



UUJEC News & Views: Spring 2026

| newsletter@uujec.org | Sally Jane Gellert, editor

Personal Civil-Rights Stories—read ours, send yours!

See page 3

Peace, Equity, & Justice Zoom Seminars

Moving Everyone: Rural-Urban Organizing for Transit

Thursday March 12 • 5 PM PDT (8 PM EDT)



We welcome Connor Descheemaker of Transit for all PA! to our Webinar series this month. He says,

We always say transit exists in all 67 counties across Pennsylvania, but what does that really mean, and who does it represent? Data shows us that there are just as high a percentage of non-drivers in our most rural communities as in our most urban, and those in power need to serve those riders with reliable, accessible service for work, healthcare and communities. Right now, Transit For All PA is base-building in small cities to identify what service looks like, and what it should look like. Learn how they are reaching workers and riders to identify how to make transit better.



Connor Descheemaker,
Transit for All PA!

Connor has more than a decade of experience building and facilitating diverse coalitions to achieve policy change, support local communities, and provide professional education and development. They came of age in Phoenix just as that sprawling metro opened its first light rail line in 2008, and their exploration of a changing downtown ignited their interest in mobility and community in urban areas. They arrived in Philadelphia in 2022 to manage the Transit Forward Philadelphia coalition, and grew the group to 35 community-based organizations covering environmental justice, immigrant and refugee support, community development, political advocacy, and elder and disability rights. Now, Connor organizes transit riders and workers across Pennsylvania to build rural-urban solidarity for accessible and reliable public transportation in all 67 counties.

Earth Day 2026

The theme of Earth Day 2026 is Our Power, Our Planet™. EarthDay.org says, "Environmental progress is built through everyday action—from communities protecting ecosystems to innovators advancing solutions. Clean air, safe water, and climate resilience aren't optional—they're essential. . . Every action counts. Every voice matters." What is happening in your community? Send to uujec@uujec.org.

Lavona Grow: A Tribute

Mourning a Friend of UUJEC

We were recently shocked to learn that Lavona Grow, long-time at Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice in Washington, D.C., where she led many a UU Day on the Hill, providing training and expertise to novices and the more experienced alike, was in hospice care, and joined the ancestors in early February. Lavona and her husband, Bob Denniston, had just recently moved and were looking forward to retirement. Lavona was a good friend to UUJEC and other UU groups, always warm-heartedly sharing her time and knowledge. She will be sorely missed.



Join the No Kings March (See page 2.)



Support and Protest

28 March: No Kings!

UUJEC is a partner organization for this third installment of nationwide rallies to say “No Thrones. No Crowns. No Kings.” in these United States. Though we are in part seeing systemic flaws that were always there, we can take this opportunity to remake this country as it has claimed to be: for the people.



Protecting the CFPB

186 Congresspersons File 5th Amicus Brief

As the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit prepares to rehear the appeal in the case National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), et al. v. CFPB Acting Director Russell Vought, et al., 186 current and former senators and representatives* have filed a brief responding to the Trump Administration’s efforts to block the CFPB’s funding and limit its operations.

The same day the brief was filed, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released their first report responding to a February 2025 letter requesting an investigation into the unlawful efforts by the Trump Administration to dismantle the CFPB. This initial report details how the Trump Administration has indeed significantly scaled down the CFPB’s ability to carry out its mission, issuing sweeping stop work orders, cutting funding, firing staff, closing CFPB’s headquarters, rolling back regulations and guidance, and dropping enforcement actions that could have returned billions of dollars to millions of consumers harmed by a variety of financial firms.

“For more than a decade, the CFPB has stood up for American families and held powerful financial institutions accountable. It has returned billions of dollars to consumers, enforced the law, and earned bipartisan support on Main Street because its mission is clear and its results are real.

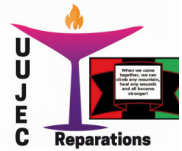
“Let me be clear: Congressional Democrats and I will not stand by while Trump tries to strip consumers of their rights and protections and hand the financial system back to the same reckless bad actors that cost millions of families their jobs, homes, and life. The CFPB was created out of that crisis, and as a lead author and staunch defender of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, I know exactly why this Bureau exists. I commend GAO for confirming what we have long warned: this Administration has indeed deliberately weakened the CFPB.”

—Maxine Waters

*133 representatives, 47 senators, and 6 former members, including Chris Dodd and Barney Frank.

A Look Back

UUJEC Leaders Recall Their Civil-Rights Era Experiences



This article was sparked by an e-mail from The Grassroots Connector about S.N.C.C.—the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. I wondered what we at UUJEC, the UUA in general, and in our communities could take away from that group’s work in circumstances that the current attacks on immigrants, supporters, and journalists mirror much too closely.

I was born a little too late, and lived in suburban New Jersey, so for me, it is mostly history; I started to become aware—woke, we might call it now—when Black Is Beautiful and Black Power were the watchwords. Some of our elder UUs, including many on our board, had direct experience, so we started by recalling those. At our board retreat, we will consider what from SNCC we can apply today, and what of their resistance already echoes—for me, the Occupy Wall Street’s general assemblies and decisions by consensus rhyme with SNCC’s participatory democracy.

—Sally Jane Gellert

Here are some other folks’ thoughts (*continues next page*):

I’ve belonged to NAACP and ACLU since the ’50s, to SPLC since the ’70s, and GLAAD since at least the 90s. I marched on Washington in 1963. I was the governor’s appointee to the town housing commission for over 5 years during which we oversaw an affordable apartment for 60 people and built 10 affordable houses. I started the Black Lives Matter and the Occupy Movement in Sudbury, Massachusetts and helped the larger Occupy Movement. I marched on too many marches to remember. I was chair of the Social Concerns and Welcoming Committee (i.e., welcoming to gay folks) in my church before I went into the ministry. As minister, I officiated at gay services of commitment (which I consider marriages to be) both before and after gay marriages were legal. I brought food, weekly, from 3 supermarkets to a food bank, and worked in 2 other food banks at different times. I helped get food from a large distribution center and bring it to the food bank in the town in which I was living. I belong to at least two groups in addition to GLAAD that support gay people.

—Rev. Judy Deutsch

For a UUJEC history, we’d love to hear about your Civil Rights/Racial Justice remembrances and reflections; send us an e-mail (uujec@uujec.org) or connect on Facebook or Bluesky (our Twitter account lingers, but we’re really not there). We’ll post a few on our Web site (look for Holidays, February so they’ll be findable for Black History Month going forward)—any format: written, short video or audio, or artwork.

The War Machine Rolls On

U.S. imperialism and militarism have long served to enforce this nation's international hegemonic policy through violence and wars. However, any vision of the U.S. as the world's sole superpower is bound to be dashed in the face of today's multilateral world. Are we not seeing our failing U.S. empire now turn to racist attacks on free speech, democratic principles, and the fascist labeling of our own population and patriots as "the enemy within"? Violence on the streets of our cities against our own citizens by ICE, backed by the National Guard, has brought massive citizen resistance. The "powers that be" have long prepared for this with surveillance technologies, now openly including AI, and crowd-control techniques that include all sorts of weaponry, including military surplus weapons shared with local police departments. ICE's arrests of darker-skinned community members without judicial warrants opens the door to the loss of Constitutionally guaranteed rights for all as our "criminal injustice" system expands.

Our current administration is acting dangerously both internationally and domestically, and in violation of International and U.S. Law. Is bombing Iran without provocation and decapitating the nation's leadership as a means of regime change a well-thought-out plan, a delusional attempt to maintain a global hegemony long past its expiration date, or just Trump's business as usual? The current administration has decapitated the leadership of both Venezuela and Iran, both fossil-fuel-rich nations, as are Nigeria and Colombia. How long will we buy into the concept that the U.S. Empire has the right to the world's natural resources? Is "might makes right" now being used against our own people? Is incarceration, torture, terror, disappearance and/or deaths of those held in detention centers in Florida's so-called Alligator Alcatraz prison and Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) what awaits civilians picked up on the streets of Minneapolis? Spared the campaigns of mass bombing deaths so freely visited on the populations of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine, we must be reminded that the larger number of deaths were civilians.

Taking on a potentially long-term war against Iran following decades of war fighting against Iraq and Afghanistan, supporting Israel's genocide, supplying arms to NATO-backed Ukraine and other military actions have left U.S. arsenals at risk of depletion, according to Pentagon officials—but there are other costs as well. Among these are global impoverishment; worsening climate from war-related emissions; and the risk of regional, world, and nuclear war.

| Cindy Piester, Chairperson, PEC Task Force

Sent my earlier response too soon: I could tell some good stories about working against the Chicago machine in the time of Daley Sr.—And there may still be a warrant out in Mississippi for husband Lee's arrest, caused by his foolishly trying to obstruct the Klan on the federal highways. (He threw a large console TV off the back of a truck and into the path of a pursuing pick-up.)

| Jane Bannor

Evanston Reparations Program

Our Reparations Task Force has been monitoring the Municipal Reparations Program, which began 5 years ago in Evanston, Illinois. The program provides \$25,000 grants for housing upgrades, mortgages, or rental assistance to African Americans who lived in the city from 1919 to 1969 when the city was complicit with racially discriminatory practices, most notably residential redlining and race-based delivery of public services. To date, more than \$6.3 million dollars has been distributed to qualified current or former residents by the program.

In a new facet of the program, the city is pilot testing the DNA Roots project for African-American descendants of those sold into slavery. Before June 30, organizers hope to test the DNA of 1,600 participants in order to trace their ancestry and possibly connect them with relatives still living in Africa. So far, 247 Black Evanston residents have received their DNA results. The program is being run through the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and has access to a vast international database of DNA results.

Evanston's Reparations program is funded through the city's cannabis tax. Though originally very lucrative, taxes have not lately been as substantial as they were at first. In Illinois, hemp-based edibles and products as opposed to marijuana products with its THC are neither taxed nor regulated, and are cutting into sales. The state and the Chicago metropolitan area are trying to rectify this situation, but so far without success.

As a home-rule jurisdiction, Evanston is trying to increase cannabis and CBD tax revenues by placing a tax on Delta-8 THC products such as gummies, vapes, and edibles. The proposed tax is still in development, not yet passed by the City Council.

The Reparations program is also being funded through a real estate transfer tax. A separate foundation has been set up using private donations to fund grants to Evanston African Americans and community groups for issues unrelated to housing. In 2024, the private foundation held almost \$45 million dollars in assets.

Jane Bannor, Member
UUJEC's Reparations Task Force

☒ Yes, I would like to put my UU values into action by joining UUJEC and its work for economic justice.

To join us, please mail this form to UUJEC at **2701 West Fitch Ave. Chicago IL 60645** or register and contribute online: uujec.org

Enclosed is my

___ Regular Adult Membership, \$40

___ Low Income/Student Membership, \$20

___ Sustaining Membership, \$100

___ Other Custom Amount (min. \$1), \$____

___ Congregational Membership, \$50-500 (\$1/member recommended)

Name _____

Address: _____

Phone _____

E-mail* _____

Congregation _____

City, State _____

___ I'll be a UUJEC contact for my congregation or community.

*May we use your e-mail address to send news bulletins periodically? Addresses are never sold or shared. ___ Yes ___ No

Economic-justice interests:

Health _____

Environment & Climate _____

Reparations _____

Military & Peace _____

Economic Systems _____

Other _____

Preferred Event Types:

Web Seminars: _____

Book Discussions: _____

Other _____

Spring 2026

Are you going to GA? Do you want to get more involved with UUJEC? We're considering taking an electronic booth this year—are you interested in visiting or staffing? E-mail us at uujec@uujec.org for info.

Letters!

UUJEC gets requests from various organizations to sign on to a variety of letters. Independently-active board members also suggest sign-ons for consideration by the UUJEC. Here we list our most recent signatures:

- ◆ Letter to Northern Compact; **keep foreign radioactive waste out** of Utah and the U.S.A.
- ◆ Rejecting change to **Public Charge Harm in PLHIV rules.**
- ◆ Letter to Mayor Joe Hogsett requesting Action to **protect endangered IHA residents.**
- ◆ Sign-on letter regarding **proposed Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) legislation.**
- ◆ Sign-on letter to Congress, requesting it to **hold the EPA accountable** for its mission,
- ◆ Sign-on letter: **No more funds for ICE** and Border Patrol.
- ◆ Letter supporting UU SANs' (State Action Networks' **protest at the Texas children's immigration concentration camp**
- ◆ Letter stating that **formaldehyde is responsible for greater cancer risk** than any other air pollutant nationwide
- ◆ National organizational sign-on letter calling for Lee Zeldin to be fired.
- ◆ Sign-on letter **opposing U.S. investment in Venezuelan oil.**
- ◆ Sign-on letter **opposing carbon-capture tax credits** for oil and gas drilling.
- ◆ Signing on as a **No Kings partner.**

Write icon created by Freepik - Flaticon



Dump the App!

UUJEC has been following and supporting the baristas of Starbucks Workers United, (SWU) and with new stores voting to unionize, we relay to you the union's latest request: Delete the Starbucks App to send a message to their union-busting management.

Top: Poster says, "You dumped Starbucks. Now what?". Bottom: At entrance to Disneyland Resort, a young woman in an SWU T-shirt honors 100 days of the strike.

A Letter to the UUA

Upon learning the plans for this year's General Assembly—not the 100% virtual that last year's delegates were promised—I wrote this letter to the UUA. It was endorsed by most UUJEC board members.

As the UUJEC board discussed plans for the year, I searched uua.org/ga and found the document titled GA 2026 Proposal v.4.9.2025.pdf. I was very disturbed by plans for an in-person component, after it was clearly stated at GA 2025 in Baltimore that GA2026 would be all-virtual, with a return to an in-person/hybrid gathering in 2027 in California. This breaks the promise, or at least implied promise, that we were given. To some degree, it also disempowers those with fewer funds and less ability to travel. Whereas there are benefits to in-person gatherings, when folks were told to plan for an all-virtual event, changing to in-person is inappropriate. This has not been shared widely, compounding the issue.

This document also included GA being split into 2 disconnected events over 2 weekends—not sequential weekends, but 2 weeks apart, with business separated from workshops, etc., with no clear plan for highlights such as the Ware Lecture, Service of the Living Tradition, and the Synergy Bridging Service.

Later, I found uua.org/ga/travel, which has the time frame collapsed into a single week, from June 14th to 21st, including the traditional Wednesday to Sunday. However, all general sessions are set for Monday and Tuesday, with in-person events Friday through Sunday. The intervening Wednesday and Thursday are devoted to “professional and leadership development”—at the very least these days should be flipped with Monday and Tuesday's general sessions, so that nonprofessionals have all events within a condensed time frame. Having business separated by 2 full days from the very-vague “in-person programming” with “online participation” raises concern that those who are mostly interested in educational and inspirational programming will have no opportunity to be exposed to any GA business, done earlier in a virtual meeting. This removes democratic participation and transparency; a step backward in terms of our stated principled support of democracy.

Unitarian Universalism has stated that we intend to be inclusive, which I presume includes not only typically marginalized identity groups, but especially those of differing wealth, income levels and physical abilities for whom in person GA adds financial or logistical challenges. This move will more drastically affect those with fewer resources. Moving the 2 sessions closer in time is a good first step, but business and enrichment programs need to be intertwined, so that folks can choose their agenda without logistical restriction of temporally separated events.

The proposed pattern decreases democracy in our association. We request that the original plan for a virtual GA be honored, with no multiday interruption that would serve to exclude many UUs from general business sessions. Was the GA Planning Committee on board with this? Or is their concern the real reason that we were asked to disband that committee?



Sally Jane Gellert
for the UUJEC board

Farm Bill? What Farm Bill?

3 years past deadline—and counting

If you attended our September 2023 conference, *Farming for the Future*, you remember speakers and a Day on the Hill to discuss the Farm Bill that was due to be voted on that very month. In the early planning stages, we wondered if we were too late, but the word was that the bill was running late, and it was important for legislators to hear about what was important to UUs. We still had a chance to advocate for SNAP/food stamps, for conservation measures that farmers want but can't afford, for smaller grants that are accessible to more than Big Ag.

So we went. We felt good, overall; some important technical problems, but lots of important information shared and connections made. Since then, periodically, one of the UUJEC board will find an article about negotiations, but a recent e-mail from *Offrange* by *ambrook.com* asks different, more troubling questions: *What if we are too divided to ever get a Farm Bill? What would we lose?*

SNAP, then called Food Stamps, was added to the bill long ago, when nutrition assistance had bipartisan support. In a more humane time, feeding the hungry, especially hungry kids, was seen a bridge between partisan divisions. By 2013, it was suggested that 2 Farm Bills should be considered: one for SNAP, one for farm policy. Now writer Claire Carlson speculates what sort of research or farm support will simply vanish if programs are funded only through the standard budget process.

Save Our Bacon Act

Now we have another issue—the Center for a Humane Economy writes of an Orwellian named Farm Bill, the so-called “Save Our Bacon Act”, which would overturn measures approved by millions of voters, eroding states' rights, emboldening factory-farm consolidation, and weakening animal welfare safeguards nationwide. The Department of Agriculture admits to listening to “Big Ag” lobbyists, and under this bill, China-owned Smithfield Farms and other such corporations are likely to attempt to build 30-story animal farms—more accurately, CAFOs, concentrated animal feeding operations—on agricultural land. These would be nothing like any farm we have ever seen in this country—not even the factory farms that so pollute the environment as seen in the 2022 film *The Smell of Money* about corporate hog farms in North Carolina.



REPLY FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

UUJEC Healthcare Task Force Chairperson Rev. Robert Murphy of St. Petersburg, Florida wrote to the president on our behalf and received this response.



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 4, 2026

The Reverend Robert Murphy
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Reverend Murphy,

Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

We are in the midst of the most extraordinary period of political reform in the history of our country—and we will continue making good on our promises to the American people and advancing our agenda of prosperity, peace, safety, and success.

Every day, my Administration is working tirelessly to seal our borders, crack down on violent crime, and bring back law and order to our communities. We have enforced our federal immigration laws, removed thousands of dangerous illegal aliens from our neighborhoods, stopped the flow of illicit drugs pouring across the border, and achieved the most secure border in our Nation's history.

At the same time, we are rebuilding the economy, reshoring our manufacturing base, slashing prices, and unleashing American energy like never before. We are cutting Government waste; purging left-wing indoctrination from our schools; preserving American culture, customs, history, and heritage; making America healthy again; and reasserting peace through strength on the world stage to deter our enemies and protect American interests.

With resolve, we will continue to build on this extraordinary momentum. We will rescue the American Dream. Above all, we will make our country safer, stronger, and greater than ever before.

The Golden Age of America is finally upon us—and we are only getting started. Thank you again for writing. May God bless you, and may He continue to bless the United States of America.

Sincerely,

A large, bold, handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Donald Trump".