News
Social Justice



Participants gather at the Nuns on the Bus & Friends rally in Brentwood, New York, on Oct. 2. The event was part of the 2024 "Vote Our Future" national bus tour sponsored by Network, a Catholic social justice advocacy nonprofit. The tour began Sept. 30 in Philadelphia and concluded Oct. 18 in San Francisco. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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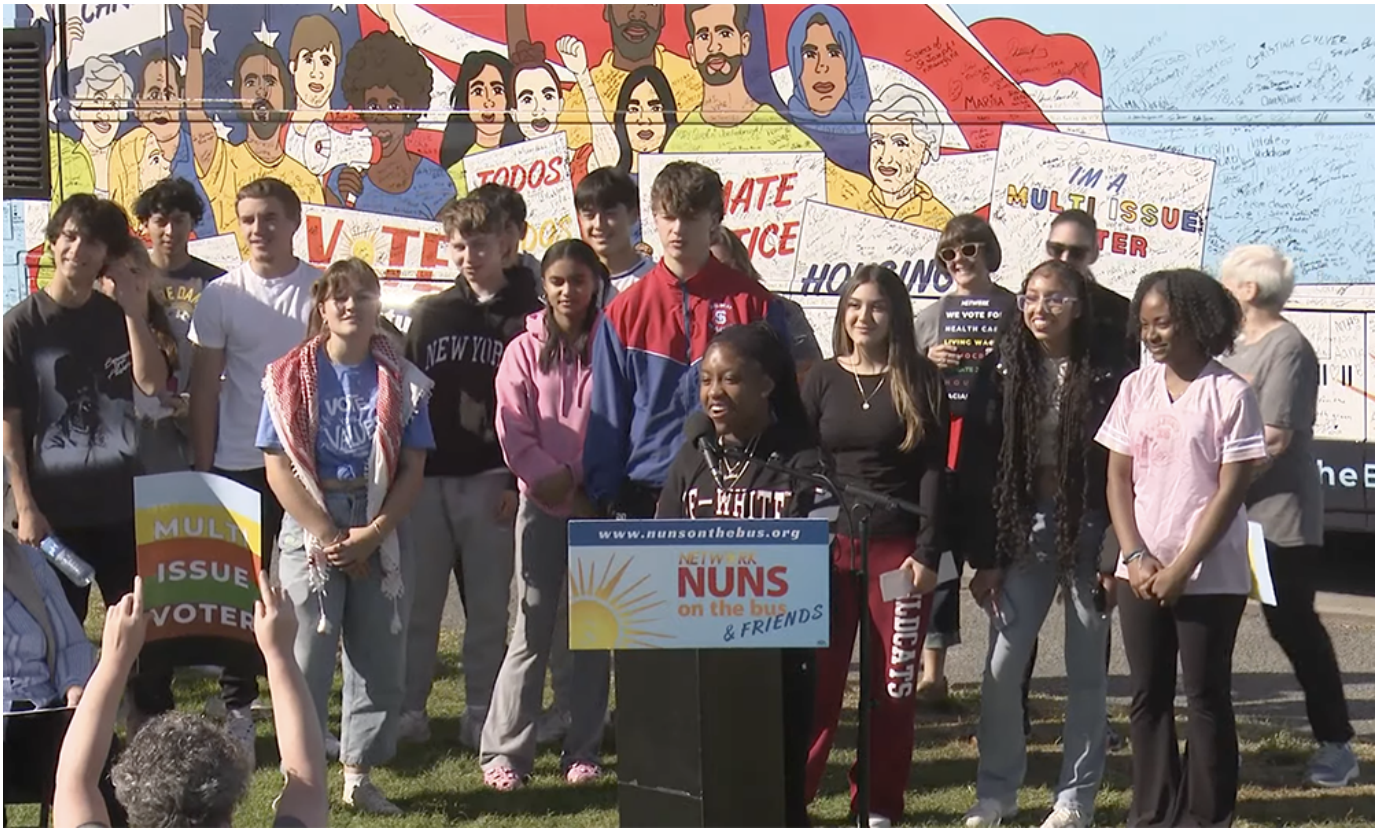
The Nuns on the Bus & Friends tour came to a rousing end Oct. 18 as speakers implored voters to choose the freedom and democracy needed for everyone in America to thrive.

Nuns on the Bus, a project of Network Advocates for Catholic Social Justice, began its "Vote Our Future" tour in Philadelphia on Sept. 30, and made 20 stops with a rotating group of 15 sisters and 15 "friends" — advocacy representatives from multiple faith-based and secular organizations.

Network started the nonpartisan, voter education Nuns on the Bus tours in 2012; this is the eighth tour and the first in-person tour since 2018, after the 2020 tour was held virtually because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our sacred mission is to remind voters of the truth: that all people are made in the image of the divine and deserve the right to be free and thrive with no exceptions," Laura Peralta-Schulte told the crowd. Peralta-Schulte is Network's senior director of public policy and government relations. She said people must be multi-issue voters "because we all live multi-issue lives."

While single-issue voters make electoral decisions based on one concern, such as abortion, Network says many issues are "equally sacred," including being healthy, having a healthy planet, having a vibrant democracy, a strong social safety net, freedom from harm, and a nation that is welcoming and values dignity and human rights.



Young-adult participants chant slogans Friday, Oct. 18, at the Nuns on the Bus closing rally in San Francisco. (GSR screenshot)

Sr. Richelle Friedman, a member of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Dubuque, Iowa, rode the last leg of this year's tour.

"It truly has been a pilgrimage of faith and hope," Friedman said. "We know that change can happen if we elect legislators with the political will to allocate the resources needed, and adopt policies that provide people with the freedom to thrive."

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Mercy Sr. Patricia Harney, who has worked the last 34 years for Mercy Housing, said every night there are 36,000 unhoused people on the streets of the Bay Area.

"It will take all of us — citizens, nonprofits, government, business, faith leaders and nuns — to continue to work together on strategies and solutions that will provide stable, affordable housing for Californians and make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring," Harney said.



Sr. Patricia Harney, who has worked for Mercy Housing for 34 years, speaks Friday, Oct. 18, at the Nuns on the Bus closing rally in San Francisco. (GSR screenshot)

Network Executive Director Mary Novak, an associate of the Congregation of St. Joseph, said in announcing the tour there is an unprecedented push to take away hard-won rights from Americans.

"We at Network have read the signs of the times and reached an inescapable conclusion: The world needs what Catholic sisters have offered for 50 years and what we at Network continue to offer, grounded in their vision," Novak said at the time, noting that America needs a government that works for everyone, not just white Christian men.

Joan Neal, Network's deputy executive director, said in a written statement the three-week tour was about freedom.

"When we embarked on the 'Vote Our Future' tour, we had one value foremost in our minds: freedom — freedom to participate in a vibrant democracy, to care for ourselves and our families, to be healthy, to be free from harm, to live on a healthy planet, and to live in a welcoming country that values dignity and human rights," the statement said. "This was a faith-filled rallying point for freedom."

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Neal said in the statement that while the tour showed how some politicians are determined to take freedoms away, they also found hope in the people they met.

"They want us to feel discouraged, tired, and willing to give up the freedoms of a thriving democracy," the statement said. "But the people we met prove that we won't see our freedoms relegated to the history books. On the road with our multi-faith and secular partners, we experienced how, when people come together, we have the power to shape that future of freedom, and to live out the vision Pope Francis described when he said, 'The only future worth building includes everyone.' "

Evelyn Rodriguez, a professor at the University of San Francisco, told the rally democracy doesn't just happen — it takes sacrifice and work.



Evelyn Rodriguez speaks Friday, Oct. 18, at the Nuns on the Bus closing rally in San Francisco. (GSR screenshot)

"I'm here because I am seeking hope," she said. "I'm inspired by the nuns on the bus and their courage and their audacity."

Rodriguez said we need to build community and repair the rifts dividing the country, that we can make 2024 more than just avoiding a worst-case scenario.

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"If we can engage in ways that make these folks feel genuinely seen and heard, may open hearts," she said. "Each of us knows deeply that democracy is not just something we have, it's something we do."

In the meantime, she said, we must go to the polls.

"Let's change the world," Rodriguez said. "Let's show up and vote."

Related: Nuns on the Bus tour lights up Las Vegas with multi-issue voting fervor

This story appears in the **Nuns on the Bus** feature series. View the full series.