



## Democracy Action Team Board Report, September 2021

**Active Members:** Fred Van Deusen, convener, First Parish in Concord, MA; Donna Scheidt, Greensboro, NC; David Shilton, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Ursula Scott, River Road, Bethesda, MD; Julia Sayles, UU Church of Arlington, Falls Church, VA; Ken Mitchell, First Unitarian of Baltimore, MD; Dee Ellison, UU of Arlington, Falls Church, VA

**ExOfficio member:** Pablo DeJesús, Executive Director

### Voting Rights Legislation

Our team is currently very much involved in congressional efforts to pass the *For the People Act* and the *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act*.

On August 11, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer attempted to bring S.1, the *For the People Act* to the floor for a vote, which was promptly blocked by the filibuster rules. At this point no Republicans have come forth in support of the bill. Senator Manchin and other Senate Democrats have been working on a revised version of the bill called the [Freedom to Vote Act](#) which was introduced on Tuesday, Sep. 14. It addresses many of the issues that we heard from Republican senators, however, it is unlikely to gain the 10 Republican votes needed to avoid a filibuster.

Senator Schumer promised to bring voting rights up again the week of September 13. It seems likely that he will give Sen. Manchin time to shop the revised bill to see if he can convince 10 Republicans to vote for it. This appears to be a near impossible task, and is hopefully one more step in the drawn out effort to change the filibuster rules. The Brookings Institute just released an interesting report [Filibuster Reform is Coming - Here's How](#). It seems clear that Senate Democrats will have to make a decision — which is more important: saving our democracy or preserving an anti-democratic, dysfunctional tool (the filibuster). If you would like to learn more about dysfunction in the Senate I recommend [Kill Switch: The Rise of the Modern Senate and the Crippling of American Democracy](#) by Adam Jentleson.

The *John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act* was introduced in the House on August 17 and it passed on August 24. It would restore the protections of the *1965 Voting Rights Act* against discriminatory voting laws. It is important to understand that we need both the *For the People Act* and the *John Lewis Act* to pass. The *For the People Act* sets the expectations that states must meet, the *John Lewis Act* protects our rights and provides a remedy when required. It now moves to the Senate and will very likely require changes to the filibuster rules to pass it, perhaps in tandem with the *For the People Act*.

## **Write Here! Write Now!**

We are currently conducting the September [Write Here! Write Now!](#) letter-writing campaign which will focus on these two bills. We are trying to arrange meetings with a number of Senate offices. We have so far conducted two intelligence gathering meetings, one with Rep. Sewell's office (she introduced the bill in the House) and one with Sen. Kaine of Virginia. Neither office had a clear sense on what would happen next in the Senate.

On September 15 we are hosting an [Expert Opinion Briefing](#) featuring Andrea Miller of Center for Common Ground and Sister Quincy Howard of Faithful Democracy. Donna Scheidt and Fred Van Deusen of the UUSJ Democracy Action team will also speak. Pablo will be the master of ceremonies. A [democracy list of actions](#) will be discussed and provided.

## **Voting Rights Action of Immediate Witness**

At the recent UU General Assembly members of the Democracy Action Team authored an Action Of Immediate Witness (AIW), a resolution to [Stop Voter Suppression and Partner for Voting Rights and a Multiracial Democracy](#). On July 22 we partnered with Nicole Pressley of UU the Vote to organize an event focused on this AIW. There will be another event on October 6, sponsored by the UUA, which includes this AIW and a second AIW "[Defend and Advocate with Transgender, Nonbinary, and Intersex Communities](#)".

## **Partnerships**

It is critical to our future success that we continue to build on our national relationships with organizations such as Faithful Democracy and Side With Love - 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. On Sunday, Sep. 12, Side With Love launched their [Action Center](#), and highlighted our Sept. 15 event in their discussion on democracy actions. We have had a wonderful and productive relationship with Faithful Democracy but their funding source is drying up and their outstanding Coordinating Director and her very able assistant are leaving the organization at the end of the year. Faithful Democracy members are discussing ways to continue and we should support that effort if we can.

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. This is an opportunity for the various action teams to collaborate.

## **Looking Forward**

If the two major democracy bills manage to pass we will likely shift our attention to the DC Statehood bill and other proposed democracy legislation. We'll also have a major celebration with all of our partners.

If they don't pass we'll work with our partners to figure out next steps. We may decide to help with state level work on redistricting.