

# WNDC



# Political Dispatch

Newsletter | December 2017

## From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

### Thought for the day

We won November 7! Keep it up and march for the Democratic Party! We can help release the power of Americans to better their lives and the life of their country.

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We have a momentous task ahead of us to protect and defend American Democracy. The highest priority of the Public Policy and Political Action Committee will be winning the mid-term elections of 2018. Our Constitutionally established separation of judicial, executive, and legislative pillars of the government are under continuous attack as is the right to vote in free and fair elections, most recently by a taxpayer-funded voter suppression commission. Trends facilitating authoritarianism include the denial on religious grounds of the legitimacy of the secular state.

Our task will include creating materials for grassroots campaigning that emphasize how positions of the Democratic Party will improve the lives of all Americans. Healthcare, including the reproductive health of women, will be a high priority, as will the health and education of our children. We will expose the corruption of top officials in the current administration and support warranted criminal prosecution.

-- Elizabeth Clark, Vice President for Public Policy and Political Action, and Chair, Foreign Policy Task Force

## Don't Let Extreme Religious Beliefs Dictate Our National Health Care Policies

We Democrats believe that Health Care is a basic human right. Every person in America has the right to the full range of science-based health care services regardless of race, skin color, religion, gender identity, or the ability to pay.

The basic structure for providing health care is the confidential Doctor-Patient relationship. Accordingly, every woman's reproductive health care decisions (contraception, abortion, childbearing, sterilization) must remain solely within the purview of the woman, her doctor, and her God.

We also oppose all legislation at the federal or state levels that would legally allow physicians, nurses, first responders, or any other medical personnel to refuse life-saving care to any person for any and all "religious belief" reasons. For instance, legislation now being considered in Michigan would allow physicians and emergency responders to refuse care for a person suspected of being LGBT. Before Roe vs Wade, many Emergency Departments turned away women suspected of having had an abortion despite obvious bleeding that could be life threatening. Neither the Hippocratic Oath nor the Florence Nightingale pledge allows personal judgment to interfere with the duty to respond by providing the necessary care to every human being who is in acute distress.

Democrats believe and will continue to practice the philosophy that "Health care is a right, not a privilege" for every one of our fellow Americans. No individual at the national or state level has the right to impose religiously held beliefs on their fellow citizens, who may not support those religious beliefs. Our Constitution never supported the concept of theocracy.

-- Karen Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force

## Public Health Issue: Children and Guns in the U. S.

In 2014, the latest year for which data are available, according to the Brady Report:

- 2,549 children and adolescents were killed by guns.
- Another 13,600 sustained injuries related to firearms.
- Boys accounted for 82 percent of all child firearm deaths.
- African-American children had the highest rate of firearm homicide.
- White and Native American children had the highest rate of firearm suicide.
- DC and Louisiana had the highest rates of all child firearm deaths.

One attempt at a solution is the ASK program (Asking Saves Kids), a joint partnership between the Brady Center and the American Academy of Pediatrics begun in 2000. The ASK program suggests that parents ask other parents a simple question: "Is there an unlocked gun where my child plays?"

## Indictments in Robert Mueller's Russia Probe: What Does this Mean for the Trump Administration?

On October 30, 2017, the press reported that Paul Manafort, President Trump's former campaign chairman, and Rick Gates, another campaign employee, were indicted on federal charges. The indictment alleges that they failed to register as agents of a foreign government (Ukraine) when lobbying US officials, filed false and misleading statements about their activities, and hid the money they received in foreign bank accounts in order to avoid detection and US taxes. Manafort's and Gates' conduct mostly pre-dated the campaign and the indictment focused on their activities for a private company as lobbyists for Ukraine, not on any campaign activities.

The same day, the press reported that George Papadopoulos, a foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign, had pleaded guilty to lying to federal investigators from Mueller's team about meetings in March and April 2016 with a Russian individual who promised to provide "dirt" on Hillary Clinton. This person, Papadopoulos understood, had substantial ties to the Russian government. Papadopoulos also tried to orchestrate a broader meeting among Trump campaign officials and the Russian government, but there is no evidence yet disclosed that such a meeting ever occurred or that Trump knew of this activity.

Although the DOJ appointed Mueller to investigate ties between Trump's campaign and Russia, the appointment gave him a broad mandate to investigate "any links and/or coordination between the Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump" and any other matters that "may arise directly from the investigation." This is a broad, powerful mandate that allowed Mueller to pursue the indictments of Manafort and Gates, which have nothing to do with the Trump campaign. In so doing, Mueller has exerted pressure on Manafort and Gates -- in the form of criminal charges hanging over their heads -- to provide information about any ties the Trump campaign had to Russia. The government also intends to seize expensive real estate (New York City, the Hamptons, and Arlington) and other assets if the two are convicted. This provides additional incentive for Manafort and Gates to cooperate and provide information about the Trump campaign and Russia. Through cooperation, they could negotiate a plea deal that reduces the charges against them, seeks a lesser punishment, and/or allows them to retain some of their assets. Mueller's exercise of his broad authority also serves as a warning to others surrounding President Trump of the consequences they could face if they don't cooperate in his investigation.

Mueller's broad mandate also covers the investigation of conduct of low-level campaign advisors, such as Papadopoulos. Papadopoulos likely is cooperating with Mueller's team, and information he provides should include information about who on the campaign team knew about -- and approved -- his Russian contacts. He may be incentivized to cooperate by a government offer to seek a lower sentence. The Manafort and Gates indictments provide no insight into possible ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. The Papadopoulos guilty plea exposes only a limited tie and does not implicate Trump or his close advisors personally. President Trump's denial of any collusion between his campaign and a foreign entity may be correct. Or, like many of his other pronouncements, it may turn out to be false. Mueller's team appears to be conducting a methodical investigation in which he collects information step by step, putting pressure on one person after another to provide information. It may be many months before any new information surfaces. For now, however, it appears that Mueller and his team continue to have leads to pursue.

-- Evelina J. Norwinski, Member, Public Policy and Political Action Committee

# Trump Governs in Darkness:

## Triumph of the *Merchants of Doubt*

Just before the last Earth Day, April 21, the WNDU screened the film *Merchants of Doubt*. It revealed how scientists and PR professionals became co-opted by industry to cast doubt on scientific evidence on such things as the health damages caused by cigarettes, the toxicity of flame-retardant chemicals on clothing and upholstery, and now, the reality of climate change. Trump's EPA is continuing and expanding on this trend. One of the worst members of Trump's environmental wrecking crew, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, has now appointed over 60 new scientific advisers, many drawn from industries regulated by the EPA, as shown by *The Washington Post* in its Energy and Environment report of November 4. Some of these industries include oil companies Total and Phillips 66, the utility Southern Company, Dow Chemical, and Procter and Gamble. Several of the new advisers take the place of academic scientists pushed out by Pruitt's ruling that no scientist receiving an EPA grant may be a member of an advisory panel.

The old slogan, "Better Living Through Chemistry," is supported by appointees from the American Chemistry Council (ACC), including Kimberly White, who will join the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), and the former senior toxicologist for the ACC, Richard Becker, who is to join the Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC) as a member of BOSC's Subcommittee on Chemical Safety for Sustainability. The new Chair of the SAB, Michael Honeycutt, has criticized EPA for its stand on the toxicity of mercury (a neurotoxin); the new Chair of the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, consultant Louis Cox, has also harshly criticized EPA for pushing strict national smog standards. It also should be noted that Pruitt has "scrapped a scheduled ban of chlorpyrifos, a neurotoxic pesticide...[and] is covering up the carcinogenic effects of glyphosate after meeting with Monsanto." (Environmental Working Group Rapid Response, Nov. 14).

Stacking the deck in favor of scientists and consultants tied to regulated industries with direct conflicts of interest has been strongly critiqued by environmental groups, who correctly see these moves by Trump as opportunities to reshape an agency that oversees a significant portion of environmental regulations. These merchants of doubt are there to weaken or abolish regulations, put in place to protect public health, governing the fossil fuel and chemical industries, and to raise doubts about the industries' contributions to dirty air, water, and soil. It is all about freely maximizing profits at our expense.

-- Jean Stewart, Chair, Earth and Environment Task Force



We the taxpayers fund the White House Commission on Election Integrity (voter fraud commission) which was largely created to keep alive the Trump myth that he won the popular vote in 2016. The Commission was recently sued by one of its members, Matthew Dunlap, who claimed that he wasn't able to get information on the Commission's activities since its last meeting in September. He charges that the Federal Advisory Commission Act requires such panels to operate transparently. This panel, however, operates in darkness.

-- Elizabeth Clark, Vice President for Public Policy and Political Action, and Chair, Foreign Policy Task Force

## Action Alert: Tell Your Representatives and Senators to Oppose the SECURE Act and More Unqualified Environmental Nominees

In the last few days, a bill titled the SECURE American Energy Act was approved by the House Committee on Natural Resources. If it becomes law, it will make it much easier and faster for fossil fuel companies to drill on millions of acres of now protected public land and in protected marine ecosystems. Pumping oil and gas will take precedence over rules protecting marine mammals; will give financial incentives to states to drill in sensitive ecosystems; and will prohibit enforcement of federal fracking regulations. You are urged to take action now to protect our natural resources and our communities from reckless oil and gas development that benefits only the fossil fuel industry.

Further evidence of so many of our leaders attacking the environment includes the nominations of two more representatives of regulated industries who are unqualified for key positions requiring scientific knowledge:

- Kathleen Hartnett White to head the White House Council on Environmental Quality. She is a climate science denier and a coal industry advocate, who admits to having no scientific expertise or even lay knowledge of the harm caused to humans by carbon dioxide buildup.
- Michael Dourson to oversee chemical safety at the EPA. Throughout his career, he has been paid by the chemical industry and the Koch Brothers to weaken chemical safety standards. Late-breaking news indicates both Senators from North Carolina will vote against Dourson in the face of serious chemical pollution of some of the state's rivers.

Please contact your Representatives and Senators and urge them to oppose passage of the SECURE Act, and the confirmations of Ms. White and Mr. Dourson.

-- Jean Stewart, Chair, Earth and Environment Task Force

# Republican Tax Plan: This is it

Republicans can't get anything passed if they need 60 votes so they had to keep the cost of their tax plan to less than \$1.5 trillion over 10 years if they wanted to get the tax cuts passed by a simple majority of 51. Thus constrained, they had to choose between business and middle class tax cuts. **They chose business.**

It would have been easy to have favored the middle class. They didn't have to increase the deficit. There is no present need for fiscal stimulus. There is no present need for reducing the corporate tax rate. The extra money corporations will get will go into the pockets of rich shareholders not create employment for the middle class. Even at the upper levels, the Republican tax plan favors the idle "coupon clippers" or idle heir to money that would no longer be taxed in estate taxes. Republicans favored a certain class of the rich: **They chose the idle rich.**

Our expert on taxes and the budget, Stuart Brown\*, says that people are believing in magic. Everyone hears something they like in the Senate or House Republican Tax plan.

**According to Brown**, those mired in 0.2% wage gains over forty years are gullible to forecasts of a \$4000/yr increase in pay. If only there is a tax cut or continued tax holiday for foreign earnings. **\$4000 would be a 10% raise on a \$40,000 income!** Never mind if the top 0.01% of taxpayers (the billionaire Republican donor base) get to keep an extra million dollars per year. That will certainly help with income disparity.

Never mind if that \$4000 in increased pay will never happen. The tax holiday of 2004 did not result in a raise for workers. It was, however, good for the stock market through share buybacks and increased dividends...until it wasn't. This trajectory was the same for employment and GDP and the Kansas experiment in cutting taxes to spur growth. **There was no miraculous new job creation or corporate innovation.**

**More money than ideas.** Corporations, with record amounts in their bank accounts, would certainly put the money to work in hopes of earning something better than the meager fraction of a percent interest on savings—if **they had good ideas for new products.** The problem is not too high tax rates, rather too much money in corporate accounts and too little burning holes in consumers' pockets. Demand for the latest gewgaw doesn't come from companies paying less tax, but from the consumer having money to spend.

**Never mind the \$2 trillion+ hole in the budget.** (Something unimaginable when there was a black man in the White House.) A bipartisan bill to repair the Affordable Care Act and reduce the Deficit cannot be given a hearing, while a Tax Resolution increasing the Deficit by a couple trillion dollars sails through. Economy shrinking? Cut taxes! Economy growing? Cut taxes! Income disparity? Cut taxes! Deficit growing? Cut taxes! Deficit shrinking? Cut taxes! **Who knew Americans were putting away too much for their retirement?** Why else reduce the tax incentive for 401k plans?

Those with income in the top 5% pay 60% of the total income tax collected. Cutting tax rates primarily benefits the top and results in budget deficits.

**The few beneficiaries of the last half century's economic prosperity want not to pay** the tax for the next trillion dollars of Medicaid, Welfare, Social Security benefits, health care assistance, education, disease control, infrastructure. "Give us this, and you might get as much as \$4000," they say. Magic. We want to believe. But then there is what is believable. And what has happened before.

*\*Chief Investment Strategist/Portfolio Manager, Warren Capital*

## Comment

### Hillary Clinton Responds to Senator Feinstein's Question in an Extended Conversation at the WNDC Woman of the Year Award Ceremony

The highlight for me of the WNDC 2017 Democratic Woman of the Year award ceremony was Hillary Clinton's program of conversation with Senator Dianne Feinstein. I found especially compelling Clinton's remarks on contraception. Clinton said that Trump has mounted attacks on reproductive rights through executive orders, legislation, and his nominees. A large segment of his base is anti-choice, including opposition to contraception. The fact that the US abortion rate is at its lowest point has not seemed to modify views on this issue, which are intensely ideological. The Republicans are not talking about supporting women. In Texas the maternal death rate is up. In her discussion with Feinstein, Clinton proposed that the Democrats go after the issue of contraception. She stated that it was important to reject an ideology that seeks to institutionalize control of women's bodies. My comment is that the Democrats should articulate that contraception, both globally and domestically, produces strongly positive outcomes, not just for women but for their nation's economic, political, and moral strength.

*-- Elizabeth Clark, Vice President for Public Policy and Political Action, and Chair, Foreign Policy Task Force*

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