

# Modesto Focus: Good News is on the Way

By **Eric Caine, The Valley Citizen**

In July, a small but lively crowd gathered in downtown Modesto to celebrate the coming launch of The Modesto Focus, an online newspaper that will offer a new model for local news coverage of Stanislaus County and nearby. Long considered a “news desert,” the northern San Joaquin Valley has wanted for truly local and civics-oriented news for decades.

Back in the 1980s into the 1990s, when print journalism was nearing the end of its Golden Age, the McClatchy-owned Modesto Bee thrived because want ads and traditional print advertising provided ample funding for award-winning photographers like Al Golub and tough journalists like Nancy Marinan. Even as late as the twenty-teens, fearless reporters like Joanne Sbranti didn’t let local power barons keep her from telling the truth about the economic forces behind dry wells at people’s small home ranches.

Nevertheless, the realities of tectonic shifts in media platforms as well as declining ad revenues had even then reduced local news to a few dimming lights in a growing sea of darkness, brought on by the juggernaut of sensationalism Rupert Murdoch brought

## THE MODESTO FOCUS

to American shores when he purchased the New York Post late in 1976.

Once Murdoch acquired Fox in 1985, the shift from print to electronic media accelerated. Within a few years, radio talk shows and tabloid television would become

We should all do our part to become as informed and engaged as possible in the making and workings of local government. The quickest and easiest way to do so now is by signing up for this all-new, “non-profit community-based newsroom.”

driving forces for “alternate” news sources that would gradually become mainstream and dominant.

Traditional newspapers suffered. Even giants like McClatchy, which owned leading newspapers throughout the nation and especially from Sacramento southward to Fresno, began a slow decline that accelerated rapidly after the turn of the century. The biggest losses were to civic awareness, especially at local levels, where growing staff shortages and an increasingly disengaged public resulted in less and less coverage of city and county government.

Today, the Modesto Bee has lost much of the institutional knowledge that informed local journalism for decades. There is still competent reporting — the recent investigation into wasteful spending at the Stanislaus Council of Governments is a good example — but staff shortages and a



**Joe Kieta and Garth Stapley**

lack of local experience have resulted in a diminution of what was already insufficient oversight of government affairs.

The Modesto Focus will bring citizens of Stanislaus County a wealth of much-needed local talent, beginning with former Bee stalwarts Garth Stapley, Marjike Rowland and Joe Kieta, a trio of dedicated journalists with decades’ experience reporting, editing, and managing local news. The Focus will eschew “breaking news” in favor of probing reports that reveal how local government works (or doesn’t) with the mission of developing civic awareness and engagement,

Longtime Bee readers will be especially pleased to know that Garth Stapley will be the “Accountability Reporter.” With decades of experience at the Bee, Stapley brings a reputation for fearless and accurate

reporting, exactly what local citizens need to re-engage with government.

None of us should forget that success for local news depends on readers who accept the responsibility for informed self-government. We should all do our part to become as informed and engaged as possible in the making and workings of local government. The quickest and easiest way to do so now is by signing up for this all-new, “non-profit community-based newsroom.” There will be no paywall. You can sign up here for updates on the launch, scheduled for mid-August.

Eric Caine formerly taught in the Humanities Department at Merced College. He was an original Community Columnist at the Modesto Bee and wrote for The Bee for over twelve years.

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## BEAM Circular Launches Inaugural Youth & Community Ambassador Programs to Empower Local Leaders in the Circular Bioeconomy

BEAM Circular is proud to announce the launch of its new Community and Youth Ambassador Programs, two pilot educational initiatives designed to equip local residents and students with the knowledge, skills, and tools to become champions for the region's circular bioeconomy and advocates for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education.

The **BEAM Community Ambassadors Program**, which officially kicked off August 26, 2025, will bring together 18 community members for a four-session interactive series exploring how the circular bioeconomy can drive local economic growth, reduce pollution, and inspire sustainable innovation in industries across the North San Joaquin Valley. Participants will also take part in a field trip to a local business leading the way in circular economy practices.

Designed for Spanish-speaking Stanislaus County residents passionate about environmental sustainability, good jobs, and community health, the Community Ambassadors Program will prepare participants to serve as trusted sources of information in their neighborhoods. Graduates of the program will be eligible to continue their involvement with BEAM Circular as Community Ambassadors, leading outreach activities and connecting others in their communities with education, information, and



opportunities related to the region's growing bioeconomy and other related STEM industries.

In parallel, BEAM Circular will also launch the **BEAM Youth Ambassador Program** on August 28, a multi-week, paid opportunity for high school and college students (ages 16–24) to immerse themselves in the science and innovation powering the circular bioeconomy. Youth Ambassadors will explore how local agricultural byproducts, such as almond shells, tomato pomace, and grape vines, can be transformed into clean energy, construction materials, tasty food ingredients, clothing, and more.

Through hands-on workshops, guest speaker sessions, and immersive site visits, students will experience the circular bioeconomy in action. They will also design and deliver interactive presentations and lead STEM activities with younger students in the community.

Participants in both programs will earn \$25/hour plus

travel reimbursement, gaining real-world experience while building leadership skills and advancing sustainability in the region.

“The circular bioeconomy isn't just about technology, it's about people,” said Karen Warner, CEO of BEAM Circular. “By engaging our neighbors and our youth as ambassadors, we're investing in local leaders who understand the challenges and the opportunities of this region. These programs put the power to build a cleaner, more resilient, and more prosperous future directly into the hands of the community.”

Both programs underscore BEAM Circular's commitment to community-driven climate action, economic resilience, and advancing educational opportunities in the Central Valley. For more information about the programs, please contact [info@beamcircular.org](mailto:info@beamcircular.org).

**About BEAM Circular:** BEAM Circular is a nonprofit organization that serves as a hub for circular bioeconomy innovation, workforce development, and industry growth in California's agricultural heartland. BEAM Circular works with over 100 partners across the North San Joaquin Valley and beyond to develop bio-based solutions that transform waste into valuable products while creating local economic opportunities and addressing environmental challenges.

## Library Foundation Fundraiser Moves to the State Theater to Spotlight Library Programs for Youth and Adults

The Stanislaus Library Foundation's annual fundraising event has been rechristened *Author Spotlight* and will feature an appearance by acclaimed author and children's advocate, Kris Calvin. The event will take place at 2 p.m. on Sunday, September 28 at The State Theater in Modesto. Tickets are now on sale.

“The Author Spotlight event raises funds for library programs for children and adults,” said Foundation president, Susan Thomas. This year, part of the money raised will be used to support Financial Literacy programming at all 13 branches of the Stanislaus County Library. “Building financially fit kids benefits us all,” said Thomas.

Ticketholders will meet and hear mystery writer, Kris Calvin, who will speak on the importance of both creativity and advocacy. “For me, creativity and advocacy go hand in hand and are the “twin pillars” that support a full and meaningful life,” said Calvin.

Calvin is the author of several mystery and crime novels, including “All That Fall” (2021) and “Under a Broken Sky” (2023). A California native, her stories take place in the greater Sacramento area. Calvin goes well beyond the normal level of research in her writing. For example, she achieved certification in Forensic Psychology to lend the maximum credence to her characters.



In addition to her writing, Calvin is recognized as a child advocate. She previously served as CEO of the American Academy of Pediatrics, California, and has been honored for her leadership in advocacy for children by the California Legislature and the Governor's office. In 2022, she received the American Academy of Pediatrics Child Advocate Award. In Calvin's books, there are crimes to solve and murderers to catch - these are, after all, mysteries and thrillers - but no harm comes to children.

Among her numerous writing honors, Calvin has received Silver Falchion National Literary Awards for Best First Novel, Best Political Thriller, and Best Female PI/Sleuth, joining past awardees that include Sue Grafton, Dean Koontz, and Ann Perry.

Tickets are \$100 per person and may be purchased online at <https://thestate.org/events>. For information, call 209-523-9083.

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# Learning to See Each Other: Reflections on Humanity, Nonviolence, and Immigration

By Michael Nagler, [Metta Center for Nonviolence](#)

TOWARD THE BEGINNING of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, where he is pointing out how elements of his education that were considered normal were in fact immoral and scientifically wrong, he gives the harsh example of being taught to pay careful attention not to mispronounce the word 'human' when he was arguing in court for the death penalty—in effect, for driving someone from the human community.

In fact, all violence against our fellow human beings requires the psychological misrepresentation to oneself of denying they are, like ourselves, fully human. This is one reason that Gandhi practically equated nonviolence with Truth; and why violence is gaining on us in this age of untruth. All violence by its very nature denies the fundamental reality of our unity. That's why it's always counterproductive in the long run; as Gandhi pointed out, unarguably, what is unreal cannot endure, while what is real cannot be overcome. Except apparently, and harmfully.

Science has come up with a name for the inevitable harm one does to oneself by harming others: moral injury. Neuroscience has discovered where this happens in the brain: our mirror neurons. But 'othering' is far too deeply embedded in our evolutionary heritage to be overcome by these discoveries, which are only facts. This is where nonviolence comes in, for to quote Gandhi again, by taking on self-suffering you do more than move the head of another person, you "move the heart also."

We often think at Metta, if only our fellow human beings could wrap their minds and hearts around the underlying signature of life: unity-in-diversity.

## Truth

By Leah Shoshannah

"I have to share something that is on my heart.

I am afraid to share my thoughts about Israel/Palestine.

I have been working as a freelance Cantorial Soloist and Jewish Musician for the past decade. I have lost jobs for sharing my thoughts on I/P.

I've always been an honest person. To a fault. Now, I am afraid of my own nature. I feel myself working against what feels natural to me - to tell the truth. Is this what being an adult is?

I feel deeply that my work as a Cantorial Soloist is my life's work. I deeply desire to pursue ordination as a Cantor - to learn and continue the musical lineage of my ancestors.

Yet, I am afraid to do this. Working in the Jewish world has become increasingly more and more political. I love the spiritual practices. I hate the politics.

Politics are different from truth.

I'd like to share a teaching from my teacher, Reb Marcia.

"The word truth, in Hebrew, is Emet. The first letter of



One evening I was in a train with a friend leaving London for her place in the south. Another lady we didn't know was with us in the compartment. I was trying to meditate (what else is new) when an announcement came over the speakers about the next stop. **The voice happened to be that of a young woman, her tone and cadence somehow familiar and comforting to me.** That small sense of ease was abruptly broken when the lady riding with us said loudly to my friend, 'Humph; sometimes you don't feel at home in your own country.' **Multiply that fleeting moment of discomfort by millions, and you can begin to imagine the scale of hostility—wars, deportations, or everyday cruelty toward immigrants, even those legally present and contributing richly to their communities.** The cruelty of this untruth can go so far that today in South Africa, as we recently learned from our friend Ela Gandhi, youths are blocking non-documented 'aliens' from getting into hospitals for needed care – not to mention what Israel is doing in Gaza.

There is a kind of deep education that could get us out of this. Structurally it would be based on that model of unity-in-diversity: once that is ingrained, differences are not a threat but a signature of life. It would also be based on the undeniable fact that in every one of us the same consciousness exists; hence the same basic capacities and the same needs – for consciousness and it would be a great step forward for education to deliver this is who we are, much more intimately than our physical manifestations, which are our individualities. God bless both; but God make us aware of the former, that we at last live in a world of living harmony.

Emet is Aleph and the last letter is Taf. The middle letter of the word is Mem. Aleph is the first letter in the alphabet, Taf is the last, and Mem is the middle.

Truth is made up of all the letters of the alphabet, including the middle."

So what is my truth?

I am not a Zionist. I am not an anti-Zionist. I am someone who wants the Jewish community (and the world at large) to reach out, instead of pointing fingers; to listen, instead of casting blame; to open and speak from the heart; to make the wholeness of peace from all of our parts.

My prayer is that folks from across the political divides can find common unity. That we form a chain, a coalition of action, to unseat fascists, end unjust wars and reverse climate change. That we learn to respect all of the different ways we are working together to mend the brokenness in our world.

וְנִמְצָא וְרַמְיָאן. לְאָרְשֵׁי לְכָ לְעוֹ וְנִיְלַע מוֹלֵשׁ הַשְּׁעִי אִידָה. וְיִמְרָמֵב מוֹלֵשׁ הַשְּׁעִי  
Oseh Shalom Bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu, v'al kol yisrael, v'al kol yoshvei tayvel, v'imru amen.

"May the One Who makes peace in the high heavens make peace for us and for all Israel, and all who dwell on Earth, and let us say: Amen."

# How Project 2025 Student Loan Changes Will Impact Your Family

By Gloria Young

From [Engage Tuolumne](#)

As parents and grandparents, we hope for better educational opportunities for our children and grandchildren. In the current environment, where savings and retirement accounts are being depleted, many of us turn to federal student grant and loan programs to help our young people afford college.

In 2010, student loans were federalized as Federal Student Aid (FSA) under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Education. Project 2025 seeks to eliminate the Department of Education, reverse FSA, and return student loans to private sector operations. Governance would occur through an agency head and board of trustees appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate, and funds would be appropriated by Congress and overseen by professional managers.

The new agency would manage the loan portfolio, handle borrower relations, administer loan applications and disbursements, monitor institutional participation and accountability issues, and issue regulations. Further, it would rescind loan forgiveness programs under the Higher Education Act.

Project 2025 would consolidate all federal loan programs into one new program that will:

Phase out existing Income-Driven Repayment student loan plans (repayment rate based on the recipient's current income), and convert them to fixed payment plans, making it extremely difficult for graduates with low income to pay off their loans.

Terminate interest rate subsidies and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, which prioritizes government or public sector work over private sector employment (public service workers, teachers, etc.).

Include annual and aggregate limits on borrowing.

Require "skin in the game" from colleges to hold them accountable for loan repayment.

These changes will place an inordinate burden on low-income people seeking higher education. Families with several children in college at the same time will suffer; youth or single parents trying to go to college on their own will struggle. In the end, fewer people will obtain college degrees, leading to fewer people getting higher-paying jobs, leading to more people living in poverty. The effect would likely be a widening gap in income equality.

## TAKE ACTION

Students and family members must contact legislators at the state and federal levels to articulate the benefits of student loans and the need for fair repayment schedules. See the [Government Information](#) tab on the Engage Tuolumne website for legislators' contact information.

Let ENGAGE TUOLUMNE know your personal story about student loans at [info@engagetuolumne.org](mailto:info@engagetuolumne.org)

Stay updated by following announcements from the U. S. Department of Education or Federal Student Aid so you know about repayment plan changes, forgiveness options, or temporary relief programs.

Avoid student loan scams and rely only on official sources like <https://studentaid.gov/>.

Join the [NAACP Student Debt Campaign](#) that pushes for fairer loan systems. Sign petitions.

NOTES "[The 'Mandate for Leadership' Series](#)," Heritage Foundation, 2025.



# Who is Jacob Myers?

By Elaine Gorman

Riverbank's motto is the "City of Action," so when I feel the need for a quick jolt of nature and activity, I head out to Jacob Myers Park (JMP). JMP is located along the Stanislaus River, just north of town, and is actually in San Joaquin County. The land was donated to Riverbank by the family of Jacob Myers in 1949 and has seen quite a few changes over the years.

I am a member of the Friends of Jacob Myers Park Committee, and I contacted another member (and pickleball pal), Marilyn McRitchie, to find out more about the history of the park. Her husband, Scott, was instrumental in park improvements, beginning in 1999.

Jacob Myers came to the US from Switzerland and settled in and lived and farmed on the future park in 1871. He eventually had 1500 acres of farmland in the area. His two sons took over the farming operations, but as neither had children, the last name was not passed on. In fact, while looking at information about the family, the name has been spelled Myers, Meyers, Meyer, and Myer! Descendants of the family have lived on the property until recently.

On this early summer morning, it was still cool and pleasant. I park in the lot near the restrooms and walk down the boat launch to check out the Stanislaus River, which is lazily making its way through Riverbank. Many families are enjoying the playground, green grassy picnic areas, and the river. Majestic cottonwoods line the banks, and large granddaddy Valley Oaks provide welcome shade. I take the hint from The Stan and mosey downstream.

One of my stops is always the Centennial Grove — a ring of redwoods which celebrates the original 13 colonies of the United States. Each tree has a plaque with the state's motto. I'll bet that you don't know which one is the Palmetto State! Our Golden State redwood is honored with a place in the center.

I continue to proceed westward and come to the mile-long loop trail. I walk clockwise and check out the Gazebo, a nice spot for photos. There is a fancy new drinking fountain, which also has spigots for dog bowls and water bottles. I stroll over to the river's bank to search for birds, turtles, and otters. Sadly, there are piles of cat food on the picnic table, left for feral cats. Signs are posted that state that this is not permitted. Oh well.

The trail (paved and accessible) is lined with willow, ripening elderberries, and wild grape. Swallows swoop over the river, searching for insects. Nuttall's and Acorn Woodpeckers are active. A Red-shouldered Hawk announces its presence. Picnic tables and benches provide opportunities to take a break and linger.

As I walk the loop, I read the many interpretive signs that give information about wildlife, the riparian ecosystem, and life cycles. At the far end of the loop, there is a dog park for those with canine friends who like to mix it up with other

canines. One of the park host sites is located there, and I had a nice chat with host Karen. The park hosts do a great job of keeping the park clean and safe. There are plans to extend the trail downriver for about another mile. Hopefully, this will happen soon. There is a small campground (complete with picnic tables, vault toilet, water, and BBQs) that is available to rent to non-profit and educational organizations. It is appropriately named for Marilyn's family. It seems like a great spot for a local camping adventure.

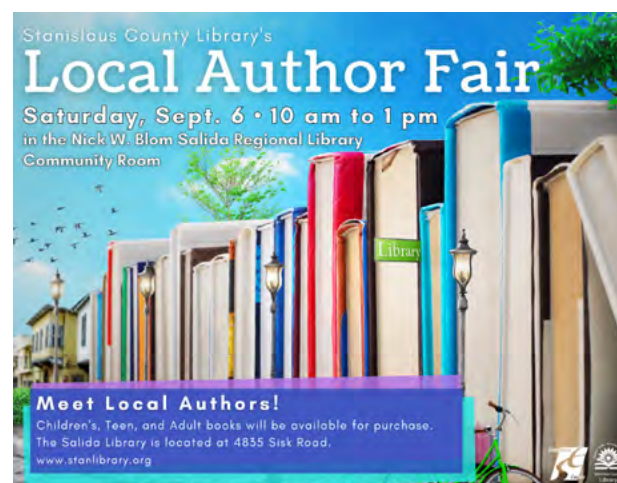
The park is located adjacent to the sewage treatment plant, which (contrary to what you might be thinking) is a great place to look for birds during the winter migration. I have seen pelicans, geese, ducks, and many other types of water birds. Keep your binos handy and just look through the chain link fence.

I complete the loop and walk back to the parking area, enjoying the shade and peaceful ambience. I'm pleased to have this bit of nature so close to

where I live. I am grateful to the Myers family, the city of Riverbank, and Friends of Jacob Myers Park for providing and maintaining such a beautiful place for local citizens. Note: Facilities such as the picnic pavilion and the campground are available to rent. Call 209-863-7150 for more information. From April 1-Sept. 30, Friday-Sunday, there is a \$7 parking fee for residents (Riverbank only) and \$10 fee for non-residents.

Getting there — About 10 miles, 25-minute drive. Take McHenry Avenue north to Patterson Rd. (Highway 108). Turn right (east). After about 3 miles, go left at the traffic light, Callander Ave. (Highway 108 continues). This will turn into Atchison St. Turn left (north) at the next traffic light, Santa Fe Rd. Cross the Stanislaus River, then turn left into the driveway of Jacob Myers Park.

Visit <https://www.riverbank.org/facilities/facility/details/jacobmyerspark-2>



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# Science and Democracy Under Siege: Documenting Six Months of the Trump Administration's Destructive Actions

Since January 2025, President Donald J. Trump has led a systemic and coordinated attack on science. In nearly six months, his administration has launched **402 attacks on science**, which is markedly more than in his entire first term. These attacks are not incidental—they are part of a larger strategy to strip public protections, consolidate power, and remove scientific evidence from policymaking. (FIG. 1)

**Gutting Scientific Expertise:** In President Trump's second term, more than 120,000 federal employees have been laid off or targeted for layoffs, and there are estimates that federal employee layoffs in the first quarter of 2025 were nearly seven times greater than in the first quarter of 2024. These cuts targeted scientific agencies such as Health and Human Services, the Department of Energy, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

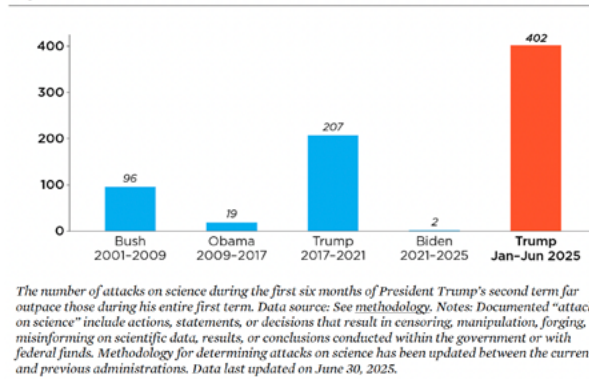
**Halting Science and Innovation:** The administration ordered the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—the largest funder of biomedical research in the world—to suspend grant review panels and freeze external communications, disrupting research nationwide. Even after some operations resumed, the NIH awarded 54 percent fewer grants than the average over the previous nine years and rescinded 2,958 grants simply for including words like Black, transgender, or bias. Lifesaving research projects on cancer, vaccine hesitancy, and health equity are being denied funding for political reasons.

**Ignoring Public Input:** Through executive orders, the administration has directed federal agencies to bypass public comment processes required under laws like the Administrative Procedure Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. The US public is being ignored to benefit corporations and the fossil fuel industry. For example, the EPA has even allowed certain polluters to email requests for regulatory exemptions directly to the president—a chilling bypass of legal norms that will put millions of people in harm's way. Union of Concerned Scientists research shows that 90 percent of these polluting facilities are within five miles of a school or daycare and these facilities are disproportionately located near communities of color, lower income communities, and communities that do not speak English as a first language.

**Eliminating Independent Expertise:** Science-based federal advisory committees (FACs), long relied on for evidence-based policy, are being dismantled by the Trump administration. The administration reinstated an executive order that has led to the termination of at least 51 (27 percent) of active science-focused FACs, with more under review.

**Censoring and Suppressing Scientific Information:** The administration has substantively changed roughly 847 of the federal government's environment and climate webpages. Officials removed public tools like EJSCREEN (the EPA's environmental justice mapping and screening tool) and the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool,

Figure 1. Extreme Rise in Documented Attacks on Science



denying communities and scientists the ability to track pollution and public health disparities.

## Recommendations to Protect Science and the Public Good

Congress should take the following actions:

- Pass the Scientific Integrity Act, which would require federal agencies to uphold evidence-based policymaking free from political interference.
- Oppose the REINS Act, which would give Congress veto power over regulations based on expert consensus.

## 'Dangerous Anti-Vaccine Fanatic' RFK Jr. Shredded by Medical Experts After Pulling Support for mRNA Research

*"RFK Jr. is systematically turning the USA from the leader in science to an ideologically anti-scientific backwater of quackery and pseudoscience," said a prominent infectious diseases doctor.*

By **Brad Reed**, [Common Dreams](#)

Health and Human Services Secretary **Robert F. Kennedy Jr.** is facing heavy criticism from medical professionals after he announced on Tuesday that he was ending financial support for research into mRNA vaccines.

In his announcement, Kennedy said that he was canceling \$500 million worth of research aimed at using mRNA technology to develop new vaccines. Instead, he said the Department of Health and Human Services would prioritize "the development of safer, broader vaccine strategies, like whole-virus vaccines and novel platforms that don't collapse when viruses mutate."

mRNA technology is the basis for major vaccines that were developed earlier this decade to protect against Covid-19. A 2022 study referenced on the National Institutes of Health's website estimates that Covid-19 vaccines prevented 14.4 million deaths in their first year

- Pass the EXPERTS Act (formerly the Stop Corporate Capture Act), which limits industry influence on science-based rulemaking.
- Strengthen whistleblower protections for federal scientists.
- Restore federal advisory committees, ensuring they are diverse, independent, and empowered.
- Reinstate and strengthen public participation in rulemaking and other government decision-making processes and restore public access to censored scientific data.

## What Is at Stake?

People are already paying the price of these attacks on science: children unnecessarily exposed to lead, families denied clean air, and lives needlessly lost in preventable disease outbreaks.

Dismantling science harms every member of the US public—but especially Black, Brown, Indigenous, rural, and low- and moderate-income communities.

You can read the full report recapping the first six months of the Trump administration [here](#).

Visit [www.ucs.org](http://www.ucs.org) to learn more, access tools for federal scientists, and join the fight to protect science.

of availability.

Given the success of these vaccines, many medical experts expressed shock and horror at Kennedy's decision to pull the plug on funding further research.

"I don't think I've seen a more dangerous decision in public health in my 50 years in the business," Mike Osterholm, an epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota, told *The Associated Press* in an interview. Osterholm also emphasized that mRNA vaccines allow for

rapid production, which he said was a critical factor in combating pandemics.

Neil Stone, an infectious diseases doctor at the University College Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London, argued on X that the mRNA funding decision shows Kennedy is a "dangerous anti-vaccine fanatic" who is jeopardizing America's leading role in providing invaluable medical research.

"RFK Jr. is systematically turning the USA from the leader in science to an ideologically anti-scientific backwater of quackery and pseudoscience," he added. "It will take years to come back from it."



# The Strongman Fantasy (updated) and Dictatorship in Real Life

By [Timothy Snyder](#)

Mar 17, 2024. Republished August 23, 2025.

(Note to readers: this is a text I wrote in March, looking ahead. Given where we are now in the US, I thought it deserved an update. Please share it.)

Quite a few Americans like the idea of strongman rule. And now we have a president-elect who vows to persecute the enemy within, and who has proposed a cabinet that seems designed to overturn a republic.

What's wrong with that, ask many? Why not a dictator who will get things done?

I lived in Eastern Europe when memories of communism were fresh. I have visited regions in Ukraine where Russia imposed its occupation regime. I have spent decades reading testimonies of people who lived under [Nazi](#) or [Stalinist](#) rule. I have seen death pits, some old, some freshly dug. And I have friends who have lived under authoritarian regimes, including political prisoners and survivors of torture. Some of the people I trusted most have been assassinated.

So I think that there is an answer to this question.

**Strongman rule is a fantasy.** Essential to it is the idea that a strongman will be *your* strongman. He won't. In a democracy, elected representatives listen to constituents. We take this for granted and imagine that a dictator would owe us something. But the vote you cast for him affirms your irrelevance. The whole point is that the strongman owes us nothing. We get abused, and we get used to it.

**Another pleasant illusion is that the strongman will unite the nation.** But an aspiring dictator will always claim that some belong and others don't. He will define one group after another as the enemy. This might feel good, so long as you feel that you are on the right side of the line. But now fear is the essence of life. The politics of us-and-them, once begun, never ends.

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Political fear not only takes away all public space; it also corrupts all private relationships. And soon it consumes your thoughts. If you cannot say what you think, you lose track of what you believe. You cease to be yourself.

We dream that a strongman will let us focus on America. But dictatorship opens our country to the worst the world has to offer. It will always turn out that the people who talk about "America First" are actually copying dictatorships abroad.

An American strongman will measure himself by the wealth and power of other dictators. He will befriend them and compete with them. From them he will learn new ways to oppress and to exploit his own people.

At least, the fantasy goes, the strongman will get things done. But dictatorial power today is not about achieving anything positive. It is about preventing anyone else from

achieving anything. The strongman is really the weak man: his secret is that he makes everyone else weaker.

Unaccountable to the law and to voters, the dictator has no reason to consider anything beyond his own personal interests. In the twenty-first century, those are simple: dying in bed as a billionaire. To enrich himself and to stay out of prison, the strongman dismantles the justice system and replaces civil servants with loyalists.

The new bureaucrats will have no sense of accountability. Basic government functions will break down. Citizens who want access will learn to pay bribes. Bureaucrats in office thanks to patronage will be corrupt, and citizens will be desperate. Quickly the corruption becomes normal, even unquestioned.

As the fantasy of strongman rule fades into everyday dictatorship, people realize that they need things like water or schools or Social Security checks. Insofar as such goods are available under a dictatorship, they come with a moral as well as a financial price. When you go to a government office, you will be expected to declare your personal loyalty to the strongman.

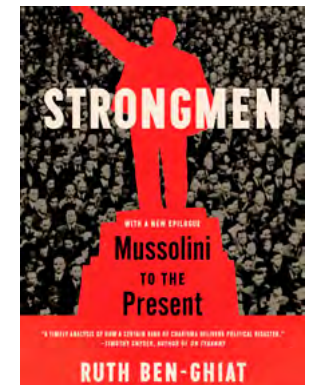
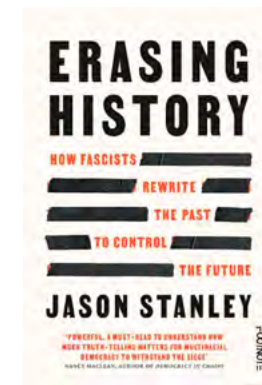
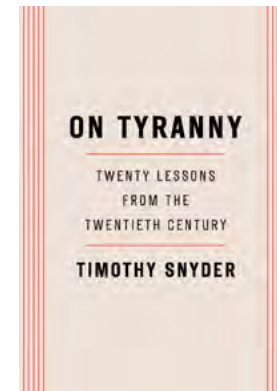
If you have a complaint about these practices, too bad. Americans are litigious people, and many of us assume that we can go to the police or sue. But when you vote a strong man in, you vote out the rule of law. In court, only loyalty and wealth will matter. Americans who do not fear the police will learn to do so. Those who wear the uniform must either resign or become the enforcers of the whims of one man.

Everybody (except the dictator and his family and friends) gets poorer. The market system depends upon competition. Under a strongman, there will be no such thing. The strongman's clan will be favored by government. Our wealth inequality, bad enough already, will get worse. Anyone hoping for prosperity will have to seek the patronage of the official oligarchs. Running a small business will become impossible. As soon as you achieve any sort of success, someone who wants your business denounces you.

In the fantasy of the strongman, politics vanishes and all is clear and bright. In fact, a dreary politics penetrates everything. You can't run a business without the threat of denunciation. You can't get basic services without humiliation. You feel bad about yourself. You think about what you say, since it can be used against you later. What you do on the internet is recorded forever, and can land you in prison.

Public space closes down around you. You cannot escape to the bar or the bowling alley, since everything you say is monitored. The person on the next stool or in the next lane might not turn you in, but you have to assume they will. If you have a t-shirt or a bumper sticker with a message, someone will report you. Even if you just repeat the dictator's words, someone can lie about you and denounce you. And then, if you voted for the strongman, you will be confused. But you should not be. This is what you voted for.

Denunciation becomes normal behavior. Without law and voting, denouncing others helps people to feel safe.



Under strongman rule, you cannot trust your colleagues or your friends or even your family. Political fear not only takes away all public space; it also corrupts all private relationships. And soon it consumes your thoughts. If you cannot say what you think, you lose track of what you believe. You cease to be yourself.

If you have a heart attack and go to the hospital, you have to worry that your name is on a list. Care of elderly parents is suddenly in jeopardy. That hospital bed or place in a retirement home is no longer assured. If you draw attention to yourself, aged relatives will be dumped in the street. This is not how America works now, but it is how authoritarian regimes *always* work.

In the strongman fantasy, no one thinks about children. But fear around children is the essence of dictatorial power. Even courageous people restrain themselves to protect their children. Parents know that children can be singled out and beaten up. If parents step out of line, children lose any chance of going to university, or lose their jobs.

Schools collapse anyway, since a dictator only wants myths that justify his power. Children learn in school to denounce one another. Each coming generation must be more tame and ignorant than the prior one. Time with young children stresses parents. Either your children repeat propaganda and tell you things you know are wrong, or you worry that they will find out what is right and get in trouble.

In a dictatorship, parents no longer say what they think to their children, because they fear that their children will repeat it in public. And once parents no longer speak their minds at home, they can no longer create a trusting family. Even parents who give up on honesty have to fear that their children will one day learn the truth, take action, and get imprisoned.

Continued next page

# ‘This Isn’t Normal!’ Secret Pentagon Plan for Troops to Put Down Local ‘Unrest’ Nationwide

*“If people aren’t allowed to peacefully protest and the elections are being rigged through gerrymandering and voter suppression, how are Americans supposed to respond when they figure out their lives are being actively destroyed by a corrupt, fascist government?”*

By **Jon Queally**, [Common Dreams](#)

Internal documents obtained by *The Washington Post* and reported on Tuesday reveal a secret Pentagon plan by the Trump administration to create a standing force of military personnel that could be rapidly deployed to U.S. cities or communities to quell public protests or any situation President **Donald Trump** deems “domestic civil unrest.”

The proposal to create what it dubs a “Domestic Civil Disturbance Quick Reaction Force”—which evidence shows has been under serious consideration by the administration over recent months—would utilize existing statute, including invocation of Title 32, to authorize the deployment of specialized National Guard units anywhere in the country within hours, according to the documents.

According to the Post:

The plan calls for 600 troops to be on standby at all times so they can deploy in as little as one hour, the documents say. They would be split into two groups of 300 and stationed at military bases in Alabama and Arizona, with purview of regions east and west of the Mississippi River, respectively.

“This isn’t normal!!!” declared one social media user, a U.S. Navy veteran, in response to the reporting.

The leaked documents detailing the plan, which the *Post* noted «represents another potential expansion of [Trump’s] willingness to employ the armed forces on American soil,» comes just a day after the president sparked serious concerns (and local protests) by deploying National Guard troops in the city of Washington, D.C. and announcing a federal takeover of the D.C. police force.

Hina Shamsi, director of ACLU’s National Security Project, said the existence of such a proposal is of grave concern.

“The Trump administration is contemplating a breathtakingly dangerous power grab that would foreseeably result in widespread violations of our civil rights and civil liberties,” Shamsi said in a statement to Common Dreams.

“Sending armed troops into cities to suppress protest should be a non-starter in any healthy democracy, but especially in a country founded on a strong presumption against the military policing civilians,” Shamsi added. “The right to protest is core to the Constitution and who we are as a nation, yet the Trump administration seems ready to betray our basic values in order to muzzle political expression across the country. If President Trump carries out this plan, we stand ready to protect the rights guaranteed to us under the Constitution.”

Civil liberties advocates and critics of Trump’s growing authoritarianism warn the president is raising “a trial balloon” to see just how much he can get away with when it comes to deploying U.S. soldiers onto the nation’s streets.

Coupled with the D.C. takeover, Tuesday’s revelations about the Pentagon’s more expansive plan served to increase those fears, especially in the light of looming political battles regarding gerrymandered districts for next year’s congressional elections and growing disgust with the broader Trump policy agenda.

“If people aren’t allowed to peacefully protest and the elections are being rigged through gerrymandering and voter suppression, how are Americans supposed to respond when they figure out their lives are being actively destroyed by a corrupt, fascist government?” asked Wisconsin State Sen. Chris Larson, a Democrat.

“The U.S. military should never be used against peaceful civilians,” said Larson. “The criminal president who thinks it’s cool can f\*ck all the way off.”

Joseph Nunn, an attorney at the Brennan Center for Justice specializing in the domestic use of the U.S. military, told the *Post* that the lawfulness of the proposal is far from clear and that the creation of such a force would be deeply troubling.

“You don’t want to normalize routine military participation in law enforcement,” Nunn warned. “You don’t want to normalize routine domestic deployment.”

“When you have this tool waiting at your fingertips, you’re going to want to use it,” he added. “It actually makes it more likely that you’re going to see domestic deployments—because why else have a task force?”

*Update: This piece was updated to include comment from Hina Shamsi of the ACLU.*

## ‘Dangerous Anti-Vaccine Fanatic’ from page 5

Mike White, an associate professor of genetics at Washington University in St. Louis, said that Kennedy’s decision would put the U.S. at a disadvantage in future medical research developments.

“Completely insane decision to walk away from one of the most promising medical technologies, allowing the U.S. to get smoked in this area of biotech by other countries with more foresight,” he commented on X.

Alastair McAlpine, a pediatric infectious diseases physician, described Kennedy’s actions to shut down mRNA research as “insanity,” given that “no other technology promises to provide as much protection against an array of diseases.” As a result, he wrote on Bluesky, “never has America been more vulnerable.”

Biomedical scientist Lucky Tran, who currently serves as the director of science communication and media relations at Columbia University, took stock of all of Kennedy’s actions and concluded that they fit in with a broader anti-vaccine agenda that is not just limited to mRNA vaccines.

“At his confirmation hearing, RFK Jr. claimed he wouldn’t take away vaccines,” he wrote on Bluesky. “So far, he has: Removed Covid vaccine recommendation; fired the CDC’s vaccine committee; replaced scientists with antivaxxers; cancelled vaccine hesitancy research; pulled \$500 million in mRNA vaccine research.”

Jonathan Reiner, a professor of medicine and surgery at George Washington University, similarly warned that it was unlikely that Kennedy would be satisfied solely with cutting off funding for mRNA vaccines.

“RFK Jr. simply doesn’t believe in vaccines, and he has the power to take them away from the American public,” he wrote. “This is just the beginning.”

## Strongmen from page 6

Most likely you won’t be killed or be required to kill. But amid the dreariness of life under dictatorship is dark responsibility for others’ death. By the time the killing starts, you will know that it is not about unity, or the nation, or getting things done. The best Americans, betrayed by you when you cast your vote, will be murdered at the whim and for the wealth of a dictator. Your tragedy will be living long enough to understand this.


Once this process begins, it is hard to stop. At the present stage of the strongman fantasy, people imagine an exciting experiment. If they don’t like strongman rule, they think, they can just elect someone else the next time. This misses the point. If you help a strongman come to power, you are taking part in the elimination of democracy.

Hard to stop, but not impossible. There are lessons to be

learned from the past, as I have shared in other posts, and in a little book. We will also have to speak to one another. People voted as they did for various reasons. The outcome of the vote makes strongman rule possible. We will have to get past arguing about the vote and have conversations about what authoritarianism is really like. This post was meant to help those conversations.

The writing in this forum, my [Substack](#) “[Thinking about...](#)” is free. You are welcome to pass it along to others. In this particular case, I would urge you to share it with anyone in your life whom it might help. Thank you.

For specific historical examples of strongman rule, make sure to read **Ruth Ben-Ghiat**. For the phenomenon of contemporary fascism, see **Jason Stanley**. On electoral authoritarianism, see **Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way**.



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## IN MEMORIAM

### Mikhail Gurfinkel

By Rabbi Caitlin Bromberg, Congregation Beth Shalom

We're all devastated by the loss of Mikhail Gurfinkel. It's hard to imagine Beth Shalom without his warmth and his beautiful spirit. Mikhail was more than a member of our community; he was its heart. He was a poet whose words touched us all, a master greeter who made everyone feel at home, and a dedicated volunteer who gave so much of himself to every event.



We know many of you are looking for a way to honor his memory and support his family during this difficult time. We've created this [GoFundMe](#) to help with funeral expenses and to provide some financial support to his family as they navigate this immense loss.

Every contribution, no matter the size, will make a difference and is a beautiful way to show our love and appreciation for Mikhail. He touched so many of our lives, and now is our chance to give back to the man who gave us so much.

## Poetry As A Bridge

By Mikhail Gurfinkel

I am originally from Chernivtsi, Ukraine, with deep roots there spanning at least three generations. The Chernobyl tragedy and the bad economy made it hard to live in the city. I lived in the USSR until I was 37, and I spent 12 of those in military service.

In 1997, I came to America with my Mother for a better life. My uncle sponsored us, and we lived in Mountain View. I began to work my way up the career ladder. I started as a food handler at Burger King. Later, I began working for Del Monte Corporation in security. I wanted to learn about computers and began taking evening classes.

After being certified as a Software Quality Assurance Engineer, I began working for Microsoft in Mountain View. Due to the dot-com crash, I changed jobs and became a patient account representative at Stanford Hospital. While there, I studied Homeland Security at the Institute of Technology in San Jose. After completing my studies, I became a security first responder at Sun Microsystems. I worked as a lead security officer for several firms.

Two and a half years ago, my wife and I moved to Modesto to live closer to our five children and their families.

As a poet, my journey began in 1974, when I first put pen to paper to express the complex emotions and experiences

of life. In 1997, I immigrated to the United States, seeking a new chapter in life. This transition was both challenging and inspiring, as I navigated the nuances of a new culture while holding on to my roots. Over the decades, my work has been deeply influenced by the diverse cultures and people I have encountered, both in my homeland of Ukraine and in my adopted country of America.

Through my poetry, I explore the universal themes of resilience, identity, and the power of human connection, often delving into my personal experiences as an immigrant. My writing reflects a lifelong passion for understanding the emotional intricacies of the human condition, with a focus on kindness, perseverance, and the courage to rise after life's inevitable setbacks. Each poem I write is not only a reflection of my inner world but also an offering to those who have shared in this journey with me.

Now, in America, my work continues to evolve as I blend the traditions of my past with the possibilities of my present, always striving to create something that speaks to both the heart and the mind. Poetry, for me, is a bridge—connecting cultures, histories, and people in a shared exploration of what it means to be human.

*A Gathering of Voices* was honored that Mr. Gurfinkel shared several of his excellent poems in the June issue of *Stanislaus Connections*.

## STARVING ON THE STREET

As a boy  
the old man  
had seen kids starving  
just blocks from  
the house nestled close  
to Dois Irmãos

the rib cages  
of the barely clothed  
protruding like chicken bones  
sometimes their bellies bloated  
from lack of meat or milk

had watched with childish eyes  
these children of the streets  
drifting toward death  
among the forgotten  
of Praia do Pinto

he didn't know the words then  
only glimpsed the sorrow  
on their mothers' faces

he couldn't find the words now  
watching the children  
of Gaza  
on cable news

## Valentina Zeff: Stanislaus County's Current Youth Poet Laureate

Valentina Zeff is a sixteen-year-old poet from Modesto, California, currently enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program at Modesto High School. Zeff has been writing free verse and ballad poetry since her freshman year of high school.

Valentina is active within her community and school through social and environmental activism, extracurricular projects, and volunteerism. She was selected as a member of the Park's Youth Committee (April 2024-current), Modesto Youth Commission (October 2024-current),

and student representative for Modesto High School's Student Senate for both ninth and tenth grade. During the 2023-2024 Speech and Debate season, she was a top finalist for Original Spoken Word Poetry at State Qualifications.

*Stanislaus Connections* congratulates Valentina on being named Stanislaus County's third Youth Poet Laureate. *A Gathering of Voices* is very pleased that she is sharing several of her fine poems with us.



cast their eyes upward  
in the same resigned way  
as babies from the favelas did  
seventy years ago

as if they knew more of life  
and its relentless failings  
than we – the privileged –  
will ever know

as if they were always  
closer to the nub  
dying slowly  
cradled  
in their mothers' arms

– Tom Portwood



## Samovar Tea

My grandmother would sing  
As she brewed samovar tea,  
her voice turning into steam  
rising from the spout of the tea kettle

Samovar zardi  
quickly prepare  
Metoula jeldie  
the yellow samovar  
Gou balkchat duvardie  
in a garden of flowers  
Gou libbey dardi  
for my heart is full of sadness.

Each note dripped sweetness,  
but the words  
bitter like over-steeped leaves  
tasted of distance,  
of a homeland sealed to me by time.  
In those moments,  
our kitchen was no longer California.

It was the Assyrian country I have never seen,  
where cinnamon and cardamom  
leaned in close to tell me  
stories in a language my tongue  
will never fully learn.

The golden kettle  
an heirloom passed through generations  
poured more than just tea.

It poured history into porcelain,  
love into loss,  
the weight of a people  
into my small, waiting hands.

White china,  
rimmed with gold and blue flowers,  
filled with Samovar tea  
the only taste of Assyria  
I will ever drink,  
the closest I will ever come  
To standing in my grandmother's garden of flowers.

## Girl Hood

The bristles of the nail polish  
smothered in bubble bath pink paste,  
hover over hardwood  
I've never seen splattered  
with pink paint.

A bowl of hot buttery popcorn

balances on a blanket  
that's never been spread  
across my floor before.

Soda cans leave imagined rings  
perfect circles no one will ever clean.

We laugh until our stomachs ache,  
though I can't recall  
What made us laugh so hard

Our feet kick in the air,  
weightless as daydreams.

Later, we'll braid each other's hair,  
watch another romantic comedy  
I've never actually watched with you,  
and gossip about a girl  
we've never whispered about,  
sharing crushes

Midnight will find us  
pretending to sleep,  
phones pressed to our ears  
for prank calls.  
And in that warm, glowing world  
that feels like it belongs to me,  
I'll remember  
I have only visited it in my mind.  
When I can't fall asleep at night.

## Astronaut

A girl will cradle an apple and a microscope  
Until society replaces it with a mirror and a makeup  
brush  
A pink diary and ballet slippers

Her passions for the sciences and literature will be  
diminished to dust  
Only for her to have to sweep it away  
Never to be seen again

At school, teachers will doubt her intelligence  
And ridicule her in front of the class for raising her hand  
and guessing a question wrong  
Only for her male counterparts to never once even be  
mocked, laughed at or shamed

Sad and embarrassed she cries, her self-esteem  
diminished  
Her looks now her only vocal point  
The only thing that allows her to be seen

Her dreams of being the 79th female astronaut now  
crushed

One she's had since first grade, disappear in the blink of  
an eye

Starting a family now sounds more doable,  
More fulfilling,  
Then pursuing a PhD in astrophysics

And when she carries a baby for nine months  
And goes through intense and painful labor  
Maybe she will realize that ninth grade algebra 1 wasn't  
that difficult  
And her dreams were always feasible

## True Story

Yesterday, I got my driver's license.  
My hands trembled on the wheel,  
my legs wouldn't stop shaking.  
I was so scared but I passed!

The whole time,  
I thought about how you got your permit  
two months ago and  
How I'll never be able to witness your driving skills  
And how you'll never see my new car.

Last Monday,  
I rearranged my room,  
brought home a white dresser  
with painted flowers.  
I think you'd like it.  
I wanted to tuck a picture of us  
into the top shelf.  
But then I remembered

Two weeks ago  
I saw my friend in Irvine  
You would really like her  
She's so nice and funny  
She reminded me of you

I wonder how your summer was.  
I wish we had called more.  
I'm sorry  
for the way things ended.

Yesterday,  
I baked our friends cookies  
But they were really for you  
Because those were your favorite  
Although I'd never admit it again,  
I do still think of you

# Great Programs on KCBP 95.5 fm, the Voice of the Valley

Streaming on [www.kcbpradio.org](http://www.kcbpradio.org)

## CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

**Confetti Park** - Music, stories New Orleans style, Saturdays at 8:00 am; & Sunday's 12:30 pm.

**The Children's Hour** - Sundays 3:00 pm. And Mondays at 4:00 p.m.

## SCIENCE

**Radio Ecoshock** – the latest scientific information on Climate Change – Saturdays, 9:00 am.

**Explorations** – Science explained with Dr. Michio Kaku - 9:00 am Sundays.

**Big Picture Science** - 1:00 pm Sundays.

**Planetary Radio** – 2:30 pm Sundays.

## PROGRAMS

**Moccasin Tracks**, in Solidarity with Traditional Original Peoples, prioritizes the voices of the original peoples and the issues confronting them today, including the decolonization of our minds, workplaces, and institutions. Includes contemporary and traditional music from Native artists, news, views, and interviews. Tuesdays at 8:00 am.

**The Ralph Nader Hour**: Citizen advocate Ralph Nader and guests discuss topics important for consumers and our nation on Saturdays at 4 p.m.

**Ukraine 2.4.2** - a collaboration between Anne Levine, WOMR, the Pacifica Network, and Kraina FM, a 26-city radio network in Ukraine that arranges weekly cutting-edge and exclusive interviews with key people in Ukraine – Thursdays, 10:00 am.

**Beethoven to Bernstein** - Classical music ranging from Beethoven to Bernstein. Big hits from well-renowned composers - Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Strauss, Ravel, Copland - and many more, mostly in the form of orchestral, chamber, and piano music - Saturdays, 10:00 pm.



**The Not Old – Better Show** - fascinating, high-energy program of big-name guests, inspiring role models, interesting topics, with entertaining host and former Modestan, Paul Vogelzang – Fridays, 2:00 pm, Saturdays, 12:30 pm.

**Down on the Farm** - topics important for our San Joaquin agriculture with Madera organic farmer Tom Willey - Saturdays, 6 am

**Sounds Irish** Music from County Wicklow - Saturdays, 7:00 pm.

**Various Musical Programs During the Noon Hour**: *Oldies, Old Piano, and International.*

**Dead Air** - Hear the Grateful Dead with Cory Daniels. Fridays, 6 pm; Saturdays, 3 pm.

**Attitude with Arne Arnesen** – 3:00 pm. Political and social issues.

**Alternative Radio** - 4:00 pm – Tuesdays. Interviews by David Barsamian focusing on national and international issues.

**Democracy Now!** - 7:00 am, Monday thru Friday. New and reporting by veteran journalists Amy Goodman & Juan Gonzalez.

**Flashpoint Magazine** - 10:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Politics, social issues, from KQED's veteran journalist, Dennis Bernstein.

**Julian Taylor's Jukebox** – 4:00 pm, Thursdays and Fridays. Eclectic, indigenous, and contemporary music.

**Nuestra Música** – 4:00 pm, Tuesdays. Eclectic, Latin-flavored music with a beat!

**Sprouts** — Mondays at 7:00 pm and Sundays at 7:00 am. Produced in collaboration with community radio stations and independent producers, featuring radio productions of national interest. Coordinated and distributed by Pacifica Radio.

## LOCALLY PRODUCED PROGRAMS

**The Well-Being of the Community, Your Family, and You** 11:00 am to 1:00 pm Thursdays.

Live, Bilingual in Spanish & English. Hosted by Jose Higuera-Lopez and Nico Torres.

**Rockin' with MJC** – One-hour music shows by Modesto Junior College students. 1:00 a.m. Saturdays, 2:00 p.m. Saturdays, 7:00 p.m. Tuesdays.

**Triumphant Tuesdays** – Noon, Tuesdays. Inspirational thoughts & music with Catrice.

**Sports Talk Modesto** - Join Jay Freeda and Jimmie Menezes. Snappy banter to catch up on everything happening in the sports world. – Thursdays, 5 pm.

**Vibn with the West Modesto Collaborative** -Hosted by Likhi Rivas and Oscar Vasquez. Engage, Educate, and Advocate on behalf of the West Modesto Community Collaborative. Showcases Voices of the West Modesto Community – Wednesdays, 7 pm.

**AREA 5150 UFO RADIO** – Old radio shows, music & sounds out of this world, Friday nights, 11:00 pm.

**Cyber Stallion: Bucks Stallion's Radio Transmission Emporium** – Cyber Acoustic Music - Saturdays, 12:00 am, Wednesdays, 5:00 p.m.

**I-On-Modesto** - John Griffin interviews local people who reveal their inspiring stories. Mondays & Fridays, 10 am, and Wednesdays at 9 pm.

**Arts of the San Joaquin Valley** with Linda Scheller and Laura Stokes - Mondays, 8:00 pm; Tuesdays, 9:00 am & Wednesdays, 8:00 pm. Listen here: <https://anchor.fm/kcbp> and on Spotify

**Women of the Valley** with Linda Scheller and Laura Stokes - 8:00 pm Tuesdays & Thursdays & Wednesdays, 9:00 am. Listen here: <https://anchor.fm/kcbpwotv> and on Spotify.

**Modesto Sound** - California Audio Roots Project (CARP) – Tuesdays 5:30 pm, Wednesdays 11:30 am, & Sundays 11:00 am & 4:30 pm. Interviews on the theme of social justice.

**Sunday Cruisin'** with your host, DeeJay Rig! Oldies hits from 1959 to 1999 – Sundays, 5:00 p.m.

**Faithful Fridays** – inspirational Black Gospel music and thoughts with Catrice – Fridays, 7:00 p.m.

**Why Not Nice?** - Showcases unique music from unique cultures and thinkers worldwide, focusing on world/academic/jazz and roots music – Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.

**Bars Radio – Hip-Hop Show** - Music, interviews from local & regional artists - Fridays, 8:00 pm. A new, second show plays on Saturday nights at 8:00 pm, with a third at 8:00 pm Sundays.

**Modesto Area Music Awards (MAMA)** with Middagh Goodwin – Mondays 5:00 pm; Fridays 9:00 pm & Saturdays 6:00 pm.

**Freak Radio** with Christian E. Boyatt, 6 pm Thursdays. Replays Saturdays, 9 pm & Tuesdays 11 pm.

**This is SKA** with Middagh Goodwin - Tuesdays, 9 pm; Fridays, 11 pm; Sundays, 5 am to 7 am.

**I'll Take You There** - A musical journey with Modesto's El Comandante - Saturday, 5:00 pm; Sundays, 9:00 pm.

**Penny Bloods** – Fun, Victorian melodrama radio plays, often performed by local actors, written by Arnold Anthony Schmidt, CSU, Stanislaus. As scheduled.

PSAs in English and Spanish produced by the West Modesto Community Collaborative.

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# “Free DC” Models Effective Resistance to Trump’s Takeover

Washington, D.C. residents’ rapid response to Trump’s National Guard deployment is a masterclass in how to prepare for crises and fight authoritarianism.

By Daniel Hunter, Waging Nonviolence

On August 11, Free DC held a press conference and rally downtown to oppose Trump’s planned federal takeover of DC.

On Monday, President Donald Trump ordered 800 National Guard troops to the nation’s capital — a move Princeton University professor Khalil Gibran Muhammad [described](#) as “a slide towards fascism” and “textbook” authoritarianism. Claiming emergency powers from the D.C. Home Rule Act, Trump also announced a takeover of the Metropolitan Police.

As is typical with authoritarians, the pretense for these orders was an [invented crime emergency](#). But pretense is just that. We should all remember Washington, D.C.’s most violent day in recent years — Jan. 6, 2021 — was sparked by Trump himself. What’s more, D.C.’s safety won’t come from militarization, but rather through decreasing unemployment, ending ICE’s kidnapping of neighbors, and restoring funding to Medicaid, SNAP and schools.

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser said she believed the deployment was illegal and challenged Trump’s crime rhetoric, citing the city’s statistics showing violent crime at a [30-year low](#). (The FBI has slightly [different numbers](#), but all show the trend downwards.)

Otherwise, she initially struck a conciliatory and yielding position, saying, “We have a responsibility to support the executive order, and one of the roles I have is to ensure that we work very collaboratively with our federal partners.” Thankfully, a crew of people from the grassroots movement [Free DC](#) was ready to fill the leadership void. Early on Monday, they [held a press conference and rally](#) — preempting both Trump’s announcement and Mayor Bowser’s compliance. By Tuesday night, they had already published [national calls to action for allies](#).

Free DC made clear, “No single event or protest will fix this. What works is disciplined, connected organizing.” And they are already showing the way forward. Here are some lessons from Free DC’s rapid response:

## 1. Plan ahead

It doesn’t help to be stuck in shock. That’s why, months ago, in a church packed with over 500 people — neighbors, activists and friends — Free DC led a role-play that helped prepare for this moment: They imagined the National Guard trying to seize control of the D.C. Council. (I was there as one of the trainers.)

That was Free DC in action — ready before this crisis struck. Despite dissenters who thought their role-play was too extreme, they got a crew ready and led dozens of trainings that prepared thousands for action.

Trump has already named Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Oakland as places where he next

wants to send the military. At all levels of society, those cities (and more) should start to prepare. Run role-play scenarios for your own community. Get a crew together and practice now what you would do (and feel) not only if federal forces took over your city, but also if you encountered any of the many unfolding situations now. Doing this planning alone feels isolating — so we need to be connected with others to make our best plans.

One resource right now is [Freedom Trainers](#), which has been leading workshops for groups, mixed with role-plays that help make sense of these authoritarian times.

## 2. Lead with values

In their now viral [Instagram post](#) laying out what to do in the immediate aftermath of Trump’s takeover, Free DC wrote, “Remember what works,” citing a short list of strategies:

- Do not obey in advance.
- Prioritize joy.
- Take up space.
- Be in solidarity.
- Organize.

It’s not only a list of calls to action, it’s a statement of principles and values. In times of crisis, great leaders use the moment to *deepen* values. It’s why amoral businesses capitulating needn’t surprise us — but schools undermining the value of free speech to appeal to a wannabe king should. It’s why veterans groups like the Chamberlain Network have [forcefully rejected Trump’s use of the military](#) based on their values of getting “military out of our communities.”

Values lead to vision. So Free DC has made clear this is a pattern of disrespect toward one of the nation’s largest cities, saying, “We also want members of Congress to stop freezing D.C.’s local budget... stop trying to overturn D.C. laws... and co-sponsor H.R. 51... so that D.C. residents don’t have to live through these cycles of attack over and over again.”

Consider what is most high and cherished in your beliefs. Let your actions be guided by shared values. And yes, [infuse some joy into your resistance](#).

## 3. Tell institutional leaders what to do

It was a little shocking to watch Mayor Bowser casually describe the situation and urge D.C. residents to act normally. “Schools will open as usual,” she asserted. It was another institutionalist showing us that their playbook isn’t up to snuff with the times.

Instead of joining the crowd decrying our vacuous political leadership, Free DC is pushing them to get better — and aims to ultimately move them. Over the weekend, Free DC sent a letter to politicians telling them what they need to do.

“Remaining silent will tell this administration we consent to their actions,” they wrote. “We do not. ... Please speak out against what is happening as soon as you are able.”

They gave a variety of suggestions, but the key was “don’t act normal.” This is the same lesson taught by our great social leaders who made noncooperation an active practice.

Mohandas Gandhi, for example, said, “If people withdraw their cooperation in every detail, the government will come to a standstill.”

Martin Luther King Jr. called it out as well, saying, “We can no longer lend our cooperation to an evil system. ... [One] who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as [one] who helps to perpetrate it.”

When someone does something awful, acting normal normalizes it. Noncooperation from different pillars of support is the antidote.

This notion of the “pillars of support” is something Free DC has been teaching about. Rather than seeing a regime as having the power to do whatever it wants, the pillars of support approach sees a regime’s power as being held up by institutions, organizations and groups — such as the military, police, media, business elites and religious bodies. Withdrawing the support of these pillars through nonviolent resistance, a regime can be weakened or even toppled.

Understanding the pillars of support can help regular folks see that we have real influence. A video from Choose Democracy [further explains](#) the tool.

## 4. Give clear instructions for involvement

“Starting tonight — get loud.” That was the message Free DC shared in a social media message on Monday.

The group offered clear actions that people could do right away: an 8 p.m. banging of pots, singing and chanting for five minutes (plus encouragement to talk to your neighbors).

They’re offering [cop watch trainings and campaign orientations](#). And they’re spreading the Free DC message — encouraging signs, posters, banners, tshirts, patches and flags all over.

By Monday evening, they had a request to people outside of D.C.: Pressure [Congress](#), which has oversight and the ability to stop this. At the same time, Free DC vows more is in the works.

If you’re feeling lost about what to do generally — and not just about the takeover of D.C. — consider coming to the [One Million Rising training](#), which is perhaps the largest single training in noncooperation ever, with over 170,000 participants already participating in learning how to [refuse to comply](#) with injustice. [You can watch the sessions](#) online or join or [host house meetings to grow the movement locally](#).

## 5. Build for the long haul

Free DC’s trainings, mutual-aid work and cross-neighborhood networks aren’t just for today — they’re preparing for the next crisis, and the one after that.

If you want to learn the Free DC model, they are happy to proliferate it to other cities. They’ve got a structure to build fast-moving groups to support mutual aid, create emergency response plans and keep meeting after the headlines fade. Democracy defense isn’t a sprint — it’s a practice.

Free DC is showing us how to fight authoritarianism: plan ahead, lead with values, push institutions, give clear steps and prepare for the long fight.

*This article is adapted from a Choose Democracy newsletter email.*

# calendar

Help keep our readers informed. We urge people participating in an event to write about it and send their story to Connections.

## SEPTEMBER 2025

**MAPS - Modesto Area Partners in Science:** Free MJC science programs on Fridays in MJC West Campus, Sierra Hall 132 at 7:30 pm., unless noted otherwise. **WILD PLANET DAY. Saturday, Sept. 20, 2025,** 10 am – 2 pm. Hands-on science exhibits for fun and learning. Modesto Junior College West Campus Science Center and Sierra Hall.

**Modesto Science Colloquium,** Wednesdays, 3:15-4:15 p.m., MJC West Campus, SCC 115. Free and open to the public. Talks are recorded for the Science Colloquium's YouTube channel. **Sept. 10:** "Stressed Out Cells: What Zebrafish Are Teaching Us About Cell Survival." Danielle Hicks, Professor of Biology, MJC. When proteins don't fold correctly, it stresses out our cells. This talk explores how two key proteins, GADD34 and CREP, help cells cope and survive. Using zebrafish as a model, learn what this research means for understanding and potentially treating neurodegenerative diseases in humans. **Sept. 24:** "May the Fields Be With You: Microwave Power and the Plasma Frontier." Edgar Perez-Lopez, Ph.D., Plasma Product Manager and Adjunct Engineering Professor, MJC. Discover how invisible fields and ionized gases are shaping tomorrow's technology and how you can get involved as a student, researcher, or innovator.

**The Prospect Theatre:** 25/26 season has continuing offerings. Visit <https://prospecttheaterproject.org/2024-2025-season/>

**3 WED: PEACE LIFE CENTER BOARD MEETING,** 829 13th St., Modesto, 6:00 pm, 529-5750. Meetings on Zoom and in person. Email Jim Costello for login information, [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org)

**6 SAT: Local Author Fair,** Nick W. Blom, Salida Regional Library, 10 am to 1 pm. See ad p.2.

**9 TUES: VIGIL: DEFEND OUR DEMOCRACY** at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five Points), 5:00-6:00 pm. Info: Call the Center at 209-529-5750 or email [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org).

**21 SUN: The State Theatre** and Modesto Film Society present **LA LA LAND**, 2 pm. Join the State Theatre. Have fun, get perks, and support Modesto's historic non-profit theatre. Visit <https://thestate.org/films/la-la-land-092025/>

**23 TUES: VIGIL: DEFEND OUR DEMOCRACY** at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five Points), 5:00-6:00 pm. Info: Call the Center at 209-529-5750 or email [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org).

### LOOKING AHEAD

**October 24: MPLC's Harvest Gathering,** 5:00 pm. Location TBA.

**January 12, 2026** John McCutcheon Concert.

### REGULAR MEETINGS SUNDAYS

**Unity of Modesto** meets in person every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. at 2467 Veneman, Modesto. Information: 209-578-5433.

**Modesto Vineyard Christian Fellowship,** 10:00 am at the MODSPOT, 1220 J St. Call or text 209-232-1932, email [modestovineyard@gmail.com](mailto:modestovineyard@gmail.com); All Welcome.

**IMCV Weekly Insight Meditation and Dharma Talk,** 8:45 am - 10:15 am, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto (rear bldg. at the end of the UUFSC east parking lot). Offered freely; donations welcome. All are welcome. For more information, please email [charlie@imcv.org](mailto:charlie@imcv.org). Our mailing address is IMCV, P.O. Box 579564, Modesto, CA 95357.

**Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stanislaus County** meets in person and on Zoom every Sunday at 10:30 am at 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto. Info: 209-788-3720; [www.stanuu.org](http://www.stanuu.org)

**Food Addicts Anonymous in Recovery.** Sundays 6:30 pm, 2467 Veneman Ave. Modesto. Info: Emily M., 209 480-8247.

### MONDAYS

**CENTRAL VALLEY DEMOCRATIC CLUB,** 3rd Monday of the month, except November and December, 7:00 to 8:30 PM. McHenry Bowl, 3700 McHenry Ave., Modesto. Info: Contact [centralvalleydemocraticclub.com](mailto:centralvalleydemocraticclub.com)

**The Compassionate Friends,** Modesto/Riverbank Area Chapter is meeting by Zoom on the second Mondays at 7:00pm. Bereaved parents, grandparents, and adult siblings are invited to participate in this support group for families whose children have died at any age, from any cause. Call 209-622-6786 or email for details: [tfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com); <https://www.modestoriverbankctcf.org/>

**Suicide Loss Support Group:** Friends for Survival meets every third Monday at 7 pm. Details: Norm Andrews 209-345-0601, [nandrews6863@charter.net](mailto:nandrews6863@charter.net).

**Walk with Me,** a women's primary infertility support group and Bible study. 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm the first and third Mondays of each month. Big Valley Grace Community Church. Interested? Email [WalkWithMeGroup@gmail.com](mailto:WalkWithMeGroup@gmail.com) or call 209.577.1604.

### TUESDAYS

**Climate Action Justice Network-Stanislaus** meets the first Tuesday of the month, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm. Link: <https://tinyurl.com/CJAN-FirstTuesday>

**Attention Veterans:** Join us for **Free Coffee & Donuts Meet & Greet** at the Stanislaus Veterans Center, 3500 Coffee Rd., Modesto, Suite 15, 7 am – 11 am

**NAACP Meeting.** King-Kennedy Center, 601 S. Martin Luther King Dr., Modesto, 3rd Tuesday @ 6:30 pm. 209-645-1909; For ZOOM link, visit <https://www.naacpmoDESTANISLAUS.org/> email: [naacp.branch1048@gmail.com](mailto:naacp.branch1048@gmail.com)

**Exploring Whiteness & Showing Up for Racial Justice Meetings,** Fourth Tuesday, monthly 7:00 p.m., Central Grace Hmong Alliance Church, 918 Sierra Dr., Modesto. Info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/24765549018387/>

**Pagan Family Social,** third Tuesdays, Golden Corral, 3737 McHenry Ave, Modesto, 6:00 pm. Info: 569-0816. All newcomers, pagan-curious and pagan-friendly welcome.

**Adult Children Of Alcoholics,** Every Tuesday, 7 pm at 1320 L St., (Christ Unity Baptist Church). Info: Jeff, 527-2469.

### WEDNESDAYS

**Retired Public Employees Association.** All seniors welcome! Meetings every third Wednesday. Denny's Restaurant, 1525 McHenry Ave. 11:30 am to 1:00 pm. Call (209) 324-2060. Pay \$8.00 and order from the menu.

**The Almond Blossom Sangha** meets on Wednesdays, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm, Zoom, and sometimes hybrid, for meditation and Dharma discussions. Call Anne at 209-404-4835 for more information.

**The GAP.** A place of support for Christian parents of LGBTQ+ or questioning kids every Wednesday 6:30 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church 1528 Oakdale Rd. Instagram: [Thegapmodesto](https://www.instagram.com/thegapmodesto)

**Ongoing meditation class** based on Qi Gong Principals.

## MODESTO PEACE LIFE CENTER ACTIVITIES

Modesto Peace/Life Center **VIGILS: held 2ND AND 4TH TUESDAYS** of the month at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five Points), 5:00 - 6:00 pm. Call the Center for info: 209-529-5750.

**MEDIA:** Listen to **KCBP 95.5 FM** Community Radio, the "Voice of the Valley" also streaming at <http://www.KCBPradio.org>

**PEACE LIFE CENTER BOARD MEETING,** FIRST Wednesdays, 829 13th St., Modesto, 6:00 pm, 529-5750. Meetings on Zoom and in person. Email Jim Costello for login information, [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org)

**PEACE/LIFE CENTER MODESTO,** 829 13th St. Call 529-5750. We'll get back to you with current info on activities.

Practice a 3 Step Guided Meditation Process I have been doing for over a decade. Fun and Easy. JOIN ME! Donations accepted but optional. Call 209.495.6608 or email Orlando Arreygue, [CMTRYT,orlando@arreygue.com](mailto:CMTRYT,orlando@arreygue.com)

**Merced LGBT Community Center** offers a variety of monthly meetings and written materials. Volunteers, on-site **Wed-Fri,** offer support. Ph: 209-626-5551. Email: [mercedboard@gaycentralvalley.org](mailto:mercedboard@gaycentralvalley.org) – 1744 G St. Suite H, Merced, CA. [www.mercedlgbtcenter.org](http://www.mercedlgbtcenter.org)

**Merced Full Spectrum** meets the second Wednesday of every month, 6 p.m. 1744 G St., Suite H, Merced <http://www.lgbtmerced.org/> Merced Full Spectrum is a division of Gay Central Valley, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. <http://www.gaycentralvalley.org/>

**TRANSGENDER SUPPORT GROUP,** 2nd & 4th Wed., 7:30 to 9 pm. Info: (209) 338-0855. Email [info@stanpride.org](mailto:info@stanpride.org), or [tgsupport@stanpride.org](mailto:tgsupport@stanpride.org)

### THURSDAYS

**Attention Veterans:** Join us for **Free Coffee & Donuts Meet & Greet** at the Stanislaus Veterans Center, 3500 Coffee Rd., Modesto, Suite 15, 7 am – 11 am

**IMCV Grupo de Meditación en Español,** cada semana 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto (edificio trasero al final del estacionamiento este de UUFSC). Ofrecido libremente, las donaciones son bienvenidas. Info: Contacto Vanessa, 209-408-6172.

**LGBTQ+ Collaborative Meetings** are on the 2nd Thursday of the month, unless noted. Evening meeting, 1pm to 2 pm, Central Valley Pride Center, 400 12th St., Suite 2, Modesto, CA. Information: John Aguirre at [cell/text-\(559\)280-3864](mailto:cell/text-(559)280-3864) e-mail: [jpamodesto@gmail.com](mailto:jpamodesto@gmail.com)

**Green Team educational meetings** the 3rd Thursday of each month, 10 to 11 am, Kirk Lindsey Center, 1020 10th St. Plaza, Suite 102, Modesto. [www.StanislausGreenTeam.com](http://www.StanislausGreenTeam.com)

**3rd Thursday Art Walk,** downtown Modesto, third Thursdays, 5 to 8 pm. stroll to art displays and galleries. Info: <https://visitmodesto.com/arts-entertainment/#art-walk>

**VALLEY HEARTLAND ZEN GROUP:** every Thurs 6:30 to 8:30 pm, Modesto Church of the Brethren, 2310 Woodland Ave. Meditation. Newcomers welcome. Info: 535-6750 or <http://emptynestzendo.org>

**Pagan Community Meeting,** 1st Thursday, Cafe Amore, 3025 McHenry Ave, Suite S., Modesto, 8 pm. Info: 569-0816. All newcomers, pagan-curious and pagan-friendly welcome.

### FRIDAYS

Friday 7:30-9:30 pm (Sept thru May) **International Folk Dancing** with Village Dancers, Carnegie Art Center, 250 N. Broadway, Turlock \$7. No experience or partner needed. 209-480-0387 for info.

**Overcoming Depression:** small group for men & women. Every Friday, 7:15 pm. Cornerstone Community Church, 17900 Comconex Rd, Manteca, CA 95366, (209) 825-1220.

**Ukulele On Funstrummer Fridays:** Every Friday morning from 9 am to 10:30 am Play Along Easy Songs from the Funstrummers Songbooks of over 500 songs. Funstrummers Performing Band Practice from 10 to noon and afternoon gig. Unitarian Church, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto, 209-505-3216 for details. Donations accepted. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mej3gD0ZD40&list=LLB8Y19zZg660qHCXGoC6ojQ&index=1>

**SIERRA CLUB:** Yokuts group. Regular meetings, third Friday, Office of Valley Improvement Projects, 1224 K St. Modesto., 6:45 pm. Info: 209-632-5473. Visit <http://www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/yokuts> for info on hikes and events.

### SATURDAY

**Free Community Drum Circle** every third Saturday,

11 am to 12:30 pm, Gallo Center for the Arts, 10<sup>th</sup> & I St., Modesto. No experience or drums necessary to participate. All levels welcome. <https://drum-love.com/>

**Refuge Recovery: A Buddhist Approach to Recovery from Addiction.** @Friends Coming of Age., 1203 Tully Rd., Ste. B., Modesto. Saturdays 8-9 am. FREE (donations accepted). Info: [RefugeRecoveryModesto@gmail.com](mailto:RefugeRecoveryModesto@gmail.com)

**Divine Feminine Gathering.** Join us for a time of ritual, song and conversation as women come together to celebrate one another and the Divine among us and within us. 3rd Saturday of the month, 3:30-5:00 p.m. Stockton, CA. Contact Rev. Erin King, 209-815-0763, [orkingenne@gmail.com](mailto:orkingenne@gmail.com)

## CALPRIDE STANISLAUS

### Peer Support Groups

Hosted at CalPride Stanislaus  
1202 H Street #C, Modesto, CA 95354  
209-408-8848

<https://www.facebook.com/CalPrideStanislaus/>

**Transcendence:** Every Friday, 2:00 pm-3:00 pm. A peer support group for transgender individuals ages 18 and older, providing a safe and judgment-free space to connect and share experiences.

**Senior Gay Men's Group:** Every Thursday, 1:00 pm. Senior Gay Men's Group is a space to connect, share, and build community. For individuals aged 55+.

**Writing Group:** Every Friday, 3:30 pm-5:00 pm, This group provides an affirming and confidential queer space to craft poetry and short stories. For individuals aged 18+.

**Folk Group:** 2nd & 4th Tuesday of the month, 4:00 pm-5:00 pm. An inclusive LGBTQ+ peer support group for individuals ages 25 to 45, providing a welcoming space to connect, share experiences, and build community. Hosted at CalPride Stanislaus 1202 H Street #C, Modesto, CA, 95354.

**Dreams & Solutions,** 1st & 3rd Wednesdays of the month, 11:00 am-12:00 pm. A supportive space for those navigating challenges with drugs and alcohol to connect, share, and heal together. For individuals aged 18+.

**We Thrive:** Every Wednesday of the month, 3:30 pm-5:00 pm. A space to explore your journey through art, connect with others, and create in a welcoming and supportive environment. This group is for individuals aged 18+.

**Heart to Heart:** First Tuesday of the month, 4:00 pm-5:00 pm. A supportive, peer-led group dedicated to exploring and nurturing healthy, respectful relationships within the LGBTQ+ community. For individuals aged 18+.

**Strength in Solidarity:** Third Tuesday of the month, 4:00 pm-5:00 pm. A safe and supportive space for sexual assault survivors to connect, share experiences, and find healing. For individuals aged 18+.

**Closet Abierto:** First and Last Thursday of the month, 4:00 pm-5:00 pm. A welcoming and affirming space for LGBTQ+ Latinx individuals to share experiences, find support, and build connections. For individuals aged 18+.

**Queer Karaoke Night:** Last Friday of Every Month: 4:00 pm-5:00 pm. Sing along to your favorite tunes with your friends at CalPride! For individuals aged 18+.