2003* and requesting the repeal of the DC budget rider prohibiting DC from spending even locally-raised money to 'lobby' for full voting representation in Congress.

Coalition organizations were busy all year with projects of their own to promote democracy for DC. The following examples show how our coalition partners helped DC Vote in 2003:

- Common Cause sent out an action e-mail alert to more than 200,000 of their supporters around the country asking them to advocate for the passage of the *No Taxation Without Representation Act*.
- The Greater Washington Urban League contacted fellow members in Rep. Frelinghuysen's (R-NJ) home congressional district in New Jersey to ask for support with the DC budget 'lobby' prohibition rider advocacy campaign. As a result, the president of the Morris County Urban League sent a letter to the Congressman letting him know that his constituents back home support equal rights for DC residents.
- The Washington, DC Association of REALTORS® (WDCAR) held a "Tea Party" at one of their national meetings to educate their colleagues from around the country about DC's plight. WDCAR and the Greater Washington Commercial Association of REALTORS® (GWCAR) also sponsored the Champions of Democracy Awards and placed advertisements in their newsletters for DC Vote.
- Kappa Alpha Psi made DC voting representation part of their legislative platform when lobbying Congress in 2003. They also passed a resolution officially supporting the movement.

- The Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington sent their own letter to the chairs and ranking members of the DC Appropriations Subcommittee asking that the ‘lobby’ restriction rider be lifted.
- The United Nations Association of the National Capital Area successfully gained support for the issue of DC voting representation from their national association. Requests were sent by the UNA–NCA nationwide to chapter members urging them to get involved in the struggle by telling their own members of Congress to support DC voting representation.
- The United Auto Workers (UAW) included a reference to the DC voting rights issue in their magazine that reaches over 1.3 million members nationwide.
- LCCR wrote a position paper supporting democracy for DC and has posted it on their website.
- DC Appleseed is currently working in partnership with DC Vote to secure funding for a strategic planning process that will include national public opinion research and polling. DC Appleseed and its partners also provide legal analysis for the movement.

Increasingly, DC Vote will look to our Coalition partners, as we shift toward a national public awareness campaign, to help us advocate in Congress for passage of legislation that will bring full congressional voting representation to America’s capital.

2. Reaching Out to Different Communities in Our Region

Additionally, we are reaching out directly to people in the region. Earlier in the year, we used our DC Voting Rights Day Protest and Rally to achieve that purpose. In preparation for that rally, we directly contacted via mail, telephone, and/or in person the following groups:

- All the ANCs and civic neighborhood associations
- Colleges and Universities in DC and student groups on those campus
- High Schools (at 8 schools)
- Churches, synagogues, and mosques (176)
- Black fraternities and sororities (15)
- Taxi cab companies (7)
- Barber shops (nearly 200)

At area high schools, DC Vote speakers discuss the effects of DC’s disenfranchisement with community youth. Speaking engagements at schools, as well as other opportunities in the community to raise public awareness, are often done by DC Vote volunteers who participate in our Speakers Bureau program. DC vote provides our Speakers Bureau volunteers with special educational training on the voting rights movement.

In the second half of the year, we continued to reach out to people through information tables at community and other events. On average, more than 300 people have signed our petition at each of these events and many more picked up material about the DC voting rights issue.

II. Communications

1. Revamping DC Vote's Website and Database

In 2003, we created a completely new website that is continuously updated. The site has more comprehensive information on the issue of DC voting representation than any other website. At the beginning of the year, our website received fewer than 1,000 unique visits per month. As a result of our aggressive "earned-media" campaigns and improved website, DC Vote now receives more than 7,000 unique visits per month. Once our database redesign and website integration was completed, DC Vote launched the interactive components of the website. At the click of a button, people can now send letters directly from our site to members of Congress and the media. The result? Supporters sent more than 220 letters and emails in response to DC Vote's first online grass roots advocacy alert issued on the 'lobby' prohibition rider.

Because of our new technological capabilities, we now enable our supporters to recruit other people, especially those outside DC, to join us as members and advocates.

2. Educating the Public through "Earned Media"

As in other years, we had tremendous success this year generating and/or enhancing news stories (through contact with the media, sharing background information, and providing quotes). Because we do not have the resources to advertise, we look for or create 'earned media' coverage of our issue and activities. We received considerable media coverage around the following activities:

- Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton's Town Hall Meeting
- DC Voting Rights Day Protest and Rally
- First-in-the-Nation Presidential Primary Bill Signing Ceremony
- Mayor Anthony Williams' Bike Ride in "Search of the 51st Star"
- DC Flag Redesign Press Event
- DC's Young Suffragists Rally and Tea Party
- Davis Proposal Discussion
- Online 'Lobby' Rider Advocacy Campaign
- DC's First-in-the-Nation Presidential Primary Election

Our "earned media" effort is working. Taken together, there have been hundreds of media reports on the DC voting rights issue and our organization has appeared in many of them. Consequently, in 2003, millions of people around the country and world learned about DC's disenfranchisement.

DC Vote also launched, for the first time, a mini-advertising campaign that emphasized the fact that the young men and women of DC were fighting the war in Iraq without a vote in Congress. We asked supporters to help DC Vote sponsor programs on WAMU where our sponsorship was recognized with the following announcement: ***"Support for WAMU is provided by DC Vote, working to end taxation without representation for DC residents, including our soldiers from the District, who will be returning from war without a vote in Congress. On the web at dcvote.org."***

The response was overwhelming. We raised the funds needed to keep the ad running for several weeks. After our campaign was launched, nationally syndicated columnist Mark Shields and *Washington Post* political cartoonist Tom Toles incorporated our theme into their work (*while the U.S. is exporting democracy abroad, we should fix it first in our nation's capital*).

3. Communicating with Our Supporters and the Public

In 2003, we continued publication and distribution of our newsletters to over 5,000 people throughout the country. We also added a monthly email bulletin to keep our supporters and stakeholders informed of the latest issues involving DC voting rights. In 2004, we will look for other opportunities to communicate externally.

III. Advocacy

1. Advocating for the Removal of the ‘Lobby’ Prohibition Rider

We worked diligently throughout the year to secure support for our effort to change the ‘lobby’ prohibition rider in the DC appropriations bill so that DC would be able to spend local funds lobbying for voting representation in Congress. Current federal law bars DC from spending any funds in this manner. Beginning in 2002, DC Vote worked with U.S. Senators Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA), and U.S. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) to craft a change in the law. In 2003, Senator DeWine agreed to lift the ban.

The change in law was adopted by the Senate Appropriations Committee and passed by the full U.S. Senate. Unfortunately, Senator DeWine encountered strong resistance from Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), Chair of the House Subcommittee. Rep. Frelinghuysen’s committee retained the old language barring the use of even local funds to lobby for voting representation. His bill passed in the U.S. House. Given the time restraints on passing the Omnibus Bill, (the DC appropriations bill was included in the omnibus package), Rep. Frelinghuysen forced his Senate counterparts to accept the House version of the budget rider.

DC Vote responded by launching our first online grass roots advocacy campaign. More than 220 letters and emails were sent in response to our advocacy alert, with more than 100 sent to Rep. Frelinghuysen. The letters included several from constituents of his home congressional district (11th District - NJ). A letter-to-the-editor written by a DC Vote volunteer who lived in New Jersey’s 11th District before moving to Washington was published in *The Daily Record* of Morris County, the largest printed publication in Rep. Frelinghuysen’s home district. The president of the Urban League of Morris County (who is a long-time friend of Rep. Frelinghuysen) sent a personal letter at the urging of one of our most recent coalition partners, the Greater Washington Urban League.

Roll Call, the most widely read publication on Capitol Hill, also printed an article on November 11, 2003, about our campaign, stating:

“In the meantime, voting-rights advocates have launched a new campaign to influence those House Members and Senators who control the committees charged with oversight of the District.

"The advocacy campaign is led by D.C. Vote, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that promotes Congressional representation for the District.

"Although voting-rights advocates typically focus their activities within Washington, organizers said the new campaign will seek to grow support throughout numerous Congressional districts.

"It hasn't really been done by D.C. advocacy groups at all in the past," explained Ilir Zherka, D.C. Vote's executive director.

"Rather than work with local or state political organizations, Zherka said the 501(c) (3) group will work with national organizations that support its cause, including the NAACP."

The Omnibus Bill was passed by the U.S. House in December 2003 and by the U.S. Senate in January 2004. Irrespective of the outcome, Chairman Frelinghuysen is on notice that DC Vote can and will engage his constituents in our cause for democracy. We plan on re-engaging this fight in 2004.

2. Promoting the *No Taxation Without Representation Act* and Responding to the Davis Proposal

Once we decided as an organization to advocate for a specific bill, it became necessary to have our coalition and other stakeholders agree on a legislative vehicle around which to organize and for which to advocate. DC Vote worked with Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and our coalition partners, especially DC Appleseed, to identify key principles and develop a legal theory in support of a "simple" legislative solution (one that requires only a majority vote of the Congress). That effort led to the development of the *No Taxation Without Representation Act of 2003*. We met with city leaders, including DC City Council Chairman Linda Cropp, DC Mayor Anthony Williams, and others prior to a stakeholders meeting where consensus was achieved in support of the legislation – a consensus that had not been attainable during the prior five years.

After the *No Taxation Without Representation Act of 2003* was introduced in March by U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and Delegate Norton, we began promoting the bill with a letter from DC Vote and 16 of our coalition partners. This was the first time a letter like this had been sent to Congress from DC Vote. We followed that letter with a few others and a series of visits and calls to the Hill. Each time we sent a letter, the number of co-sponsors for the legislation increased.

Our congressional focus shifted, however, when U.S. Representative Tom Davis (R-VA) began discussing the possibility of introducing legislation to provide DC with representation in the House. Instead of promoting the '*No Taxation*' bill, DC Vote began working to ensure that Davis' proposal, when introduced, would take the same approach as the '*No Taxation*' bill by treating DC as if it were a state for purposes of representation in the House. Additionally, we established contact with congressional offices in Utah, a state that is in dispute over the apportionment of House seats and would stand to gain from the passage of legislation by Davis.

3. Promoting a New DC Flag Design

In 2002, the DC City Council passed a bill adding the phrase “No Taxation Without Representation” to the city’s flag and creating a commission to consider different designs.

DC Vote assisted the efforts by making recommendations of possible candidates for the commission. Unfortunately, it took nearly 10 months for members of the commission to be appointed. Once in place, DC Vote testified before the commission and encouraged others to do the same. Those we encouraged to testify were the only witnesses to appear before the commission. Once it adopted two final designs, DC Vote helped the Commission organize and stage a press conference to hand over their report to the City Council. We helped line up speakers for the Council hearing on the adoption of the final design. We also worked with DC attorney, Jack Olender, who pledged funding of new flags for the District. But, despite DC Vote’s best efforts, we suffered from an “11th Hour” conversion by DC City Council Chairman Linda Cropp from proponent to opponent of the change. The DC City Council is now reviewing further options for the flag redesign.

IV. Financial Support

1. Developing and Launching the DC Vote Membership Program

After much discussion over the years, DC Vote launched a membership program in 2003. General membership is \$20, and DC Vote considers anyone who has donated at least \$20 in a calendar year to be a DC Vote member. We expected to recruit about 500 members in 2003. We exceeded that goal with more than 600 people contributing to DC Vote in 2003.

2. Connecting with Private Foundations

DC Vote continues to receive the strong support of the Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation, the Woodbury Fund, and a number of other foundations. The Public Welfare Foundation provided us with a general operating grant for 2004 and the Trellis Fund gave us a project grant to develop a ‘briefing book’ on the movement. In November 2003, these two foundations also co-hosted a panel discussion where DC Vote provided a ‘State of the Movement’ presentation to fifteen other local foundations.

The following foundations provided support to DC Vote in 2003:

- The Community Foundation for the National Capital Area
- Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation
- The Proteus Fund
- Shefa Fund
- Trellis Fund
- The Woodbury Fund

3. Honoring DC Vote's 2003 Annual Champions of Democracy

DC Vote was proud to hold its Third Annual Champions of Democracy Awards Reception on Tuesday, October 14, 2003, at the City Museum of Washington, DC. The awards reception is DC Vote's most significant way of honoring individuals and organizations that have shown a commitment and dedication to civil and human rights. Our honorees also show a deep dedication to bringing full democracy to Washington, DC. Our generous supporters and friends made the 2003 Awards Reception a great success.

Honorees for DC Vote's 2003 Champions of Democracy Awards included:

- **Honorable Walter E. Washington**

First elected mayor of Washington, DC, and the first African-American mayor of any major American city

- **Mr. & Mrs. Phil & Jan Fenty**

Local community heroes, lifelong supporters of equal rights for DC and longtime supporters of DC Vote

- **Jack H. Olender, Esq.**

Washington philanthropist and major advocate for full congressional voting rights for the District of Columbia.

With the theme, "**Celebrating Our Communities – United for Equal Rights,**" this year's Awards Reception featured a "**Taste of the Community**" where local restaurants provided an array of delicacies and national beverage distributors provided drinks. DC Vote held its First Annual Silent Auction where individuals and businesses donated items or services to help DC Vote raise funds. DC Vote is grateful to all the volunteers, sponsors, underwriters and friends who helped make this year's Awards Reception a memorable celebration of the movement.

The following businesses and organizations provided major support for the 2003 Champions of Democracy Awards Reception:

- Austin Grill Restaurant
- BB&T Bank
- Best Cellars Wine
- Cake Love Bakery
- Capital City Brewing Company
- Capitol Community News, Inc.
- Chef Geoff's
- Comcast, Washington, DC
- Dream Nightclub and Restaurant
- Georgia Brown's Restaurant
- Greater Washington Commercial Association of REALTORS®
- Grey Goose Vodka
- Ice Kristals, Inc.
- Jenner & Block LLP
- The John Akridge Companies
- Kelly/Editors Press Inc.
- Love Café
- Nixon Peabody LLP
- Red Bull
- Ruth's Chris Steak House Restaurant

- Saki Restaurant
- Washington, DC Association of REALTORS®
- United Food & Commercial Workers Local 400
- Verizon, Washington, DC

The following individuals provided major support for the 2003 Champions of Democracy Awards Reception:

- Jason Burnett
- Richard & Lois England
- David & Resa Eppler
- Royal Kennedy Rodgers
- Eric Koenig & Amy Schwartz
- Lloyd Leonard
- R. Robert Linowes
- Samuel & Shelvie McCoy
- Charles & Jeanette Miller
- Jack & Lovell Olender
- Cynthia Robbins
- Daniel & Jane Solomon
- Bruce Spiva & Anna Gelpert
- Joe Sternlieb & Linda Singer
- Kerry Stowell

V. Conclusion

DC Vote had considerable success in 2003 with a new, limited staff. We continued to engage the local community and area businesses, expanded our 'earned media' campaign, and began advocating in the Congress.

In 2004, the time is ripe to advance the DC voting rights struggle. Together with our coalition partners and through our education efforts, we have laid a strong foundation for activism and advocacy on this issue and have increased public pressure for a resolution. Members of Congress have responded. For the first time in 30 years, we are poised to help advance congressional legislation addressing the disenfranchisement of DC residents.

In the long-term, we will continue pursuing a national campaign that is targeted, non-partisan, and designed to educate and persuade swing voters in the Congress to support full voting representation. Our collective efforts will provide the fuel for a successful campaign that fulfills the promise of American democracy and achieves full voting representation for residents of the District of Columbia.

DC Vote Board of Directors for 2003

Daniel Solomon – *Chair*

Director, The Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen Foundation

Joshua Wyner – *Vice Chair*

Chief Program Officer,
Jack Kent Cooke Foundation

Cynthia Robbins – *Treasurer*

Vice-President of Development,
Edison Schools

Mark Schaefer – *Secretary*

United Methodist Chaplain,
American University

Johnny Barnes

Executive Director,
ACLU - National Capital Area

Lisa Bolden

President, HealthCapital Partners

William Fitzgerald

Chairman, Independence Federal Savings Bank

Scott Harshbarger

Corporate Governance Partner
Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane, LLP

Wade Henderson

Executive Director,
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

Aviva Kempner

Filmmaker and Writer

Kay Maxwell

President, League of Women Voters

Samuel McCoy

Consultant

Charles Miller

Partner, Covington & Burling

Chellie Pingree

President & CEO, Common Cause

Kathryn Schmidt

Retired Liaison, League of Women Voters

Walter Smith

Executive Director, DC Appleseed

Bruce Spiva

Partner, Jenner & Block

Joseph Sternlieb

Deputy Director, Downtown Business Improvement District

Organizations listed for identification purposes only.

DC Vote Staff for 2003

Ilir Zherka

Executive Director

Kimberly Bassett

Program Director

Chris Belisle

Executive Assistant

Kevin Kiger

Communications Director

Special Thanks

DC Vote thanks the numerous supporters and volunteers who gave so much of their time and energy to DC Vote in 2003. The following individuals deserve special thanks for going above and beyond the call of duty:

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Monique McDowell
Susan Murany

Catherine Oleksiw
Sarah Pokempner
Frank H. Rich Sr.
Mark David Richards