



ATD FOURTH WORLD

FALL 2018 NEWSLETTER

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Photo by Jay Baker at Baltimore, MD - flickr.com/photos/mdgovpics/14432536983/

What's at stake in the November midterm elections for people living in poverty and their allies?

As members of a movement working to eradicate poverty we cannot afford to be indifferent about the upcoming midterm elections. However frustrating our governmental functioning has been, particularly of late, there are critical issues on the table affecting the lives of people in chronic poverty. Our elected officials are the ones who work on these laws and policies while others like judges, or departments such as Health and Human Services or Housing and Urban Development, for example, interpret and carry them out. **We have an obligation to put people in political responsibilities who are dedicated to overcoming poverty and are ready to learn from people who experience poverty.**

In anticipation of these midterm elections we asked ATD Fourth World Movement president Peggy Simmons to write an opinion piece and some members of ATD Fourth World around the country to say how they see the issues; what's at stake this November for people in poverty and how are people in underserved areas mobilized for these elections?

Following are excerpts of their responses. Their writings can also be found on 4thworldmovement.org/midterm-elections

"It is just as important what we do after a measure wins, as the work we do to help it win. **People living on the streets need opportunities to engage in creative solutions. They know best what works.**"



Janny Castillo, Oakland, California

Across California affordable housing is one of the major issues. I feel good that we have voting measures at the local and state level that will bring in much needed revenue to build affordable housing. Unfortunately, the crisis is so extreme that even if everything passes, for decades we will still have rents way out of most people's reach, with no end to homelessness in sight.

In the city of Oakland we have a measure that will place a tax on vacant property that will go towards addressing homelessness and reducing illegal dumping. It is just as important what we do after a measure wins, as the work we do to help it win. People living on the streets need opportunities to engage in creative solutions. They know best what works.

At St. Mary's Center we have several grass roots organizations that are training our seniors to GOTV (Get Out The Vote) and educating them on the ballot measures. We will host several events, such as a candidate forum on housing, homelessness, and hunger, a visit from the League of Women's Voters, and a table at several events to speak to as many seniors as possible. We will build our state-wide Residents United Network using this election season, and when our shelter opens in the fall we will help our unhoused seniors get registered to vote. Outside of the election, during the budget and legislative season, we will be speaking with our legislators on issues that are important to those living in poverty. November 6th is one day. **The fight for justice and equity is 365 days a year.**

Sister Alison McCrary, SFCC, New Orleans, Louisiana

"None of us can make social change alone and democracy goes on the verge of extinction when we don't vote and fail to contact those who are paid to represent our voices."



Our votes reflect our values and what we care about, the common good of all people and those most vulnerable and on the margins. There's a new tax policy on the line that folks can read more about at www.taxpolicycenter.org. This new policy will affect all of us and it matters how your representatives will vote on this new policy. We need to make sure that those we vote into office and the people in Congress will support and create safety nets that protect those most in need in our communities. None of us can make social change alone and democracy goes on the verge of extinction when we don't vote and fail to contact those who are paid to represent our voices.

It's also important that we tell the stories of those who are most directly impacted by these policies to the decision makers and put a face and story with the issues. **Those who are closest to the problem are the ones closest to the solution.** Stories must be told so people will hear how medicaid cuts or cutting affordable housing will affect them and their neighbors and allow their hearts to be tugged on so they will get more informed and educated on issues and vote according to their values.

Alvenia Hutton, Brooklyn, New York

"Many of us make great efforts to get our young people out to vote, educate them on the importance and the right that was paid with a price."



Some major issues that I think should be addressed during this election season are 1) teen pregnancy rates in low-income neighborhoods, with the causes and possible solutions, 2) police brutality and the lack of adequate and/or justified penalties, 3) the rising violent crime rate around the country, especially in 'inner-city' areas, and 4) the babies who were ripped from their parents at the border and the services they will need as a result of their trauma.

People living in deep poverty are not the ones on that newly "employed list" that allows some cities and statistics to say unemployment has decreased in areas of poverty. No, gentrification moves "employable" people into a previously dilapidated neighborhood, they get employed, and the employment rate for that area increases. **However, the same ones who've been in the neighborhood trying to simply survive, not even thrive, remain in the same condition.** They continue to live from one check to the next, if that, and are forced to figure out how to make ends meet one day at a time.

Many of us make great efforts to get our young people out to vote, educate them on the importance and the right that was paid with a price. We also have various community events (cookouts, gospel shows, etc.) in the local parks and playgrounds to get people out and educate the community on the candidates that are running, particularly those that have been actively participating and contributing to the productivity of the community. In my neighborhood, the local leaders (pastors, principals, community boards) host various information sessions to provide education about what's going on, possible actions that can be taken, and the importance of your voice/vote.

Thom Reilly, Las Vegas, Nevada

"It's a proven fact **the pathway out of poverty and toward socioeconomic mobility is education beyond high school** – while not everyone needs a 4-year degree, individuals need additional training such as a certificate or 2-year degree to be competitive. However, this viable option has and remains elusive for many."



College Affordability: The Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act hangs in the political balance...It's a proven fact the pathway out of poverty and toward socioeconomic mobility is education beyond high school – while not everyone needs a 4-year degree, individuals need additional training such as a certificate or 2-year degree to be competitive. However, this viable option has and remains elusive for many. College tuition continues to rise as does the rates of student debt. As such, the college participation rate has seen a steady decline. The U.S. average for low income families is at 39 percent and in Nevada it's 29%. Access and affordability are inextricably linked as impoverished individuals struggle to access higher education because they cannot afford it. In Nevada, we rank 49th in the nation in overall college participation rates for 18- to 24- year olds. Funding college for the financially neediest students is an issue our country continues to grapple with.

Criminal Justice Reform: The Nevada legislature and the state's community colleges are working to assist in prison education that allows for low offending inmates to receive college credit while incarcerated. Research supports that the investment in prison education is pivotal toward the reduction in recidivism and aids in the rehabilitation and employability of felons upon release.

Immigration: The current presidential administration has taken a hard stance toward strengthening immigration policies to include making it tougher for nonresident students to start and continue with higher education pursuits. These students, commonly referred to as DREAMERS or DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients, received conditional residency and immigration protections based on legislative provisions. Those provisions were rescinded fall of 2017. This has created extreme anxiety among our students and their families, many of whom are our neediest students and already face financial hardships.

Outreach: It appears the more local the candidate, the more they tend to do outreach to impoverished communities through holding round tables with community leaders around particular topics of interest. Voter registration efforts appear to be the primary mechanism by which people in underserved areas are mobilized. There are also special interest groups like unions and professional organizations that have traditionally served to help with communication and messaging around significant issues.



Peggy Simmons, Oakland, California

We asked Peggy Simmons, President of ATD Fourth World Movement's board of directors in the USA, to write about the impact she sees of these midterm elections on people and communities directly affected by poverty. For 10 years Peggy has run creative writing workshops with incarcerated youth in the local juvenile hall and since 1992 with children and adults of different backgrounds, many having lived very hard lives because of poverty. It's through these experiences that Peggy expresses the importance of our democratic elections and local civic involvement, for ourselves and our neighbors.

I was one of several community leaders to testify about 18-year-old Robert's accomplishments during the 18 months he had been incarcerated in the county's juvenile detention facility. He was only a couple credits away from graduating from high school and was student of the month several times, had started writing poetry and won a poetry award, had graduated from a life skills course, and had stayed out of trouble. After hearing our stories about how well Robert had done, the judge said, "Well, Robert, you seem to do well in an institution, better than you did with your mother, so we'd better keep you in one," and sent him to the state juvenile facility, an hour and half away, for at least three years. His mother, sister, and uncles who were there were devastated: We were hoping Robert would be coming home on probation or at least sent to a local group home. I could not believe that this judge would basically punish Robert for working hard, doing what he was told, and succeeding.

This is the power that judges have over individuals and families. I know a lot people who've never had to deal with the court system and have no awareness of this power. And I know very few people who understand that these powerful judges who have so much control over people's lives are elected. In my county, they often run unopposed.

State and federal elections are important, but there is deep power locally. Judges, the sheriff, the district attorney (DA) and the school board are daily making decisions that directly affect the lives, safety, and livelihoods of our neighbors and our community's children. The DA decides what charges are brought against individuals and whether or not law enforcement officers are charged with anything at all when they hurt or kill people. The DA is elected and not a campaign that gets a lot of attention or scrutiny. I would like to see us pay more attention to those campaigns and those candidates.

Another source of local power that is often overlooked is the strength of local organizations to create and lobby for changes in laws and propositions that can, for example, fund safety-net programs. Oakland is home to several organizations who have worked hard to change state sentencing laws and have had a lot of success. These are organizations powered by youth and community members of all kinds, not politicians and lawyers. Lives have been changed thanks to their work and they need our support and help.

All around us there is power to affect our lives and the lives of our neighbors. Do we have more influence over who has that power than we realize?