



Democracy Action Team Board Report, March, 2022

Active Members: Fred Van Deusen, convener, First Parish in Concord, MA; Donna Scheidt, UU Church of Greensboro, NC; David Shilton, UU Church of Arlington, VA; Ursula Scott, River Road, Bethesda, MD; Julia Sayles, UU Church of Arlington, Falls Church, VA; Ken Mitchell, First Unitarian of Baltimore, MD; Dee Ellison, UU of Arlington, Falls Church, VA; Tony Giordano, UU Congregation of Monmouth County, Lincroft, NJ; Deb Bauder, Edmonds, WA UU Congregation; Teresa DeSousa, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair, NJ

ExOfficio member: Pablo DeJesús, Executive Director

Voting Rights Legislation

Following our profound disappointment that the U.S. Senate failed to protect fundamental voting rights when it filibustered the Freedom to Vote: John Lewis Act in January, the UUSJ Democracy Action Team (DAT) is turning its attention to essential democracy protections that have a reasonable chance of passing in the short-term.

Of the democracy and voting rights related actions currently under consideration in Congress, a vital one that is generating some bipartisan support is the [Electoral Count Modernization Act](#). This act would update, tighten and clarify the Electoral Count Act (ECA) of 1887, which has long provided the framework governing the casting and counting of electoral votes for the presidency, including the role of Congress and the vice president. Reforming the ambiguous 1887 ECA would serve to avert the chaos and misinformation that has been prevalent following the 2020 election.

Although some interest is appearing for adding a few crucial elements of voting rights protections to the Electoral Count Modernization Act, there are members of Congress who claim that would only re-litigate the January failure of voting rights and bog down reform of the ECA.

In view of these developments, the Democracy Action Team is working to schedule intelligence gathering meetings with the offices of key senators involved in discussions about reforming the ECA. We are seeking to learn more about how the reform is developing and what is likely to be included in a bill. We have had one meeting thus far with Sen. Kaine's office, and have scheduled a meeting on March 16 with Mike Wakefield, Senior Counsel for Senator Collins who is heading up the bi-partisan ECA effort.

While reform of the Electoral Count Act is most welcome, it remains vital that federal voting rights action be taken. Lawmakers in 27 states are considering more than 250 bills that would limit voting access, and lawmakers in 13 states are considering 41 bills that would undermine the electoral process.

Education Events

On February 17 we hosted a Zoom event titled *State of Our US Democracy: A UU View from Texas*. Texas Rep. Donna Howard (Austin) was the main speaker. She described the current situation of voting rights in Texas, and discussed her trip with other state Democrats to Washington, DC to prevent Texas Republicans from passing voting rights restrictions.

"People of faith have a huge role to play to help people recognize that when you draw the circle you're not drawing it to say who's in and out, but you're drawing it to be inclusive and to bring everybody in," Rep. Howard said during the UUSJ Briefing. "When we talk about being a liberal religion, we're talking about being a generous religion, we're not talking about liberal politics."

"We've got to find a way to invite people in who have different beliefs politically, but who share common values," she added. Watch the video of the meeting [HERE](#).

UUSJ's Democracy Action Team is co-hosting *Democracy as a Spiritual Practice* on Thursdays, March 31 and April 12, 7:30pm on Zoom. Here is the writeup for the events.

Join us for a compelling two-part series on [Democracy as a Spiritual Practice](#). Our first program - **Strengthening our Civic Muscles** - explores authoritarian regimes through the lens of Timothy Snyder's book *On Tyranny* with Rev. Patrick McLaughlin from the UU Church of Manchester NH. We encourage attendees to read this short book prior to the session.

The second session, **After the Protests**, explores the ways in which we can engage and rebuild our civic society to bring our democracy back into balance. This program is led by the Rev. Sharon Welch, professor and author of numerous books (including *After the Protests*), and First Parish in Concord's Social Action Manager, Rev. Paul Langston-Daley.

Action Alert

We issued an [Action Alert](#) in February about voting rights and modernizing the Electoral Care Act.

Looking Forward

As we get closer to midterm elections we expect to work on getting out the vote in individual states.