Executive Director’s Message

Listening, Speaking Up, and Being Heard
I’m glad the school year is over. COVID-19 has changed so much in our world in the year I became a 5th grade teacher as well as a democracy advocate.

As the news reports have come in from around the country, my heart is with all of the courageous people working to overcome fear, hate, racism, and inequality. Witnessing young leaders of color demand deep systemic transformation, I have hope for a future that might be a little more just. This is what happens when people put their values into action. I am impressed this month with the level of democracy action. Thank you to all those who took action.

Now, I’d like to share with you a success story in speaking up, listening and being heard. Six weeks ago the Select Committee on 2020 Emergency Election Support was convened to advise the Secretary of State on preparations for this fall’s elections during COVID-19, and how to allocate the CARES elections support money the state received.

The committee had a huge task, with bewildering testimony about the impact of COVID-19 on the health and safety of the voters and poll workers, and the logistics that will result. But under the wise guidance of Chairman Brad Cook, the committee has been a model for good government. The six members of the committee, three Republicans and three Democrats, have hosted weeks of testimony from groups like Open Democracy Action and its allies; town and city clerks; moderators and supervisors of the checklist; schools and colleges; political parties; technical experts, and the general public. They took the time to reply and have actual conversations with people who contacted them with suggestions and comments. Their report has just been issued, and is available for you to read. The process is a shining example of what it means to listen, and act on what you’ve heard.

Now, I want to share what it means to speak up. Our Regional Democracy Team members were many of those people who wrote in with questions and suggestions. They wrote scores of letters, postcards and emails to the Emergency Election Support committee, and had constructive conversations, one of which resulted in our RDT member testifying before the committee. They asked the Secretary of State to implement no-excuse absentee ballots and acquire the CARES funding to support the elections. They wrote LTEs. They spoke with their local town and city clerks and informed them that funding was available, and to be thinking about the logistics ahead. Some of our members have even signed up to be poll workers to support those at risk.

We spoke up, and we were heard by the Emergency Elections Committee. Now, we hope that the Secretary of State and the Governor have HEARD what the legislature, the Emergency Elections Committee and the PEOPLE are telling them.

Will you speak up? Will you help Granite State citizens exercise their sacred right to vote? Contact us. We’ll help you help New Hampshire.

Olivia Zink, Executive Director
Annual Meeting this Wednesday, June 10, 6 PM

Don’t miss a special event this Wednesday, featuring former Salon editor David Daley, author of “Ratf*ked” and the just-released follow up, “UNRIGGED: How Americans are Battling Back to Save Democracy.”

That sounds like Open Democracy and Open Democracy Action, don’t you think?

The cost is only $10.00, and you can RSVP here, but if the cost is an issue, we’ll waive that donation in exchange for a letter to a legislator or letter to the editor! Contact Doreen at Doreen@OpenDemocracy.me for any help you require.

This is our annual meeting, so there will be a short business meeting to elect new board members and receive the annual reports.

If you’re interested in obtaining a copy of David Daley’s new book, Toadstool, Gibson’s and other independent booksellers have it available.

Update on COVID-19 Voting Crisis

As we discussed in our special report last month, thousands of voters may not vote this fall because they fear COVID-19. The Secretary of State and the Attorney General have just issued a second guidance on using the “disability” excuse to allow voting by absentee ballot, and recently, registering to vote via the mail. But serious barriers exist, such as the language on the absentee ballot application, and an intimidating process mired in red tape.

Despite the efforts of the Select Committee for 2020 Emergency Election Support, there are signs that many of their recommendations will be ignored by the Secretary of State and the Governor, which if it happens, will be a travesty for Democracy in New Hampshire. Both Open Democracy and Open Democracy Action have been working urgently to prepare NH to vote safely this fall, with Open Democracy on educating the public, and Open Democracy Action on mobilizing its Regional Democracy Teams to write legislators and state officials to take action.

Weekly Team Briefings

Open Democracy Action has been hosting seven weekly briefings on the COVID-19 voting crisis. In each Zoom meeting, team members share the actions they’ve taken in the past week, and get instructions on actions for the coming week. We also share what we’ve learned from the Emergency Elections Support committee and any pending legislative hearings.

Attendees are not just team members, but other Open Democracy Action supporters, and members of other activist groups and political groups.

If you’d like to join the briefings, our North Country & Southern NH briefings are Wednesdays at 2 PM & 3 PM, Monadnock and Central NH on Thursdays at 1 PM & 2 PM, and Upper Valley and Seacoast on Fridays at 2 PM and 3 PM. Sunday night at 7 PM, we’ve added an all-team briefing for anyone who missed their meeting earlier in the week. [Go here for the briefing schedule & Zoom Links]
Regional Democracy Team Activities
In addition to briefings, our teams have reached their highest level of activity since their inception last fall, partly due to their understanding of what's at stake for voting this fall. In the past month, the RDT's new portal page has been expanded, and our Absentee Ballot & Registration Action page updated weekly now with more materials to support the teams' efforts.

Letters & Phone Calls
- To the Governor - Asking for an executive order to streamline the voter registration and absentee ballot request process.
- To the EES Committee - Asking members for a comprehensive plan for dealing with COVID-19 voting, and for clear and simple instructions to voters. This effort resulted in dozens of conversations.
- To the SOS & Dep. SOS – Asking for clear & simple instructions for voters and clerks.
- To Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Maggie Hassan: Asking for additional federal funding by supporting election support funding in the HEROES Act and any future COVID-19 packages.
- To NH State Senators and Representatives asking them to support legislation supporting fall elections.

Contacting Town Clerks
Because the Secretary of State was so late in providing guidance to cities and towns, our members contacted their town & city clerks to make sure they were aware that funding was available, and invited them to be part of the EES committee hearings. A number of our members have volunteered their help in being poll workers, and explained the absentee ballot voting process in their town newsletters.

Letters to the Editor
Several of our team members submitted letters to news outlets around the state reminding their communities about the state's changes allowing voting by absentee ballot. Letters appeared in the Keene Sentinel, Seacoast Online, Concord Monitor, Monadnock Ledger and others which will appear shortly in other papers.

Letters & Certificates to Graduating Seniors
Led by team members Judy Krassowski, Susan Richman & Mary Wilke, a group of Open Democracy and Kent Street volunteers created a letter and certificate to send to graduating seniors, congratulating them and providing them with details on how to register to vote and vote by absentee. The materials were sent electronically to 94 public high schools and 67 private high schools to distribute to their graduates. Judy Krassowski also had an extended conversation with EES committee member Kate Hanna which resulted in Judy testifying to the committee about the proposal.

“Don't Let COVID-19 Keep You from Voting” campaign
The Emergency Election Support committee has recommended, and every Democracy group in New Hampshire has asked for, a robust public information campaign to educate voters on their options for voting this fall. To get an early start Open Democracy Action developed a webpage with numerous downloadable materials for its supporters to distribute, in addition to sending materials out to New Hampshire media outlets.

Materials include:
- Facebook graphic & post
- Ask Me About Absentee Facebook profile picture
- Instagram graphic
- Twitter post
- 30 second video
- Printable poster for your town’s bulletin boards
You have permission to download these materials and help us get the word out about requesting an absentee ballot. Use your social media channels, community websites and Facebook pages, and distribute the printed posters on supermarket, convenience store, town office or post office bulletin boards. If you’re unable to print the posters, contact Doreen@OpenDemocracy.me with how many you need and we’ll print you some.

**2020 Seacoast Walk for COVID-19 Voting Safety**

Our annual Seacoast Walk on Sunday, July 5 in Portsmouth will be our first in-person event in four months, and we are putting aside money-in-politics for this summer to instead work to help Granite Staters to vote.

We’re not sure whether the 10-person gathering limit for gathering will be in place at that time, but are planning for groups of 10 people with a version of the signs seen in the graphic at right. Groups will be deployed with vests and signs around the city, with some groups walking and other staying in one place. Each of the 10 will stand 20-25 or so feet apart to spell out the message – and keep our distance!

Masks for the event are required, and each participant will be provided a mask to keep. Details for the event are at the 2020 Seacoast Walk page. Sign up ASAP so we can plan for the number of masks we need, and acquire the necessary permits.

**Select Committee on Emergency Election Support Wraps Up Recommendations on COVID-19 Voting Preparations**

The Select Committee on Emergency Election Support (EES), a six-person bipartisan committee appointed by the Secretary of State, was charged with making recommendations to prepare for the state’s fall elections, and to allocate the $3.2 million in federal CARES Covid-19 election support money.

On Thursday, June 4, the EES issued its final recommendations, which includes a menu of recommendations from which the Secretary of State can choose. Among them, a recommendation that PPE be acquired for all poll workers, who have elevated risk by coming into contact with hundreds or even thousands of voters in a single day. It also recommended that statutes be adjusted so clerks, moderators and supervisors of the checklist can deal with what’s expected to be a 50% or higher absentee ballot use.

Postage will eat up a large portion of the CARES money. The committee recommended a statewide informational mailing (ODA advocated for two) going to every household and PO Box in the state to inform voters of their options. They also recommended that absentee ballot envelopes should have return postage affixed to encourage voter participation.

The absentee ballot application currently features an affidavit asking voters to swear that they are truly disabled. But it does not include any explanation that the Secretary of State and Attorney General recently authorized voters to use that excuse to request an absentee ballot. The absentee ballot also requires that separate applications be used for the September primary and November general elections. The committee unfortunately deferred to the Secretary of State on this matter, with no recommended form redesign.

The committee did not recommend a paid broadcast media campaign, relying instead on donated public service announcements provided by local broadcasters.
 Legislative Update
The COVID-19 crisis brought legislation to a halt for several weeks, but the legislature has started to
meet on the committee level, including the Senate Election Law committee. Working out
arrangements for social distancing and electronic voting has proved challenging, but the NH House
meets in person for the first full session at the UNH Whittemore Arena on June 11, and the Senate
meets in Representatives Hall on June 16.

Only Essential Bills Moving Forward
House and Senate leadership are streamlining and consolidating 2020 bills. Hundreds of bills will be
killed to make room in the docket for important COVID-19 emergency legislation, including changes
to accommodate fall 2020 voting. Last Thursday the Senate Election Law committee considered HB
1672, a bill proposing “no-excuse” absentee ballots, which Open Democracy Action supports. The
bill has been amended, however, with emergency voting proposals, including:

- PPE for all poll workers
- Extensions of time for processing absentee ballots, storage of absentee, and allowing secure drop
  boxes for return of ballots.
- Streamlining the absentee ballot application process, and making it a no-excuse ballot
- Sending absentee ballot applications to all voters
- Return postage for absentee ballots
- Participation in ERIC, which is an interstate registration database which keeps voter lists cleaner using a combination of resources like the USPS change of address system to do name &
  address matching.
- An online voter registration portal

HB 1672 did pass committee on Thursday, June 4 on a party-line vote, 3-2 and goes to the full
Senate on June 16. It then would return to the House to concur with the Senate’s decision.

There may be two additional bills, one of which is even more rich in reforms, and another, more
practical bill. Open Democracy Action has not seen language for these bills, but is following
discussions closely.

Advisory Independent Redistricting Commission
Many supporters worked hard to get the HB 1665 Advisory Independent Redistricting Bill through
the House this winter. The bill passed the House and is in the hands of the Senate. Chair of the
Senate Election Law & Municipal Affairs Committee, Sen. Melanie Levesque, is hopeful that HB 1665
will not be killed as the legislature tries to cut down the number of bills it hears. The clock is
ticking, since the redistricting process starts when U.S. Census data is complete. She told our
Granny D Legacy Committee recently that there was a chance that the Granny D Day observance bill
might be consolidated with other bills and could be heard by the House.

A Letter a Week is All We Ask
Perhaps you think that you don’t have time to be an “activist,” but you want to help. Even a letter a
week would be a significant contribution to the movement, and could be the personal story that puts
a human face to a piece of legislation and changes a representative’s mind.

To make it easier, we’ve started to create sample letters and write background guidance, such as this
week’s action to ask your state representatives to back legislation so all voters in New Hampshire
can vote safely no matter their health, and protects our poll workers.

Or perhaps you’d like to write a Letter to the Editor about using absentee ballot to vote to help keep
your family and poll workers safe. We have sample letters to help you with this, too.
Ways You Can Help

- Join a Regional Democracy Team and write letters and take actions to make our state officials accountable.
- Write letters to the editor.
- Help us distribute “How to Vote by Absentee Ballot in NH” posters and literature.
- Use your social media to communicate to your community to inform voters about voting absentee.
- Get an invitation for OD or ODA to speak: Churches, fraternal and business groups, and distribute our literature to them about absentee ballots.

Contact Dep. Director Brian Beihl 603-620-8300 to find out how you can help!

Granny D Memorial Walk, August 8
Like the 2020 Seacoast Walk, the Granny D Memorial Walk will be done in person, but will require social distancing and masks. We're considering walking a loop with walkers socially distanced, or possibly walking independently and sending in pictures of you with your sign, or perhaps walking in small, socially distanced groups and doing a Zoom rally at the end.

The staff has set Saturday, August 8, as the date, and details will be forthcoming in the July newsletter or before by a dedicated email.

Be Part of the ODA Twitter Brigade!
If you tweet regularly, we would like you to volunteer to be part of a Twitter “direct message” group we're assembling to help us to tweet to journalists, politicians and public officials. Step 1 is to FOLLOW @OpenDemoAction, @NHRebellion and @OpenDemocracyNH. Then contact Sara Lobdell at Sara@OpenDemocracy.me and tell her you want to help!

Dollar for Dollar NH Gives Matching Event on June 9 & 10
June 9 & 10: Open Democracy will be participating in this online, statewide, 24 hour fundraising initiative. A $250,000 site-wide match, available from the NH Charitable Fund, will be available starting June 9 at 6 pm. Every online donation made at our NH Gives page will be matched dollar for dollar (up to $1,000 per donation) until all the funds have been expended.

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