

Remembering Harvey Milk
Sunday, May 21, 2023
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County
Eustis, FL
Rev. Cynthia A. Snaveley

Tomorrow, May 22 is Harvey Milk Day. It was officially established as a holiday in 2009 when Arnold Schwarzenegger, then governor of California, signed it into law. May 22 was Milk's birthday. He was born on May 22 in 1930. According to Wikipedia Milk ran unsuccessfully for the office of San Francisco city supervisor several times. "Milk was elected city supervisor in 1977 after San Francisco reorganized its election procedures to choose representatives from neighborhoods rather than through city-wide ballots.

"Milk served almost eleven months in office, during which he sponsored a bill banning discrimination in public accommodations, housing, and employment on the basis of sexual orientation. The Supervisors passed the bill by a vote of 11-1, and it was signed into law by Mayor George Moscone. On November 27, 1978, Milk and Moscone were assassinated by Dan White, a disgruntled former city supervisor who cast the sole vote against Milk's bill," [Harvey Milk - Wikipedia](#).

Milk said of his own election, "The only thing they have to look forward to is hope. And you have to give them hope. Hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow, hope for a better place to come to if the pressures at home are too great. Hope that all will be all right. Without hope, not only gays, but the blacks, the seniors, the handicapped, the us'es, the us'es will give up. And if you help elect to the central committee and other offices, more gay people, that gives a green light to all who feel disenfranchised, a green light to move forward. It means hope to a nation that has given up, because if a gay person makes it, the doors are open to everyone.

So if there is a message I have to give, it is that if I've found one overriding thing about my personal election, it's the fact that if a gay person can be elected, it's a green light. And you and you and you, you have to give people hope...."

"It's not my victory, it's yours and yours and yours. If a gay can win, it means there is hope that the system can work for all minorities if we fight. We've given them hope."

With that quote in mind, think of who the elected officials are now serving that Milk would consider his legacy. I think of the Tennessee Three, Justin Jones, Justin Pearson and Gloria Johnson who stood with citizens protesting for gun control interrupting proceedings of the Tennessee House of Representatives. The two Justins were expelled from the Tennessee House and Johnson retained her seat by a single vote. Jones and Pearson were quickly sent back. On Monday, April 10, the Nashville Metro Council voted unanimously to reinstate Jones, and two days later the Shelby County Commission voted unanimously to reinstate Pearson. "This is not about expelling us as individuals. This is your attempt to expel the voices of the people from the people's house. It will not be successful," Jones said before the vote to expel him. "Your overreaction, your flexing of false power has awakened a generation of people who will let you know that your time is up." [The "Tennessee Three": Why were two of the Democratic lawmakers](#)

[expelled, and what happens now? - CBS News](#). I think of Zoey Zephyr. Shaylee Ragar and Acacia Squires reported in April for NPR that, “Republicans, who dominate the Montana House of Representatives, have voted Wednesday to formally punish Democratic Rep. Zoey Zephyr.

“Zephyr, who is transgender, has been blocked from speaking...(after) she told supporters of a bill to ban gender-affirming care that when they bowed their heads in prayer, she hoped they would see ‘blood on [their] hands.’ She says she was alluding to studies that show that transgender health care can reduce suicidality in youth.

“The formal punishment decided... bans Zephyr from attending or speaking during floor sessions. She (was) only ... allowed to vote remotely in the (last) days of the legislative session. It's a lesser punishment than expulsion, which was also on the table, according to House leadership.

“I have fielded calls from families in Montana, including one family whose trans teenager attempted to take her life while watching a hearing on one of the anti-trans bills,’ Zephyr said during the debate Wednesday. ‘So, when I rose up and said ‘there is blood on your hands,’ I was not being hyperbolic,’ she said.” [Trans Montana Rep. Zoey Zephyr punished by Montana Republicans : NPR](#).

On May 10 Casey Parks wrote an article for [The Washington Post](#) that began, “The Colorado legislative session had opened two weeks earlier, but business was light, so state Rep. Brianna Titone headed across the Capitol to talk to the House minority leader.

“Titone, a Democrat, was the co-chair of a caucus that now held more power than ever before. Democrats controlled 46 of the House’s 65 seats, but Titone often reminded herself that a supermajority did not constitute a dictatorship. The real work of legislating, she thought, included far more than blocking and passing bills.

“She knocked, and a couple of Republicans in cowboy hats nodded. Minority Leader Mike Lynch waved her in.

Later in the article, Parks writes that, “(Titone)’d decided months earlier to introduce her first trans-specific legislation — a bill that would turn Colorado into a sanctuary state for trans people fleeing conservative edicts elsewhere. That alone would have marked a turn in Titone’s career, but then, seven weeks before the 2023 session began, a gunman killed five people in a Colorado Springs gay bar, and Titone knew even a good bill would not be enough. She had to be braver.

“Nationwide, Titone is one of just eight transgender state legislators. She’s the only one who leads a party with a supermajority, and because of that, she holds more power than perhaps any other trans lawmaker. After the Club Q shooting, Titone realized she could do something few others could. She could meet with Republicans. She could show them trans people were not weird or threatening,” [Trans lawmaker Rep. Brianna Titone is trying to win over Republicans - The Washington Post](#).

Think of Matthew Frost, the youngest American congressperson who is representing Florida’s 10th congressional district, born to a Puerto Rican woman of Lebanese descent and a Haitian father, brought into politics through concern for gun control, [Maxwell Frost - Wikipedia](#).

Staying in Florida, on May 2 Christine Jordan Sexton wrote on the Florida Politics website, “The House OK'd the measure, which Senators approved last week.

“Insurers and providers would have the right to refuse health care that is at odds with their moral religious or ethical beliefs under a bill (SB 1580) the House has passed by an 84-34 vote....

Rep. Michele Rayner-Goolsby responded, “I’m old enough, I am Black enough, and I’m queer enough, and I’m woman enough to know that the impact of the bill — and I would argue the very intent of this bill — is to discriminate against folks,” [Legislature passes physician 'freedom' bill backed by Gov. DeSantis \(floridapolitics.com\)](#).

Former Representative from Wyoming Liz Cheney lost her primary in October, but she didn’t see that as the end of her abilities to have an influence. Soon after she voted in Jackson, Wyo., Cheney told CBS News' Robert Costa that Tuesday's primary is ‘certainly the beginning of a battle that is going to continue to go on. And as a country, we're facing a moment where our democracy really is under attack and under threat.’

“I feel very proud about all the work I've done together with the people of Wyoming over the last six years and really understand and recognize there's nothing more important than the defense of our Constitution,” [Liz Cheney says "it's the beginning the battle" ahead of Republican primary loss - CBS News](#).

Last summer the gay Republican group the Log Cabin Republicans of Fort Worth, said they were not allowed a booth at the Texas Republican Party Convention, a move which they called out as "narrow-minded" and "politically short-sighted," [Gay Republicans Say Texas GOP Is 'Narrow-Minded' for Excluding Group \(businessinsider.com\)](#).

There are Republicans and Democrats and Greens and independents and more who are all committed to the values Unitarian Universalists share, The inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations; the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

Too often we dismiss our politicians as power hungry, as corrupt, as useless. But there are people out there who have gone into politics to make a difference for good, who want to give people hope. Many of them stand today on the shoulders of Harvey Milk.

They are willing to take risks to do the work. Milk said, “You’ve gotta give them hope. If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.” We think about the risks a President of the United States takes, but the story of Harvey Milk reminds us that other politicians too are willing to serve us knowing that the work may endanger themselves and their loved ones.

Time reported this week that, “A man with a metal baseball bat walked into the northern Virginia office of U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly on Monday, asked for him, then struck two of his workers with the bat, including an intern in her first day on the job, police and the congressman said.

“The attack marked the latest in an uptick in violence aimed at lawmakers or those close to them,” [Man in Custody After Baseball Bat Attack at Congressman's Virginia Office | Time](#).

It was just this past October that Paul Pelosi, husband of Nancy Pelosi, then Speaker of the House, was attacked by someone whose intention was apparently to take her hostage and interrogate her,. [Attack on Paul Pelosi - Wikipedia](#).

Notice that the quote from Milk about possibly being killed because of his political work began with, "You've gotta give them hope." "Hope" was a signature word for Milk. It was what he was about. He said, "Politics is theater. It doesn't matter if you win. You make a statement. You say, 'I'm here, pay attention to me.'" Standing up and saying, "I'm here." "I support gun control, and I am here." "I am a woman, and I am here." "I am gay, and I am here." "I am trans, and I am here." "I am black, and I am here." "I am young, and I am here." "I am for abortion rights, and I am here." "I am for democracy, and I am here." Seeing others take those public stands gives hope.

Milk said, "I ask for the movement to continue, for the movement to grow, because last week I got a phone call from Altoona, Pennsylvania, and my election gave somebody else, one more person, hope. And after all, that's what this is all about. It's not about personal gain, not about ego, not about power – it's about giving those young people out there in the Altoona, Pennsylvanias, hope. You gotta give them hope."

If you have a county commissioner, a school board member, a city councilperson, a state representative, any elected official whom you admire and who is doing work on issues that you support, take some time to reach out and thank them.

Many religious denominations have prayers for elected officials in their books of worship. Jessica Halperin has written one for us.

"Spirit of Love and Justice, Be with us today, and always.

"We take to the streets, we write letters, we sing and worship and gather in community – remind us that our gatherings are sacred because you are there.

"Spirit of Love and Justice, Be with our elected officials, today and always.

"In the difficult work they are called to do, in the choices they must make and the lives that they change – remind them that the work they do is sacred, filled with opportunities to bring more love and justice into the world.

"Spirit of Love and Justice, We know that life is complicated, and that no choice is easy and without repercussions. We know that the complexities of this world is what brings us together as people in sacred community, so that we may better know and remember the love and justice that guide (us). We are grateful for the choices we can make, for the freedom, and dignity, and life-giving power that we claim when each of us makes a choice that is right for us.

"Sometimes you whisper in our ears, Spirit, and sometimes we hear the roar of your presence in the voices of people raised in witness. You make yourself available to every one of us, [...] and we gather in prayer today to ask you to be with us, and with everyone we meet.

"May every one of us, and every one of our Elected Officials, hear and heed your cries – Spirit of Love and Justice. May we be grateful for the complicated choices that each of us have to make and recognize that those choices are not only opportunities to bring more love and more justice into our world, but that those choices are the products of justice in our world – that discernment and conscience are sacred rights bestowed to each of us.

“May we and our Elected Officials live fully into these gifts of choice and sacred discernment, and may they always be used to sustain more love and more justice. (And, I would add with Harvey Milk, more hope.)

“Amen.”