Executive Director’s Message

“Democracy is something we DO”.

Granny D’s message has never been so true.

We reported to you in June that our staff and our Regional Democracy Teams had shifted to work on helping New Hampshire citizens to vote safely. You wouldn’t think that would be too much to ask, but we’ve encountered obstacles – pandemic and man-made – to making voter registration and voting accessible to ALL.

Our Regional Democracy Teams “do” democracy as Granny D envisioned. We’ll detail some of their work later in the newsletter, but these volunteers stepped up in countless ways to keep our officials accountable, informing the public when no one else was, identifying voting problems in their communities, and stepping up to be poll workers themselves. They’ve done over 400 actions and counting.

But the most incredible work has been in helping people vote, particularly in under-resourced communities. Our staff and volunteers have worked together to get absentee ballot applications and instructions to Meals on Wheels clients, food pantries & food-insecure families, nursing homes, senior housing complexes. And we’ve now phonebanked 175,000 calls to people at-risk for not voting in the election.

Some of these team members do three actions every week, and some can only spend a little time and perhaps write an email. Some can contribute money for signs, copies and postage. But every action counts, and we are far more powerful doing our actions together.

Be a part of it, and DO Democracy with us.

Olivia Zink, Executive Director

Thank You!

Coming Up

Sept. 30, 6:30 pm– North Country VOTES! public voter info Q&A . RSVP
Oct. 5, 7 pm – NH VOTES!– Southern NH Public Voter Information Q&A  RSVP
Oct. 6, 6:30 pm – NH Council of Churches Voter Information Presentation RSVP
Oct. 6, 7 pm – An Evening with U.S. Congressman John Sarbanes  RSVP
Oct. 8, 7 pm – Upper Valley VOTES! Public voter information Q&A RSVP
Nov. 3, Election Day !

Click to Become a Sustaining Donor
Join U.S. Congressman John Sarbanes' Meeting With Open Democracy, Tuesday, Oct. 6

Join us for an evening with Rep. John Sarbanes of Maryland, author of H.R. 1, the sweeping Democracy reform bill which passed the U.S. House in 2019, but which awaits action in the Senate.

The event is Tuesday evening Oct. 6, 7 pm via Zoom or phone, and is free and open to all. RSVP here to be in the “room” with the Congressman. Come for inspiration and hope, or to learn about how we move this important reform forward.

Update on COVID-19 Voting Crisis
Some Select Committee Recommendations Implemented; Others Ignored

About 80% of our time this past summer has been spent helping Granite State citizens vote safely. In June we reported on the recommendations of the Select Committee on 2020 Emergency Election Support. While some of the recommendations of the committee were heeded, including a mailer to all NH households, amending the absentee ballot application to reduce confusion, and acquiring personal protective equipment for poll workers. Unfortunately, political pressure kept the Secretary of State from implementing return postage for absentee ballots, implementing an online voter registration system, and streamlining the voter registration by mail. Open Democracy Action was active throughout the process, testifying, submitting position papers, mobilizing letters to members and the SOS, and facilitating letters to the editor.

The lack of online voter registration, after failure to adopt bills in the 2020 and prior sessions, was particularly problematic. With town and city halls closed for months, the State violated the NH Constitution’s guarantee of “accessible voter registration” for weeks prior to officially allowing mail-in voter registration for those concerned with COVID-19. Online voter registration would have made this a non-issue, and Open Democracy Action will be advocating for it again in 2021.

The Fight for Sensible Absentee Ballot Voting

Shortly after the Select Committee submitted its recommendations, two bills attempted to implement those recommendations that required statute changes.

Senator Tom Sherman amended HB 1266 to propose allowing clerks three days prior to election day to begin pre-processing ballots, and revising the absentee ballot application to include a concern for COVID-19 checkbox.

After pressure from the Governor and Secretary of State, a stripped-down version of the bill passed and was signed. Celebration quickly stopped when the SOS’s new application showed “struck-out” paragraphs, immediately confusing voters who received it. Due to the efforts of Open Democracy, the ACLU and other allies, the application was revised again without struck-out language.
Affidavit Envelope Causes More Unneeded Confusion
Once absentee ballots were released, Open Democracy started to get complaints about the affidavit envelope. While the absentee application had been fixed, the Secretary of State’s office had not changed the corresponding language on the inner affidavit envelope, claiming it was dictated by the NH Constitution. Our Regional Democracy Teams immediately swung into action, demanding the SOS replace the envelopes. A compromise was struck with the SOS, thanks again to Henry Klementowicz of the ACLU, adding a yellow sticky note informing voters that they can sign the “Religious Observance or Physical Disability side of the affidavit.

Pictures of Absentee Ballot Packages Around State Shows Inconsistent Contents
As a weekly action, our Regional Democracy Team members took pictures of what they received in their absentee ballot envelopes. The results was surprising and alarming. In the best cases, cities and towns included current instructions, referencing special COVID-19 permissions and including all necessary components for the voter to return the ballot. In the worst cases, voters received no instructions at all, non-COVID instructions (either causing apprehension to sign the affidavit for fear of prosecution), lack of the voter information return label, and in some cases the absence of an address to which to return the ballot. With this information Open Democracy Action lobbied the Secretary of State to provide a directive to municipalities as to the proper contents of ballot packages, and took the extra step of contacting clerks prior to the release of the Nov. 3 absentee ballot.

“Something We DO” – Join a Regional Democracy Team Briefing
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. 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, Central NH & Seacoast on Thursdays at 1 pm, 2 pm & 7 pm and Upper Valley, Fridays at 2 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 mandating masks at polling places, and asking him to sign the HB 1665 advisory independent redistricting commission.
• To the SOS & Dep. SOS – Asking for additional training for election workers, demanding changes to the absentee ballot application & affidavit envelope.
• LTEs to their local newspapers on voting by absentee, protecting poll workers, and returning their ballots quickly.
• To NH State Senators and Representatives asking them to support the overrides of Democracy reform vetoes, including one critical COVID-19 voting support bill. None of the bills received a 66% majority to override, so HB 1665, HB 1672, and SB 7 all failed.
Contacting Town Clerks & Volunteering as Election Workers
Communication has been slow and incomplete from the Secretary of State’s office. Our team members volunteered in their communities around the state to help prepare absentee ballots for mailing, playing a watchdog role when election workers weren’t clear on the rules, and communicating rule changes. A town clerk told one of our volunteers, “I heard about rule changes from Open Democracy before I heard them from the Secretary of State.”

Reaching Out to NH Citizens at Risk for Not Voting
Probably our most important task this summer has been reaching out to voters who might be at risk for not voting. Our Regional Democracy Teams members have come up with all kinds of great ideas. Our Upper Valley team had the idea of getting absentee voting information to clients of Meals on Wheels, and Open Democracy RDTs have now facilitated this action in seven NH counties. We’ve also reached out to food pantries and other programs aiding food-insecure families, senior living centers, nursing homes, farmers markets, and graduating high school seniors and teens turning 18 prior to the election.

137,000 Calls – and Counting!
On evenings and weekends, our Open Democracy Executive Director Olivia Zink has been coordinating a phone banking effort of paid and volunteer callers, reaching out to folks who’ve been identified as infrequent or inconsistent voters. We’re sharing options for voting this fall, registration guidance, and mailing absentee ballot applications to those who want them.

Upcoming Voter Information Zoom Meetings
Because of the changes in 2020 elections, voters have had many questions about registering, voting absentee, voting in person, the U.S. Postal Service, and other challenges. Our Regional Democracy Teams are hosting nonpartisan Zoom question & answer sessions open to the public
North Country Votes, Wednesday, Sept. 30, 6:30 pm
NH Votes (Southern NH), Monday, October 5, 7 pm
NH Council of Churches, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 6:30 pm
Upper Valley Votes, Thursday, October 8, 7 pm

Summer Walks: Democracy Gets Masked and Socially Distanced!
Our Seacoast Walk on July 5th was our first test of a COVID-19 era in-person event, and we proved we could be safe and still bring our message to the people. We had one group walking in and around Portsmouth, and another stationary group located on Rt. 1A with a “Burma-Shave”-style message with sequential signs. See the video to hear the stories of the people who came out on July 4th weekend for Democracy.

Then on August 8th, the annual Granny D Memorial Walk celebrated both Doris Haddock’s grit and determination, and the determination of the suffragists who prevailed in passing the 19th amendment, 100 years before.

Groups of walkers followed routes around Keene, NH, then gathered at Keene’s Central Square bandstand for Granny D speeches read by her grandson Lawrence Haddock, and her friend and traveling assistant, Carol Wyndham. Thanks to Ben & Jerry’s for the ice cream cups!
Tired of Seeing Democracy Being Dismantled?

- 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.
- Become a monthly sustaining donor. You can see what we’re accomplishing-- please help us fund the work!

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

Help Us Rescue “Rosie,” Granny D's RV

Many of you will remember “Rosie,” the RV Doris Haddock used in her “Working Women Vote” registration drives around the country, and for her 2004 U.S. Senate campaign. Until recently, Rosie was owned by PACE, an organization charged with keeping Granny D’s legacy alive. Attempts to get Rosie into a museum were unsuccessful, and she has been in storage for the last 15 years.

Just in the last month, Open Democracy became Rosie’s steward. On September 18, Rosie was towed from Keene to board member Bob Perry's farm. Bob, a confessed motor-head, will be spearheading the restoration, after which the organization hopes to use her as a rolling activist, bringing a message of Democracy to schools, parades, and rallies throughout NH and perhaps further. We estimate that we'll need $20,000 to $30,000 for restoration and housing for her once she's restored.

How can you help?

- We’ll need handymen & women to help make the necessary repairs to her exterior and interior
- Mechanics (shade-tree or pros) are needed to assist Bob in getting her roadworthy
- Artists will be needed to stabilize her amazing exterior scenes, and restore her paintings to their original glory.
- A short-term dry storage barn
- Most of all, we need your MONEY, not only for restoration, but also for a permanent place for her to live, so she can be preserved long term.

Contact Bob Perry 603-715-4474
if you can help with the restoration, or if you can donate to Rosie's restoration    If you can DONATE, contact Doreen at 603-608-6211, or donate to Rescue Rosie online.
New Book of Speeches Planned by the Granny D Legacy Committee

One of the key efforts of the Granny D Legacy Committee, which succeeded PACE, was to continue the Granny D play, “The Power of One,” with actress Dixie Timitz in schools and other venues around New Hampshire. COVID changed those plans, but the committee has been at work planning a new book of select Granny D speeches which should be available for holiday giving. The committee is working with Doris’ friend & co-author Dennis Burke on the project, and the committee is selecting their favorite and most inspirational speeches. Contact Doreen if you’d like to be on the waiting list for copies.

Your State Needs You! Volunteer to be a Poll Worker Nov. 3rd

There could not be more at stake this election, and having enough poll workers is critical to protect our democracy. Wondering how you can help? Sign up to become a poll worker in your community to help ensure the integrity of our election system on November 3rd.

The NH Campaign for Voting Rights, of which Open Democracy is a partner, is using a platform to quickly connect you with your town or city clerk: www.powerthepolls.org/nhvotes. Jobs that unelected poll workers can do include:

- marking the checklist
- handing out ballots
- helping voters in need at the ballot booths
- receiving ballots at the box

You’ll also be provided with personal protective equipment, including masks and other items needed to keep you safe during the process. You must be 17 years old and older to be a poll worker in NH. Thanks for helping New Hampshire vote!

Honest Elections & Clean Government NH - COMING SOON!

What is Honest Elections & Clean Government New Hampshire? Stay tuned for more information and how you can help.

Honoring “100 Years of Women Walking for Democracy” at the 2020 Granny D Memorial Walk

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