

Summary of Unitarian Society of New Haven (USNH) House Meetings 2018

The goal of this document is to summarize the issues and concerns regarding the upcoming gubernatorial campaigns from the 9 house meetings of USNH members. These nine house meetings took place in April, May, and June 2018. Approximately 70 people participated in these meetings, which were led by a facilitator and a notetaker. Participants were asked to talk about their concerns and if possible to relate them to their personal experiences.

Below are the various issues discussed by meeting participants. They are not listed in any prioritized order. Some summarized points are included in each issue paragraph. Also included with each issue/concern are the number of house meetings where the issue was brought up.

- **Health Care/Access to Health Insurance:** Health care issues were mentioned at eight of the nine house meetings and were a main concern to many participants. Overall, there was a strong consensus for universal health care coverage. Several people spoke of the need to protect the Affordable Care Act (including coverage for pre-existing conditions) and Medicare nationally and Husky in Connecticut. Several were concerned about the high cost of medicine, especially for seniors. Ensuring health care for children (including funding for school-based health centers) and low-income women were mentioned. Lack of adequate funding for transportation to medical appointments was also mentioned. The need to support reproductive health care resources was also mentioned.
- **Mental Health:** Access to adequate mental health services was a concern to many participants and was mentioned in 7 of the 9 house meetings. This includes addiction services, especially relating to the opioid epidemic. There is a need for mental health resources for kids in school and young adults. Providing more funding for the CT Dept of Mental Health and Addiction Services was mentioned. The problems of lack of mental health coverage by insurance companies and health providers not taking people's insurance for mental health services, including Husky was described. There should be more mental health services provided for incarcerated people.
- **Gun Violence/Gun Control/School Safety:** The impact of gun violence and the need for gun control measures was mentioned in 7 of the 9 meetings. At least one person mentioned having a personal connection to a victim of gun violence. Gun control measures supported including banning assault and military rifles, banning "ghost guns," comprehensive universal background checks and raising the age of gun ownership. Also mentioned was keeping weapons stored away from children. Prevention-oriented school safety programs such as teaching conflict resolution, anti-bullying strategies and early identification of high risk youth were supported.
- **Immigration and Refugee Rights:** Participants in five of the house meetings spoke of immigration and refugee issues. There was acknowledgement that CT has been a "welcoming" state for immigrants and refugees, and this should continue and expand. There is a need to support DACA, implement comprehensive immigration reform and support the Trust Act. Candidates should be asked to take a stand on these issues.

- Income Inequality, Economic Development, Tax Policy:** Several participants in 8 of the house meetings discussed issues and needs around CT's economic problems, income inequality, tax policy and the need for aggressive economic development to produce jobs and revenue. Addressing the large income inequality gap in CT was deemed a priority. Emphasis should be on developing good jobs for low-income people. There was strong support for unions (including expanding union coverage) and good pensions. There was concern that a Republican governor and legislature will try to cut funding for pensions and attack state unions. Expanding the clean energy economy was seen as an important strategy to grow small businesses and produce good paying jobs, especially for low-income workers. The PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) program should be reviewed re: its impact on local communities. Addressing the discrepancies in the state income tax (lower tax rate for higher income earners than middle class) should be addressed, as well as seeking new revenue sources like highway tolls. Property tax relief should be implemented. Also mentioned was the need to address cost of living issues for young people and seniors who were leaving the state.
- Racism, Diversity, Civil and Human Rights, Criminal Justice Reform:** These issues were brought up in 6 of the 9 house meetings. A major theme was growing racism, including bigoted messages from the White House, racial profiling, mass incarceration of people of color, and discrepancies in suspensions by school administrators. A failure among many white people to understand white privilege was identified as a problem to be addressed. Several people were concerned about attacks on civil and human rights, as well as general lack of civility. Some mentioned continuing institutional racism
- Environmental Issues, Including Climate Change:** Participants in 5 of the house meetings brought up the need to address environmental issues, particularly climate change. It was noted that climate change will disproportionately affect the health of low income communities. Discussion included addressing access to energy efficiency resources (HES energy assessments) and access to solar power. Several people spoke of the need for communities to ban fracking waste and to ban single use plastic bags. Part of the discussion regarding environmental issues was to address environmental justice issues like lead poisoning and neighborhood contamination sources.
- Support for Education Funding and Youth Services:** Education and related youth services were discussed in 5 of the 9 house meetings. Adequate and stable funding, particularly in cities like New Haven and Bridgeport, were stressed. This included funding for school-based health clinics, mentioned above. More emphasis should be on funding adequate personnel rather than technology. Universal quality early childhood education should be provided. Several people expressed concern about the high cost and impact of higher education student loans. College education should be made more affordable and available to all people. One way of addressing inadequate funding for local schools was to encourage regionalization in CT.
- Other Issues and Themes Discussed:**

- *Issues affecting Senior Citizens:* These included housing, access to health care services, the cost of living and taxes.
- *Support for Social Service Programs* Adequate funding for social service programs was a thread running through most of the issue areas presented above. This included support for local libraries and the services they provide.
- *Voter Registration and Civic Involvement:* The governor, other state officials should implement ways to maximize voter participation, including same day registration and other strategies.
- *Moral and Ethical Conduct, Civility:* A few people talked about the need for moral and ethical conduct, especially regarding elected officials, and more respect and civility for all people.