



2009 Annual Report

**DC Vote 2009 Annual Report
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Executive Summary

DC Vote is at a historic moment in the movement for democracy in the nation's capital. Because of our hard work over the past 10 years, District residents are at the precipice of achieving full voting rights in the House of Representatives. The DC Voting Rights Act (DC VRA) passed in the Senate in February 2009, marking the first time in 31 years that DC voting rights legislation passed in the Senate.

Unfortunately, the DC VRA stalled in the House due to a gun amendment attached at the last minute in the Senate by Senator John Ensign (R-NV). The Ensign amendment would eviscerate DC's gun control laws and take local control away from DC elected leaders. DC Vote rejected the amendment along with our allies on the City Council and within our coalition. In direct response to this most recent obstacle, we: visited pro-gun House Democrats multiple times in support of a "clean bill;" traveled to the home district of Representative Travis Childers (D-MS), the amendment's author in the House; and launched hard-hitting advertisements in Nevada, Ensign's home state.

Also in 2009, DC Vote: expanded our mission; launched a new *I Am DC* campaign; campaigned for 'Taxation Without Representation' license plates on the presidential limo; hosted Students for DC Vote speak outs and action days; engaged hundreds of local residents in lobby days, community festivals and as volunteers; and chose DC Vote's next campaign – steps to full democracy and statehood.

2009 Benchmarks

- Individuals attending Hill advocacy days and rallies: 223
- Congressional offices visited: 201
- High-profile individuals and organizations who wrote letters to Congress: 49
- Lobby days: 3
- Articles, editorials, newscasts and blog posts about DC democracy: 566
- Events that DC Vote spoke at, recruited for or hosted: 131
- Students reached: 500+
- Petitions supporting the DC VRA collected: 13,437
- Letters to Congress generated through our Web site alone: 5,319
- Calls generated in 8 hours on February 23, 2009 (the day before the Senate vote): 4,313
- Calls generated in emergency call-in **hour** before the vote on the Ensign amendment: 389
- Yea Votes in the Senate for the DC VRA: 61
- Senate Democrats who voted for the Ensign amendment: 22

I. Advocacy and Outreach

1. The DC House Voting Rights Act

DC Vote serves as the educational, grassroots and informational hub of the DC voting rights movement.

In 2009, we worked to educate and advocate for the DC Voting Rights Act as it went through the legislative process. Using tactics that have proven useful in the past, we organized our supporters to contact members of Congress about this legislation through call-in days, letter-writing campaigns and face-to-face advocacy. Complementing the work of our individual supporters, we also engaged our coalition partners and pro bono lobbyists to educate members of Congress and their staff, gather intelligence and advocate for enactment.



DC Vote provided key support to Congress and elected officials. DC Vote consistently responded to requests from elected officials for talking points on questions from the press, banners and other materials on voting rights and speakers for congressional hearings. As soon as Congress scheduled hearings or markups of the bill, we moved quickly to recruit and organize legal, grassroots and organizational speakers. We wrote and produced various documents to educate Representatives and their staff, such as fact sheets and legal background materials. Working with our coalition partners, we coordinated advocacy letters signed by dozens of high-profile individuals and organizations. By creating and circulating this multitude of documents, the strongest constitutional and historical arguments rose to the top and our friends in Congress, the media and coalition organizations repeated them, creating a consistent message in many quarters.

After the Ensign amendment stalled the DC Voting Rights Act this summer, DC Vote was the primary voice providing optimism for the DC voting rights movement. We were one of the few voices in the press explaining that the bill was still alive and providing supporters with specific action steps they could take. DC Vote also worked behind the scenes to find creative ways to deal with the gun amendment and move the bill forward. This is a role we will continue to play in 2010.

2. Outreach to the President

Our new president offers the first possibility in eight years that the DC VRA will be signed rather than vetoed. To capitalize on that possibility and to energize our supporters, we initiated a postcard campaign asking President Obama to act swiftly on the bill once it reaches his desk. Using printed and online postcards and social networking tools such as Facebook, we collected over 7,000 petitions to add to the 40,000 names on similar petitions that we've collected over the last several years.

In January, we took advantage of the influx of visitors to Washington, DC during the presidential inauguration. We secured premium ad space in the *Washington Post's* inaugural edition at an extremely competitive price. The issue was read by nearly three

million readers and will remain in households across the country as a souvenir of this historic event.

We also organized a mini-campaign to ask President Obama to change the license plates on the presidential limo to the ones that proclaim 'Taxation Without Representation.' We repeated the message directly to the media, to opinion leaders and to the administration. Despite the local popularity of this specific issue, DC Vote was the only organization communicating the request directly to the administration.

3. Engaging Local Residents

Our work in the community to engage activists and educate the public continues to be a cornerstone of our work. In April, we held a "Ballots Not Bullets Rally" to protest attempts in the House to attach a gun amendment to the DC VRA. More than 75 supporters joined us for a lunchtime rally on the Hill. Speakers included Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Paul Helmke of the Brady Campaign and Maudine Cooper of the Greater Washington Urban League. We distributed informational cards on the gun amendment proposal and garnered excellent media attention.



As is our annual tradition, DC Vote reached thousands of supporters and broadened our network through our outreach at summer festivals including: the National Black L.U.V. Festival, Palisades Parade, Adams Morgan Day Festival, Barracks Row Festival, Fiesta DC, Stone Soul Picnic and the H Street Festival. We collected 1,670 petition signatures through direct interactions, distributed literature, engaged dozens of volunteers and recruited new members to the cause.

4. National Targeted Campaign: Mississippi

Our 2008 strategy of taking our campaign to the states proved so effective that we revived it this year to bring energy to the DC voting rights movement after the Ensign amendment stalled the DC VRA. Staff traveled to Mississippi in August 2009 to raise awareness among local residents that Representative Travis Childers (D-MS) is spending time in Washington, DC legislating for DC residents rather than working for Mississippi. This message resounded strongly in both Tupelo, Mississippi and Washington, DC. Mississippians were appalled to learn that their leaders engaged in partisan politics for issues unrelated to them and their needs. **Washingtonians loved that DC Vote stood up for the District and went after national politicians who meddled in our local affairs.**

We met with one local leader, Henry Perry, who was highlighted in an Associated Press story:

Not until [DC Vote] visited Perry in Mississippi did he learn that District of Columbia residents pay taxes and serve in the military, but don't have a vote in Congress.

"I think it's really a disgrace that they're denied that right," said Perry, president of the Teamsters Local Union No. 667 in Memphis, which also has members in Mississippi. "I was kind of shocked."

He fired off a letter to Rep. Travis Childers, D-Miss., who has led a drive to repeal D.C. gun limits. Perry told Childers that DC residents have the right to elect their own officials to act in their interests. He also urged Childers to pass the voting rights bill without "harmful amendments."

5. Student Outreach

Students for DC Vote provided opportunities for high school and college students to help educate their communities about DC voting rights. During DC Emancipation Week at the True Reformer Building, Students for DC Vote hosted Project S.T.A.N.D. (Students Together Advocating for National Democracy). This event showcased the unique perspectives of DC youth on the topic of DC democracy with performances by Def Jam poet, Sciryl, "Demand the Vote" songwriter and performer, Joe L. Da Vessel and the Amidon Bowen High Tech Campus Cheerleaders.

Students for DC Vote hosted their fourth annual Summer Send-Off BBQ in July. The event featured slam poetry, a Young Activist Award ceremony and celebrity volunteers – the cast of MTV's *Real World DC*. All attendees received care packages with school supplies, study snacks and a Students for DC Vote advocacy tool kit. With students across the country heading back to school, the advocacy tool kit provided tools for educating fellow students about DC voting rights.



DC voting rights was featured in more than a dozen student publications, including the *Scholastic News Magazine* and *New York Times Upfront*. These two publications reach a combined audience of nearly 1.5 million elementary and high school students. George Washington University's radio station, local outlet IM4radio.com and college papers nationwide discussed the issue of DC voting rights.

II. Communications

1. Media Outreach

DC Vote serves as the definitive source of information for members of the press on this issue. We consistently generate press releases, stories explaining the significance of the lack of representation for District residents, and direct quotes providing a positive perspective. Most importantly, DC Vote aggressively reaches out to newspapers, reporters and editorial boards to educate them on the issue. Our relationship with the *Washington*

Post is especially strong and one that we work to cultivate and maintain. Because of our hard work, nearly all of the articles and newscasts on DC voting rights published locally and nationally this year featured DC Vote's information and messaging.

2. National Public Awareness Campaign

DC Vote is the only organization working on a national level to educate Americans about DC voting rights. We use a variety of aggressive and effective tactics to draw attention to this issue. After the successful Senate vote in February, we used the deluge of media and academic inquiries to launch an online Google ad campaign. The campaign spread the message of DC voting rights through text ads and yielded nearly 7 million impressions worldwide. Google featured DC Vote in their media outreach as an innovator in using online tools for advocacy.

When the Ensign gun amendment proved to be increasingly controversial, we launched an online ad campaign that yielded more than 8 million impressions across the nation. The ad urged readers to contact Congress to ask them to reject harmful amendments to the DC VRA. We produced a series of Audio News Releases in key states which asked constituents to call their members of Congress. It reached more than 4 million listeners on CBS, ABC and CNN affiliate radio stations.

As DC Vote ratcheted up the intensity against congressional opponents, we designed high-impact ads on liberal blogs in Nevada that urged Senator Ensign to "mind his own affairs" rather than legislate for District residents.

DC Vote used these ad campaigns to generate earned media and grassroots support in new ways. The blog ads targeting Senator Ensign sparked media stories in outlets including the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Examiner*, Associated Press, Fox News, *DCist* and numerous national blogs. E-mails to our supporters explaining these efforts yielded enthusiastic responses and hundreds of dollars in donations. We consistently find new ways to create more buzz and excitement with each national project.

3. I Am DC Campaign

This summer we launched the *I Am DC; I Demand the Vote* communications and membership campaign. Aimed at enlisting greater engagement from DC residents, the campaign profiles 10 local residents and tells their personal stories about why voting rights is important to them.

Our 2008 travels to the states taught us that Americans are still surprised to learn that everyday people—not just politicians—call DC home. The *I Am DC* campaign highlights the stories of regular Americans who call DC home and who demand equal voting rights.

Whose Affairs?



Senator Ensign is focused on DC's affairs... and his own – where does Nevada fit in? With all of Nevada's problems why is our Senator working on legislation for Washington, DC? We deserve his attention.

Tell Senator Ensign to focus on NEVADA.

I Am DC
I Demand the Vote

Everyone from Julian Bond, NAACP Chairman, to a local poet and DC Public School teacher participated in this groundbreaking campaign.

Their images and stories make up an extensive and ongoing advertising and advocacy campaign that includes print, online and radio ads. It also includes an interactive portion where DC residents share their stories via an online component at www.dcvote.org. The 600 stories we've received so far feature personal anecdotes about why voting and democracy is so important. All told, we estimate upwards of 5 million people have been exposed to this exciting campaign.

III. Fundraising & Development

1. Foundation Support

We received news this summer from four foundations that we would not be awarded grants this year. The loss in funds, totaling nearly \$300,000 (including income projections that did not materialize), came at a crucial time in our efforts to pass the DC VRA. We approached each of our supporting foundations to explain our financial situation and explore possibilities for an emergency grant. The Public Welfare Foundation (PWF), under the dynamic leadership of Deborah Leff, responded within days with a request for a proposal. They fast-tracked our application and delivered a \$115,000 "bridge grant" within a month! In addition, two of the four foundations that originally denied our grant proposals came through with emergency grants, though at lower levels.

We are tightening our belts in response to these shortfalls and in anticipation of slower fundraising next year. Above all, DC Vote is dedicated to our mission and difficult decisions were necessary to ensure the important work of ending 'Taxation Without Representation' in our nation's capital.

2. Champions of Democracy 2009

Our annual Champions of Democracy Awards Dinner was a remarkable success. More than 320 people joined us at the W Hotel to honor Congressman John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI), Wade Henderson and Nancy Zirkin of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and Akridge Real Estate. Even in a recession, the lure of a newly-opened hotel, excellent company, and an opportunity to support DC Vote's work attracted old friends and new faces. Our silent auction was the largest yet, with 130 items. DC Vote raised nearly \$200,000 through this signature event.



Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, introducing a special video for the evening from Stephen Colbert of the *Colbert Report*:

Let me thank... DC Vote, especially Ilir Zherka, who has led the DC Vote struggle with legendary commitment and strategic brilliance...You have brought perseverance, when some would have faltered; tenacity, when others would have grown weary, focused intelligence and above all, guts, plenty of guts, to this fight...Because DC Vote never gave up, we are close to victory tonight.

3. Membership Program

DC Vote launched a renewed membership campaign this summer. Through a “get-a-member” strategy, DC Vote staff and Board recruited dozens of new members at the \$35 level (or above). We also unveiled a new DC Vote membership card that entitles supporters to discounts at local businesses.

As of mid-December, 527 people (316 at \$35 and above) joined DC Vote as new members this year. DC Vote currently has over 2,800 members from 37 states and the District of Columbia. They join the tens of thousands of people who support DC Vote.

IV. Strategic Planning

1. Mission Statement Expansion

In June, the Board of Directors approved a small, yet bold change to our mission statement, adding the highlighted words below:

*DC Vote is a 501 (c)(3) educational and advocacy organization dedicated to securing full voting representation in Congress **and full democracy** for the residents of the District of Columbia.*

This organizational shift positions DC Vote as the only organization solely dedicated to defending and fighting for the interests of Washington, DC residents in Congress. Given the control that Congress wields over the District, this role is central to the welfare of the District. DC Vote is the only vehicle through which DC residents can consistently engage with the Congress that has direct control over their lives.

Recent events have shown all too clearly Congress’ audacity in passing legislation for DC that they would never consider in their home districts. DC Vote must and will protect the District’s local democracy.

As DC elected leaders work to pass a same-sex marriage law, DC Vote has and will continue to advocate against congressional interference. We do not have a stance on same-sex marriage (or gun control, needle exchange and hot-button issues), but we will staunchly defend DC’s right to decide these issues for itself.

2. DC Vote’s Next Campaign

In 2009, we chose the next major campaign for DC Vote and the DC voting rights movement. Based on research and discussion, **the Board of Directors affirmed our strategy of steps toward equal representation and Home Rule and unanimously decided to support statehood as the ultimate goal for DC Vote.**

As we continue to educate and advocate for the DC Voting Rights Act, we will also research and explore future legislative vehicles for full local democracy and eventual statehood. This

could include significant objectives like budget and legislative autonomy, delegates to the Senate and regional support for DC statehood.

We will develop a responsible campaign for DC statehood that is well-researched. We will present the historical, financial and political facts and possibilities for what statehood would mean for DC and how we could realistically achieve it. Statehood has long been a rallying cry for DC residents and elected officials. With DC Vote's support, it will become a reasoned and grounded campaign for DC democracy with concrete steps to attain it.

V. Conclusion

We believe the next few years represent the best chance in a generation to make significant changes for DC voting rights. With leadership in Congress and a President who is a former co-sponsor of the DC VRA, we are optimistic about the possibilities for our issue over the next few years. We also know that our supporters – from foundations to the card-carrying DC Vote members who faithfully donate each year – are extremely loyal and dedicated to our work. Their support will enable DC Vote to survive the current difficult economic climate and persist in fighting for full voting representation in Congress and full democracy in our nation's capital.

Appendix I
DC Vote's Board of Directors

Elizabeth A. Allen – *Chair*

Assistant General Counsel
Gannett Co., Inc

Marque Chambliss – *Vice Chair*

Consultant

Laurie Wingate – *Treasurer*

Senior Advisor, Center for Inspired Teaching

Curtis L. Etherly Jr. – *Secretary*

Vice President of Public Affairs,
Coca-Cola Enterprises

Judith Barnett

The Barnett Group, LLC

Ed Davis

Consultant

John Klenert

Political & Media Consultant

Lorie S. Masters

Partner, Jenner & Block LLP

Marc Morial

President & CEO, National Urban League

Stefan C. Nicholas

Income Director, Jackson & Campbell, P.C.

Vincent Orange Sr.

Region Vice President, District of Columbia
Pepco

Joseph Perta

Principal, Bernstein Global Wealth
Management

Donald Sherman

Attorney, Crowell & Moring, LLP

Daniel Solomon

Director, The Naomi and Nehemiah Cohen
Foundation

Joseph Sternlieb

Vice President for Acquisitions, EastBanc,

Trish Vradenburg

Co-Principal, Vradenburg Foundation

Appendix II
2009 Events that DC Vote Spoke at, Recruited for, or Hosted

TOTAL: 131

January – 19

Speaker Bureau Training
Residence Hall Panel at American University
Brazilian Youth Ambassador Program
National Democratic Women's Club Conversation on DC Voting Rights and Legislative Outlook
Fauntroy Tribute
Council Unveils Voting Rights Awareness Sign & meetings – Design for Inaugural Inaugural Peace Ball, GAYLA, 51st State Ball, DC Democratic State Committee Ball
The Continuation of Hope and Real Change, commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & Celebrate the Historical Election of President-Elect Barack Obama
DC for Obama Inauguration Advocacy Summit
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates 2nd Annual Community Reception
National Association of Social Workers Inauguration Week/Home Rule for DC celebration
ACC Meeting and Presentation
House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Coalition Briefing Day for New Members
Ward 7 Democrats Meeting
DCPS Student Presentation – 5th grade

February – 22

DC League of Women Voters' Program on "The Drive for Full Class Citizenship"
Ward 4 Democrats Meeting
DC Statehood, Now Is The Time! An Open Discussion Hosted by the DC Statehood Green Party
Senate Markup Hearing: DC VRA
NAACP Centennial Reception & Image Awards Viewing Party
Panel Discussion on DC Voting Rights and Statehood
DC Chamber Government Affairs Meeting
Afro-Latino Event
Michael Fauntroy at the Ward Eight Democrats' annual Black History Month program
WMD at DC9 to benefit DC Vote
Ward 6 Democrats Voting Rights Discussion and Social Hour
Anacostia Coordinating Council
Senate Begins Consideration of DC VRA; Mark Up at House Judiciary Committee
Press Conference
Senate Vote
Speak on DC Voting Rights at "Migration of Beauty" documentary movie
Roots, Rhythm, Diversity in Ward 7
Gun Violence Prevention National Partners Briefing
DC4D member retreat and meeting. Topic: What comes after the DC VR Act?
Capital City Charter School Presentation

Lincoln Town Hall
UDC Guest lecturer on DC VRA, statehood

March – 24

Presentation at Ben Chili's Bowl
National Treasury Employees Union's March 4th reception for the 11th Congress
Board of Trade 2009 Mid-Winter Dinner
Columbia Heights Youth Center Presentation
DC Voting Rights Presentation at UDC
DC City Council versus Media Game
Bell Multicultural High School Presentation
MoveOn Mixer
HSW Annual Meeting
DC for Obama Meetup
Policy Forum and Legislative Reception
Greater Washington Urban League 37th Annual Gala Dinner
Class Presentation at George Mason University
Internet Advocacy Roundtable Video Strategy for Advocacy
Presentation at Earth Conservation Corp
An Evening With Labor: 32nd Annual Awards Dinner
Ward 6 Democrats Forum
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates' 1st Annual Youth Advocacy Day
Vradenburg Event
Eyes on Another Prize: DC Voting Rights House Party at Chris Thomas'
UDC Symposium on DC VRA and Statehood
Emma Levine and Margaret McCarthy's Happy Hour for DC Vote
Jews United for Justice Labor Seder
Wednesday Cleray Fellowship Breakfast

April – 10

April Fools House Party
Special Committee on Statehood
Project S.T.A.N.D.
Unnatural State at DC Filmfest
Election Reform – Advancement Project
Legal lunch event
Book release: Keeping Down the Black Vote
Ballots not Bullets rally
DC NAACP presentation
Give DC Peeps the Vote – Wilson Building Tour

May – 9

Nannie Boroughs Day Parade
Congressional Staff Briefing
DC City Council Youth Hearing
Committee on Statehood
I Am DC photo shoot

Dina Curtis House Party
Presentations to Thurgood Marshall Charter School
Presentation to National Cathedral School
I Am DC business recruitment

June – 7

Committee on Statehood & Self Determination
Capitol Pride
Young Suffragist rally at White House
DCJCC panel
German Marshall Fund fellows
Jenner & Block lunch – DC Bar event
DC History Class presentation

July – 8

Patton Boggs Happy Hour
Palisades Fourth of July Parade
Appropriations Markup
Committee on Statehood & Self-Determination
National Conference of State Legislatures
Students for DC Vote Summer Send off
I Am DC press conference
Anacostia Coordinating Council

August – 6

Mississippi Public Awareness Trip
Memphis Labor Council
NAACP meeting in Mississippi
Stone Soul Picnic
Students for DC Vote Happy Hour
Maryland Association of Counties

September – 15

Adams Morgan Day
LUV Festival
Congressional Black Caucus
Brookland Festival
Fiesta DC
Barrack's Row Festival
H Street Festival
DC Youth Advisory Council Meeting
Justice for All Bash
Congressional Black Caucus Reception at the Park
ACC Boat Ride
National Black Family Reunion
Hillcrest Civic Association
Ward 8 Dems Biennial Convention

Delegate Norton's Healthcare summit

October - 3

SEIU 32BJ Membership Meeting
I Am DC Advocacy Day
Champions of Democracy Awards Dinner

November - 3

Presentation at George Mason University Class
Budget/Legislative Autonomy
OLLI Institute at American University

December - 5

Holiday House Party
Un-Natural State screening at the Avalon Theatre
DC Vote Holiday Party
DC Needle Exchange Ban Press Conference - World AIDS Day
McKinley Tech Community Service Fair