

WGG Meeting April 1, 2019

Women for Good Government held the April 2019 meeting at **First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin**. This was the first time we met at First UU. We started a new sign-in procedure and had new permanent name tags.

Our guest speaker was **Pooja Sethi, Esq., Immigration Attorney**. Pooja advocates in Austin for the rights of Immigrants, women who suffer domestic abuse, translation of languages in our jails and with the police, and a more inclusive city for all. She recently received the Emmitt Till Award from the Syracuse College of Law for her Immigration work with detained clients, and advocacy with Texas Legislatures and elected officials. The fight for Immigration reform is not a job, it is her passion, and she hopes that everyone joins in this fight to create better Immigration reform that helps people live in peace and without fear.

Pooja offered an overview of H1B visas, asylum, immigration policy, and “knowing your rights (as an immigrant)”/what to do when ICE knocks on your door.

Asylum (since 1951)

- It is a legal right (by international and federal law) to seek asylum at our border or within a year of entering the U.S. as a visitor. People who come to the border to seek asylum are not doing anything illegal – one must be at the border or inside the country to apply for asylum; those applying from elsewhere are refugees.
- The Trump administration policy is to make asylum seekers stay in detention centers rather than letting them out in the community while they are waiting to be adjudicated.
- Since September 2018 a new policy memorandum made it that if an application is not sent in correctly the whole application can be rejected putting the applicant out-of-status and at risk for immediate deportation.
- Notice to Appear (NTA) instructs an individual to appear before an immigration judge. It is the first step in removal (deportation) proceedings.

H1B Visa

- H1B professionals are highly skilled workers, often “tech” workers
- H1B Visas are being denied often and that negatively effects industry and economy – we are probably going to be facing a worker deficit
- Currently H1B spouses are having worker authorization pulled with the result being that they cannot work
- Pooja noted this is also an example of legal immigration suffering under this administration

ICE Detainer

- Travis and Williamson counties call ICE on most immigrants (legal and undocumented) giving ICE an opportunity to take them to a detention center

If ICE comes to your door

- Keep the door closed
- Ask for warrants with specific names
- Sign nothing without a lawyer
- Show documents if you have them with you
- Keep documents with you *at all times* (all family members) even if citizen or here legally
- Don't run. Stay calm

Pooja said people can help by voting, staying informed and helping others to “Know Your Rights” (there is a flyer put out by the ACLU).

Pooja also has a backpack project for children (San Antonio) and a project to get clothing for people at a sex-trafficking refugee ranch outside of Austin. Marilee Phillips, Dona Stallworth and Yvonne Larue volunteered to coordinate with Pooja to assemble the backpacks and will get specific out to WGG members who would like to help.

Announcements:

- Thank you to Kathi Miller for the name tags and to Lorraine Broll for volunteering to serve as our treasurer.
- Treasurer Report: \$2,340.00 total collected (including today)
Expenses to date: \$24.15 for checks; \$15.10 for name tags; \$1,020.00 for rental of space which takes us through 2019; \$5.00 for a savings account
- Parking – ignore the Massage School parking signs for our Monday meetings. Do not park in the credit union parking lot.
- Mary proposed writing thank you notes to Central Texas House Dem Party. She will send out the names and addresses for those interested. People have the option of mentioning WGG or not
- Speaker in May will be from Fair Maps
- Kim Olson will be our speaker in June
- Any candidate any time can make a 2-minute elevator speech at the end of our program. We will hold Candidate forums in 2020 but WGG does not endorse any candidates until primary winners are determined.
- TCDP work would begin at the earliest in May 2020
- Get involved with precincts – community, neighborhood organizing works! Talk about voting (not necessarily candidates) – help voters connect the dots as to why voting is essential for our democracy
- VDR training at 1st UU on the 3rd Saturday beginning in May

- Sheri Soltes is running for Travis County Commissioner Precinct 3. She also offer space to assemble backpacks