

# WNDC



# Political Dispatch

Newsletter | October 2017

## From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

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.

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## Trump Governs in Darkness

### Trump Strategy for Getting Something Done: Turn Off All the Light Switches

President Trump has managed either to rescind existing and desirable government regulations or to slip obscurely named harmful articles and amendments into otherwise innocuous sounding legislation. These are “accomplishments” if your goal is making Americans less safe, less healthy, less educated, and less prosperous.

We are launching a regular feature in the Political Dispatch to drag out these hidden bits of bad policy and are calling it “Trump Governs in Darkness.” We hope exposure to daylight will enable opposition.

First Up On the List:

Republican lawmakers and National Rifle Association (NRA) supporters have come up with “The Hearing Protection Act,” which has been slipped into the “Sportsmen’s Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act (SHARE Act).” The Act has been reported out from the House Committee on Natural Resources. Silencers (the “Hearing Protection”) have been renamed “suppressors” and are touted by Donald Trump Jr., among others, as being “great for little kids in the game.” Under the Act it will be easier to buy silencers. This has pleased the gun industry as a new profit source and recruitment tool. Although research has found that the public has no interest in deregulating silencers, corporations that sell silencers are already touting their new sales prospects to shareholders. On the other side, John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety, has been quoted as saying, “silencers distort the sound of a gun, and in the wrong hands, they put people’s safety at risk.”

*(Sources: Nick Wing, Huff Post, 9/14/2017; Amanda Marcotte, Salon, 9/13/2017; Washington Post, Editorial, 9/19/2017)*

## Darkness in the Light: Trump at the UN

When Donald Trump, in his address to the UN General Assembly, said he would “totally destroy North Korea,” either he meant what he said, in which case he is urging the murder of innocent civilians and is committing a war crime, or he is being a reality TV star and not a serious leader of a member state of the United Nations.

# Health Policy Task Force - Mission Statement

The mission of the WNDC's Health Policy Task Force is to:

- Inform the WNDC membership about significant health policy issues;
- Highlight current issues of legislative and regulatory importance;
- Engage the WNDC to influence legislation and regulatory actions;
- Serve as the WNDC's representative in coalitions focused on health policy.

The Health Policy Task Force accomplishes its mission by:

- Providing background papers to the membership on significant policy issues;
- Drafting action alerts on current issues of legislative importance;
- Submitting comments on proposed regulatory actions; and
- Arranging programs that bring experts to address the WNDC membership.

For 2017 – 2018 the Health Policy Task Force proposes to highlight:

In the short-term (Sept. 2017):

- Supporting the reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP); and
- Supporting proposals to stabilize the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Exchange markets.

In the long-term (Sept. 2017 – 2018)

- Promoting proposals for universal health insurance coverage;
- Highlighting the economic importance of health insurance for economic security;
- Highlighting the disparities in health insurance coverage based on gender, race, and economic status;
- Supporting efforts to protect women's reproductive health; and
- Highlighting the complexity of prescription drug pricing.

*Note: This is a revised and expanded Mission Statement, reflecting both current and future needs in this critically important area.*

# Action Alerts from the Health Policy Task Force

This Republican administration -- The White House, House of Representatives, and Senate -- are determined to gut the Affordable Care Act, denying millions of Americans access to healthcare, in order to give massive tax cuts to the wealthiest among us. To try to counter these efforts, in the last three months, the Health Policy Task Force has issued five Action Alerts, asking our members to call their Representatives and Senators to oppose various bills to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. These Action Alert subjects are:

**June 30** – Tell Your Senators to Reject the Senate Health Care Plan That Slashes Coverage and Destroys Traditional Medicaid

**July 13** – Tell Your Senators and Representatives that any Republican health bill will be unacceptable if it destroys essential health care (listed 5 components of any bill that would affect coverage, quality, and affordability of health insurance)

**September 3** – Urgent Action Required to Stop Trump Attack on Children's Health (CHIP)

**September 12** – Tell Congress to Strengthen ACA Cost-Sharing Reduction Payments (CSRs)

**September 19** – Urgent: Tell Your Senators to Reject the Cassidy-Graham ACA Repeal Bill

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## Action Alert: Tell the Senate to Reject These Nominations

Catastrophic flooding in Texas, hurricane damage across Florida, and wildfires of unprecedented scope and severity burning across several Western states: the Trump Administration meets these ominous signs of a warming planet by ignoring them. Evidence of this includes the nominations of two unqualified right-wing politicians for key positions requiring scientific knowledge:

- Sam Clovis to serve as Chief Scientist for the United States Department of Agriculture. Clovis has no scientific background whatsoever, and believes climate change is "junk science."
- Trump's nominee to head NASA is Rep. Jim Bridenstine (R-Okla.), a climate science skeptic with no background in science or engineering. He is a member of the House Freedom Caucus, and if confirmed would be the first politician to serve as NASA Administrator.

Both of these agencies have crucial roles in addressing the challenges of a warming planet. We cannot have any confidence in leaders whose sole qualification is political alignment with this administration and its refusal to recognize the dangers of climate change.

Please contact your Senators, 202-224-3121, and tell them to oppose the confirmations of both Sam Clovis and Rep. Jim Bridenstine.

## Barack Obama on the DACA action

"What makes us American is not a question of what we look like, or where our names come from, or the way we pray. What makes us Americans is our fidelity to a set of ideals – that all of us are created equal; that all of us deserve the chance to make of our lives what we will; that all of us share an obligation to stand up, speak out, and secure our most cherished values for the next generation. That's how America has traveled this far. That's how, if we keep at it, we will ultimately reach that more perfect union."

- Barack Obama

(Excerpt from a longer post on Facebook, September 5, 2017)

## Flood, Wind, and Fire: Administration Answer is Magical Thinking

Catastrophic flooding, three powerful hurricanes, and wildfires of unprecedented scope and severity in several Western states: the Trump Administration meets these ominous signs of a warming planet by pretending that climate change does not exist. Among some of their egregious actions:

- Selecting officials for key positions requiring scientific knowledge are made by picking anti-environment candidates like Pruitt at EPA and EPA grant reviewer John Konkus. Konkus is a political operative who bans any use of the "double-c word" by grant applicants. The "double-c word" is now officially outlawed.
- Terminating funding for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's *Bay Journal* because some recent articles addressed climate change's effects on the Bay.
- Nominating Sam Clovis to serve as Chief Scientist for the United States Department of Agriculture. Clovis has no scientific background whatsoever, but says climate change is "junk science."
- Nominating Rep. Jim Bridenstine (R-Okla.), a climate science skeptic with no background in science or engineering, to head NASA. A member of the House Freedom Caucus, Bridenstine would be, if confirmed, the first politician to serve as NASA Administrator. He believes that we should be investigating climate change on Mars to "prove" that there is no human-driven climate change on Earth.
- And, even worse, issuing a new executive order that eliminates requirements for flood mitigation plans in all infrastructure projects.

Magical thinking, namely suppressing any mention of climate change and nominating climate change deniers to lead agencies with important environmental missions, is not a policy. Nor is willful ignorance an effective way to protect our lives, our health, and the Earth as a habitable world.

-- Jean Stewart

Chair, Earth and Environment Task Force

## Voting Against Debt

In September two Republican Members of the House of Representatives from Florida, Matt Gaetz and Ted Yoho, voted against federal assistance to victims of hurricane Irma in their home state. Huh?

The reason they gave was that the legislation also lifted the ceiling on the US debt, allowing the government to continue to function and government debt to increase. They wanted to make the point of their principled opposition to greater government debt, saying debt is "generational theft" as taxpayers will need to pay in the future for the relief enjoyed now.

Apart from the fact that shutting down parts of the government, even if briefly, has been shown to impose greater costs on the public than any savings, opposition to government debt ignores the potential public benefit of deficit spending, even if there is nearly full employment. If the government borrows money to build a road or school or aircraft carrier, it creates value in public goods such as access to work, smarter kids, or greater security. These public goods can be understood to yield greater benefit to society than the cost of the public debt. Society is better off than it would be otherwise.

Of course, wasteful public spending should be avoided. But the concern expressed by the Congressmen was not about waste but about the idea of a debt increase for any reason.

-- Warren Clark

Member, PPC

# The Democratic Party and the White, Working Class

Much has been made of the significance of the white working class vote in the 2016 presidential election. Since the New Deal the Democrats have been able to rely on this voting block—especially in the Industrial Midwest. Up to Election Day it still appeared that Hillary would carry their vote in Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania as Obama and practically every other Democratic presidential candidate had done. The vote was close, but close is not a win; and though there are a whole lot of other reasons why Trump won, the failure to deliver this voting block is listed at or near the top by most pundits.

So we Democrats are now dealing with what happened and why. How do we respond going forward? Do we write these folks off as a lost cause or do we try to change our message and our tactics to reclaim them and bring them back into the fold? My belief is that we lost the traditional-Democratic, white, working class vote for a lot of understandable reasons, that it would be wrong to write them off, and that we can get them back. Here is my take on what happened and what we can do about it.

## Who Are “Those People”?

The white, working class population is actually quite diverse depending on what part of the country they are from, their religion, what kind of jobs and education they have, and how they feel about the issue of race. I wrote a book called *Hard Living on Clay Street*, published in 1973 and still in print today, (with a new 2017 edition with an endorsement by Joan Williams on the cover, “Want to understand why Trump won the election? Read this book.”). The blue collar families I wrote about were largely rural migrants to the Washington, DC, area, fiercely independent, and somewhat alienated from mainstream politics. They struggled with making ends meet, alcohol addiction, various health issues, personal relationships, and simply getting by in an increasingly complex world. They were also proud, brutally honest, and aware that the deck was pretty much stacked against them. Though they lacked much, if any, education beyond high school, they were smart, had good survival skills, and were remarkably resilient. Though race was clearly an issue, I would not call them racists per se. As the saying goes, they were nuanced.

There is no doubt in my mind that almost everyone we got to know well, if they were still alive today (and no one is), would have voted for Trump in 2016. The reason is simple. They would be sending a message that they were not happy with how their lives were going and knew the hand they had been dealt was weak. ...

## Where To Go From Here

There are five things we Democrats need to do to recapture the white, working class vote that we failed to get in the 2016 election. We must change our attitude and how we look at “those people.” We must offer a message of hope and credibly demonstrate that we can deliver on it. We must vigorously and unrelentingly expose the sham and bait-and-switch policies of the Trump Administration. We must put money into the effort and boots on the ground in a grassroots effort to get our message across and get folks to the polls. And, finally, at every level we must recruit and select good, electable candidates that have empathy, vision, and charisma. ...

The good news is that the Democratic Party seems to have figured most of this out. The leadership is working on a new message focusing on jobs and the economy, seems to understand that grassroots organizing is now a priority and already has solicited a large number of good candidates at various levels. My hope is that we will also listen better to what the white, working class is telling us and address their needs better than we have done in the past.

Who knows what the future will hold? We do not yet know how the Mueller investigation will turn out or what will happen with the Korean nuclear showdown. It is not certain what legislation will actually pass or if Trump’s recent collaborations with Democratic leaders will change his direction.

What we do know is that the country is in crisis. The only way out of it is to change the cast of characters who got us into this mess and who are unable to get us out of it. This will take time, money, and effort. Using “dark money” and clever tactics, Republicans got the ship of state to change direction. The result has been a disaster. Democrats must now rise to the challenge and beat them at their own game of organizing at the grassroots level. Regaining the trust of the white, working class is part of the answer.

-- Joe Howell  
Chair, Task Force on Populism

(Note: The entire article, from which this portion is excerpted, can be found on our website.)