



## Democracy Action Team Report for June, 2021 Board Meeting

**Active Members:** Fred Van Deusen, convener, First Parish in Concord, MA; Donna Scheidt, Greensboro, NC; David Shilton, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Suzan Chastain, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Ursula Scott, River Road, Bethesda, MD; Martha Ades, UU Congregation of Fairfax, VA; Julia Sayles, UU Church of Arlington, Falls Church, VA; Ken Mitchell, First Unitarian of Baltimore, MD; Dee Ellison, UU of Arlington, Falls Church, VA; Peter Bishop, Washington Ethicals Society, DC

**ExOfficio members:** Bob Denniston, Board Chair, and Pablo DeJesús, Executive Director - participate as appropriate and as invited.

### 2020

Throughout 2020 our major focus was on supporting the UUA *UU the Vote* program:

- through the [materials we developed](#),
- by working with our UUSJ organizer Kelsey Cowger, and
- by working with our individual congregations.

It was clear to us that no significant democracy legislation would pass given the leadership in the Senate and White House at the time, and focusing on helping to change that situation was the most useful thing we could do. As it turned out, our efforts, and those of millions of others, have led us to be much more optimistic about the current possibilities.

In December, 2020, we decided to focus our efforts on HR 1, the *For the People Act*, and particularly on components of that bill that make it easier to vote such as on-line and automatic registration, voting by mail and early voting. With Pablo and Anna's great assistance we were able to meet with 16 Senate staff members, both Democrat and Republican. Click on this link to read a [summary of the process we used and the meeting results](#).

### 2021

In January, 2021 we developed our [team priorities for 2021](#) which again focused heavily on voting rights and HR 1/S.1. We also discussed potential partners to evaluate. The list included: Brennan Center, Common Cause, Declaration for American Democracy, Faithful Democracy, Poor Peoples' Campaign, ACLU, NAACP, League of Women Voters, CASA/LUAC, Lawyers Committee, and Public Citizen.

In February we agreed that [Faithful Democracy](#) was the best choice.

Since then, our Democracy Action Team's focus has continued to be on H.R.1 / S.1 - For the People Act of 2021, as well as H.R.51 / S.51 - Washington, DC Admission Act.

Both bills have passed the House. The mark-up for S.1 in the Senate Rules Committee occurred on May 11 and the final vote was 9 to 9, just sufficient for Majority Leader Sen. Schumer to bring it to the floor. A [cloture vote](#) is scheduled to occur on June 22, and it is very likely to be filibustered. All of the Democratic Senators are co-sponsors and very supportive of the bill with one current exception, Senator Manchin of West Virginia whose position is somewhat malleable as he seeks bipartisanship.

Our strategy for S.1 has been to work actively with our partner Faithful Democracy to hold meetings with key Senate offices, create faith-based sign-on letters in selected states, and distribute Action Alerts in states around the country.

In March, April and May we organized meetings with seven Senate offices, and attended many more with Faithful Democracy coalition members, to assess the level of bipartisan support for S.1, and expectations for how it will proceed through the Senate. Our meetings with offices of moderate Republican Senators Murkowski, Collins, Capito, Burr, and Portman indicated some support for particular elements of the bill, but no sense that they were prepared to vote in favor of it as a whole.

We have been reaching out to UU State Action Networks and individual congregations in selected states to ask for their support in contacting their senators to support S.1. We have gotten a great response to our two S.1 Action Alerts (see table below). Many thanks to those of you who have supported our latest [S.1 Action Alert](#). If you have a chance, please ask your friends to also support the bill. It's important that as many UUs as possible, nationwide, voice support for S.1, and for not allowing the filibuster to prevent it from passing.

Below are the numbers for DAT action alerts and WHWN for the past year as of June 15, 2021. Response to the most recent Action Alert for S1 has been growing rapidly with the help of UU the Vote support and our other efforts.

Topic / Activity	Messages Sent	Writers	Legislators
WHWN Jun Secure the Vote	88	40	14
WHWN Dec Vote Reg/Acc online	173	103	38
WHWN Dec Vote Reg/Acc classic	21	11	6
AA Jun Secure the Vote	252	126	68
AA Mar2021 S1-For the People Act	1100	643	141
AA May2021 S1-Stop Filibuster	606	349	80
AA Apr2021 DC Statehood	416	154	135

The DC Statehood bill was introduced in January and has been assigned to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. It is scheduled to be taken up in committee on June 22. Pablo secured a *Side With Love* endorsement for the [DC Statehood alert](#). Peter Bishop has taken the lead on this for our group and has been involved in several local DC actions and meetings.

On April 14, the DAT participated with UU the Vote in an action Demand Democracy, the team prepared materials and assisted Pablo in representing UUSJ during that event.

During June UUSJ was asked to consider developing an Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) regarding the health of our democracy, voting rights and DC statehood. A working group was formed and the AIW is in development.

### **Looking Ahead:**

**S.1:** As we look ahead we are likely to see various approaches used to pass S.1, either in its entirety or in selected pieces. All are likely to require changes in the filibuster rules.

**H.R.4/S.4:** We will also see the introduction of H.R.4/S.4, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (JLVRAA). It already has at least one Republican supporter. Senators Manchin (D-WV) and Murkowski (R-AK) recently sent a letter to Senate and House leaders asking for bipartisan reauthorization of the JLVRAA.

**S.51:** This is only the second time DC Statehood has been given a committee hearing in the Senate. It will be historic if this bill is reported out of committee and is brought to the floor of the Senate. At this point, if the filibuster has not been tamed, then it will not be able to pass the Senate.

### Context:

It is important to understand that we need both the H.R.1/S.1 and H.R.4/S.4 bills to pass. H.R.1/S.1 sets the standards that states must meet and H.R.4/S.4 will create the vehicle to enforce the standards. By itself the John Lewis Voting Act will not undo the restrictive voting bills already passed in five states, nor the 55+ restrictive bills in 24 states that are moving through legislatures: 29 have passed at least one chamber, while another 26 have had some sort of committee action.

It is critical to our future success that we continue to build on our national relationships with organizations such as Faithful Democracy and UU the Vote. We have had good success with both of these groups and need to continue to develop these relationships, and also see what other potential partnerships exist.

We also need to develop relationships with Senate offices and congregations in a number of key states that will have an important impact on our democracy concerns. In some cases State Action Networks will be helpful in supporting our efforts, and in others they either do not exist, or are focused only on activities within their states.

2021 promises to be a busy year for democracy legislation and it will provide a good opportunity to engage UU's in states around the country.