



2022

Fighting Back

ANNUAL REPORT



From Our Executive Director

In 2016, a few veterans organized a rally outside of Trump Tower to oppose the hateful rhetoric being unleashed on the campaign trail. They had one clear goal—to show the country that veterans did not stand behind this racist and divisive vision of America. Veterans have been organizing for justice and progress throughout American history, from Harriet Tubman to Cesar Chavez, embedded in the civil rights and labor movements and beyond. But the right-wing has invested hundreds of millions of dollars co-opting the idea of service and patriotism to such success that the mention of “our troops” or waving the American flag is now synonymous with a crusade to deny our rights and suppress our vote.

The veterans who organized that rally became the founders of Common Defense, which is now the only membership driven, grassroots movement combating the myth that veterans are a conservative monolith. We have stemmed the rising tide of fascism and changed the national conversation by doing what we know works— one-on-one organizing, veteran to veteran. We launched the Veterans Organizing Institute to teach the tools veterans need to develop their voice, and a supportive community within which to do it. We built a national base of veterans committed to continuing their service and to upholding the oath they swore to defend this country against all enemies, foreign and domestic. We fought back against voter suppression in the states where it is the most egregious, we contacted over a million voters this year, and we advocated for legislation that affects us as veterans, as citizens, as parents, as people.

We knew our work was just beginning when we showed up to that rally at Trump Tower. We just had no idea that within six years we would have grown to the largest grassroots army of veterans in the country.

We stand on the shoulders of Harriet and Cesar, and all of the veterans before us who believed in and fought for an America they knew was possible. We’re proud to continue their legacy, no matter what these turbulent times bring—uncommon people, fighting for the common defense.

In solidarity,



José Vasquez
Army Veteran
Common Defense, Executive Director



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Founded in 2016, Common Defense is the nation's largest grassroots organization of US military veterans and the only one that invests in the leadership of its members through training and deployment in campaigns that connect directly to their history of service, including voting rights, climate justice, and anti-militarism. Common Defense's family of organizations includes the Common Defense Education Fund (501c3) for training and organizing, Common Defense Civic Engagement (501c4) for issue based and electoral advocacy, and Common Defense Action Fund (PAC) for lobbying and electoral support

Common Defense Education Fund (CDEF)

- Veterans Organizing Institute—our flagship non-partisan training program for veterans
- Ongoing member education and training
- Voter education and registration
- Organized efforts to combat voter suppression
- Non-partisan get out the vote efforts in targeted states and districts

Common Defense Civic Engagement (CDCE)

- Lobbying and advocacy around particular legislative issues and bills
- Member education around particular legislative issues and bills
- Endorsements of progressive candidates
- Candidate specific voter contact

Common Defense Action Fund (CDAF)

- Targeted, non-coordinated electoral support
- Paid advertisements

VETERANS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE



Veterans have seen the climate crisis firsthand. Our members fought in wars waged over fossil fuels, and served on

the frontlines in response to hurricanes, wildfires, heat waves, and other weather disasters, returning home only to find our communities devastated by pollution and economic exploitation in service to a fossil fuel economy that still holds a death grip on so much of America. To protect our communities and our country, we must act now to prevent the most catastrophic outcomes of a warming planet, which is why in early 2022 we launched our most ambitious campaign to date—Veterans for Climate Justice.

Veterans for Climate Justice, a combined project of CDEF and CDCE, will:

- lead national, state, and local campaigns to raise public awareness of the climate crisis
- build political will for urgent and ambitious action
- put pressure on key decision makers, including elected officials and government agencies and leaders of corporations and financial institutions
- mobilize our grassroots membership in partnership with ally organizations to make sure veterans are key voices in the movement toward urgent and transformative action to save our planet

Veterans for Climate Justice seeks to win bold, comprehensive action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition our country to a clean energy economy.

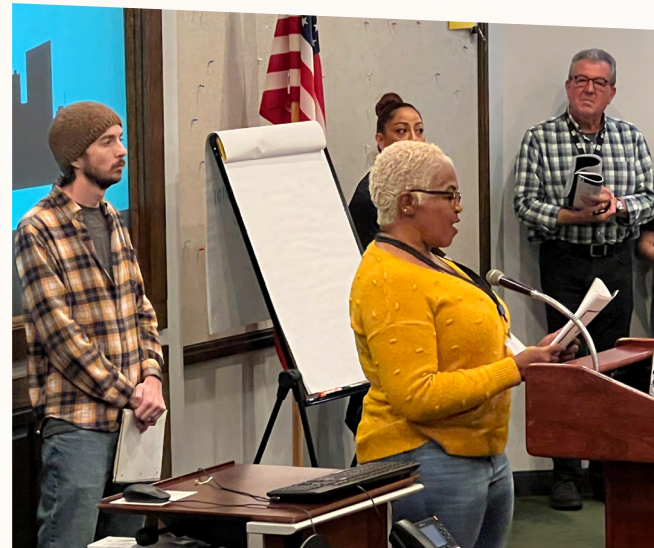


Common Defense is organizing and training a diverse cadre of veterans across the country who are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, and mobilizing these members to build political will and create sustained, strategic pressure on decision makers.

Since the September 2022 Climate VOI, more than 30 members of Common Defense have joined the new Climate Justice Committee. This committee meets biweekly to discuss current campaigns, advocacy tactics, and to participate in collective learning. We've also been engaged in deep visioning to build upon the previous strategic planning process and identify our core values and aspirations for Veterans for Climate Justice:

OUR ASPIRATIONS

- 1. Win bold climate action** by leading a national movement of veterans to protect our communities, our country, and our planet from the climate crisis.
- 2. Transform the US energy system**, creating millions of good union jobs and finally freeing ourselves from the choking grip of fossil fuels. This means ensuring universal access to clean water and air, protecting indigenous land, and confronting racism and economic inequality, both at home and abroad.
- 3. Energize and grow the power of Common Defense** by building our membership, forging new relationships and connections with frontline communities, bringing on new resources and capacities, and increasing our impact.



COMMON DEFENSE EDUCATION FUND: 2022 HIGHLIGHTS

VETERANS ORGANIZING INSTITUTE

After moving to an entirely virtual model due to Covid in 2020 and 2021, Veterans Organizing Institute made up for lost time with four in person cohorts and two virtual cohorts in 2022—empowering over 120 veterans to develop and leverage their voice for meaningful change in their communities.

VOI's foundational training curriculum has been extended from 4 days to 5 days to include an immersive experience, which gave participants to explore the history of civil and voting rights in Atlanta and understand the battle for the sacred land of Oak Flat outside of Phoenix. VOI hosted its first international cohort in Israel and Palestine in partnership with Breaking the Silence, forging a bond of solidarity that will grow over the coming year. These immersions give an opportunity for participants to ground themselves in their "Why" and serve as a means to build community before the start of the core curriculum.

VOI has transformed my leadership and advocacy skills, and motivated me to focus my organizing on the environmental issues that directly impact myself and fellow workers in wastewater treatment. When I get home I'm going to use my new skills to mobilize like-minded veterans to ensure that polluting industries find a pathway to renewable energy."

-Craig Romanovich, US Army Veteran and UWUA Member



GETTING OUT THE VOTE

Common Defense set an ambitious goal of contacting one million voters in the months and weeks leading up to the 2022 midterm elections with a nonpartisan appeal to vote, leveraging the power of the veteran voice. Messages included:

Democracy works—we know because we’ve defended it at home and abroad.

To vote is to defend democracy

Veterans sacrificed and fought to defend our democracy. Your vote is how you honor them.

Voting is a patriotic act.

Delivered

From August - November 2022, Common Defense members and staff contacted 953,025 voters in our key states of AZ, GA, NC and PA, receiving a 10% response rate which is higher than other GOTV operations.



Members quickly pivoted to the Georgia

runoff, contacting over 105,000 voters in four weeks.



COMMON DEFENSE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ENDORSEMENTS

Common Defense makes endorsements as a tool in advancing our vision of an inclusive democracy where liberty and justice truly exist for all. Our Endorsement Committee is comprised of 32 members from around the country who meet multiple times a month throughout an election cycle to nominate and evaluate candidates with progressive policy positions that align with our own.

Out of the 58 candidates in competitive House and Senate races, 44 won their races.



COMMON DEFENSE

 **Endorses Chris DeLuzio for Congress, PA-17**

Learn more at www.chrisforpa.com

An exciting outcome of the 2022 endorsement season is having our first ever Veterans Organizing Institute alum in Congress! Common Defense was proud to endorse and support Chris DeLuzio, a Naval Academy grad who served a deployment to Iraq and as a naval officer from 2006 to 2012, in the competitive race for PA17. We look forward to working closely with him and his team to further a progressive foreign and domestic policy that works for all Americans.

// Like my fellow veterans of Common Defense, I am committed to never again sending Americans to endless Forever Wars and to putting working families first. It's an honor to have their powerhouse endorsement in PA17." - Chris DeLuzio

Common Defense is proud of our other VOI alumni who won down ballot races, including Jennifer Parenti (CO HD 19), Stacey Travers (AZ House of Reps LD#14), Bridget Bellavigna (Kyrene County, AZ Constable), and Signa Oliver (Phoenix, AZ Union School Board).

VETERANS FOR DEMOCRACY

After a successful year of organizing and advocacy around voting rights legislation in 2021, the Veterans for Democracy campaign prioritized two main areas of work— getting out the vote in the critical midterm elections and fighting for January 6th justice.

In conjunction with the release of the Special Report by the January 6th Select Committee, Common Defense organized mobilizations in AZ, DC, Philly, NYC calling for accountability for those involved in the insurrection. Veterans from all around the country convened to demand justice and highlight the hypocrisy of elected officials who are not upholding the oath they swore to our constitution. Common Defense veterans demonstrated their commitment to the Constitution at the event by retaking their oath of enlistment, which calls on them to protect our nation from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Veterans from all around the country convened to demand justice and highlight the hypocrisy of elected officials who are not upholding the oath they swore to our constitution.



Common Defense in 2023

VETERANS FOR DEMOCRACY

Common Defense is proud to be a founding partner of the newly formed coalition Courage For America, speaking out against an extreme MAGA agenda that puts money and power over the rights and freedoms of the American people. The campaign is amplifying the voices of Americans in communities across the country—veterans, educators, faith leaders, and more—to demand the People’s House works for the people. Kicking off with a week of action in DC to commemorate the 2nd anniversary of January 6th, Common Defense will be leading and participating in many other Courage for America actions and events throughout the year.



VETERANS ORGANIZING INSTITUTE

In February, VOI will host its first Train the Trainer cohort in Phoenix, Arizona designed to create a cadre of alumni facilitators to assist in facilitating future VOI sessions. In addition to in person and virtual foundational cohorts, VOI is planning a climate focused session in the Gulf South in fall of 2023.



VETERANS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

In 2023, Veterans for Climate Justice will be focused on three key areas of work:

Climate Security Project

Leverage the veteran voice to redirect defense funding away from war, weapons and borders, and toward climate investment and reframe national security around people and communities, protecting our natural resources, and global cooperation and human rights.

Clean Energy Workforce

Advocate for the creation of good union jobs, and build pathways for veterans (especially BIPOC and women) to join the clean energy boom. Reframe the transition around patriotism and prosperity, build red state investment in the clean energy future, and reshape the politics of climate & energy.

State and Local Partnerships

Grow our membership at the ground level, build relationships with local organizations and communities, and add veteran and military voices to frontline struggles.



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