



2007 Annual Report

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Executive Summary

For nearly 10 years, DC Vote has been at the helm of an intensive campaign to bring voting rights to the residents of the District of Columbia. Over the course of the past two years, this campaign has taken enormous strides. The DC House Voting Rights Act (H.R. 1905, S. 1257) passed the House with 241 votes due to enormous pressure by DC Vote and our coalition. Fifty-seven senators supported a motion to bring the bill before the Senate, an enormous achievement for a movement that most people discounted just a few years ago. To get to those two incredible votes, our organization directly lobbied Congress, got thousands of people around the country to contact their representatives and senators, and educated millions of people through our public awareness campaign.

I. Advocacy and Outreach

1. The DC Voting Rights Act

DC Vote has played a key role in the passage of the DC Voting Rights Act (H.R. 1905) in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 19, 2007. As the bill moved through five committee hearings and two committee votes, DC Vote worked behind the scenes with members of Congress and their staffs to prompt action, answer questions and overcome obstacles to progress. Just as importantly, DC Vote provided leadership and informational resources to the 72 organizations in the DC Vote Coalition, which mobilized supporters across the country to take part in the debate over the bill. As opponents of the DC Voting Rights Act put forward misleading arguments about the constitutionality of the bill, DC Vote provided accurate information to members of Congress and the media. We recruited 25 legal scholars and 25 elected officials from across the ideological spectrum to sign letters to Congress supporting our position.

DC Vote also orchestrated the following congressional outreach events:

- Organized four briefings attended by more than 60 members of Congress and their staff
- Mobilized more than 500 volunteers on February 15, 2007, to visit nearly every congressional office
- Mobilized more than 200 additional volunteers from May through September to conduct continuing congressional visits
- Enabled 9,506 people to send letters of support to Congress about our issue through our Congress Web feature on www.dcvote.org
- Held two national Senate call-in days that enabled more than 6,000 people to contact their senators and give their support for DC voting rights and the DC Voting Rights Act
- Partnered with MoveOn.org and Care2.org to ask over 50,000 online activists to contact their members of Congress regarding our issue

2. Voting Rights March

Our goal with the Voting Rights March (VRM) on April 16, 2007, was to educate and engage the public generally. To recruit supporters for this historic event, DC Vote engaged 32 members of our coalition to sponsor the VRM. An entirely new Web site, www.VotingRightsMarch.org, was created to accommodate the needs of the VRM and disseminate information. The Web site received 143,567 visits between March and December. We held two organizing meetings per week in February and March and disseminated over 50,000 flyers, posters and handouts in various neighborhoods to recruit marchers. We did outreach to dozens of colleges, universities and schools, resulting in huge student turn out for the VRM, and collaborated with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights to engage local and national coalition organizations to communicate with their membership about the VRM.

We implemented a strategic advertising campaign in support of the VRM, including ads on local and national political blogs and in the Washington Post, Washington City Paper, East of the River, Hill Rag, DC North, the Afro-American and other local newspapers. We also worked with the Office of the Secretary of the District of Columbia and the Council Chairman to design and erect a banner for the VRM at the Wilson Building, and with ClearChannel Outdoor to design and post more than 40 billboards ads around the city in support of the VRM. Comcast of the District broadcasted interviews about DC voting rights with Mayor Fenty and Ilir Zherka; each interview ran daily for one month.

Ultimately, more than 9,000 Washingtonians signed up to march on April 16 and approximately 5,000 did so despite gale-force winds that closed schools, cancelled sporting events and delayed flights across Washington. Our success with the VRM helped propel the DC Voting Rights Act to a greater than expected margin of victory in the House and better than expected prospects for passage in the Senate.

3. Re-Engaging Students

Student outreach continued to expand in 2007. DC Vote staff reached over 1,000 students through speaking events, online outreach, and Students for DC Vote initiatives. Presentations were made to over 250 students of all levels, ranging from the 3rd grade class of Two Rivers Charter School to teenage City Year participants and college students from Brigham Young University. We worked with student participants in the American University Freshman Service Experience to collect nearly 250 petition signatures, distribute over 100 "I Demand The Vote!" signs to local businesses and visit 21 representatives and 27 senators to express their support for the DC Voting Rights Act. Our interns and staff maintained and expanded our online outreach tools including our Facebook and MySpace accounts, which now have more than 500 members each. Students for DC Vote continued to evolve with a well-attended Summer Sendoff at Busboys and Poets, an organizational event at a Nationals Game, and a revision of its supporting materials. We recently received a significant grant from the CrossCurrents Foundation for student outreach and hired a new Outreach Associate to implement a two-year amplified student outreach effort. With this effort we will strengthen our student outreach, engaging DCPS and charter school students through the use of our Lesson Plan for Teachers and a letter-writing initiative.

4. Reaching Out in Our Communities

DC Vote increased its presence at community events, working to reach out to a broad and diversified group of people to create interest and engagement in DC voting rights. Volunteers and staff represented the organization at community festivals including Unifest, Adams Morgan Day, Capital Pride, H Street Festival, and Fiesta DC, where we acquired new members from across the city. We made presentations at the meetings of civic organizations throughout DC, including the Anacostia Coordinating Council, American Federation of Government Employees, the Ward 4 Democrats and a local chapter of Veterans of Foreign Wars. As a result of our outreach efforts we were able to turn out approximately 5,000 attendees at the Voting Rights March, more than 750 at our Lobby Day events on Capitol Hill, and hundreds of others at our events throughout the year. This year we also collaborated with DCTV, the city's public access cable channel, to record public service announcements from DC residents that were aired throughout the city.

5. Working in Partnership with City Officials

Throughout the year DC Vote collaborated with local officials to create a unified political effort in support of DC voting rights. In February we helped to organize a press conference in which the newly-elected Mayor Fenty announced his strong support of DC voting rights. Similarly, we have worked with the many new City Councilmembers throughout the year to help promote DC voting rights. The mayor and numerous members of the Council attended the Voting Rights March in April and encouraged their constituents to march as well. More recently, two members of the DC City Council, in collaboration with DC Vote, recorded questions for Republican presidential candidates that they submitted to the YouTube/CNN Debate. DC Vote also has assisted the City Council in promoting hearings on legislation that would place an electronic "tax ticker" on the Wilson Building and new Nationals Stadium displaying the ever-increasing amount of federal tax dollars paid by disenfranchised Washingtonians – "Dollars without Democracy".

6. Working with Our Coalition

The coalition welcomed more than a half dozen new members this year, including the Center for Non-Profit Advancement, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Jews United for Justice. Our coalition members continued to provide outstanding support with increasing membership and introducing fresh resources and new viewpoints to our efforts. The partnership of organizations like the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, People for the American Way and others was critical for successful planning and execution of advocacy efforts, including congressional lobby days, phone banking, letter-writing campaigns, local parade appearances, and the Voting Rights March on April 16. All of this was achieved via weekly coalition meetings and conference calls designed to maintain consistent communications, allow for strategic planning, and coordinate resources. This year also marked the recognition of DC Vote as an official member of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. As efforts continue to expand, ties with our coalition partners will be crucial to our success.

7. Creating and Utilizing a Pro Bono Force of Lobbyists

Due to limited resources, we created a virtual task force of pro bono lobbyists that included three members of Jack Kemp's firm, a former Tom DeLay staffer (paid for by LCCR), two former Senator Hatch staffers, and two DC residents who donate and interact with GOP office holders. Staff of the Federal City Council, which joined our coalition this year, augmented this team. Lastly, Mayor Fenty and his staff worked in concert with our lobby task force, as did staff of Senators Joe Lieberman and Patrick Leahy, Representatives Tom Davis and Chris Cannon and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton. LCCR's lead lobbyist and Vice President, Nancy Zirkin, co-chaired the lobby task force with our Executive Director. The group met weekly by phone and occasionally in person. The group of lobbyists provided unprecedented access to House and Senate staff and to the principals as well. We had intelligence directly from the key people involved and in the case of a number of House members and Senators, were able to sway people to vote for the bill. The dollar value of this type of assistance is more than \$1 million. We are confident that we will be able to bring this group together again for our advocacy push in 2008.

II. Communications

1. Providing Information Electronically

Our Web site, www.dcvote.org, has become the definitive online resource for information about our issue. The DC Vote Web site attracted 1,385,237 total visits during the calendar year 2007, averaging 4,074 visits per day (this is compared to 814,903 visits and an average of 2,232 per day in the calendar year 2006). This represents an increase in traffic of 42 percent. In July 2007, we reached an average of more than 5,800 unique visits per day. People downloaded more than 100,000 copies of our fact sheets and reports, including 619 copies of our report on the connection between DC voting rights and public health in the District of Columbia (funded by the Consumer Health Foundation). In addition, we sent dozens of information alerts to 10,000 online activists and monthly bulletins to our broader e-mail list, which expanded to more than 27,000 addresses as a result of the Voting Rights March and a partnership with Care2.com.

2. Educating the General Public

From media coverage and an online Lesson Plan for Teachers to interactive tools and historical materials, there is little doubt that DC Vote's award-winning Web site serves as the most comprehensive source of information on the DC voting rights movement. Visitors can view our public awareness videos, download educational posters, read the latest media coverage, learn about upcoming events and keep up-to-date on the most current information available on our issue. Whether it is their first exposure to the issue or they are just looking for more information, reporters, opinion leaders and other influential people use our Web site to stay in touch with the DC voting rights movement.

In 2006, DC Vote received a grant from the DC government to conduct an intensive public awareness campaign around the issue of DC voting rights. We conducted groundbreaking

public opinion research (including polls, focus groups and individual interviews) that identified the messages most likely to motivate members of key demographic groups to take action on our issue. Using this research, we produced four videos featuring “everyday Washingtonians” speaking directly about the impact of disenfranchisement. According to Medialink News Service, these videos aired at least 601 times in 82 markets across the country reaching 132 million viewers (many more stations likely carried the videos than Medialink was able to track). DC Vote also produced two “everyday Washingtonian” ads, one featuring firefighters and the other an elementary school teacher. We displayed the ads at four high-traffic bus shelters and three Metro stations for nine months.

3. Using “Earned Media” to Educate the General Public

DC Vote has become a trusted source of information for editors and reporters at major local and national newspapers and political journals. In the past year, journalists from the *Washington Post*, the *Nation*, *Roll Call*, the *Washingtonian*, *DCist* and several other publications regularly contacted us to inform their reporting as the DC Voting Rights Act moved through the legislative process. Further, we cultivated new relationships with journalists at the *New York Times*, where columnist Bob Herbert published the first opinion column on our issue in the NYT since the 1970s. The NYT editorial board also published editorials strongly in favor of DC voting rights. In all, DC Vote influenced the publication of more than 50 unsigned editorials in favor of voting rights in newspapers such as the *LA Times*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *U.S. News and World Report*, the *Washington Examiner*, the *Journal-Courier* (KY), the *Deseret Morning News*, *Seattle-Post Intelligencer* and the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

Additionally, DC Vote issued 50 media releases in the past year and was quoted or mentioned in nearly 200 unique news stories. Approximately half of these stories appeared in publications that reach an audience outside of DC, such as the Associated Press, Reuters, Gannett News Service, *Christian Science Monitor*, *International Herald Tribune*, *National Journal*, *Congressional Quarterly*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Financial Times* and National Public Radio. The Voting Rights March on April 16 was an especially effective “earned media” strategy, producing positive stories over consecutive days in a variety of national publications as well as in-depth broadcast segments on the CBS Evening News and the News Hour with Jim Lehrer.

III. Financial Support

1. Raising Development to New Heights

We have achieved considerable success this year in fundraising. We received an unprecedented grant of \$250,000 from the Public Welfare Foundation. The Meyer Foundation has increased its support this year and has instituted a challenge to other local funders to do the same. The Trellis Fund met that challenge with a two-year grant of \$85,000 a year. We also received renewal grants from most of the other foundations that support us. We continue to raise significant funds through our Champions of Democracy Awards Reception. Our goal in 2007 was to raise \$175,000, and current indications show that we will raise more than \$185,000. We also raised more than \$100,000 in individual

contributions, including major gifts. Lastly, the DC government approved a \$500,000 grant for the second year in a row (we received \$500,000 in 2006 as well), and we have asked the DC government to set aside \$1 million in the District's 2009 budget.

Conclusion

For nearly 10 years, DC Vote has been at the helm of an intensive campaign to bring voting rights to the residents of the District of Columbia. Over the course of the past two years, this campaign has taken enormous strides. The DC House Voting Rights Act (H.R. 1905, S. 1257) passed the House with 241 votes due to enormous pressure by DC Vote and our coalition. Fifty-seven senators supported a motion to bring the bill before the Senate, an enormous achievement for a movement that most people discounted just a few years ago. To get to those two incredible votes, our organization directly lobbied Congress, got thousands of people around the country to contact their representatives and senators, and educated millions of people through our public awareness campaign.