

A TIME TO CELEBRATE FLORIDIANS FOR DEMOCRACY, 2023

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Feb. 6 (Zoom) Karen and Jim Nathan meet with Jeff Cull & Ella Naylor to discuss the 1939 Project.

Feb. 18 (In-person) Eight people meet in the home of Karen & Jim to share perspectives and concerns of new Florida laws and proposed bills creating fears and actual disruptions to lives and livelihood.

Comparisons identified with what was happening in Germany in the 1930s.

Feb. 21 (In-person) Karen & Jim attend the “Concerned Citizens of Lower Lee County” meeting about the spread of hate and antisemitism in Southwest Florida, hosted by Liz Matt and Pat Duncan in Bonita Springs.

Feb. 27 (Zoom) The 1939 Project group discusses next steps. Consider a two-pronged approach: (1) Possible litigation regarding laws that endanger the First Amendment; and (2) Build a network of folks (possibly Lee & Collier) to create a “Campaign to Protect Democracy.” Ella and Jeff are sponsoring the “Pass Over” play with a “Black Lives Matter” theme and a panel discussion that could be an opportunity to talk about the 1939 Project.

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March 6 (Zoom) Karen & Jim ask advice from political advisor Robert (Bob) Schaeffer for the 1939 Project.

March 13 (Zoom) 1939 Project Committee discusses reaching out to others and planning an in-person event. Jeff Cull provides a detailed list of onerous passed and proposed bills. Bill Petrarca presents a draft of a mission statement. Jim and Karen share Mr. Schaeffer’s thoughts on the challenges we face. We become more determined.

March 20 (Zoom) 1939 Project Committee. Melinda Isley, with an impressive background in PR joins our group. Dave Aronberg, past Florida State Senator, and current state attorney, joins us from Palm Beach County to share his thoughts and advice. He suggests we get involved in social media and consider a trip to Tallahassee to have our voices heard in person. On advice from Jeff Cull and Mike Martin, the Group decides the situation is too dire to take time to plan an in-person event. We agree to reach out to 20-30 people known to us from Sarasota to Naples who have similar democratic values for a Zoom in two weeks. In the meantime, Jeff, Jim, and Mike agree to reach out to some Republicans in Collier and on Sanibel who might be willing to speak out against some of the bills passed in Tallahassee.

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April 3 (Zoom) Word about the 1939 Project has spread. We have 84 in attendance. Speakers include Jeff Cull (analysis of current bills), Howard Simon (What we can try to accomplish), Melinda Isley (Gathering together brings us hope), Todd Thomas (The fight is in us. We must continue.), Bob Schaeffer (Great Importance on bringing more people together. PowerPoint “Keys to Building Effective Advocacy Organizations”).

April 8 (In-person) “Pass Over” play with Black Lives Matter theme at the Lab Theatre; panel discussion.

April 10 (Zoom) 1939 Project Meeting. Discuss filing Articles of Incorporation for a 501(c)4. Perhaps have a bank account, and maybe a part-time employee. Decide to start a Constant Contact newsletter.

Brainstorm a list of possible speakers. Agree to find an attorney, and choose a positive name, Floridians for Democracy, and incorporate a c3 and c4.

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May 1 FFDI and FFD file Articles of Incorporation.

FFDI [501(c)3] board members: Jim Nathan, Jan Martin, Wayne Smith; soon joined by Mike Martin, Grace Brannigan, Jeff Cull, and Robert Schaeffer.

FFD [501(c)4] board members: Ella Naylor, Karen Nathan, Bill Petrarca; soon joined by Devon Browne, Katelyn Tellgren, and Alex Rundlet.

May 1 (Zoom) Announce our new name & incorporation! Rabbi Nicole Luna and Abdul Haq Muhammed provide words of inspiration, followed by a quick city/county call-out “What’s on Your Mind?” Speaker Nikki Fried, past Florida Commissioner of Agriculture and current Chair of the Democratic party, encourages us to get people registered to vote, push back against the culture wars and bad bills, and use our voices to stand up for democracy in Florida. (187 participants)

May 8 (Zoom) Agree to hire ActiveData Digital and to develop a newsletter and Websites.

May 15 (Zoom) Speaker Bobby Block, executive director of the Florida First Amendment Foundation, adds his perspective on today’s challenges to democracy in Florida. (160 participants)

Lynn Revo-Cohen shares her “We’re on Fire” video with young people excited about preserving democracy. Board members present our five Goals with the participants: Partner, Educate, Enhance (GOTV & Run for Something), Communicate, Fund. There is a great deal of interest.

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June 7 (Zoom) Partnered with Citizens of Lower Lee County. “White Supremacists and a Brave Sheriff and Florida Legislator.” (60 participants)

June 15 (Zoom) Speaker David Pepper and author of “Saving Democracy” suggests we incorporate “saving democracy” in our mission statement. Alerts us that attacking democracy has become a full-time billion-dollar enterprise. Saving democracy is an act that requires continuous action. “Run for something.” Encourage, focus on, and support local and state candidates who support democracy. (105 participants)

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July 6 (Zoom) Board unanimously approves Strategic Plan developed by Devon Browne. Approve survey created to go to current 520 participants.

July 13, August 1, August 8 (Zoom) Board Meetings. Discuss the survey results, updates on funding, and ActiveData’s Facebook and Instagram pages. Approve research into hiring part-time employee.

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Aug. 11 (Zoom) FFD “Partnering” Team meets with Cecile Scoon and Debbie Chandler (LWV-FL), Cynthia Lippert (Indivisible), Karyn Edison (Lee Dems), Robyn Cook (Sanibel LWV), and Richard Jacobs (author and philanthropist).

Aug. 17 (Zoom) Board Meeting. Discuss how to separate (c)3 and (c)4 while continuing to share information and team effort.

Aug. 24 (Zoom) FFD Speakers: Karen Svoboda (Defense of Democracy), Andrew Warren (former Hillsborough Co. State Attorney), Tommy Doyle (Lee County Supervisor of Elections). (75 participants).

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Sept. 6 (Zoom) Board Meeting. Approve printing rack cards. FFDI elects chair and spokesperson. FFD elects interim co-presidents.

Sept. 12 (Zoom) FFD “Enhance” Team meets with five speakers: Phyllis Andrews (Collier Freedom), Cynthia Lippert & Rachel Ekeroth (Indivisible), Nancy Terreri (“Postcard Lady”), and Robyn Cook (Sanibel LWV).

Sept. 19 (Zoom) FFD on “Education Under Siegel How Should We Respond?” Speakers Dr. Pat Okker, Immediate past President of New College; and Gwyn Gittens, past Chair Lee County School Board; representatives of the Purple Group; and Maz Tuchman, an impressive candidate for Miami-Dade School Board. (114 participants).

Sept. 21 (FFDI) and Sept. 26 (FFD) (Zoom) Board Meetings. Welcome new board members. Determine FFD (c)4 can endorse candidates who stand for pro-democracy policies.

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Oct. 5 (Zoom) Second “Enhance” Team Meeting. Discuss concerns regarding high number of abortion referendum petitions being rejected due to signatures not matching exactly. Study charts of upcoming events and criteria for candidates to support (Floridareportcard.com) provided by Katelyn Tellgren.

Oct. 10 (Zoom) Speaker Simon Rosenberg “Messaging Hope and Optimism” (58 participants). Key messages: The “War Room” today is groups like FFD and others. The MAGA and fascist-like groups’ propaganda machine is huge, but we are not powerless. Use our voices. Talk about the good works of Joe Biden. Be aggressive, but not annoying. Stakes are high, but there is an opportunity to come back in Florida. We are being called to rise, as people did in the 1940s.

Oct. 26 (Zoom) Pro-Democracy Summit with David Jolly (97 participants). Key messages: Institutions of the press and truth have been undermined. Take stands against issues that weaken democracy. Choose three issues – provide education and passion about them. Go to Tallahassee with storytelling, messaging, and advocacy. Identify: “How we have gotten to the point where it is essential to talk about protecting people from the powers of the state?”

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Nov. 8 (Zoom) Speakers Florida State Reps Rita Harris and Anna Eskamani (40 participants). Key messages: “There has been a freight train of bad bills in Tallahassee.” Stand for something. To determine what to run for, ask yourself what you are passionate about. Do the math – what will it cost? Calculate the votes needed. Attend events, do door knocking, expect to put in the time. FFD can do voter registration and raise awareness of what goes on in state government. See the long picture. “Should you do it even if it seems hopeless? If you give up and stop trying, then it is hopeless.”

Nov. 11, 4-7:30, FFD partners with Florida Veterans for Common Sense and Choose Democracy Now. Veterans Day Expo, UU Congregation in Sarasota in-person (over 300) and live streaming nationally. Speaker Professor Ruth Ben-Ghait, author of Strongmen. Topic: “Fascism at Our Doorstep”

Nov. 14, 11-1:15 In-person. Meet & Greet, Dave Aronberg presentation on challenges and opportunities of democracy in Florida and beyond. Six individuals recognized as “Voices for Democracy.” (85 attendees) Dr. Robert Hilliard, Dr. Maddie Stewart & Bobbie D’Alessandro (Purple Group), Phyllis Andrews & Michael Sales (Collier Freedom), and Jan Sommer, esq.

Nov. 17 (In-person) Both boards (FFD and FFDI) discuss our future.

Nov. 30 (Zoom) FFD on the Environment. Speakers Jaclyn Lopez and Leslie Poole. Will recognize Richard Jacobs in memoriam.