

## ***MUUSAN in 2016: What Have We Accomplished? Where do we go from here?***



MUUSAN at the Pride Portland! March, June 17, 2016

As 2016 draws to its close, in this tumultuous year for politics and public policy for both the nation and for Maine, it is time for the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network Steering Committee to report to our faithful UU members and friends on the progress that our young legislative ministry has made during the year, and on our first ideas on the challenges that 2017 will present.

Yes, we are a young organization, but we are starting to stand on more mature legs and to have an impact in Augusta and across the state. At our November 12<sup>th</sup> bi-monthly Network meeting in Augusta, while shocked and recovering from the news of the Presidential election, we celebrated ***MUUSAN's fourth birthday***. In our first three years of activity we operated as an all volunteer organization with very limited income and expenses. As our aspirations grew in 2015 things began to shift with our first grant from the UU Association's Funding Program. The seed money we received from UUA's Fund for UU Social Responsibility allowed us to hire our half-time MUUSAN administrator, Betsy Parsons in November 2015. Big changes have occurred since Betsy's arrival in terms of meeting the three goals of the UUA grant: (1) operating a state-wide communications system, (2) improving our visibility to UUs across the state and to our social activist allies; and (3) building organizational and financial stability into the future.

In this first MUUSAN Annual Report we will review what we have accomplished in 2016 in establishing a communications network for policy mobilization at state level and in terms of MUUSAN's three chosen policy areas: (1) Protecting and strengthening the **Democratic Process** in state elections and policy making; (2) Ensuring that adequate **Health Care** is provided to all Mainers; and (3) Effectively addressing **Climate Change** with good public policy and investment strategies.

### **Improving MUUSAN Communications for Policy Mobilization**

Our Administrator has worked tirelessly to improve MUUSAN's communications system. We have three internet-based communications tools that she has strengthened: our webpage ( [www.muusan.org](http://www.muusan.org) ), the use of Mail Chimp to send out periodic newsletters and e-mail action alerts, and our Facebook page ( [www.facebook.com/MaineUUSAN](http://www.facebook.com/MaineUUSAN) ). For example in October 637 people visited our web site and over 3,400 were reached by our FaceBook page. In addition, two action alerts

were sent to our e-mail list, which has more than doubled in size in our most recent year of operations. Betsy also facilitates the use of MUUSAN's Zoom electronic meeting service used by the Steering Committee and our three issue groups. In 2017 MUUSAN, with technical assistance from CUUSAN (the Coalition of 25 state UU Networks throughout the country), will be improving our data base of members and congregations for better mobilization and more consistent fundraising.



September 10, 2016 Network Meeting at Augusta Public Library: 37 UUs were present from 15 congregations!

## Issue Area 1: Democracy in Action in Maine

In the past year MUUSAN has had its greatest public policy successes as part of two coalition efforts that were passed by Maine voters: (1) MUUSAN was an endorsing partner organization with Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, running a referendum campaign that on Nov. 3, 2015 strengthened Maine's "first-in-the-nation" Clean Elections Law. It provided a dedicated pool of money for public financing of election campaigns, which allows moderate income persons to run for office; and (2) on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> of this year Maine voters approved the nation's first Ranked Choice Voting Law that mandates using a ranked voting system for all state-wide elections (governor, US and Maine senator and representatives) and primaries. MUUSAN was the only religiously-based interest organization of the 13 groups endorsing this measure, which became law by a comfortable margin.

In the coming legislative session, beginning in January, 2017, we must closely follow the crafting of implementation regulations for the new ranked choice law, as well as being ready to support other state and national measures to "get big money out of politics". This especially applies to efforts to legislate a reversal to the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision of 2010. Our democracy issue area is led by co-chairs Cush Anthony of Portland and Karen Kusiak of Fairfield, both of whom are former state representatives. This group puts into action our 5<sup>th</sup> UU principle of using the democratic process in society at large.

## Issue Area 2: Climate Change



Coastal Flooding in Portland 11-15-16

MUUSAN's Climate Change issue group was also very active during the spring 2016 legislative session. Seven volunteers from four congregations visited US Sen. Susan Collins office in January 2016 to express concerns regarding climate change and to thank her for supporting the President's Clean Power Plan. Picking up steam, the climate change group became very involved in the effort to support passage of a new solar energy bill in the Maine Legislature. MUUSAN became an active participant in the coalition



for the proposed solar legislation led by the Natural Resources Council of Maine. Several letters to the editor were written and individual legislators were intensively lobbied in person. The action was largely focused on the solar enabling legislation (L.D 1649), which passed both houses, but was then vetoed by Gov. LePage in late April. The final vote in the house to override the veto failed by two votes, due to some last minute Republican defections, all a major disappointment to the coalition of solar supporters and to the Maine solar industry, hoping to ramp up new installations.

MUUSAN's climate change group is led by Mary Ann Larson of Portland and Melanie Lanctot of Readfield. It does its work following our 7<sup>th</sup> UU principle, respect for the interdependent web of all existence.



Mary Ann Larson testifies in Augusta for solar energy

Anticipated upcoming issues in the 2017 legislative session include a reintroduction of the solar bill, perhaps modified to some degree, and seeking consensus on a percentage target for regional power plant (RGGI) carbon emission reduction for coming years. Another area of longer term debate is on ways of instituting a possible carbon tax. MUUSAN allies in the field of climate change, such as the Maine chapter of the Citizens Climate Lobby, are pushing for a carbon tax with direct rebates to all citizens as a market-led approach to making substantial reductions in carbon emissions.

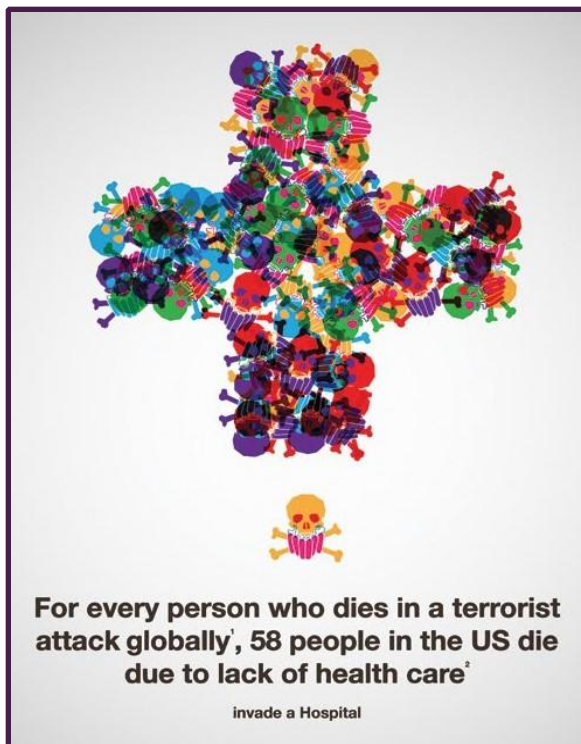
### Issue Area 3: Health Care for All

In MUUSAN's first two years, 2013 and 2014, expanding Maine Care (Maine's Medicaid program)

under the Affordable Care Act was our top legislative priority. MUUSAN, working with the Cover Maine Now Coalition, felt that there was enough bipartisan support for this program (to be paid for with federal dollars, that would cover an additional 70,000 Mainers) to be passed by the Maine legislature. Not anticipated were Governor LePage's veto and the lack of sufficient votes to override it. This happened on five separate times since then, which certainly reduced the optimism that Maine could join the 32 other states – controlled by both Republicans and Democrats – that had opted for Medicaid expansion under provisions of the Affordable Care Act.

During this year's voting, a substantial number of MUUSAN members joined an effort organized by Maine Equal Justice Partners and the Maine People's Alliance to gather signatures for putting "Maine Care" expansion on the ballot. Apparently enough signatures were gathered during this effort to get the measure on the ballot in 2018.

So now what do we do? First, we obviously have to wait for the dust to settle a bit in Washington and for the fate of the ACA to be determined. We will then be able to chart a



course towards a government run, single payer system ("Medicare for All") that certainly has increasing support in Maine. As we learned in our recent conversations at the polls with Mainers who had had good experiences with Medicare, Maine Care, the initial Obama Care coverage, and its recent price increases, "Single Payer" seems to have broad, bipartisan support across the state. The prospect of MUUSAN joining a unified effort for a push for a single payer system involving Maine All Care, the Cover Maine Now Coalition, Maine Equal Justice Partners, and the Maine People's Alliance is exciting to contemplate.

MUUSAN's Health Care Group is co-coordinated by Reverend Pamela Gross of Brunswick and Rosemary Winslow of Waterville, who are most ably assisted by MUUSAN's volunteer legislative strategist, Dale McCormick. They pursue UU principle No. 1, the worth and dignity of every person.

## More Highlights of MUUSAN's 2016 Year

**Betsy Parsons Receives Award:** The Chaplaincy Institute of Maine awarded MUUSAN's administrator Betsy Parsons (formerly an English teacher in two Portland high schools, social activist, and LGBTQ youth champion) their Planetary Chaplain Award, October 28th at the group's annual fundraising banquet. Congratulations Betsy!

**MUUSAN's Reverend Carie Johnsen Travels to Standing Rock:** In November 2016 Rev. Johnsen of the UU Community Church of Augusta (UCCA) joined clergy from across the country in support of the Pipeline protest at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation and at the Bismark, North Dakota state capital. Carie is a founding member of MUUSAN, and the Augusta UCC provides MUUSAN's financial and logistical umbrella. The Steering Committee and membership of MUUSAN is deeply grateful for this institutional support and for Rev. Carie's leadership.

**MUUSAN Finances:** MUUSAN follows Augusta UCC's July to June fiscal year. In FY 15-16, MUUSAN spent a little over \$13,000 of our \$17,000 budget. Of those expenses that 66% went to the administrator's half time wages (over 8 months of the year). For FY16-17 now underway the Steering Committee approved a budget of \$27,600. Due to two generous grants totaling \$10,000 (from the UUA Social Action Fund and a match from the Deborah Pulliam Grant program from the UU Church of Castine), as of November 1, 2016 MUUSAN has received about 60% of that desired income for FY 16-17. However, most of the remaining income is budgeted to come from congregational plate-splits (about \$3,500 to go) and individual contributions (about \$3,800). To continue functioning for the rest of FY 16-17 and beyond, MUUSAN needs your contribution. Please make a tax-deductible donation by the end of 2016 to enable MUUSAN to do even more during the critical legislative session that will begin in January. Thank you in advance from the Steering Committee!

## Donate to MUUSAN

**There are several ways to do so ...** If more convenient for you, go to our web site ( [www.MUUSAN.org](http://www.MUUSAN.org) ) and contribute online via PayPal or a credit card (there is also a link from our FaceBook page). Or if you'd like to mail in a check, send it to MUUSAN, PO Box 8, Augusta, ME 04332-0008. All donations to MUUSAN are fully tax deductible under the IRS Code and you will promptly receive an acknowledgement letter.

## MUUSAN's 2016-17 Steering Committee



**Trudy Ferland, Pittsfield, Co-Chair**  
**Julia Fitz-Randolph, New Harbor, Co-Chair**  
**David Wilcock, Corea and Falmouth, Treasurer**  
**Dale McCormick, Augusta, Legislative Specialist**  
**Rev. Margaret Beckman, Holden**  
**Rev. Pamela Gross, Brunswick**  
**Rev. Carie Johnsen, Augusta**  
**Karen Kusiak, Fairfield**  
**Mary Ann Larson, Portland**  
**Kent Price, Castine**