



## DEMOCRACY TALKING POINTS

*Connecting Democracy and Human Dignity Issues*

### 1) Inclusion of all; Equality for all.

“Democracies have various arrangements to prevent any person or branch of government from becoming too powerful.” Throughout history, the most important aspects of the democratic way of life have been the principles of individual equality and freedom.” (All quotes are from *The World Book Encyclopedia 1994* except where noted.)

In his State of the Union speech in 1941, a time when Hitler was sweeping across Europe, Franklin Roosevelt discussed four essential human freedoms. The first was freedom of speech and expression; the second was freedom of religious expression; the third was freedom from want; and the fourth was freedom from fear.

Roosevelt’s freedom of speech and expression and freedom from fear seems especially pertinent to this principle of democracy. Only with freedom from fear and with freedom of speech and expression will all voices be heard.

What is meant by inclusion of all has changed over time as seen in the struggle for increased suffrage for those groups not originally included by our founding fathers. And genuine inclusion of all in a broader sense than voting rights is still not a reality. However, inclusion of all is an incredibly important goal of democracy. Based on ROP bylaws, inclusion of all includes age, color, economic status, education, marital status, national origin, parenthood, familial status, race, religion, gender, sexual identity or physical handicap.

### 2) Majority rule and minority rights.

“Majority rule is based on the idea that if all citizens are equal, the judgment of the many will be better than the judgment of a few.” “Democratic countries guarantee that certain rights can never be taken from the people, even by extremely large majorities.” “Most constitutions have a detailed bill of rights that describes the basic liberties of the people and forbids the government to violate those rights.”

### 3) Democracy requires well-educated and well-informed people who participate in the democratic process.

“Democracy calls for widespread participation in politics by the people.” “The quality of government depends on the quality of participation. Well-informed and well-educated citizens are able to participate more intelligently.”

This principle requires that people move far beyond the “sound bite” level in their discussion and analysis of issues. This means research and digging up facts as well as careful analysis and open discussion of concerns. Applying this principle to anti-affirmative action efforts, for example, helps broaden that discussion to the underlying issue of racism and people’s fears about economic decline that requires scapegoats rather than close examination of the widening gap between the haves and the have nots and how that gap is facilitated (or not) by government policies and business practices.

### 4) A reasonable standard of living – Economic justice.

“Most successful democracies have existed in developed societies. In such societies, literacy rates are high, per capita (per person) incomes are moderate to high, and there are few extremes of wealth and poverty.”

In his 1941 State of the Union speech, Roosevelt said, “Certainly this is no time for any of us to stop thinking about the social and economic problems which are the root cause of the social revolution which is today a supreme factor in the world. For there is nothing mysterious about the foundations of a healthy and strong democracy. The basic things expected by our people of their political and economic systems are simple. They are: Equality of opportunity for youth and for others. Jobs for those who can work. Security for those who need it.” (From: *The American Reader*, editor, Diane Ravitch, Harper-Collins, 1990).