



West Virginia Citizen Action Group

## Capital Eye

Volume 13, Number 10 – Summer 2020

### What A Year So Far!

by Gary Zuckett

I don't know about you but in my soon to be 69 years on the planet, I can't remember one so packed with both risk, drama and opportunity for change. We started out with some significant wins at the WV Legislature (and several bad bills defeated - see our Spring newsletter).

Then, just as we'd wrapped up the session, the pandemic exploded and everything changed for everyone. Just as things were starting to reopen (though the pandemic was still raging) the murder of George Floyd sparked state, national, then global Black Lives Matter protests. As these protests continued, we held our first pandemic-altered primary elections where half of you voted by mail and polling locations that could open had trouble finding workers. Candidates campaigned online and on Zoom and we had some of the closest state-wide primary races in history.

All this and we're just now past the year's half-way point!

We hope that you and your loved ones are staying healthy and safe and are otherwise weathering this crisis. Here at CAG, most of us have been working remotely with mostly me and sometimes Alex Gallo coming into the office to check mail, messages, pay bills and open your member renewals. It's heartening to have so many loyal supporters like you who realize the fight must go on even through a global pandemic the likes of which few alive have ever seen. You continue to make our work possible - THANKS!

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### Keep Us Going and Growing!

by Alex Gallo

Our staff, volunteers and board members have continued to work hard through these challenging times. Some of the projects we focused on are highlighted in this update. We need your support to keep this work going and growing!

**Healthcare for All** - Our Healthcare for All campaign believes that healthcare is a human right and every West Virginian should have access to affordable, quality healthcare. We are working in coalition with the WV Center on Budget and Policy and West Virginians for Affordable Healthcare to expand Medicaid and fight for legislation that puts the health of West Virginians first! This summer we hosted four regional virtual town halls to get input from West Virginians on the Healthcare for All agenda.

Nationally, we are fighting for Medicare for All. On the state level, we had several legislative wins during the 2020 legislative session, including successfully placing a \$100 cap on insulin co-pays, and expanding Medicaid to include preventative dental coverage — and we aren't stopping there! You can check out the 2021 legislative agenda at [www.healthcareforallwv.com](http://www.healthcareforallwv.com).

**Please Save the Date for the Health Care for All Summit, scheduled for September 21 and 22.**

**Environmental/Climate Justice** has been a top priority too. We are working with local grassroots groups across the state to develop clean, green legislative priorities that focused on climate justice. We will continue to fight on the roll-back of clean water regulations. Last session, we worked to pass a bill to allow utility-scale solar installations by the electric utilities in WV and build support for Power Purchase Agreements to allow affordable solar installs on homes and small businesses.

**Democracy and Fair Courts** – Our clean elections campaign is working to increase transparency and accountability in West Virginia elections, and ensure that our courts are fair and impartial. Ahead of the primary, we worked with partners and allies to ensure that state and local election officials had plans in place to administer the election safely and we're currently focused on making sure voting is safe, accessible and secure in the General Election.

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## **What A Year So Far! (continued from page 1)**

Since the legislative session, we've banded together with other groups on both the c-3 and c-4 (more political) side and made literally thousands of calls and text messages to both educate voters on their new way to vote by mail and also suggest who would make good supreme court judges. See inside for more on the difference your support made in the primary elections.

On the issue side, we've worked with allies to communicate to our governor, DHHR, and other state and local officials what regular folks really need to get through this crisis. We've also communicated with our Senators on the need to make the next COVID Aid package big and bold like the HEROES Act that passed the House in May. We did a banner drop and Car-a-Van at Senator Capito's office to underline the critical needs of West Virginians right now.

Our Citizen Action Network has expanded by adding allied groups and coordinators in the Eastern Panhandle and Western edge of the state working on either Climate Justice and/or Health Care for All WV. All politics is local and community voices have power to make change!

Even before the pandemic, our national government had been infected with a critical case of Trump-itis. However, there is a sure cure coming in November. In a reversal of the film 'Matrix', enough of us must choose the Blue pill instead of the Red one. Of Course, the Blue pill is not a cure all, it is a road to recovery for a nation and state so addicted to money and (white) power, that working class folks (of all races) continue sliding deeper into debt and those already in poverty are deemed expendable. This is why we show up everyday to the fight.

What we're fighting for is a living wage, universal health care, climate & environmental justice, and a basic decent way of life for everyone. In the wealthiest nation on earth, these demands are just and achievable if we all work together.

Thank you for being our partners in the fight. When we fight, we win! And to make sure your friends and family know which candidates will fight for them when elected in November. When we vote, we win! ♦



Clockwise from top: WV CAG Board Member Betsy Forester at our #PeoplesBailout banner drop at Senator Capito's office, the Car-a-Van on Virginia Street in Charleston, WV CAG Executive Director Gary Zuckett talks to the press about what is needed in the next COVID relief package for workers, our families and communities. (Take action and demand a #PeoplesBailout! See page 4 Covid Relief for details.)

## **Keep Us Going and Growing! (continued from page 1)**

**Race Matters in Education** - We are really proud to sponsor the powerful work of Race Matters in Education. As we know there are deep systems of oppression and Race Matters in Education is taking the lead on tackling these systems and raising awareness. In West Virginia, children of color are 1.6 x more likely to spend time out of school due to disciplinary action than their fellow white classmates. Children cannot learn when they are out of school. Race Matters in Education is working to dismantle systemic racism and raise awareness of implicit bias, educating parents and guardians on the rights of their children, and increasing exposure to opportunities to learn about history and culture.

**Our work is possible because of the support of people like you!** Thank YOU! Together, we can keep going and growing. Please consider making a donation online at [www.wvcag.org](http://www.wvcag.org) or mail a check payable to WVCAG to 1500 Dixie Street, Charleston WV 25311. ♦

## **COVID Relief Needed: Demand Senators Pass a #PeoplesBailout**

Since mid-March, WV-CAG has been convening the West Virginians United table to pull resources and provide a local, state, and federal response to the pandemic. Here is what we've been advocating for workers, families and our communities:

- **Healthcare:** Increase federal Medicaid match 12-15% so to help states cover increased healthcare costs for sick residents and newly displaced workers
- **Food Security:** Bump SNAP by 15% as was done in 2008 recession. Make sure the WV Summer Foods program expands its reach and actually gets to kids in need.
- **Housing:** Keep families from being evicted and mortgages foreclosed for the duration of the pandemic.
- **Kids and Families:** Support childcare for workers and families. Support foster & kinship families. Don't force kids back into schools until it is safe.
- **States, Counties, and Cities:** Need money to stabilize their budgets, and to keep public workers who provide essential services employed.

Although the House passed the HEROES Act in May, the Senate has yet to pass another relief and recovery package until now. Thus, worsening the growing health and economic crisis which is forcing families to forgo basic needs like food and healthcare, creating massive fiscal crisis for states and wiping out jobs and small businesses.

Now is the time to contact your Senators with these demands. If we go too small, it will prolong both the economic, health and social harms. What is needed now is a bold robust response that takes care of everyone, not corporations. Contact Senators Capito and Manchin using this handy link:

<https://tinyurl.com/DemandPeoplesBailout>. ♦



## **We Are #WVProDemocracy: Fighting for Free, Fair, and Safe Elections for West Virginians**

*by Julie Archer*

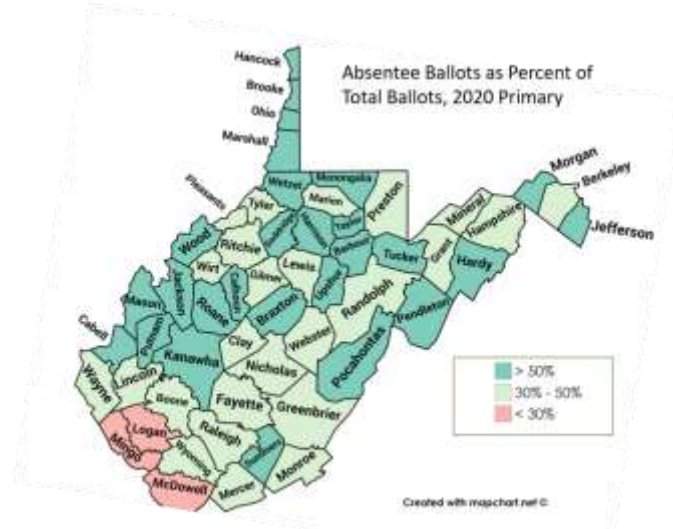
In advance of Governor Justice's stay at home order, when it appeared that our primary election would be held as the coronavirus was peaking in West Virginia, we initiated conversations with the Secretary of State's office to ensure they had plans in place to administer the election safely and protect the health of voters and poll workers.

After it was announced that the election would be delayed and that absentee voting would be available to all West Virginia voters due to the pandemic, we worked with partners and allies to educate voters about their voting options and how to vote safely in the age of COVID-19. As part of Vote Together WV, we made 7,659 calls and texted 62,423 voters.

Additionally, WV Citizens for Clean Elections partnered with the WV Consumer Protection Alliance on a website ([www.wvcourtelections.org](http://www.wvcourtelections.org)) to help voters learn more about our state Supreme Court elections and the candidates. None of this would have been possible without our amazing volunteers and the support of members like you that make our election protection and voter engagement efforts possible.

By most accounts, the primary election was a success. Although turnout was lower than we hoped, there were no systemic problems and West Virginia voters embraced absentee voting in large numbers, with half of voters choosing to cast their ballots safely from home. Ensuring the process used in the primary continues for the November election is essential to protecting our health and making our voices heard.

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●Lifting up our Pro-Democracy Platform by sending a questionnaire to legislative candidates and publicizing the results. By supporting the platform, the Legislature can give us all a greater voice, and help us all participate in building a healthier democracy.

●Advancing recusal including working on a report using this report from Common Cause Ohio as a template, and engaging legal scholars and former judges. (What is recusal and why is it important? Visit [www.wvoter-owned.org](http://www.wvoter-owned.org) to read my June commentary on reforms needed to bring greater trust, accountability and transparency to the judiciary.)

Please contact [julie@wvoter-owned.org](mailto:julie@wvoter-owned.org) if you are interested in being part of these efforts. We're grateful for your support and look forward to hearing from you! ♦

Absentee voting in the primary was a "natural experiment" that provided evidence regarding the acceptance of vote-by-mail in WV. Source: [www.VoteByMailWV.com](http://www.VoteByMailWV.com). Check out this new website to learn more about vote by mail, how it is envisioned for WV, and how it works in other states.

**We Are #WVProDemocracy  
(continued from page 3)**

Although the Secretary of State's office confirmed that voters will be able to use COVID-19 as a medical excuse to vote absentee in the upcoming election, at this point we don't know if the necessary executive orders and funding will be in place to mail applications to voters, as was done in the primary.

Giving all West Virginia voters the option to safely vote absentee ballot in light of the ongoing pandemic was just and right. WV Citizens for Clean Elections, the WV Poor People's Campaign and others are part of a coalition of voting rights advocates and community leaders calling on the governor, and state and local election officials to make the process consistent with the primary by mailing absentee ballot applications to all registered voters. Help us keep the pressure on by sending a letter to Governor Jim Justice and Secretary of State Mac Warner using this link:  
<https://tinyurl.com/ProtectOurVoteWV>

Our democracy depends on fair and open elections and the health of our people. We can have both!

In addition to ensuring voting is safe, accessible and secure in November, we are working to engage folks in projects we have planned for the remainder of 2020, and move people to action on our pro-democracy and fair courts agenda. This includes:



Some of the amazing volunteers who were part of our Vote Together WV phone bank. We made 7,659 calls and texted 62,423 voters to educate them about their voting options and how to vote safely in the age of COVID-19.

# Pandemic Primary Primer

by Gary Zuckett

Along with everything else, the pandemic really threw the primary election for a loop. Candidates couldn't knock on doors and there were no in-person town halls or candidate forums. Meanwhile, voters sent in requests for absentee (mail-in) ballots and several of our more populated counties had a hard time keeping up. County clerks also had a hard time recruiting poll workers (most are older and at risk) so many counties drastically curtailed and combined polling locations. Harrison and Wood both went down from nearly 70 polling locations to seven each.

Even with a whopping 50% of all votes being mailed in, our turnout dropped compared to the last presidential primary – down to 37% from 40% percent four years ago. With less than 100 days to go, universal vote by mail cannot be enacted and implemented before November, but we can, and should, carry the process that was used in the primary over to the General Election. See Julie's article, and visit [www.VoteByMailWV.com](http://www.VoteByMailWV.com) to learn more about vote by mail, how it is envisioned for WV, and how it works in other states.

## Squeakers Abound

'Every vote counts' was never so true as in this primary. Several state and federal races were drawn out for over a week as last minute mail-in ballots made the difference in the Democratic race for the Attorney General nomination. In the end, Sam Brown Petsonk overtook his opponent, Delegate Sponaugle by only .1% or 168 votes. Sam will now challenge Republican AG Patrick Morrissey. In the 3rd Congressional District, the Democratic nomination went to Hilary Turner who beat Mr. Lacy Watson by only 102 votes out of over 57,000 cast in the race! Hilary now goes up against first term incumbent Carol Miller. Now the challenge is to Get Out The Vote (GOTV) in November!

WV CAG is proud to have both present and former board members running for office. Delegate Sammi Brown from Jefferson County is running for reelection, and former board member and cofounder of our Kanawha County grassroots affiliate Rise Up WV, Cathy Kunkel, ran unopposed in the 2nd Congressional District's Democratic primary. She will challenge Republican incumbent Alex Mooney in November.

## Squawkers, Too

In all ten incumbent Republicans lost their primary elections including Senate President Carmichael and former House Majority leader Daryl Cowles. None of the Democrats seeking reelection were defeated in their primaries.

## WV Will Have to Wait (a Little Longer)

Stephen Smith was neck and neck much of election night with Ben Salango but, in the end, voters put Kanawha County Commissioner Salango over the top by only 5% in a five-way race where the winner got less than 40% of the vote. Stephen ran a historic campaign with a detailed 34-point policy plan and a team of over 80 'WV Can't Wait' candidates running for office. A whopping 47 won their primary elections and are advancing to November. Statewide candidates included WV Can't Wait candidates like Paula Jean Swearingen (challenging Senator Shelley Moore Capito) and Mary Ann Claytor for WV Auditor (challenging JB McCuskey). Salango's task now is to bring Smith's supporters into the 'big tent' to successfully challenge incumbent governor Jim Justice.

The other major grassroots political movement that is gathering steam is the **WV Working Families Party**. WV-CAG is a founding member. Check out their endorsements at [www.wvworkingfamilies.org](http://www.wvworkingfamilies.org). **If you like what you see, attend their state convention online this Saturday August 8<sup>th</sup> sign up here:**

<https://www.mobilize.us/wv-wfp/event/289206/>

We've often heard 'this is the most important election in our lifetimes'. Well, this IS the most important election in ours for sure. If we don't get off their butts and vote to change the direction the state and country are heading, we may not have a recognizable democracy by 2024. Make a commitment today to do more than vote. Find a local or state candidate that you believe in and volunteer, or sign up to be a citizen activist with us here at WV CAG. We'll be working with our members and affiliates all over the state on GOTV efforts. Contact [alexandra@wvcag.org](mailto:alexandra@wvcag.org) for more info on how you can be part of the 2020 team!

You can also help us Get Out The Vote by renewing your membership or making a donation today using the form on the back of this newsletter. Your support will help keep the 'Action' in Citizen Action! ♦

WV Citizen Action Group  
1500 Dixie Street  
Charleston, WV 25311



## Address Service Requested

*Keep Us Going and Growing!*

**WV CAG Membership/ WV CAEF Support Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual: \_\_\$35    Family: \_\_\$50    Student/Senior: \_\_\$15    Sustainer: \_\_\$250    Public Citizen: \_\_\$500

Enclosed is \$ \_\_\_\_\_ made payable to **WV Citizen Action (WV CAG) (not tax deductible).**

Enclosed is \$ \_\_\_\_\_ made payable to **WV Citizen Action Education Fund (WV-CAEF) (tax deductible).**

**Please mail checks to:** WV CAG or WVCAEF | 1500 Dixie Street | Charleston, WV 25311

**You can also donate online at [wvcag.org](http://wvcag.org) or [wvcaef.org](http://wvcaef.org).**

*Please consider setting up an automatic monthly recurring donation.*

**Thank you for your support!**