



THE OKLAHOMAN

Oklahomans gather to reflect on anniversary of Jan. 6 insurrection

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Oklahoman Jan. 6th 2022

A small group braved frigid temperatures in Oklahoma City on Thursday to assert their support of democracy, a system they believe was threatened by the riot at U.S. Capitol a year ago.

Organized shortly before the Jan. 6 anniversary, as leaders of the First Unitarian Church in Oklahoma City recognized there were no similar events planned in the state, the Change Oklahoma Vigil for Democracy and Day of Remembrance promoted democracy while rejecting the competing narratives stemming from last year's events.

Attendees chanted and drummed songs, waved American flags and held signs championing the nation's freedoms — freedoms that many in attendance said were thrown into question a year ago.

"I am here today because I feel like our democracy — today being the anniversary of the insurrection at the Capitol — is really important for the people," said Maureen Harvey, chair of Voices Organized in Civic Engagement, or VOICE. "And our representatives are acting like nothing happened. And so we need to get out here, and we need to make sure that this is nipped in the bud."

Outside of championing ideals laid out in the Constitution, there was a shared sentiment and frustration among the crowd based on the feeling that many elected leaders have yet to openly acknowledge and confront what happened during the riot.

"We live here in Oklahoma City where, at least prior to Jan. 6 (2021), the worst act of political terrorism ever happened. Right? And now, how Oklahoma elected officials are dismissing a coup attempt, it's very frightening," said Tim Atkins, director of religious exploration at First Unitarian Church in Oklahoma City.

Among the seven members of Oklahoma's congressional congregation, all Republicans, only Rep. Stephanie Bice has publicly acknowledged the attack on the Capitol in the days leading up to the anniversary, saying in a news release, "the

breach of the U.S. Capitol building and subsequent violence that occurred undermine the very foundation of our democracy."

Bice continued on to say, "But, I empathize with those whose frustrations with the electoral process remain unresolved."

The frustration felt toward some political leaders at the vigil was compounded by the reality of other vigils across the country celebrating those who are facing prosecution for actions at the Capitol that day.

"We can't let these people whitewash what happened, and pretend that nothing happened, pushing their alternate reality. It's just, we got to stand up for ourselves," Harvey said.

Those who attended the vigil in Oklahoma City agreed that the country should revert back its founding democratic ideals.

"A year after we've been able to reflect, and what's changed? Nothing's changed," Atkins said. "You still don't have good voting rights legislation, we still don't have elected officials speaking truth at the fear of losing their own sense of power, and it's morally wrong as far as I'm concerned."

Simultaneously, others said dealing with the grief felt by those that watched the insurrection is still necessary.

"And I don't think that has been fully addressed, how many people saw this as an assault and not just against this country, not just against our seat of government and our democracy and free elections, but against their life's work," said the Rev. Diana Davies, of the First Unitarian Church in Oklahoma City.

"We can't forget what happened; we have to protect our democracy," Atkins said. "And if we let this slip into the history books, we have failed to uphold our democratic values."