

UUSJ

Defending our Democracy (DrD) Task Group Report to UUSJ Board January 2020

The DrD Task Group meets on the first Sunday of the month online
from 7:30-9:00 pm ET

Active Members: Fred Van Deusen, convener, First Parish in Concord, MA; Lavona Grow, Advocacy Oversight Chair, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Rev. Earl Koteen, Berkeley, CA; Donna Scheidt, Greensboro, NC; David Delk, First Unitarian Portland, OR; David Shilton, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Suzan Chastain, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Ursula Scott, River Road, Bethesda, MD; Vonna Heaton, River Road, Bethesda, MD; Martha Ades, UU Congregation of Fairfax, VA

Ex Officio members: Bob Denniston, Board Chair, and Pablo DeJesús, Executive Director - participate as appropriate and as invited.

In 2018 UUSJ membership voted to have the organization engage in “Elections/Voting/Defending Democracy” as a priority issue area with two sub-issues a) voting rights, integrity and voter suppression; and, b) campaign finance reform. In 2019 this vote was endorsed by the Board, and the decision to create a new task group was made.

The [Defending Our Democracy \(DrD\) Task Group](#) formed over the summer of 2019, recruited interested members and surveyed them to determine the most important issues to work on, as well as their particular interests. We held our first meeting on August 15, 2019. Our group is responsible for:

- assessing and prioritizing the democracy areas of focus for UUSJ (e.g. voting rights, fair redistricting, reducing the influence of big money)
- identifying a community of like-minded partners
- aligning the areas of focus with legislation in Congress to advocate for change
- developing background materials for each of the selected areas of focus
- leading, helping to organize, supporting or participating in related UU democracy education and advocacy events

The [“Our Democracy Uncorrupted” Statement of Conscience](#) from the 2019 General Assembly meeting is a useful reference for our group.

Priorities: Our primary legislative priority has been **HR1**, the For The People Act of 2019, which was introduced and passed in the House on March 8, 2019 to expand voting rights, limit partisan gerrymandering, strengthen ethics rules, and limit the influence of private donor money in politics.

We selected the following issue priorities: protecting and expanding voting rights and making it easier to register, campaign finance reform, mobilizing for the 2020 election, overturning the Citizens United Supreme Court decision, gerrymandering reform, and election security. The Advocacy Core went out on several of our issues including HR1, election security, and war powers. We have also formed a sub-group focused on gerrymandering.

UU the Vote: In the summer of 2019 UUA President Susan Frederick-Gray announced the goal to [“UU the Vote” in 2020](#) with a program focused on mobilizing voters (voter registration, education, get-out-the-vote), challenging voter suppression, holding values-based conversations with neighbors, inviting our partners to utilize our available meeting spaces, and providing spiritual sustenance.

At our September meeting we discussed this program, and in light of the lack of progress in the Senate of any democracy legislation, decided to focus our efforts on supporting this program. We agreed to partner with the UUA and developed the following UUSJ website pages:

1. [UUSJ UUs Mobilizing for the 2020 Elections](#) landing page
2. [Vote 2020 Leader’s Guide](#) with Sample Project Timeline and Sample Communications Plan
3. [UUSJ Voter Mobilization Guide](#)
4. [What you need to know about voter registration](#)
5. [Partnering to register voters](#)
6. [Encouraging historically low-turnout voters to register & vote](#)
7. [Voter Mobilization Partners](#)
8. UUSJ’s congregational [Voter Information Table Checklist](#)
9. UUSJ’s branded printable signage and volunteer signup sheet for congregation tables with voter information and mobilization for elections opportunities.

We expect these pages to be very useful for congregations working on this effort.

10. We also developed questions for the new 2019 UUSJ issue Defending Our Democracy to be added to the [UUSJ Candidates Questions Guide 2020](#): Getting Candidates on the Record.

Upcoming Efforts: During the Spring the DrD Task Group will continue to support the UU the Vote program and begin developing background materials for our areas of focus.

Submitted by: **Fred Van Deusen**, Convener, DrD Task Group, UUSJ

