



# Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Your Voice in the Nation's Capital



## UUSJ Guide to Questions for Candidates 2018

Every election is an opportunity to engage with candidates as they host town halls and meet with voters in the weeks before we all vote. This provides a great way to lift up our UU concerns to candidates and the public alike. As a non-partisan organization, Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ) engages at the Federal level across the political spectrum to work for positive change and advocate for UU values. We hope you find this Guide to Questions for Candidates 2018 and toolkit of tips useful as you make plans to engage directly with candidates and the public to raise our issues of concern.

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This is the PDF version of the [online Guide](http://www.uusj.org) found at [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org). As of 10-24-2018.

# Introduction & Purpose of this Guide

UUs are great at conducting traditional voter registration and voter mobilization efforts. **This Guide intends to support UUs that also wish to participate in public forums with candidates and engage them on social justice issues from a faith-based perspective.**

The Guide also intends to help UUs consider how they will vote in the 2018 midterm elections and better understand how issues are grounded in our faith. **It focuses on three issues that reflect UU values — immigration, economic justice, and environmental and climate justice.** These issues reflect UU Statements of Conscience and other UU positions. The sample questions reflect timely issues that are under consideration in Congress or fall to Congress for action.

Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote seven Principles, which **we hold as strong values and moral guides**. From these principles grow our expressions of love, our work for social justice and our quest for “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations” and the affirmation of “the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” **We are especially inspired by our 4th Principle, a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, and our 5th Principle, which undergirds our support of the democratic process.**



The sample questions in this Guide are designed for candidates for the US Congress. They can be modified and adapted to address specific local issues and perspectives. The questions can be used by individuals or in congregational and community discussions.

**Why should we bother?** We are living out our 5th Principle – the use of the democratic process. Engaging with candidates creates opportunities to build relationships for future conversations with elected officials.

**Asking questions grounded in UU values gives us an opportunity to raise our concerns not only with candidates but with the general public, too.**

**Candidates need to hear from us!** What candidates hear on the campaign trail informs them of the issues their constituents care about and can influence the actions they are willing to take, if elected. These relationships are a vital part of the full civic engagement cycle—from candidate to elected official to public accountability. After an election UUs need to continue to raise our voices on critical social justice issues—**civic engagement and advocacy is a year-round responsibility!**

# How to Use This Guide



Become a better informed and engaged voter. Raise our UU issues with candidates and your local community by using this Guide.

**Here are two ways to make the most of this Guide:**

1. **Use questions in this Guide “as is” or adapt them to raise questions with your candidates for the US Congress.** Use the Guide as an individual or along with members of your congregation.

OR

2. **Use this Guide as a starting point in your congregation to begin a discernment process for in-depth discussion on issues that are important to your congregation and community.** Develop your own questions for state and/or Federal candidates and localize your questions.



**Here are some tips to engage with candidates:**

**Following are some tips to create a plan to find and engage candidates – as an individual or group from your congregation – to raise your UU issues of concern.**



**Talk with your minister and social justice leaders about gathering a group** to discuss what issues are most important to them and the community. Then promote the gathering widely.



**Hold a gathering to discuss and discern the issues most important in your community and congregation.** Allow at least two hours. If it's around a meal time, bring snacks or make it a potluck.



**In preparation for the meeting, identify several issues that might be considered using this Guide and adding issues that you know have been a concern to members of your congregation and community.** This will help focus the conversation. Decide if the issues will be at the state and/or Federal level. Then do some brainstorming and list the issues with the most support on a flip chart. If needed and if there are many people in attendance, rank issues by dot voting and a pattern will emerge. Identify the top questions that you want to ask your candidates.



**As part of the discernment process, consider why an issue is important.** How is it grounded in our faith? Has the denomination or General Assembly taken a position on the issue, such as a Statement of Conscience, Congregational Study Action Issue, or Action of Immediate Witness?




**Research the candidates' positions on the issues you've identified.** If one of the candidates is an incumbent in the U.S. House of Representatives or Senate, go to [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) and research their voting records. Go to trusted sources, such as the League of Women Voters, Sierra Club, or

AAUW Action Fund to find out about the candidates. For example, you can find out [how lawmakers voted](#) on key Affordable Health Care Act (ACA) legislation.

 **Make a plan of engagement with the candidates to raise your questions:**

- **Do some “bird dogging.” Find out where candidates will already be speaking** and show up and ask your questions at existing events.
  - Follow candidates on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to both raise your questions and concerns and to learn where they are appearing at public events.
- **Tips for speaking at a public forum – speak from your heart:**
  - Make your questions provocative without being rude.
  - Keep questions short. The longer you speak the more of your audience you will lose and less time for the candidates to talk.
  - Do not lecture. If you must cite a fact or share a personal story to set up your question keep it on point, brief and as compelling as possible.
  - Find more tips [here](#) or at the end of this Guide for speaking in public meetings.
- **Identify people willing to go to the public events.** Provide several questions—you will need several people each to ask a question. And it’s possible that you will have to submit your question in writing. Prepare it in advance.
- **Send a letter or email message to the candidate to ask your questions.**
- **Write a letter to the editor or respond to an article in the newspaper.** Keep your responses short—150 words or less.

 **Take photos at campaign events. And share the candidates’ responses to your questions with your congregation and allies. Send your photos to [gotv@uusj.org](mailto:gotv@uusj.org) and we’ll share them to encourage others.**

And find out more about UUSJ’s mobilizing for the elections resource including signage for tabling on Sundays. Visit our UUSJ [UUs Mobilizing for the 2018 Midterm Election toolkit - link here](#) - or at website at [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org),



## Questions for Candidates

Below are three sets of questions to be used for US Senate and House races that can be used “as is” or modified to better fit your particular state or local concerns. It’s important to be clear about UU social justice issues that are of concern to you, your congregation and community and to prepare your questions in advance. You can link to additional questions at the end of each section.



## Immigration Justice

**Question:** What will you do to support immigrants, regardless of legal status, especially those that currently have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS)?

**UU perspective:** We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and their right to feel safe and to have basic food and shelter. Challenging economic and social conditions such as gang and domestic violence that drive migration, especially from Central America, are often linked to US policies or environmental issues. We support clear paths to permanent residency and citizenship and work visas that allow multiple entries and discourage exploitation of labor. We call for adherence to Constitutional requirements for equal protection regardless of citizenship status as well as adherence to international law protecting those seeking asylum.

**Question:** What are your views on the detention of families and children to deter border crossing or on deporting law-abiding legal residents with American children or spouses?

**UU perspective:** The current Administration's restrictive and punishing policies harm migrants and our asylum system and conflict with our 2nd Principle which calls for justice, equity and compassion in human relations.. The "zero tolerance" family separation of border crossers traumatized thousands, with dozens of children still not reunited with their families. Additionally, the number of unaccompanied minors being kept in detention is growing (12,500 as of October 2018). Keeping asylum-seeking families in detention uses many times more of our tax dollars than proven community-based alternatives. Also, abusive treatment of detainees by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and contractors has been documented. Moral immigration laws that are just and humane contribute to the public good, define the parameters of legal immigration, and restrict harmful influences such as criminal intent, epidemics, and contraband. We advocate improved technology for surveillance, not more miles of a separation wall, to help secure our borders.

**Question:** What are your views on the recent drastic reductions in the refugee resettlement ceiling and the ban on any refugees from a number of Muslim-majority countries?

**UU perspective:** We believe the US has a moral responsibility to support refugees and that moral immigration policy would include the provision of asylum for refugees and others living in fear of violence or retribution. While the world is in the midst of the largest global migration on record, any reduction in the refugee admissions cap is an affront to the moral

*responsibility and humanitarian values of the US as a safe haven for those fleeing violence and insecurity. The current administration had set the 2018 cap at historic low levels (45,000) and has not dedicated necessary resources to the processing of even that low level. Levels for 2019 were set even lower. UUs stand with refugees, and we have for 80 years.*

**Question:** For those who cross our borders requesting asylum, do you believe that credible fear of gang violence, domestic violence, or harassment of LGBTQ individuals should be among the justifications for granting asylum?

**UU perspective:** *We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and in the human right of everyone to feel safe. Just as in the case of refugees fleeing countries at war or experiencing civil conflict, persons fleeing countries which have a high level of gang-related violence, in part the outcome of past US policies, deserve to be considered for asylum. Individuals who have suffered documented violence, discrimination, and harassment based on their sexual orientation must continue to be considered for asylum as should women who have a credible fear of death or injury from domestic abuse by their partners.*

*Following are additional questions for your consideration:*

- *What are your views on using for-profit contractors to provide facilities for immigrant detainees? Do you support community-based alternatives to detention?*
- *Do you believe the current lottery immigration system to encourage country diversity should be continued? Should we expand the “merit” system to select immigrants?*
- *Should minors who have crossed our borders and been apprehended have access to legal representation in any removal proceedings?*





## Environmental and Climate Justice

**Question:** A recent scientific report to the United Nations projects rapidly rising temperatures, extreme storms and heat waves, and coastal devastation unless immediate and drastic changes are made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit our use of fossil fuels within the next 12 years. To avoid devastating changes to the planet and civilization, what policies will you support to avert these catastrophes?

**UU perspective:** Our 7th Principle calls us to have respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. We agree with most scientists and 13 federal agencies that humans are the primary cause of the global temperature rise. The United Nations urgently warns that rapid action must be taken within 12 years (before 2030) to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, to avoid the worst damage from climate change. We believe the US should be a leader in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and in the shift from support for and use of fossil fuels to renewable energy technologies and improved energy efficiency. Bold action, both individually and collectively, is required to address these alarming trends.

**Question:** How will you ensure that we all, including the most vulnerable, have access to clean and affordable water, and ensure the air we breathe is clean today and for future generations?

**UU perspective:** We believe that a healthy environment is a basic human right and includes access to clean and affordable water, and clean air. Water is essential for life, but access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is not universally available in the US. After decades of progress to reduce hazardous air pollutants, national clean air regulations are being loosened or eliminated, putting our health at risk. Lower income Americans and those facing economic crises struggle most with the negative consequences of poor water quality and clean air policies.

**Question:** Since the US is in the process of withdrawing from the Paris climate accord, how should the US be involved in international efforts to mitigate and adapt to extreme weather changes including rising sea-levels that particularly impact vulnerable communities?

**UU perspective:** Guided by an Action of Immediate Witness in support of joining the Paris Agreement and our 2nd Principle to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, we believe the US should remain a party to the Paris Agreement because climate change is a global threat that requires global solutions. We support the Agreement as an effort by the international community to mitigate and adapt to climate change to help the world's most vulnerable communities. The Agreement requires transparent funding, new



technology, and capacity building. Ignoring this urgent call to action could lead to more global unrest and mass migration. Bold action, both individually and collectively, is required by all nations to address this existential threat.

**Question:** Since international demand for renewable energy is expanding, what role should US public policy play to advance renewable energy technology and usage, like solar, wind, and geothermal?

**UU perspective:** Guided by our 2nd and 7th Principles to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations and respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part, UUs believe we have a moral responsibility to Earth, to all beings, and to future generations to do everything in our power to bring about a swift transition from fossil fuels to a sustainable energy economy. The world's dependence on coal and petroleum comes at great cost to the environment and human health. US public investment in advanced technologies for renewable energy would demonstrate leadership as well as provide jobs, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, foster economic development, and improve our national security. We support moving away from subsidies for the fossil fuel sector and investing in renewable energy.

**Question:** The transportation sector is a leading contributor to greenhouse gases. Do you agree with freezing fuel economy standards at 2020 levels, or increasing them every year? Do you support allowing states to set their own standards, as California has done?

**UU Perspective:** The clean car standards are the most significant American effort to curb climate pollution. It is crucial to increase fuel economy standards every year. Increasing fuel economy standards also supports American innovation and auto manufacturing jobs. As UUs, our 5th principle promotes the democratic process. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must consider feedback received during the public hearings and public comment period during the federal rulemaking process that is going on now. There should be a Congressional hearing that allows back-and-forth on the input. Congress should direct the National Academy of Sciences to provide supplemental data and analysis to the EPA before its final decision to rollback clean car rules.

Following are additional questions for your consideration:

- Conservative projections are that sea levels will rise another 1½ feet over the next 2-3 decades, bringing extreme weather changes that threaten people's health and welfare, security, and property, and the economy in areas such as tourism. What policies and regulations will you support to mitigate the dangers to communities at risk?
- What are your views on the use of a carbon fee and dividend, or similar approaches to pricing to reflect the true price of carbon, to help reduce greenhouse gases and mitigate the effects of our warming climate?
- What solutions do you suggest for addressing the climate crisis we now face?
- Do you believe that the current regulations on coal-burning power plant mercury emissions are essential to protect children's health or do you support the rollback of regulations on toxic chemicals emissions being considered by the administration?

## More Resources and About UUSJ

We hope you have found this Guide helpful. Any feedback will be most welcome as we gear up for the 2020 elections. We will continue our UUSJ advocacy work throughout the year, and will hold our elected officials accountable for the promises made during their political campaigns. If you would like to help us develop and grow a rapid response UU network please contact us. Send comments, questions and suggestions to [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org).

### More Resources:

- **“Write Here! Write Now!” letter-writing campaign toolkit.** Many UU congregations across the country use this toolkit to write letters to their Members of Congress on key issues, which UUSJ’s Capitol Hill Advocacy Corps then delivers to Capitol Hill, often in face-to-face meetings with Congressional staff. The toolkit is available on our website at [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org). To learn more contact [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org).
- **“UUs Mobilizing for the 2018 Midterm Election”** toolkit, which links to resources and congregational tabling signage, sign-up forms, etc.
- For advocacy resources and the PDF version of the guide visit [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org) and link to the **“advocacy”** tab.

### About UUSJ

UUSJ’s mission is to mobilize and amplify the voices of UUs as we seek to change the world through acts of love and justice. We engage Members of Congress across the political spectrum, promoting UU values and voices. As a 501(c)3(h) organization, UUSJ is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates or parties.



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**When you support UUSJ with a donation you make our advocacy possible on behalf of UUs across the country.**

**Donate online at [uusj.org](http://uusj.org) or call 202-600-9132. Send check to: UUSJ, 7750 16th St., NW, Washington, DC 20012**

[Link here to go to the online version of this guide.](#) Or go to [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org).

## Attachment

### Tips for Speaking at a Public Forum and Getting Your Questions Answered



#### A Guide to the Theater of Speaking In Public Meetings

Speaking in a public meeting is like a performance. You are not only performing for the candidate, but for the entire community audience (and press). With this in mind, we offer the following suggestions:

- Keep questions short. The longer you speak the more of your audience you will lose, and the less time the candidates will have to talk.
- Do not lecture. If you must cite a fact or share a personal story to set up your question, keep it on point, brief and as compelling as possible.
- Make your questions provocative without being rude.
- Be compassionate and show it in your tone of voice. Extend this compassion to the candidates as well as the audience.
- Your lead-in statement should be passionate and thoughtful - speak from your heart.
- Dress appropriately. No political buttons or shirts. Keep it nonpartisan. A sea of "Side of Love" T-shirts makes quite an impression. However, if you do not own and cannot acquire one, error on casual business attire if you don't have a sense of what others are likely to wear.
- Smile and be friendly. - Take time to breathe deeply before speaking, even if your heart is pounding.
- Cold anger and grief are appropriate only for very personal narratives.
- Unless you are an authorized representative, do not speak for your congregation or any community other than yourself.
- Practice what you're going to say in front of a mirror, with loved ones, and even before a video camera if possible. Review the video noting body language and tone of voice, etc., in addition to the content of your message.
- Write your questions out in advance. It's possible that you will have to submit your question in writing.
- You'll only have the opportunity to ask one question, so have a backup question in case someone else asks a similar question.
- If you are going in a group, agree in advance on which questions are most important to ask and decide who will ask which questions.

[Link here](#) to return to the Online Guide or at [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org).