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**Achieving Change Together**

## June 2022 ClassACTions Newsletter

June is bustin' out all over. Given the events in the news, certainly not quite the way we all would wish. We hope you can find time to do something restorative. If you are looking for a provocative beach or deck read (we know, an oxymoron), may we suggest "The Flag, The Cross and the Station Wagon: A Graying American Looks Back at His Suburban Boyhood and Wonders What the Hell Happened," by **Bill McKibben '82**? The author—an eminent environmental journalist—has many of the same concerns that animate ClassACT HR73, including a desire to keep fighting the good fight. Not exactly escapist, we know, but renewing nonetheless.

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### **VOTER SUPPRESSION: A CANCER IN OUR BODY POLITIC**



Video created by **Rick Brotman '73**

[Click here for more information](#)

With many primaries behind us, we now are scant weeks away from the 2022 midterm elections. Many of us are looking toward November with considerable trepidation, and not only because of societal and economic turbulence. In several crucial precincts, we are worried that the outcomes will be influenced by voter suppression.

Classmates **Marilyn Go**, **Ryan O’Connell** and **Jim Harbison** of ClassACT HR73’s Justice & Civic Engagement group have been studying voter suppression. (Their findings are reported here and in the accompanying video above). To say the least, the situation is dire. Says Ryan, “This is the most serious, well-coordinated attack on voting rights that we have seen since the end of the Civil War. Now, it’s not just Black Americans who are affected but also white urban Americans who live in key battleground states with razor-thin election margins.”

Legislatures in many Republican-dominated states are passing laws in a deliberate drive to make it harder for voters, particularly minorities, to cast their ballots. Since the 2020 election, lawmakers in 19 states have passed 34 laws that restrict voting rights. It is not a coincidence that seven of those states have a long history of suppressing African-Americans’ access to the ballot box. (But among the states in the voter-suppression ranks, notes Ryan, are Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, hardly bastions of the old Confederacy.)

For fifty years, many of these states were among the 15 jurisdictions that were constrained by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. They had to submit any proposed voting laws for review by the Department of Justice. But in 2013, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the U.S. Supreme Court eviscerated Section 5 of the Act, and ended the preclearance requirement. That decision has allowed seven of these states, and others, to pass the current wave of voter suppression laws. Says Jim, “As soon as the Voting Rights Act got gutted, immediately there were legislatures that passed legislation that changed [things]. They were just waiting and—bang!—it happened.”

Matters have only become worse in 2022, as legislators in at least 27 states have introduced, pre-filed, or carried over 250 bills with restrictive provisions. This dramatic increase in the number of harsh voter suppression measures threatens our democracy – it is a cancer in our body politic. (One place you can go to keep up with the suppression standings is the website of the Brennan Center for Justice, [brennancenter.org](https://www.brennancenter.org).)

The stated rationale behind these efforts is that fraud exists that must be eliminated. “There’s virtually no significant fraud in any American election anywhere,” says Ryan. “So this is a solution in search of a problem that doesn’t exist.”

## **Voter Suppression Techniques**

Laws restricting voting rights that have been passed, or have been proposed, seek to disenfranchise voters through several techniques, such as:

- Limiting the use of voting by mail, either outright or by reducing the number of drop boxes. This is a favorite target. Why? Says Ryan, “A lot of Blacks and Latinos have working-class jobs and live in neighborhoods where often the lines are quite long. They don’t have a nice white-collar job where they can step out of the office for a couple of hours. It doesn’t work that way.” So they are perfect candidates for mail-in voting. “Six states use mail-in voting almost exclusively and it works fine,” says Ryan.
- Cutting the number of polling stations in densely populated cities, particularly in minority neighborhoods.
- Reducing the hours when polling stations are open.
- Allowing officials great leeway to purge voting rolls.
- Requiring voter identification or limiting the acceptable forms of voter ID—often a problem for minority voters.
- Preventing groups from providing water bottles to voters standing in long lines in areas with limited polling sites.

In a new twist, several states, such as Georgia, have enacted laws that could allow partisan politicians to interfere in overseeing election results. Under these laws, they have been given the authority to supplant non-partisan state officials, such as secretaries of state, who have traditionally tabulated and certified election results.

Furthermore, several new laws impose criminal penalties—including prison sentences—upon election officials who take innocuous steps such as sending mail-in ballots to voters on their own initiative, rather than in response to a request. These laws are intended to intimidate election officials from performing their duties.

How far will the suppressors go to suppress? Says Jim, “In the 2018 election Florida passed a referendum declaring that convicted felons who had served their time could vote again. But the legislature then passed a law that said first they had to pay back the monetary costs of the crime that put them in the clink to begin with.” (There’s now a bill in the legislature that would overturn the legislature’s work.)

## **Don’t Count on the Federal Government**

Since the 2020 election, Congress has failed twice to pass legislation to

protect voting rights in Federal elections, primarily because of steadfast Republican opposition.

Also, in 2021, the Supreme Court issued a decision that severely weakened Section 2, the other major provision of the Voting Rights Act, in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*.

The Department of Justice launched an investigation of the voting suppression law that Georgia passed in 2021, but that has not led to any other action thus far.

In short, we should not anticipate that the Federal Government will act.

Instead, we should assume that the states will conduct their 2022 (and '24) elections under the new, repressive laws. Georgia and several other states have already conducted their primary elections under their new frameworks.

**How to Defend Voting Rights**

Organization	Category	Mobilization	Registration	Education	5013	Description	Web Site	Address Phone Email
National and Multi-State								
Common Cause		Y	Y	Y	Y	Common Cause has a national office in Washington, D.C. and local offices in 30 states, including one in NYC. The national and state organizations have campaigns on voting and election. The national organization has focused on vote-by-mail, election integrity, national popular vote, election protection, voting rights and voter registration. Each state branch has its own and differing focus. For example, the New York office website lists in its voting rights section various campaigns on different topics, including ranked choice voting, generation vote (getting younger voters to vote) and ballot access measures. See <a href="https://www.commoncause.org/our-work/voting-and-elections/">https://www.commoncause.org/our-work/voting-and-elections/</a>	<a href="http://www.commoncause.org/">www.commoncause.org/</a>	
Election Protection Coalition		Y	Y	Y	Y	Election Protection is a national network of nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations that work to protect all voters by providing information, resources and help for any issues voters may experience. Volunteer lawyers take calls from voters in the office or at home to advise them on registration, eligibility and other issues on a state-specific basis, before and on Election Day. EP provides remote training sessions and state-specific materials for volunteers. EP volunteers also monitor polling stations and advise voters on site. Made up of more than 100 local, state and national partners. Works with Common Cause and other voter groups. Election Protection is a subsidiary of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, also included in this spreadsheet.	<a href="http://866ourvote.org">866ourvote.org</a>	
Fair Fight		Y	Y	Y	Y	Fair Fight promotes fair elections around the country, encourages voter participation in elections, and educates voters about elections and their voting rights. Originally founded by Stacy Abrams in Georgia, now fighting anti-voter bills across the country	<a href="http://www.fairfight.com">www.fairfight.com</a>	1270 Caroline Street, NE Suite D120-432 Atlanta, GA 30307  info@FairFightAction.com
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights		Y	Y	Y	Y	In addition to its activities as a member of the Election Protection Coalition, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights has coordinated and integrated programs of litigation, voter protection, advocacy and education designed to empower communities of color, low-income communities, youth, people with disabilities and other traditionally disenfranchised populations.	<a href="http://www.lawyerscommittee.org/project/voting-rights-project/">www.lawyerscommittee.org/project/voting-rights-project/</a>	1500 K Street NW Suite 900 Washington, DC 20005  202-662-8600 Toll Free

*Click photo to see full list of activism opportunities!*

The goal of the new laws is to suppress voter turnout in key districts, particularly in swing states, to favor one political party. At this point, the best way to defend voting rights is through massive drives to register voters and helping them get to the polls. The J&CE team has compiled a list of organizations (**click the photo above**) that have the experience and know-how to do that.

The list includes broad-based civic groups, such as Common Cause and the League of Women Voters, as well as groups that focus on Blacks, Latinos, and

Asian Americans. We describe the organizations and provide their contact information. Please note that the list is compiled based on available information as of the date indicated on the spreadsheet. Tax laws and the tax status of organizations may be changed, and you should separately consider the deductibility of any donations made. For information regarding how to register to vote, polling sites, absentee ballots, and other voting information by state, go to: <https://www.commoncause.org/voting-tools/>.

Because of ClassACT HR73's 501c3 non-profit status, we have only listed groups that are non-partisan, though some organizations may be 501c4 entities to which donations are not tax-deductible.

For the lawyers in our class, Ryan particularly recommends the Election Protection Coalition. "It is nonpartisan, excellent," he says. "You do have to be a lawyer. They allow you to call from your office or your house and they advise voters on a real-time basis. I worked for them in 2020 and they're a superb outfit."

There's always good, old-fashioned reaching out. Says Jim, "If absentee ballots need to be in seven days before the election, you can participate in phone banks that help people get their ballots in eight days before. It's marginal, it won't solve the whole thing, but it might make it easier for some people to vote." One at a time, those votes are crucial to democracy.

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### **SPOTLIGHT ON: THE CLASSACT HR73 COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE**



*Video created by **Rick Brotman '73***

What does ClassACT HR73's Communications Committee do? What does it not do? Says committee chairman and ClassACT HR73 Board Member **Stan Mark '73**; "The Communications Committee really touches every part of

ClassACT HR73.” Adds fellow board and committee member **Henrietta Wigglesworth Lodge ’73**, a prime producer of the steady stream of publications, “It’s more than a Communications Committee—it’s a marketing committee.”

As if it didn’t have enough to do, the Communications Committee commissioned member **Rick Brotman ’73** to produce a video about its work—and, it hopes, as a recruiting tool to augment its industrious staff.

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### COUNTDOWN TO THE 50TH REUNION



*Marion Dry, Therese Steiner, Dan Hoffheimer, Jane Condon, Bob Dohner, Patty Potter, Ken Bartels, Kathryn Tolbert Dohner, George Putnam, John Noran, Janet O'Connell, Ryan O'Connell, Carl Muller, Allison Muller, Nick Sakellariadis at National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati*

Don’t look now...but our 50th reunion is officially less than a year away. Before every major reunion members of our class host regional gatherings, several of which already are in the works (see below). Every classmate is invited to every regional event. The first took place in early May in Dayton/Cincinnati and was attended by a large number of classmates and guests.

Attending one or more of these is a great way to reconnect with classmates and get primed for the reunion!

## Dates and locations for Pre-Reunion Regional Gatherings:

- New York City: Wednesday, November 2, 2022
- Boston: Friday, November 11, 2022
- San Francisco: February, 2023 (date TBD)
- Charleston, SC: Saturday, April 22 and Sunday, April, 23, 2023
- Washington, D.C.: Tuesday, April 25, 2023
- Los Angeles, CA: TBD

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## COUNTDOWN TO THE 50TH: THE MOVIE



*\*Click on the video above to see how this project might take shape*

A message from ClassACT HR73 videomeister **Rick Brotman**:

For almost 50 years many of us in the Class of '73 have moved in the direction of our dreams towards a more equitable, responsible, engaged community. This pursuit has taken on many forms.

**Over the next year I intend to create a series of videos that illustrate the stories of how our classmates are doing this.**

This project's intent is to honor and recognize the way we have initiated and are pursuing change in a myriad of ways. Additionally, it is to focus the conversation over the next year as we approach the 50th reunion around how we can mutually support such activities.

ClassACT HR73 provides a framework and starting point for doing this primarily through the Bridges. Additionally, ClassACT HR73's communications committee's participation allows the project to broaden beyond what I can do alone.

The world of video has changed and evolved significantly during the pandemic. An unfunded project of this scope was unthinkable a few years ago. The opportunity to reach out to individuals who are part of ClassACT HR73 or who could participate is unique. This project would allow us all to build momentum towards the reunion and it would give ClassACT HR73 the opportunity to initiate and lead the conversation around building community and giving back.

I have a number of ideas regarding how to present the videos as a buildup to the reunion on social media. Additionally, there may be ways of helping with the reunion programming either online or in person. All of that is still over the horizon and not yet visible, but, as the Chinese proverb says, even the longest journey starts with a single step.

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**A NEW POST FOR CLASSMATE AND HARVARD OVERSEER  
LESLIE TOLBERT**



Photo courtesy of **Leslie Tolbert '73**

Congratulations to **Leslie Tolbert '73, Ph.D. '78**, who recently has been named Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee of the Harvard Board of Overseers. Leslie will serve in the post during 2022-23, the final year of her six-year term as overseer. This is the latest prestigious position for Leslie, a neuroscientist and former senior vice president for research at the University of Arizona. For more about Leslie's distinguished career and many roles on

the Board of Overseers, see below.

[Click for the article](#)

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### **Interested in helping ClassACT?**

ClassACT is built on classmate participation and we are interested in having every classmate as a member of our ClassACT community. If you are interested in learning more about ClassACT and how you can be involved, please visit our [website](#) or send us an [email](#).

While encouraging the sharing of time and willingness to work together, ClassACT also welcomes financial support. To support our work in this way you can donate below.

[Donate Here](#)

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[Class Achieving Change Together \(Class ACT\), Inc.](#)



