

POLITICAL DISPATCH

FROM THE PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE



The articles below are commentary on current events, intended to encourage further reflection and debate. Except for official Board statements, the viewpoints expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the Woman's National Democratic Club.

WNDC Statement: Condolences to the Citizens of Brussels after ISIS Attack

On March 22, 2016, the Brussels metro station and airport were attacked with bombs by Islamic State (ISIS) guerillas. More than thirty civilians were murdered.

ISIS was quick to claim responsibility. The bombings occurred four days after the arrest of one of the bombers charged in the attacks on Paris in November 2015.

The Brussels murders meet the definition of terrorism: random murders of innocent citizens to instill terror in people's everyday lives.

Tragically, ISIS's terror attacks also devastate the daily lives of peaceful Muslims in Europe and the U.S. We hear U.S. presidential (and some European) candidates advocate carpet bombing, murders of ISIS suspects' families, religious tests for refugees fleeing for their lives, police patrolling of Muslim neighborhoods, and "rounding up" of Muslims. This hatred diminishes us as Americans and will not keep us safe.

We will defeat ISIS by sharing information among European, Middle Eastern, and American intelligence and financial operatives. Our Treasury Department is already weakening ISIS by tracking and shutting down financial support for ISIS guerillas and weaponry.

But this sickening attack underscores the need for vigilance, international cooperation, and determination to face and eliminate the scourge that exploded in Brussels yesterday.

*WNDC Board of Governors
March 23, 2016*

TRAP Laws Are Legislative Assault—Not Safety Rules to Protect Women

[Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt](#) (heard by the Supreme Court on March 2) hinges on TRAP, or Targeted Regulations for Abortion Providers laws, which require clinics providing abortion services to meet the same medical standards as surgical suites providing invasive cardiac procedures, tonsillectomies, sinus surgery, and other similar procedures. The Texas law at issue in this case, which caused the majority of Texas abortion clinics to close, requires that all Texas abortion providers meet these TRAP standards.

These regulations—which aim not to protect patients but to limit access to abortion—mandate minute and irrelevant features such as the size of procedure rooms, the size of hallways (two stretchers

wide), the size of the parking lot, the type of snacks available, and the type of awnings over the entrance. Their goal is not to protect patients but to keep them from exercising their right to an abortion.

Other mandates such as resuscitative equipment and infection control measures are superfluous because such medically necessary standards are already in place, and abortion providers are currently equipped to meet these standards.

The most recent TRAP requirement abortion opponents are proposing is that abortion providers have “hospital admitting privileges,” a phony concern that is not required of other medical or dental offices. In fact, patients who present to an emergency room by ambulance or on their own most often will NOT have a physician with admitting privileges at that hospital.

Emergency rooms are legally required to care for **every person** who presents for care, *without exception*. Every patient must be evaluated and rendered care in the emergency room by that hospital’s emergency room physicians. The presence or absence of a personal physician who has admitting privileges is irrelevant.

The real question is whether or not facts matter. The [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) stated that “barriers to care — under the guise of concerns about patient safety — are bad medicine. Women in need of abortion should not be forced to burden themselves and their families in order to get the health care that is right for them. Other needed forms of health care are not subject to these unfounded restrictions and attacks.”

Judge Richard A. Posner of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit struck down Wisconsin’s “admitting privileges law” in 2015, saying “Courts should weigh the medical evidence behind a regulation against the impact. If the evidence is feeble and the burden substantial, the burden is undue.” We concur with that judicial rationale and demand the Supreme Court to follow this standard.

The Supreme Court must rely on the facts of evidence-based medicine rather than abortion opponents’ tactics to limit women’s access to needed services. The Court must reaffirm women’ rights to make their own private and confidential health care decisions.

*Karen Pataky, NPC
Chair, Health Care Task Force*

Roberts Court and Republicans Try to Revoke the Voting Rights Act of 1965



On March 3, Ari Berman spoke to a large gathering at the Club on Republican efforts to undercut the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and to otherwise limit the ability of minorities to vote. Mr. Berman is the author of several books, including the recently published *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*. The book’s title is from Martin Luther King, Jr.’s first speech on voting rights in May of 1957, a precursor to the March on Washington in 1963.

He made three key points in his talk:

- Voting is not a privilege, but a right: the most fundamental right in a democracy.

- Democracy is strengthened by larger voter turnouts.
- It is morally—not just politically—wrong to try to win elections by limiting the right to vote.

Revoking restrictions on African Americans' ability to exercise their right to vote was a key part of the struggle for civil rights in America. Since the 2008 election of Barack Obama, there has been a concerted effort by the Roberts Supreme Court and the Republican Party to impose new voter restrictions. Democrats need to make it clear that voting restrictions are largely about race. The major takeaway from Berman's talk is a call for Democrats to organize **now** to oppose Republican-sponsored barriers to voting by changing restrictive laws, conducting registration drives, and getting out the vote for Democratic candidates.

*Jean Stewart, Chair
Energy & Environment Task Force*

Celebrating Berta Caceres and Protecting Indigenous Water Rights

Four days before International Women's Day, feminist and human rights icon Berta Caceres—a powerful organizer for indigenous rights and democracy—was assassinated March 3, 2016. Fellow activist Nelson Garcia was also murdered on March 15 after Honduran Security forces violently evicted an indigenous Lenca community.

Caceres, whose mother was a midwife and governor, had started the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) when she was a young woman. Caceres led campaigns on a variety of issues but is particularly celebrated for mobilizing the Lenca people against the Agua Zarca dam, which threatened Lenca access to water, food and medicine.

COPINH built a roadblock that lasted a year. Through legal and community action, they convinced the International Monetary Fund and the Chinese company, Sinohydro to withdraw from the project. But another Honduran company, DESA, reinstated the dam project on the Gualcarque River, which COPINH continues to oppose.

In 2015, Caceres was awarded the prestigious Goldman prize, comparable to a Nobel Prize, for the environment in South and Central America.

Gustavo Castro Soto, coordinator for Friends of the Earth, was with Caceres during the March 3 attack. Caceres died in his arms. He was also injured, later detained, and held in inhumane conditions and questioned. After being released, he was escorted to the airport by the Mexican ambassador but has been ordered by Honduran authorities to stay in the country for thirty days.

These events occurred within the context of repressive Honduran leadership that has stepped up violence since the 2009 coup d'état that occurred after the democratically elected president, Mel Zelaya, ordered a non-binding straw poll to consider democratic revisions of the constitution. The Honduran military and judicial system opposed Zelaya, and he was removed from office and forcibly flown to Costa Rica. The United Nations and the Organization of American States called the action a "coup," but the United States did not intercede or support Zelaya.

Since the coup, Honduras has pursued mass privatization of rivers and cities. More than 100 other members of COPINH have been murdered, child refugee numbers have increased 40-fold, and Honduras has been ranked the most dangerous country for environmental advocates. Terror has reigned for citizens while the government has protected multinational corporations and financiers from any accountability.

Caceres' and Garcia's deaths must be met with justice.

There must be independent investigations into their deaths and full accountability for the perpetrators. Castro must be safely returned to his home. Criminalization of COPINH activities must end.

So too, the United States must deeply question our long history of support for brutal regimes. And we must end "security" aid to Honduras and other repressive governments.

Caceres, a vocal critic of the coup, spoke of a way forward: "We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only assure our own self destruction... Let us build societies that are able to coexist in a dignified way, in a way that protects life."

*Veena Trehan, Chair
Global Women Task Force*