

Co-Creating Our Reality

The world and the systems we inhabit are neither predetermined nor permanent. As human beings with dignity and free will, we are charged with taking an active role shaping the world we seek.

Creating Change Begins with Our Actions

With a vision of justice and peace for the future in mind, it is up to us to transform our society to more closely embody that vision. We are co-creators of our political, economic, and social systems. We cannot complain about the “powers that be” without claiming our own power to make change.

For those living in the United States, this ability to co-create our reality should be understood through the lens of the U.S. democratic political system. Our representative democracy provides an accessible route for each of us to directly influence our politics. No matter what political system is in place, however, residents of every nation of the world have some power to shape the world around them.

Individually, each citizen of the United States *should* be able to vote in federal, state, and local elections (though that right is too often stripped away), and all U.S. residents pay taxes and are free to join political parties or other associations to work for shared goals. Individuals can work to influence their fellow U.S. residents, and even their elected officials, by persuading them to support a certain position. Even if your favored candidate does not win the election or a bill fails to pass through the legislative body, it does not mean that your participation was ineffective. Every moment Spirit-filled voters are engaged in our democracy, you are shaping the fabric of our nation.

If you are bothered by elected officials telling lies, denounce the lies and spread the truth — to yourself, to your friends, or to the internet. If you support a piece of legislation, call your Representatives and ask them to support it. Run for office yourself!

There are many ways to be involved, but first we must accept the responsibility of being co-creators of our reality. Otherwise, if we do not accept this responsibility consciously, and we refuse to act with intention, our indifference will shape the society we live in.

Our Voice is Our Vote

By U.S. Representative Terri Sewell

As a proud daughter of Selma, Alabama, growing up I was surrounded by the heroes and sheroes of the civil and voting rights movements. I was reminded every day of the powerful change that ordinary Americans can achieve.

My home church, Brown Chapel A.M.E., is where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. planned the Selma-to-Montgomery marches and where protesters sheltered on Bloody Sunday; on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which looms large over downtown Selma, my colleague and mentor, Congressman John Lewis, was beaten bloody by billy clubs.

There was rarely a family gathering or church function that didn't include proud participants of the movement, their stories told and retold as a reminder to us all of what ordinary Americans are capable.

The history of Alabama's 7th Congressional District sets it apart, as one of our country's most potent testaments to the triumph of human courage; the power of grassroots, community organizing; and the resilience of our democracy.

I would not walk the halls of Congress today if it were not for the foot soldiers of the civil and voting rights movements, who marched, bled and died for the right to vote.

Sadly, old battles have become new again. Modern-day barriers to the ballot box – strict voter ID, polling location closures, and voter roll purges – have prevented too many Americans from making their voices heard.

Since the Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision gutted the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 and halted federal preclearance, elections have taken place under laws that were later found in court to be intentionally discriminatory. In states across the country and, particularly, in many previously-covered under the preclearance requirements of the VRA, new state laws and voting procedures have diluted the voting rights of certain vulnerable communities – the elderly, disabled, minority groups and younger voters.

In the 2018 midterm elections, the Republican candidate for governor in Georgia used his powers as Secretary of State to put 53,000 voter registrations on hold, nearly 70% of which belonged to Black voters. In North Carolina, the state legislature closed 20% of early voting locations in 2018. In New Hampshire, Florida, Texas, and Wisconsin, students faced higher hurdles to cast their ballots.

And this year, on Super Tuesday, a Houston resident waited seven hours to cast his ballot. No one should have to wait hours in line to exercise their constitutional right to vote!

In 2012, before the *Shelby* decision, Texas had one polling place for every 4,000 residents. By 2018, that figure had dropped to one polling place per 7,700 residents. It's no mistake those closures disproportionately took place in growing African American and Latino neighborhoods.

Since the *Shelby* decision, changes to state voting laws are leaving the voices of millions of citizens behind. The road to justice is long and winding, but no citizen deserves to be left in the rearview mirror.

We must double down on our commitment to the voting rights movement and elect candidates who are committed to restoring the protections of the Voting Rights Act and expanding voter access across the country.

The foot soldiers of the civil rights movement reminded us that every one of us can change the course of history. Our vote is our voice. We must use it this November!

Terri Sewell is a Member of the United States House of Representatives 116th Congress. She represents Alabama's 7th District, which includes Selma, Alabama, the birthplace of the Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights.

We Pray

Lord,

On the first day, you created light and dark. You saw that it was good.

On the second day, you separated ocean from sky. And you saw that it was good.

On the third day, you created earth and all of the plants. You saw that they were good.

On the fourth day, you made the sun, moon, and the stars. You saw that they were good.

On the fifth day, you created animals of the sea and the sky. And you saw that they were good.

On the sixth day, you brought forth animals of the earth and human beings. You made humans in your divine image. You looked around and you saw that all of your creation was good.

Help us to always remember that our life and our purpose comes from you, our Creator. By virtue of our divine creation, we are called to care for the earth and cultivate a world of justice and peace for all.

Give us strength and perseverance to structure a society that cherishes all persons and the earth.

Amen.

Take Action

One way to take an active role in co-creating the world in which we live is sharing your beliefs in the media. Letters to the Editor (LTEs) are among the most widely read sections of newspapers and magazines, and they are closely monitored by elected officials and political campaigns to find out what voters are thinking. Write and submit your own letter to the editor about an issue that is important to you using our LTE tips.

Tips for Writing Powerful LTEs:

- Submit your LTE to a local media outlet, following the guidelines of the specific publication to ensure you have the correct length, style, and format. Most publications prefer letters to be 200 words or less.
- Frame your letter in relation to a recent news item or topic. Editors are more likely to publish a letter when written in response to a story printed in that publication.
- Use local, specific information whenever possible.
- Be aware of your audience: use talking points that will appeal to the readers, avoid jargon and abbreviations, and don't engage in personal attacks.
- Include your credentials.
- If you're working from a sample letter to the editor, don't copy talking points verbatim. Papers can search for canned content after it is published one time.

You can find more information about LTEs and a sample LTE at www.networkadvocates.org/2020election/LTEs, or contact NETWORK for assistance with your LTE by emailing info@networklobby.org.