



2008 Annual Report

**DC Vote 2008 Annual Report
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I. Executive Summary

In 2008, DC Vote worked to build upon our success of the House passage of the DC Voting Rights Act and led the effort to gain passage of the bill through the Senate. In September 2007, we succeeded in securing majority support in the Senate, 57-42. Unconscionably, a minority of Senators launched a filibuster of the bill and continue to block its passage today. As a result, DC Vote expanded its programs to end the Senate filibuster of the DC Voting Rights Act. We broadened our public awareness campaign to include a greater focus on work in the states while maintaining constant media engagement, building our local and national coalition, growing our network of individual citizen advocates and strengthening other DC voting rights advocacy activities.

II. Communications

1. Public Awareness Campaign

Toward the end of 2007, DC Vote developed plans to intensify the public awareness campaign by taking the issue of DC voting rights on the road. Beginning in January 2008, DC Vote staff traveled to New Hampshire, Montana, Oregon and Mississippi to meet with constituents, media and legislators. These trips garnered significant media coverage, including a number of positive editorials, and laid strong foundations with new allies in the home states of Senators key to passage of the DC Voting Rights Act.

In July 2008, DC Vote staff accompanied a delegation from the DC City Council to the National Conference of State Legislators in New Orleans. During the conference, we co-hosted a reception with the DC City Council for legislators from across the country; distributed thousands of educational flyers, stickers and buttons; met one-on-one with state legislators from across the country and collected hundreds of petition signatures. We also received pledges from 70 state legislators to support DC voting rights.

At the Democratic National Convention in August, staff and volunteers led canvassing groups; co-hosted a Taxation Without Representation rally at the Denver Mint; handed out thousands of flyers, t-shirts, buttons, and stickers to promote awareness of DC voting rights; participated in a number of co-sponsored events and receptions and presented to eight state delegations from across the country. Additionally, DC Vote premiered its new music video for the song "Demand the Vote" prior to Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton's speech at the Pepsi Center.

DC Vote staff also traveled to the Republican National Convention where we canvassed with volunteers in the Twin Cities and worked with DC delegates to spread the message of DC voting rights. DC Vote staff and volunteers distributed thousands of flyers, stickers, buttons and t-shirts to convention attendees in an effort to educate people about DC's denial of democracy.

In total, DC Vote and our coalition partners' presence at the DNC and RNC yielded more than 45 media stories about DC Vote.

2. Web Site and Online Communications

An important component of our Public Awareness Campaign is our award-winning Web site www.dcvote.org. The frequently updated site serves as the definitive resource of information on the issue. We continually add advocacy tools, media coverage and, recently, new posts to our “DC Vote on the Road” blog. In 2007, we attracted 1.4 million visits to the Web site, compared to 811,527 visits during the same period in the prior year—an increase of 73 percent. The media frequently report back to us that our Web site served as an important source of information as they created their stories and checked facts.

In 2008, the Library of Congress requested permission to archive the DC Vote Web site as an important source of information on an issue of significance in American civics and politics.

3. Media Engagement

Encouraged by activities under DC Vote’s public awareness campaign, media outlets nationwide covered the issue of DC voting rights during the past year. Two DC Vote media successes of special note in the past year were the DC Vote Tea Party—a commemoration of the 234th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party—and our activities at the Democratic and Republican Conventions. The *Washington Post* ran a photo of the tea party on their front page which was tied to an excellent article in the front of the Metro section. Similarly, the *Washington Post*, *Washington Times* and *Roll Call* wrote about our presence at the conventions.

Behind the scenes, DC Vote successfully encourages the *Post* editorial staff to highlight the denial of democracy in DC by linking the issue to current events, such as the DC quarter proposal to the U.S. Mint and Maryland’s potential loss of congressional representation with Congressman Wynn’s resignation. In addition to suggesting ideas for editorials, DC Vote also provides the *Post* editorial staff with information for these pieces. Since September 2007, the *Post* has written six positive editorials in which they call upon the Senate to end its filibuster of the DC Voting Rights Act.

4. Television Advertising

DC Vote enlisted the services of the CW (WDCW-DC 50) television network to produce a four-month advertising campaign aimed at engaging local supporters.

At the heart of the campaign is a 30-second commercial centered on the theme of “Let Washington Vote.” Using DC Vote volunteers as cast members, we created a commercial that highlights DC’s lack of a voice and a vote in Congress. The commercial aired 40 times per week for four months and was aimed at engaging new DC voting rights supporters from diverse age ranges and backgrounds. Additionally, we had a DC Vote banner ad on trenDC.com—the CW network’s blog focused on DC events and activities—and a billboard ad on the CW bus.

The commercial, coupled with the banner ad and bus billboard, reached millions of people in the District, Maryland and Virginia. To reinforce the “Let Washington Vote” message, we

added a home page feature to our Web site where people can join DC Vote and become a part of the movement for DC voting rights.

5. Print Advertising

We used strategically-placed print ads in local and national publications to spread the message of DC voting rights. One print ad campaign focused on DC's veterans and fallen soldiers and was featured in two full-page placements in *Roll Call* and *The Hill*, as well as half-page ads in special DNC and RNC convention preview guides. With a combined total circulation of more than 60,000 copies, the ad reached more than 100,000 readers, many of whom work in congressional offices.

The veterans and fallen soldiers print ad was the centerpiece of a joint press conference we held with the DC City Council on July 15. A full-size poster version of the ad was later used by Delegate Norton during an address on the House floor and was seen by millions on C-SPAN.

We were also successful at using the veterans and fallen soldiers ad in media and outreach efforts leading up to our November 11 Veterans Day Rally on Capitol Hill. Attended by nearly 300 people, the rally highlighted the service and sacrifice made by DC's young men and women in the military while bringing greater attention to the denial of democracy that DC's veterans experience at home.

6. Viral Animation and Music Video

DC Vote worked with a local firm to design a 60 second animation to engage and educate constituents of the states who do not know about the issue of DC voting rights. We used this new format to tell the story of DC voting rights in a humorous yet compelling way. The ultimate goal was to have a cutting-edge animation circulated by the public to friends, family and colleagues to yield a "viral" effect, reaching tens of thousands of viewers.

As part of the campaign, DC Vote launched a microsite to host this newly-created animated video designed to educate people about DC voting rights. The "Dr. Bill Show" was a creative, educational animation which informed viewers about DC's denial of democracy. We promoted the animation on our own Web site and through blog ads on targeted sites. It was viewed by more than 26,000 people and created more than 11 million impressions on national sites such as Dailykos.com, Talkingpointsmemo.com, Wonkette.com and others.

DC Vote also had the opportunity to enlist the help of local artist Joe L. Da Vessel to create a song to educate people about DC voting rights. This go-go song, called "Demand the Vote," has been a huge hit with our supporters and tells the story of DC's denial of democracy in an entertaining, creative format. We also created a music video to accompany the song. The video features more than 100 DC residents, including elected officials Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), DC City Council Chairman Vincent Gray and the DC Shadow Delegation. A preview of the video premiered at the DNC in August, reaching a national audience of millions, and the full version is featured on our Web site, YouTube and on trenDC.com. More than 3,000 people viewed the video via DC Vote's Web site alone—making it DC Vote's most successful online video to date.

III. Advocacy and Outreach

1. Coalition Partnerships

DC Vote continued to increase the number of coalition partners and local supporters involved in the DC voting rights movement. In 2007, twenty new organizations joined the DC Vote coalition, which now includes more than 80 local and national organizations. Additionally, in late 2007, DC Vote became an official member of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the most prestigious and influential civil rights organization in the country.

2. Outreach Events

DC Vote organized a number of successful community outreach and advocacy events. In addition to the DC Vote Tea Party mentioned earlier, more than a dozen veterans living in DC attended our Veterans Rally and Lobby Day on Capitol Hill and visited the offices of fellow veterans, Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Chuck Hagel (R-NE) and John Warner (R-VA).

On Tax Day, April 15, 2008, more than 30 volunteers joined DC Vote staff for a day of activities. Activists distributed more than 2,000 postcards and wooden coins to pedestrians in high-traffic areas—from Metro stops to the National Post Office. Pedestrians received a postcard with information about DC's denial of congressional voting rights affixed with a wooden "DC Quarter" imprinted with a "Taxation Without Representation" design. DC Vote's Tax Day activities were featured in the *Washington Post*, *DCist* and *Roll Call*.

Throughout 2008, members of DC Vote's outreach team were out in the community meeting one-on-one with thousands of people at local events, including: the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Parade, Jews United for Justice Annual Labor Seder, Capital Pride Festival, Unifest, All-Soul Picnic, Congressional Black Caucus, Black Pride Festival, Campus Progress National Conference, Fourth of July Palisades Parade and Fiesta DC. DC Vote staff distributed thousands of informational flyers, postcards, buttons, stickers and t-shirts at each event to reinforce our message.

3. Student Outreach

Our Student Outreach Program continues to grow. During the 2007-2008 academic year, DC Vote's outreach associate visited more than 15 classrooms across the city. These visits—to public, charter and private schools—translated into grade-appropriate lessons on DC voting rights to more than 350 students. Through our outreach to local schools, we expanded our information database to include more than 30 teachers.

We also achieved a breakthrough by integrating the DC voting rights lesson plan into the DC Public Schools' high school social studies curriculum. The new supplement to the textbook used by all DCPS 12th grade DC History classes, *City of Magnificent Intentions*, now includes text and pictures about the recent history of the DC voting rights movement.

In addition to engaging local university students, DC Vote staff met with students and student groups on seven campuses in Montana and Oregon—increasing the scope of the national Students for DC Vote network.

IV. Development and Fundraising

1. Grants, Foundation Support and Events

We have achieved considerable success this year in fundraising. We received a two-year grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and a two-year grant from the Ford Foundation. In spite of early indications that they would not be able to fund DC Vote again after their generous grant to support the Voting Rights March in 2007, the Public Welfare Foundation gave DC Vote another grant in 2008. The CrossCurrents Foundation increased their grant in 2008 from 2007. We also received renewal grants from most of the other foundations that support DC Vote's work.

We continue to raise significant funds through our Champions of Democracy Awards event. In October 2008, we honored DC Vote co-founder Daniel Solomon, in our first-ever seated dinner reception which was attended by nearly 500 guests. Our goal in 2008 was to raise \$220,000 and we exceeded that goal by more than \$50,000.

We also raised more than \$100,000 in individual contributions and major gifts, and received a \$500,000 grant from the DC government—the third grant awarded by the District government.

2. Awards

DC Vote is proud to have received a number of awards and honors in 2008, including:

- Ronald H. Brown Foundation Award for Civil Rights Leadership
- Whitney M. Young Jr. Community Service Award from the Greater Washington Urban League awarded to DC Vote Executive Director Ilir Zherka
- Inclusion in the 2008-2009 Catalogue for Philanthropy: Greater Washington

V. Conclusion

With the inauguration of a new President and the potential for newly-elected members of Congress in 2009, DC Vote is looking ahead to a pivotal year for the movement for DC voting rights. We will continue to build upon our critical work in the states, our outreach to the local community and media and our solid foundation of support from our coalition, volunteers, donors and elected officials to create a successful campaign to pass the DC Voting Rights Act in the 111th Congress.