

The Democracy Advocate

A Guide to Strengthening Our Democratic Institutions



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Defending Democracy advocates for policies and actions that strengthen democracy and its institutions through: education, mobilization, and outreach.

This November's election in Virginia has significant ramifications for our democracy for several reasons. Being the first major state-wide election since the emergence of an autocratic regime at the federal level, it represents a barometer for measuring the strength of opposition to the Trump administration. Virginia must stand strongly in opposition to the autocratic regime currently in Washington for several reasons. Our adjacency to Washington and the large number of federal workers and military personnel in the state will magnify the outcome in the national conversation. After four years of a conservative governor, lieutenant governor, and state attorney general who have been obsequious in their relationship with Trump and his edicts (recall that our governor's comments on the widespread firing of government workers - "there are lots of jobs if they want them" - the modern-day equivalent of "let them eat cake"), the state has serious issues it must address in the coming four years. Affordable housing, Medicaid, legality of ICE cooperation with local law officials, campaign finance reform, election suppression, and public education are but a few that must be addressed if the state is to be a bulwark against creeping authoritarianism. To help citizens understand the importance of certain issues in the election, Defending Democracy is holding an event we are calling: **Democracy is on the Ballot**. A panel of five experts will present important information on five critical issues confronting us: *housing, health care, election suppression, immigration, and public education*. Citizens are invited to attend and make their ideas and opinions known so they can be discussed. Organizations focused on the five areas will be there and available to help attendees understand how they can be most effective in addressing the problems associated with the issues. We strongly encourage our readers to attend and be active!

Democracy is on the Ballot
September 27: 10:00 a.m. to noon
Unitarian Universalists Congregation of the New River Valley
1301 Gladewood Drive, Blacksburg, VA

*For additional information write to us at the
Email address at the bottom of this newsletter*

**Get Involved: For Events of Note,
Go to one of the following sites**

Sources for Upcoming Events Sponsored by Local Activist Groups
Use QR codes or the Website URLs

Action Hub of the New River Valley



NRV Citizen Activist Network



JOIN US

[The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, VA](#)

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League in Montgomery County was organized in 1971.

Website, Videos and Podcasts of Importance:

[Virginia Solidarity Economy](#). The VA Solidarity Economy Network supports, educates, and connects people striving to build a more resilient and equitable economy based on shared values.

[Virginia Good Governance Scorecard](#). Where candidates stand on issues critical to Virginia. Go to the Scorecard.

Readings For Resistance and Resilience:

Here are some books worth spending time reading. Included are those that help us understand authoritarianism and how to resist, and equally important, those that will help us be more resilient personally in times of high anxiety.

Resisting Authoritarianism

The Kingdom, The Power, and the Glory. American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism. Tim Alberta. New York Times best seller that documents the rise of the evangelical linkages to the radical right.

Tyranny of the Minority. Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt. How we have arrived at a governance dominated by the minority view and what can be done to change that condition.

Plutocrats. The Rise of the New Global Super Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else. Chrystia Freeman. Essential reading if you want to understand the rise of inequality in our times.

Poverty, By America. Matthew Desmond. Why and how the USA has more poverty than any other advanced democracy. Reveals the social, economic, and political roots of persistent poverty—and how poverty benefits those of us who are not poor: “the secure, the insured, the housed, the college educated, the protected, the lucky”. Good read juxtaposed against

Plutocrats.

Personal Resilience - Coping with Anxiety

Dare to Lead & Strong Ground. Brené Brown. Two books in her series of leadership and the wisdom of the human spirit. Read together, they provide insight into how to connect with oneself during times of anxiety.

Corruption, Fraud, & Stupidity

We decided that given the events of the past month, the content of this section needed to be broadened to include Stupidity as an on-going theme. Currently we have the most underqualified and incompetent array of senior government officials in this country's history.

Lincoln had a “team of rivals” whereas with Trump we have a “collection of stupid sycophants”. David Brooks in his column in January 2025 of the NYTs identified six principles of stupid behavior that are relevant here.

1. Ideology produces disagreement, but stupidity produces befuddlement. *Recall those “What the hell “moments after a statement from a Trump official.*
2. Stupidity often is inherent in organizations with sycophants. *Check the videos of cabinet meetings! Sycophants incorporated!*
3. Stupidity by individuals is more dangerous than malicious intent. *Check the number of violent conflicts originating from stupid decisions.*
4. People who behave stupidly are unaware of the stupidity of their actions. *See below.*
5. Stupidity is almost impossible to oppose. *Reason is not a defense against stupidity.*
6. The opposite of stupidity is not intelligence, its rationality. *Even some smart people believe in nonsensical conspiracies.*

So, let us hear from our readers as to their nomination for the stupidity award for this administration! Here are two nominations taken from the senate hearings with RFK, Jr.

RFK Jr., Secretary of HHS: *The only confusion (on COVID) I expressed is exactly how many lives were saved. I don’t think anyone knows that.”* FACTS: WHO study in 2024 showed deaths were reduced by at least 57%. A 2022 study published in the Lancet Infectious Diseases found nearly 20 million lives saved in just the first year.

RFK Jr.: *I’m looking at kids while I walk through the airports today, as I walk down the street, and I see these kids that are just overburdened with mitochondrial challenges, inflammation, you can tell it from their faces, from their body movement, and from their lack of social connection.”* **Stupid and weird!!**

Activist Interviews:

Why I Engage:

A Conversation with Carolyn Rude

By Katherine Allen

Carolyn Rude is a past president of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County and continues to serve on its programs, communications, and voter services committees.

1. Why “defending democracy” and why now?

Democracy may be one election away from collapsing. We need a Congress that can resist the authoritarian initiatives of the current administration. We have seen a preview of a post-democratic US: a brutal ICE, destruction of the social safety net, compromised international relationships, actions to encourage climate deterioration, increased income inequality, increased racism, denigration of women and their needs, compromised health care, interference with science and the arts, loss of free and fair elections through gerrymandering, voter suppression, etc. Next: a revision of the Constitution through Article V to permanently install undemocratic systems.

2. What worries you most about democracy in this time?

Voter suppression: extreme gerrymandering in the states; the push to eliminate mail-in voting (which about 1/3 of voters use); stringent voter ID requests, such as original birth certificates which some cultures don’t even use and many people can’t find; limits on the numbers of polling places making it hard to vote; the false narrative of rampant voter fraud. These measures target

groups that are already underrepresented. The intent is to disenfranchise so that the rich can make their own anti-government rules that disregard majority interests and needs.

3. People seem scared and helpless. What are good strategies to enable individuals to contribute to the protection of democracy?

Project 2025 intentionally throws outrages at us very fast so that we will remain off balance, unable to focus on one issue before another gets our attention. The volume and rapidity of changes is paralyzing. (Steve Bannon calls this strategy “muzzle velocity.”) In addition, resistance organizations and candidates, all doing good work, flood our inboxes with requests for money. How can we use our time and treasure most effectively?

One way to emerge from this paralysis and a feeling of being overwhelmed is to focus on one issue instead of trying to think about them all. We can each do a part and collectively address the big issues. That might mean joining one advocacy organization. It might mean writing “get out the vote” postcards, knocking on doors for a candidate, or tutoring an immigrant to help that person get closer to citizenship. It might mean supporting just a few candidates and organizations, selectively, rather than trying to help them all. None of us can save democracy on our own, but we can help a local organization do its work.

4. What are you doing to defend democracy?

I am focusing on voting: registering voters, voter education, encouraging people to vote. I also have deep interests in climate, reproductive health, civil rights, and other issues, but to me the most critical issue right now is free and fair elections. If we can’t elect people with democratic values, we will have no recourse against the plot to dismantle democracy and no option to restore the agencies that promote equality, health care, safety, science, education, and nonviolent commitment to the world order. Some destruction is irreversible, but newly elected officials could restore our values and build stronger safeguards for democracy.

Opinion - Making Sense of Nonsense **By T Pain**

I am delighted to have this issue’s OpEd provided by Anthony Flaccavento. Anthony is a small farmer living outside of Abington, VA and the Executive Director of RUBI, the **Rural Urban Bridge Initiative**.

Going Beyond Resistance

My friend, Jack, is a hard-working man, a part-time farmer and a mechanic who teaches at the local vocational school. Earlier this summer, he was helping me finish up some wiring in my greenhouse when we started talking politics. A Christian, Jack voted for Trump reluctantly, as he believes that many of the president’s words and actions are “reprehensible” as he put it. His problem was that he didn’t see the Democrats presenting any kind of alternative. “All they do is complain about Trump. They never say what they’re going to do to help the working man.”

Since Trump began his second term, millions of Americans have joined rallies and protests against his administration’s many harmful actions, all part of a national “resistance” taking place in big cities and small towns alike. I’ve been to several of the protest rallies myself in Southwest Virginia. One of the organizational leaders of the resistance, Indivisible, made its strategy clear

in their “Practical Guide to Democracy on the Brink”, which states in part, “For the next two years, ‘no’ is a complete sentence. This is a time for defense”, they advise, rather than “proposing our own policies.” That pretty well sums up what I’ve seen of the resistance thus far.

But where does that strategy leave Jack? Or the millions of other working-class and rural folks looking for answers at a time of shrinking job markets, rising prices, family farms and small businesses barely hanging on? Where do they go, to whom do they turn?

As director of the [Rural Urban Bridge Initiative](#), I believe that this near-singular focus on defense, on fighting the fire hose of bad stuff coming from the Trump administration is a grave mistake. There’s no doubt that we need to take to the streets, the courts and the ballot box to fight these injustices and attacks on our democracy. At the same time, however, there must be an equally robust effort to put working people’s concerns at the center of our fight and to put forward a clear, compelling and implementable platform that addresses their needs and grievances. This is why we have joined forces with Rural Democracy Initiative, Dirt Road Organizing, Rust Belt Rising, the Center for Working-Class Politics and others to launch [Beyond Resistance: Reclaiming Our Nation for the Workers Who Build it](#). The campaign officially began last Wednesday, September 10th, with an event featuring Congressman Ro Khanna along with several speakers fighting for rural people and communities. Follow up events and actions are underway this week, including a number of “Meet in the Middle” community conversations in the NRV, Abingdon and Wise County on September 26th.

Though it frustrates many on the Left, most working people are more concerned about bread-and-butter issues, about reversing the declining economic opportunities they’ve been facing for more than a generation than they are about this administration’s anti-democratic acts. Whether a small business owner, a construction worker, a family farmer or someone working in manufacturing, these folks understand that the system has been rigged against them for more than 40 years. Their own struggles, and in many cases the shocking deterioration of their communities is all the evidence they need to know that our economic and political system has betrayed them. Is it any wonder that calls to “save our democracy” have largely failed to motivate people who wonder whether such a broken system is worth saving?

Beyond Resistance turns the resistance script on its head in two ways: First, by elevating the concerns, especially economic, of rural and working-class people struggling to get by. We’ll be doing this in a number of ways, from a “rural harms tracker” we’re developing to document the many betrayals of this administration, to helping launch pro-worker, pro-farmer, pro-union rallies and events. We are also offering signs and social media posts that lift up the concerns of these communities to people organizing resistance-type rallies.

Secondly, and every bit as important, the campaign is putting forward a positive vision, backed up by concrete policies to address these concerns and help rural communities solve their own problems through better policies and targeted investment. As part of this, we’ll be lifting up “rural success stories” to showcase what’s possible, and providing well-grounded, rural-driven public policy platforms like the [Rural New Deal](#), and the [Rural Policy Action plan](#), an updated version of which will be released in October.

There’s no doubt that we need to stop the myriad destructive actions of this Administration. But we also need to build a much better system, a politics and economy that works for hard-working Americans everywhere. You can help do both by joining us in going [Beyond Resistance](#).

Readers Forum

We welcome your feedback on the newsletter. In particular, we would like suggestions for feature stories, books, websites, opinions, etc. Also, if you wish to write something for us, send it along for review. If this Democracy Advocate was forwarded from a friend and you would like to be on the Defending Democracy activist list, drop a line to our email address with your name, email address, and zip code.

Send all correspondence to our email address: defendingdemocracy124@gmail.com