

UUSJ Defending Our Democracy Board Report June 10, 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 Shilton, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Suzan Chastain, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Ursula Scott, 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.

This report primarily covers the period since the last board report at the end of March, 2020.

Advocacy work

DRD members created a [Protect Your Right to Vote](#) Action Alert on May 11 to support Vote by Mail and other efforts to improve the voting process. Congress must provide the necessary \$4 billion to fund safe elections in November. \$400 Million was allocated to voting security in the \$2 Trillion Coronavirus Relief package but ten times that is needed - some states may not be able to afford to do much. An updated version of this Action Alert is planned for June that also includes a request to fund the US Post Office.

UU the Vote 2020 program support

DRD has been working with the UUA and our own congregations to support the UU the Vote program. At the end of last year we developed a series of UU the Vote webpages to help [UUs mobilize for the 2020 elections](#). In March the COVID-19 pandemic had a dramatic impact on these efforts, basically bringing to a halt any planned in-person activities such as setting up voter registration tables in other states. Two popular activities have survived the pandemic, pretty much intact.

- [Reclaim Our Vote](#) - sending postcards to North Carolina and other states using an NAACP list of voters removed from the registration list
- [Ask Your College](#) - asking UUs with college connections (alum, faculty, parents of children in college) to write to their college presidents and ask them to commit to a goal of full student voter participation, and utilize an existing program called [All in Campus Democracy Challenge](#).

The Ask Your College campaign originated at Fred's congregation in Concord, MA and has been very well supported by the UUSJ, including hosting it on the UUSJ website.

Introduction to Kelsey Cowger

At our June meeting we met with Kelsey Cowger, the Reeb Project/UUSJ Voting Campaign Organizer, and discussed her plans to implement a non-partisan voter mobilization campaign in selected states in the Mid-Atlantic region including PA, VA, NC, TX and GA. She plans to work on voter suppression, low registration, mail-in balloting, and closure of polling places. The situation is very dynamic and varies by state. She wants to help congregations mobilize around these issues. She plans to start with Reclaim Our Vote postcards to build denominational solidarity.

Future Plans

We agreed to meet in July and August to help congregations plan for their September and October voting actions. We will share information and support each other's activities.