



Capital Eye

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Stand Up for Voting Rights: Restore the Voting Rights Act

by Vivian Stockman and Julie Archer

On Tuesday, August 6, dozens of people gathered outside the federal courthouse in downtown Charleston, WV to mark the 54th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. We came to commemorate it, but we could not celebrate its ongoing achievements.

That's because in 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in the Shelby County v. Holder case. Since then, restrictive voting laws have been passed in 20 states. Voter ID laws, gerrymandering and voter purges have been putting up new barriers to keep people from voting, especially young people and people of color.

So, on the anniversary of the VRA, WV Citizens for Clean Elections members and allies joined advocates nationwide to **demand that Congress halt the rise in voter suppression and restore the rights the Act was supposed to guarantee by passing HR 4, the Voting Rights Advancement Act.**

Protecting the right to vote for every citizen is critical to a functioning democracy. This was the message delivered by our inspiring, fiery speakers: Rick Martin, NAACP Charleston WV; Katonya Hart, AACP West Virginia; Jules Kessler, WV Wesleyan Student; and Delegate Danielle Walker, D-Monongalia. (Watch video of the speeches at wvoter-owned.org or on WVCCE's Facebook page.) In addition to calling on Congress to restore the

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Building Grassroots Power across the Mountain State

by Savanna Lyons

This year WV Citizen Action Education Fund launched an exciting new project to support and connect local grassroots organizing across the state. It's called the **WV Citizen Action Network (WV CAN)**, and it's all about connecting with voters who feel left behind by political candidates and parties – especially low-income folks, people of color, and young people. **WV CAN helps local grassroots groups listen to their own communities, build local campaigns, and take action with underrepresented voters on the issues that are hitting them the hardest.**

We started this year by working with three local grassroots partners. **Now, thanks to three new grants, we'll be supporting at least 8 local organizing projects in 2020!** This is a big step towards building people power around issues that affect so many West Virginians, like healthcare, housing, and air and water pollution. To strengthen organizing across the state, we help our local partners with things like:

- Help with choosing, planning, and implementing issue campaigns
- Grants to employ a voter engagement campaign coordinator for 10 hours/week

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Canvassers didn't let the sweltering heat burn their high spirits as they went door-to-door: Together with WV Citizen Action Network affiliate Rise Up WV, we hosted a door-to-door canvass in Kanawha County this summer to speak with community members about health care. 63% of local voters we spoke to supported Medicare for All.

- Voter outreach technology like the Voter Activation Network (VAN)
- News media outreach and social media campaign support
- Training in campaign development, canvassing, fundraising, and more
- Opportunities to collaborate on fundraising
- A statewide community of folks doing similar work, and a chance to coordinate

This summer, we were just getting started:

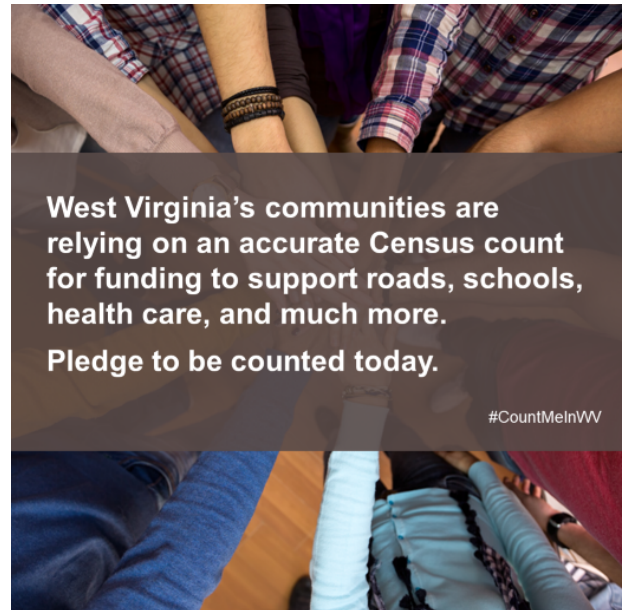
In August, we helped local partner Rise Up WV canvass over 500 homes in Kanawha County and survey members of local churches about their healthcare experiences. Our canvassers took this time to listen to residents' experience with healthcare and ask them how to improve the system. **They found that 63% of the nearly 100 people they spoke to supported Medicare for All,** and 20% were not sure but did not oppose it. Since many folks had questions about what a new national health system could do for them, we teamed up with Rise Up WV, Kanawha Valley DSA, and WV Women's March South to host forums on Medicare for All, which brought in over 70 people. Now Rise Up WV is planning another canvass, one-on-one meetings with legislators about our Healthcare for All platform, and more.

In September, we helped local partner Summers County Huddle knock on hundreds of doors and survey over 100 people to find out how Summers County residents want to improve in their communities. Their conversations with neighbors confirmed what they already suspected -- that **the lack of quality, affordable housing in Summers County is a HUGE issue.** After losing an entire local family in a house fire at a poorly maintained rental unit, the community is ready to hold landlords and local officials accountable. The Huddle teamed up with Legal Aid to provide a community training on tenants' rights and began holding campaign meetings for residents dealing with substandard housing. Activated by these actions, the City of Hinton recently held its own housing forum and is now considering hiring its own building inspector.

And in October, **we helped Ready to Vote in Jefferson County organize a door-knocking project to talk to infrequent voters and find out what issues matter most to them.** This project comes on the heels of a massive organizing movement to stop the construction of the Rockwool

insulation manufacturing plant in Jefferson County. The canvass is an opportunity to connect with people who less involved in activism, but who still worry about the water and air pollution and rising utility rates associated with Rockwool.

Partners Wanted! We're now seeking grassroots partners, especially those who want to run local campaigns on health care or environmental justice issues. Organizations who are selected will receive financial support for a local coordinator, and lots of other resources. Apply at tinyurl.com/wvcan. ♦



The Census helps make West Virginians heard. #CountMeInWV strives to count everyone.

by Julie Archer

An accurate Census count is critical for our communities. Participating in the Census helps West Virginia gets its fair share of funding for education, health care, transportation, housing, and more. The financial stakes are tremendous.

The Census is also about fair representation.

Census data is used to make decisions around political representation and to make sure that political power is fairly allocated among the states—and within states at the local level. The count determines how many seats each state gets in the House of Representatives and guides state redistricting processes. An accurate Census count makes sure that our voices are heard.

If our state and communities aren't fully counted, we pay the price in reduced political influence and power as well as money and other resources. West Virginia could even lose a member of Congress. Your city or county could give up representation in the state legislature to a community that was fully counted. That means losing access to all kinds of resources—without a chance to fix the problem for another 10 years.

Important legal battles have been fought and won to ensure that the 2020 census doesn't undercount immigrant communities and communities of color, and to hold those who have drawn political boundaries to suppress the votes of these communities are held accountable for their actions. So our hope is that everyone will participate in the Census. Otherwise those who want to manipulate the process for their own political gain win. We can't let that happen.

Get involved! The Census counts. So do you. Pledge to be counted and to educate your community about the importance of the Census and how it impacts each and every one of us. **Take the #CountMeInWV pledge at wvhealthykids.org/censuspledge.** ♦

Getting Ready for 2020

by Savanna Lyons

WV Citizen Action Group is working to build a political system that works for all West Virginians, not just the wealthy few. This year that means building a cadre of volunteers and grassroots partners who want to vet candidates based on working people's issues, then run massive voter outreach efforts before the 2020 elections. We plan to target voters who feel betrayed both political parties, and to support new candidates who will work for working people. And we want to do it in a way that builds long-term power for everyday folks – through cross-class, multiracial organizing and leadership development in our towns and rural communities.

2020 offers some big opportunities in West Virginia. Although we've seen our state turn red just in the past several years, we know many voters feel disgusted with both parties and their "business as usual" politics. Today, there are still more registered Democrats (41%) than Republicans (33%). But Democrats have been leaving the party,

with 22% of voters now identifying as unaffiliated. And in 2016, 1 in 2 eligible West Virginians didn't vote.

People are losing their faith in politics, and in both parties. But if we can talk to people about the *issues* and *values* that matter to them, we can build their confidence in voting again. And we can build power together by forming strong organizations that set the agenda for our candidates – instead of the other way around.

The time is right for this kind of movement-building, because lots of new people are getting involved. Over 17 new local grassroots organizations formed in WV since 2016. Thousands of miners have lost their pensions, jobs or paychecks to coal company bankruptcy settlements that favor corporate interests over families' survival. Many of the 230,000 county and state workers insured through the Public Employee Insurance Agency are outraged by their eroding coverage and rising premiums, which are likely to get worse next year if the legislature doesn't take action. Tens of thousands of teachers, emboldened after two successful statewide strikes in as many years, are ready to fight for investments in public education and services for kids, and to stop the diversion of tax dollars to private interests.

With volunteers like these, we have a bold plan for supporting candidates in 2020 who will step up for working people. **Our opposition is focused on influencing swing voters, but swing voters represent a tiny middle percentage of the whole electorate. But we center on people who, according to the latest turnout figures, are being left out of the political process: low income folks, people of color, and young people.** Together with these voters, we believe we have a real chance to change our representation in the State Senate and in several other areas, and we plan to knock on over 50,000 doors in key Senate districts.

For people to take action, they need to see themselves in the political process. **That's why we're fundraising to hire young and working class organizers and people of color to lead voter outreach efforts in their community.** But we're going to need your help! We rely on members, like you, to fund our electoral work and help transform the future of our state. A donation to WV Citizen Action Group can make a big difference. ♦

WVCAG Board Members wanted!

Apply at: tinyurl.com/WVCAG-board
or call our office. **Deadline: December 10.**
Elections will take place in December.

Fundraising & Administrative Volunteers Wanted!

You can help from anywhere.

Contact savanna@wvcag.org
or call our office at for details, (304) 346-5891

Stand Up (continued from page 1)

protections in the VRA, we also used the opportunity to **encourage everyone to vote in the May 12, 2020 primary**—when West Virginians will have the opportunity to vote for an **unprecedented three out of five WV Supreme Court Justices**—and in the November 3, 2020 general elections when the people will elect our next Governor and other statewide office holders, as well as the next President of the United States.

Check out the last page of this newsletter for actions you can take to support voting rights! ♦

Citizens for Clean Elections Calls for Pro-Voter Reforms, Diversity on the Bench

by Julie Archer

Below are excerpts from two recent op-eds by WV Citizens for Clean Elections. WVCCE is a coalition co-founded by WV CAG and the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition to restore health to our democracy, clean up elections, and assure that our courts are fair and impartial. To learn about our work and ways to get involved in the #WVProDemocracy movement, visit wvoter-owned.org.

From ‘**Lawmakers need to protect, promote right to vote**’ by Julie Archer, WV CAG Project Manager and Coordinator for WVCCE, published in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* 9/25/19:

In West Virginia, pro-voter advocates envision a state where elected officials don’t make it harder to vote, but rather ensure that every eligible citizen has a chance to make their voice heard. That’s why

we’re excited that our state has the distinction of being one of the first to enact automatic voter registration, in 2016. It’s a streamlined process that registers a voter or updates their registration when an eligible citizen interacts with the Division of Motor Vehicles.

Unfortunately, in West Virginia, we are suffering from a decline in voter participation, and AVR has been slow to be implemented. We started in the lead, but this puts us behind other states with healthier democracies where voters are encouraged to participate, with dramatic results. For example 9 of the top 10 states in turnout — those with turnout averaging 61 percent — offer same-day registration, full “voting at home” (also known as vote by mail), or both, according to a report by the nonprofit VOTE Foundation. By comparison, the bottom 10 states, which lack policies like these, had turnout averaging just over 43 percent, nearly 20 points lower.

With sensible policies like these, that don’t get in people’s way, we can better reflect the will of the people and, therefore, elect a government that is accountable to our communities, not powerful special interests. Anyone who supports these common-sense proposals can sign on to WV Citizens for Clean Elections’ Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption Platform to tell politicians it is time West Virginia was in the lead again.

From ‘**Judicial public financing is a racial justice issue**’ by Pam Nixon, a board member with OVEC and the People Concerned About Chemical Safety, and OVEC’s Executive Director, Vivian Stockman, published in the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, 8/17/19:

Two things happened recently that highlight the importance of the way we choose our judges. The NAACP filed lawsuits in Louisiana, Alabama and



Throwing shade at voter suppression: Julie Archer (left) and Pam Nixon (right) join advocates nationwide to demand that Congress stop the rise in voter suppression and restore the Voting Rights Act by passing HR 4.

Arkansas that argue that their judicial election districts are discriminatory. Separately, the Brennan Center for Justice found that WV's supreme courts are woefully unrepresentative of the populations our courts serve. Both tell us that the way we choose our judges has a big impact on representation on the bench and, ultimately, on our aspirations for racial justice in our criminal legal system.

West Virginia stands out as one of the few states that provides state supreme court candidates with public financing. ... The aim of public financing was to remove conflicts of interest from our courts by giving judicial candidates the ability to run for office without taking money from parties who may later have cases before the court. This program may also offer us a way forward to more representative courts. If it is strengthened and expanded, it could help a more diverse set of qualified judges get over the hurdles between them and the bench.

For many West Virginians, seeing someone on the bench who comes from a similar background and life experience is also an important part of having trust in decisions from the court. Fortunately, the WV Citizens for Clean Elections coalition has a roadmap to implementing the types of reform we need. It's the Anti-Corruption, Pro-Democracy Platform, an initiative fighting for fairer, more diverse courts in West Virginia, as well as numerous other important reforms to our state's politics.

We know that protecting and improving public financing won't transform our courts overnight. For our courts to be more fair and just, there has to be a concerted effort, starting even before law school, to recruit a diverse pool of talented law students who could eventually become judges.

We also know that you shouldn't have to be wealthy, white and male to run for the Supreme Court and that West Virginians who end up before our judges should be able to trust that there are a range of life experiences represented. ♦

Citizen Action Board Member Runs for Congress

by Savanna Lyons

It's always a little sad when someone leaves our Board of Directors. But Cathy Kunkel had a pretty good excuse. She's running for Congress to challenge Rep. Alex Mooney in the Second District.

Cathy is well-known in West Virginia for her advocacy for clean drinking water, better energy policy, and a just transition from fossil fuels. A policy analyst by trade, Cathy has advocated tirelessly for public utilities, including the rebuilding of utilities in Puerto Rico during the devastating blackouts and aftermath of Hurricane Maria. After the 2014 water crisis she co-founded Advocates for a Safe Water System, and after the 2016 election she co-founded Rise Up WV, an organization with over 1500 members, whose work has been foundational to the current organizing model used by WV Citizen Action. She also served on the national team of climate justice organizers that launched the Sunrise Movement. But after years of helping other people organize issue campaigns... and run for local office, she realized she needed to take her organizing to the federal level.

"Fundamentally, I think we should be building an economy that benefits all of us, not just the wealthy few," Kunkel told the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*. "We deserve representation in Washington, D.C., that really listens to the people of West Virginia."

Cathy's platform calls for new federal investments to help Appalachia make a strong and equitable economic transition from fossil fuels. These include infrastructure investments in water systems, broadband, reclamation and transportation. She also promotes policies to protect pensions, strengthen public education and eliminate student debt, and she supports Medicare for All.

Her opponent Alex Mooney is known for opposing social programs, immigrants' rights, and the ACA, and famously never showing up in his home district.

We wish Cathy the best in her race! ♦



Left: Former CAG board member Cathy Kunkel speaking at CAG's Spring Fling fundraiser in May. Cathy was awarded our Paul Nyden and Don Marsh Public Service award in 2018. She announced her run for Congress this fall.



GET ON THE BUS! Insulin Caravan departs for Canada in December

by Gary Zuckett

The cost of insulin, especially for Type I diabetics, is skyrocketing. Prices have climbed over 1,000% for certain types of the drug. Recent news articles reported deaths among both young people and seniors in Virginia and Ohio who were rationing their insulin or using cheaper varieties than the kind they needed. But relief may be in sight: our Healthcare for All coalition is pushing a new state bill that could control insulin costs in West Virginia.

Meanwhile, if you or someone you know is struggling to afford insulin, we have a solution!

On Sunday, Dec. 8 a bus will leave Morgantown for a day trip to Niagara Falls, Canada. Its passengers will be West Virginians who want to purchase their insulin at the much lower costs available in Canada – because Canada, unlike us, has a national health system that negotiates on drug prices. The trip is also a great publicity opportunity to pressure our lawmakers. It's time they stand up to Big Pharma and control prescription drug costs of all kinds.

To travel on the bus you'll need to do the following:

1. **Make sure you have a current passport.** If you don't, there's still time to get one! Required forms, which must be mailed, are available at travel.state.gov. Passport cards cost \$65.00; a regular passport is \$165. Regular passport applications take 6-8 weeks to process. Expedited service (8 days) costs \$60.00.
2. **Sign up for the bus.** Tickets are \$100. Scholarships may be available for those who

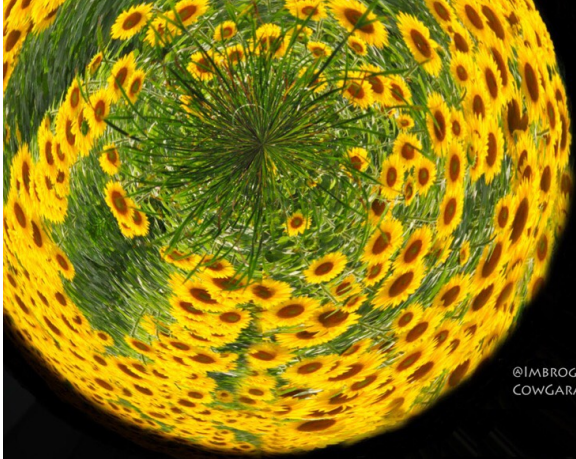
need them; fundraising is currently underway. To donate or to sign up for the bus, go to: insulincaravan.eventsmart.com.

For more info, e-mail insulincaravan@gmail.com.

Rally for Climate Strike Week

by Gary Zuckett

WV Citizens Climate Lobby, WV-CAG and other groups came together in Sept. to rally at the RC Byrd Federal Courthouse in Charleston to send a message to our government to take immediate and effective actions to mitigate the global climate crisis. This was done as part of the global Climate Strike week of action and drew about 175 folks out in support. WV-CAG board member Karan Ireland was one of the speakers and pointed out that, besides local Delegate Mike Pushkin, there were no elected officials in the crowd. [Videos](#) of this event are on our Facebook page. ♦



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GLOBALCLIMATECRISIS RALLY

THURSDAY SEP 26 | 5:30-6:30 PM
Federal Courthouse Plaza
300 Virginia St. East, Charleston WV

for MEANINGFUL ACTION on CLIMATE CHANGE

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Healthcare for All: This is the year!

by Gary Zuckett

The Affordable Care Act survived Congress, but it's still being eroded by the Trump administration and attacked in court. Thousands of people are still uninsured or have deductibles and co-pays too high to afford. Prescription drug prices are through the roof. **Time to get back on the offensive, and fight for a healthcare system that covers us all!**

In 2020 we have a plan to fight harder than ever for Medicare for All, and to win a whole list of state health policy improvements (see box at right). We're proud to announce that WV Citizen Action Education Fund, along with West Virginians for Affordable Healthcare and the WV Center on Budget and Policy, just won a grant for this work. \$300,000 from the Rx Foundation will help take our healthcare grassroots organizing to the next level.

We've supported Healthcare for All since the 1990s, and we feel now's the time to make the push across the goal line. As election day grows near, we'll be sending you info on which candidates have pledged to deliver on our healthcare agenda.

Quit Killing Us With Monopoly Rx Prices!

This fall we joined a new national campaign called "Lower Drug Prices Now," launching with a press conference and later a rally outside Sen Capito's office. At the top of our Rx agenda: the bill HR 3, which would force Big Pharma to come to the table and negotiate lower costs for consumers. Senate Majority leader "Moscow Mitch" claims the bill will be dead on arrival when it comes to his chamber. But he can't fight the American people forever! Call Senator Capito at 304-347-5372 or [sign our petition](https://tinyurl.com/rxpetition) (<https://tinyurl.com/rxpetition>) asking our Senators to get Mitch to pass drug pricing reforms.

Our Healthcare for All Platform

Federal level: Enact Medicare for All!

State level: (in the meantime...)

- Control prescription drug & insulin costs
- Protect pre-existing Conditions
- Expand Medicaid to 12 Months Post-Partum for births
- Enact Paid Family and Medical Leave
- Form a Minority Health Advisory Committee to address health disparities
- Fund Medicaid IDD Waiver slots
- End Surprise Billing
- Stop Medicaid Work Requirements

SAVE THE DATE!!

Healthcare for All Lobby Day, Jan. 30

Affordable Care Act Still Under Attack

As Medicare for All gains traction and political supporters, the ACA is still under attack in the Supreme Court. A Texas court ruling that previously declared the ACA unconstitutional is under appeal and that ruling is expected any day. If we lose the ACA before passing Medicare for All, the results would be devastating. The ACA's Medicaid expansion covers 10% (180,000+) of us in West Virginia. People with pre-existing conditions would also suffer, as insurance companies would no longer be required to cover those conditions.

Unfortunately, WV's Attorney General Patrick Morrisey has signed West Virginia on to the lawsuit against the ACA. This summer we held a 'mock trial' outside his office to expose his disregard for West Virginians' healthcare needs. The good news is that he's up for re-election next year, and has a competent challenger, so he may be easy to oust. Stay tuned!



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Sammi Brown
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Karan Ireland
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Craig Wanless

4 things you can do to be #WVProDemocracy

*#WVProDemocracy is a campaign of WV Citizens for Clean Elections,
co-founded by WV CAG and the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition.*

1. **Contact your Member of Congress** and demand they reinstate important enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act by passing the Voting Rights Advancement Act, HR 4.
2. **Check your voter registration status at [GoVoteWV.com](https://www.GoVoteWV.com)** to get ready to vote in the 2020 elections.
3. **Visit [wvoter-owned.org](https://www.wvoter-owned.org) and sign our petition** asking WV legislators to support the Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption Platform, a set of common-sense solutions that can help put our government on a path to solve problems that affect us all.
4. **Join the Democracy Donor Challenge!** If WV Citizens for Clean Elections raises \$5,000 by the end of the year, we'll receive an *additional* \$5,000 from one of our donors. Please donate online at [ohvec.org](https://www.ohvec.org) or send a check to OVEC at:
PO Box 6753, Huntington, WV 25773. Include "WV Pro-Democracy Match" in the memo line.