

# WNDC



# Political Dispatch

Newsletter | February 2018

## From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

---

As part of our top priority objective - winning in 2018 - the task forces of the Public Policy Committee have worked on writing campaign messages. They are in a format intended to be suitable to use and distribute in grassroots campaigns anywhere and every where. They are intended to deliver a positive Democratic message on the issues that matter to the American voter. Four campaign messages were presented to the WNDC Board of Governors for approval in January. The issues were Education, Health Care, The Environment, and Foreign Policy. Campaign messages on other subjects will follow. Below is our message on Health Care, written by the Health Policy Task Force.

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

### Democratic Positions on Health Care

We Democrats believe that all persons are created equal and that all persons' lives are of equal value. We believe that all Americans have the right to science-based health care regardless of race, sex, skin color, religion, gender identity, or ability to pay. We believe all Americans deserve universal health care that encompasses all life stages from birth to death.

Therefore, we will fight for:

- Full funding of all Medicaid payment mechanisms for present health services and growth to accommodate population increases
  - Reauthorization and funding of CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program)
  - Continued structural remedies to protect and expand the ACA (Affordable Care Act) also known as "Obamacare"
  - Full Funding of Medicare for all Americans from age 62 onward
  - Continued confidentiality and privacy of the Doctor-Patient relationship
  - Comprehensive health care for all women, which includes pregnancy and birthing care, family planning, abortion services, and full funding for Planned Parenthood
  - Protection of the *professional obligations* of all health care providers to render *urgent* care to every patient in need regardless of personal concerns
  - Decent affordable housing that is warm and dry and free of dust, mold, vermin, lead, or other toxins
  - Increased funding and improved staffing for the VA (Veteran's Administration), which cares for our veterans and their families
  - Full funding for science-based research through the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) into the full range of causes of diseases and deaths, including those injuries and deaths related to guns and opioid overdoses.
-

## This Black History Month, A Focus on Her-Story

Studies are increasingly showing that people of color are at greater risk for pregnancy complications and preterm labor – a fact we have known to be anecdotally true for a long time. Even between women of the same socioeconomic status, education level, and geographic location, childbirth outcomes are statistically worse if the birthing person\* is a person of color (Gallardo, 2017).

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has been shown to reduce racial health disparities by providing coverage to pregnant persons not eligible for Medicaid and their children (Wagnerman & Brooks, 2017). The series of lapses in CHIP funding is a threat to the progress that has been made in reducing racial health disparities.

National Public Radio's partnership with ProPublica has shone light on and examined the high maternal mortality rates in the United States.

Organizations like Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere (ROSE) and Black Mamas Matter have been formed to raise awareness around maternal health disparities in communities of color and to support interventions to reduce those disparities. The first annual Black Maternal Health Week is April 11-17, 2018; follow the conversation and elevate the voices and needs of pregnant people of color using #BlackMaternalHealthWeek and #BlackMHWeek2018. As Democrats, we believe that the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) should continue to be fully funded through the Federal budget.

-- Jenna Oien, member of the Health Policy Task Force

Thanks to Claudia Booker of Birthing Hands DC for her contributions to this article.

*\*"Birthing person" is used here in place of "birthing woman" in order to be inclusive of transfolk and non-gender conforming persons – populations that also experience disproportionately poor birth outcomes.*

Gallardo, A. (2017, December 8). Black women disproportionately suffer complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Let's talk about it. ProPublica.

Wagnerman, K., & Brooks, T. (2017, April 26). Medicaid and CHIP help address racial/ethnic disparities in children's health. Say Ahhh! Blog.

## The False Missile Alert; The Real Threat to America

When a Hawaii Emergency Management Systems official discovered that a missile alert received in Hawaii was a mistake (a lower level operative pushed the "Missile Alert" instead of the "Test Missile Alert" button (!!)), a warning of missile threat was sent to cell phones, televisions, and radios on Hawaii. President Trump was informed. Officials around Trump would have known no missile threat was detected (so no big deal, right?). The first Trump statement on the false alert was that this was a state matter (!!). The gap between the (false) alert and the retraction was 38 minutes (!!!). Emergency alerts are described (see *Washington Post*, 1/15) as a "partnership" between the Federal Communications Commission, the wireless industry, and the Federal Emergency Management Administration (tentatively said to be "taking the lead"). What worsened the situation, according to the report, was that "THERE WAS NO SYSTEM FOR CORRECTING THE ERROR." The state agency has standing permission to send out an alert but not to send out a subsequent false alarm alert (!!!!).

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

### Ongoing Feature:

## Trump Governs in Darkness

### Outrage among Mental Health Professionals on Suspension of Federal Registry of Therapeutic Programs Evaluated as Scientifically Sound

Launched in 1997, the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) offers a database of programs evaluated by an independent contractor for professionals and community groups to find effective interventions for treating and preventing mental illness. It has been terminated with no successor entity operating to take its place. As the website has been shut down, 90 new programs that have been assessed are not available to the public. The president of the Association for Child and Adolescent Counseling called NREPP "an impartial and nonpartisan trustworthy source." The successor organization that is intended to replace NREPP is an entity known as The Policy Lab. Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) finds this change of the 1997 Drug Free Communities Act requirement for federal certification of the effectiveness of programs a cause of concern. Others are concerned that the focus in the future will be on the seriously mentally ill and not on prevention. According to a *Washington Post* article (1/12/18), the CEO of the Children's Mental Health Network said he is not getting answers on what in the future will be considered "evidence-based" strategies.

# Look Back on 2017: Two Takes

## 1. From “10 of the Best Theories about Donald Trump,” by Andrew O’Hehir/*Salon*

(*Alternet.org*, December 30, 2017)

“Trump epitomizes the ugly but unavoidable fact that a large chunk of the American population is entirely disconnected from the values on which the republic was founded, or views them as sanctimonious bullshit mouthed by hypocrites, roughly the way Soviet citizens of the 1970s viewed the promise of a stateless society of universal plenty and equality. Trump’s fans love him for speaking truth to power, the truth in this instance being that American life has no point beyond self-aggrandizement, self-indulgence and spectacle. This problem has been evident for years, but we’ve all been pretending it isn’t there. We can’t do that anymore; in this and in so many other things, our Dear Leader has shown us the way.”

**ON THE OTHER HAND -**

## 2. Comment on “In Rural Iowa, a Future Rests on Immigration,” by Patricia Cohen

(*New York Times*, May 29, 2017)

In Iowa fierce global competition, agriculture automation, and plant closures have left many towns struggling for survival. However, Storm Lake, Iowa, unlike neighboring towns, is growing. It has absorbed successive waves of immigrants who have filled jobs at pork, egg, and turkey plants and are spending money at local businesses and, yes, also setting up local businesses. And, after decades, local residents are moving away from negative, racist attitudes and realize they are all in a community together. One of the local residents acknowledges that it wasn’t the arrival of foreign workers that drove down wages but strongly anti-union plant owners. With changes in plant owners, eventually one, Tyson’s Foods, began offering a better wage (\$15), which opened the way for a Laotian refugee plant worker to advance to management, as an overseer of 300 workers, and into Storm Lake’s upper middle class. At present a local newspaperman, interviewing the *Times* reporter, can leap up from his seat to find a story in his paper on an El Salvadoran scholarship college student, who has come back to Storm Lake to start a house painting business. “Those kids are our future,” he said.

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

## Republicans Found a Way to be an Effective Political Force at the State Level - Democrats Can Too

- ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), formed in 1973, brings state legislators together with private sector representatives to promote free markets and limited government. It does so primarily by offering models of legislation for introduction in state legislatures on a range of conservative issues.
- This includes questioning the accuracy and importance of climate change. For example, ALEC has undertaken efforts to complicate the ability of homeowners to install solar panels in their homes and to forestall various EPA emissions regulations.
- Main members are state legislators, but also 100 alumni governors and Members of Congress (only one a Democrat). National level Republican policy makers frequently turn to ALEC for advice.
- ALEC takes up emotional issues such as “stand your ground,” particularly around crime and guns.\* Choosing such hot button issues guarantees these issues will get on the policy agenda. Additionally, by pursuing the same issues at the same time in all fifty states, ALEC is normalizing its policy ideas, making them commonplace and mainstream. In this way it is helping to move the political center of the U.S. to the right, thereby controlling the range of issues and solutions that the American public and policymakers consider.
- ALEC also is setting the policy agenda by working to influence whose voice gets heard. For example, ALEC is a driving force behind the spate of voter ID laws that effectively disenfranchise poor people and minorities, and campaign finance laws that disproportionately favor the wealthy.
- Part of ALEC’s strategy is to target policymakers, not the public, and to do so at the state, rather than federal, level. Tackling these issues at the state level allows ALEC to inject itself directly into lawmaking and to do so with less scrutiny than exists at the federal level. Drafting legislation is a complex process that requires problem-solving skills, political acumen, and legal language. State legislators often have little experience and few staff or other resources. They often are happy for the introduction-ready bills provided by ALEC. Virginia alone has adopted nearly 50 such bills with wording almost exactly as suggested by ALEC.

-- Melinda Burrell, Chair, Task Force on Elections and Grassroots Campaigning

\*Note: The WNDC led in denunciation of ALEC and “Stand Your Ground” at the time of the shooting of Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012.

## Public Policy Committee Breakfast on the Virginia and Alabama Elections

December 15 the Public Policy Committee hosted a breakfast discussion on lessons to be drawn from the Virginia and Alabama elections. The goal was to help the WNDC put together positive Democratic Party policy positions for use in grassroots campaign messaging in 2018. The positions express the “community values” we share as Democrats. Leading the discussion was Joe Howell, PPC Task Force chair on Populism. Our findings and recommendations are as follows:

### The Virginia and Alabama Elections

The PPC was heartened by the results of both elections, which we believe illustrate the weakness of Trump and his agenda and the vulnerability of Republicans in 2018. Key lessons learned:

- Strong center-left Democratic candidates with character and decency can win in purple and even deep red states when the Republican candidate is flawed.
- Voter turnout is key, especially among African American, other minority populations, and women. The grassroots, on-the-ground effort to get the Democratic base to the polls really paid off and was a decisive factor, especially in Alabama.
- Opportunities for broadening support for Democrats is stronger now than it has been in a long time due to the offensive behavior and incompetence of Trump. Large numbers of college educated, moderate Republican women and Independent voters living in suburban voting districts and Millennials voted for the Democratic candidate. A formula for success will be to broadcast a message that resonates with these populations to favor progressive candidates.
- While it is unlikely that Democrats will be able to make significant inroads with Trump’s base, we should not abandon the white working class and need to reach out to this voting block with policies that favor strong job creation and wage growth.

The policy issues discussed were used in crafting the positions presented to the WNDC Board of Governors, one of which is highlighted in this Political Dispatch.

-- Joe Howell, Chair, Populism Task Force

## Who lives, who dies, who decides, who pays?

In a continuing and disturbing trend of a Congress of majority upper-class white men deciding how those of lower socioeconomic status will make a living and go about their lives, there seems to be no end in sight to the ongoing assault on social welfare programs. In the first month of this new year, Congress granted new permission for states to impose work requirements on Medicaid recipients, plans to expand “conscience” protections for healthcare providers, and dwindling Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) funding – again. During the average month, the President of the United States spends \$3.6 million on personal travel to play golf (Kalmbacher, 2018); eleven months of the President’s golf fund could pay for CHIP coverage for all of the District of Columbia for a year (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017). It’s also one-tenth of the amount of state and local taxes paid by undocumented immigrants in Maryland in the same length of time (Gee, Gardner, Hill, & Wiehe, 2017). One month of the President’s personal travel expenses could pay for Medicaid coverage for 7,531 people that same month (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2014).

Putting aside the President’s golf habits, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act passed in December of 2017 will ultimately cost taxpayers between \$1.4 trillion and \$2.2 trillion and prioritizes tax breaks for large companies. While the bill was intended to allow for large companies to increase worker wages over time, some companies have chosen to offer one-time bonuses and reap the future benefits of their lower tax rates as profit to benefit the upper levels of management (Domonoske, 2018). The bill also eliminates the insurance mandate enacted by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010, of which an unintended consequence will be that pooled money for sicker patients is decreased and insurance premiums will be increased. There is no doubt that the policy changes mentioned here will be paid for not only with American tax dollars, but also with American lives.

The choices the American government is making at the moment are not prioritizing the needs of the people who are least able to make it on their own and are in the greatest need of social support. Such decisions will have a far-reaching and long-lasting impact on the health and well-being of the most vulnerable populations that are already experiencing great health inequity.

-- Jenna Oien, member of the Health Policy Task Force

*Domonoske, C. (2018, January 11). Walmart, citing new tax law, will raise starting wages; Also closes 63 Sam's Clubs. The Two-Way.*

*Gee, L. C., Gardner, M., Hill, M. E., & Wiehe, M. (2017). Undocumented Immigrants' State & Local Tax Contributions. Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy. Washington, DC: Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy.*

*Kalmbacher, C. (2018, January 1). Report: The American Public spent \$43 million last year so Trump could play golf. MSN News.*

*The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. (2014). Medicaid Spending per Enrollee (Full or Partial Benefit) . Retrieved from State Health Facts: Medicaid Spending per Enrollee (Full or Partial Benefit)*

*The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. (2017, June 23). Total CHIP Expenditures. Retrieved from State Health Facts: <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/total-chip-spending/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>*