

WNDC



Political Dispatch

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From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Statement from the PPC Chair

We have a momentous task ahead of us to protect and defend our democracy and our American values. As your chair, I will have as my highest priority winning the election of 2018. Unlike the President with his personalistic loyalties, we Democrats care for other Americans as our fellow men and women and will work for their well-being and happiness.

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

Let's Hear it for our Strong and Effective Democratic Leaders: "The Trump Administration is damaging America's leadership role in the world and threatening our national security"

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) spoke to a group of Democrats February 5. Most of his audience had served the US government, often in dangerous jobs, from diplomats to Peace Corps volunteers, all of immense value in strengthening US leadership to achieve economic development, peace, and democracy, avoiding the staggering financial costs of war and conflict. Now dollars are being taken away from economic development and given to the military.

Connolly, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, is worried that the Trump Administration has seriously degraded our nation's Foreign Service. You don't "Make America Great" by withdrawing from the Trans Pacific Partnership with its 40% of global GDP and 20% of global trade ("they are still drinking champagne in Beijing"), leaving the door open for China to profit in trade deals at our expense. America led the world on human rights standards and labor standards.

Because of us, Vietnam had to adopt those standards. There is no one else, Connolly said, who tries to live with a moral imperative.

The Iran Nuclear Deal we are standing back from took away a threat to our ally Israel. This is the most enormous retreat from the world since 1945. As the only country not in the Paris Climate Change Pact, "we are living in a delusional world." Connolly wants Democrats to forge a platform with a broad clear message. In his Fairfax County we have made good on that message. We are invested in public security and public education. We have created 600,000 jobs in Fairfax; and fewer than 45% of residents must commute to Washington.

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

Ongoing Feature:

Trump Governs in Darkness

Government Saves American Lives; Trump Threatens Them

The Trump Administration's drive to reduce regulations stopped a regulation to require testing engineers for sleep apnea. That was a measure designed to avoid in the future two train accidents in the NY metropolitan area, one of which resulted in the death of a passenger as well as multiple injuries and high costs. The withdrawal of the regulation "mystified" the Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board" (NYT, 2/7). But now.....

Trump Governs in the Light

Republican War on the Federal Government, Supportive Religious Doctrines

The Trump administration has released its infrastructure plan. Taken together, the Trump budget and infrastructure plan would cut existing highway and transportation funds and shift the cost burden onto states and localities, which means higher local and state taxes. In terms of highway construction, the Administration will rely heavily on tolls to fund its efforts, including new tolls on existing interstates. And there are plans to sell the National and Dulles airports and hand over local highways to states. The Republican governor of Maryland likes that last idea. He will fund maintenance from tolls income. On the other hand, the Virginia Finance Secretary Aubrey Layne said, "All I can see now is a federal obligation they're trying to push off. Where do we get the money from without a revenue source?" Trump's infrastructure plan would kill infrastructure jobs by cutting existing highway and public transportation funds. In fact, by one calculation, for every \$1 of proposed expenditure on infrastructure, the infrastructure scam and budget would cut \$1.69 in spending.

The ability to find sources of funding outside the federal government will be the most important yardstick for getting an infrastructure project selected by the federal government, accounting for 70% of the formula for choosing projects. How "the project will spur economic and social returns on investment" ranks at the bottom of the guidelines, at just 5%.

The plan calls for a massive investment in infrastructure, but the federal portion will cover only \$200 billion in direct federal spending -- paid for with cuts to other critical domestic programs like Medicare and Medicaid. According to reports, in DC, tuition aid and Metro subway maintenance programs are at risk.

Paired with his budget, the impacts of proposed cuts to the Highway Trust Fund at the state level would deepen regional inequality and political divisions across the country. Our infrastructure needs a real plan for revitalization -- not a scam intended to enrich the already wealthy.

For corporate polluters and Wall Street bankers, Trump's proposals would gut protections for clean air, clean water, and wildlife, harming our environment, and would encourage dangerous business practices. The Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act would all face massive changes that would weaken their ability to keep our planet clean and healthy. These are changes that 94% of Americans oppose.

Comment

If 94% of Americans oppose most of Trump's deal, why is it happening? Certainly the influence of big Republican donors must rank very high. I believe there is another factor that is not being looked at, and that is the influence of the religious far right. Did you know, or remember, that Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney had set up a universal health care system when he was Massachusetts governor that became the model for the ACA? Romney got by criticism from his party partly because of a doctrine called the "subsidiarity doctrine" in the Catholic Church. Under this doctrine, what is not OK at the federal level can be OK at the state level. As the Acton Institute (whose leader is a close friend of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos) says in its statement of principles: "The state should exercise this responsibility according to the principle of subsidiarity. This principle has two components. First, jurisdictionally broader institutions must refrain from usurping the proper functions that should be performed by the person and institutions more immediate to him. Second, jurisdictionally broader institutions should assist individual persons and institutions more immediate to the person only when the latter cannot fulfill their proper functions."

This doctrine is used to attack any role for the federal government as a social safety net. Another religious doctrine used for that purpose is the "Prosperity Gospel." My taxpayer dollars go into the hands of billionaires, some of them non-American citizens (\$35 billion of the Trump Tax Cut will go to non-American citizen coupon clippers). But that is OK by believers in the Prosperity Gospel, under which God has blessed those who do well. God wants billionaires to have 10 million times the income I have. Trump himself was a follower of Norman Vincent Peale, whose belief in the "Power of Positive Thinking" is perfectly congruent with these beliefs. Both the Subsidiarity Doctrine and the Prosperity Doctrine of course mean we aren't all equal. In fact, God has given us that evidence. Therefore, we do not have to be treated equally. Other religious fundamentalist beliefs say that giving aid to the poor goes against an obligation to see that there is no obstacle between believers and their God, including on the matter of whether the believer chooses in his relationship to donate to charity. According to those beliefs, the government must not interfere.

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

A greatly impaired man occupies the high office of President of the United States and attacks our Constitution. He calls individuals who refuse to clap for him "treasonous." Failure to clap for him -- or to wave a flag along Pennsylvania Avenue when he spends tens of millions of your taxpayer dollars for a roll-out of tanks honoring him -- not only is covered by our Constitution's guarantee of protection for free speech, but also is a sign and symbol of the freedom we enjoy because of our democratic institutions. America is not one person, however much Trump is working for that goal.

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

Trump SOTU Reveals Republican Plan to Privatize Everything

On January 30, 2018, the 45th president of the United States strode onto the congressional "stage" amid a scripted chorus of Republican senators, representatives, and cabinet officers. Though his actual speech had roughly the same number of words as State of the Union speeches in 1992 and 2006, it took him an extra half-hour to read it, mostly due to self-congratulatory applause and Republican standing ovations that occurred approximately every four words.

#45 represents the culmination of 70 years of right-wing Republican dreams of destroying public policies to protect the "Four Freedoms" of democracy begun under President Roosevelt in the 1940s. The right-wing assault on democracy has reached the legislative process; the recent GOP budget was passed by a Republican majority without hearings or public commentary and behind doors closed to Democrats. The limitation, shaming, and silencing of political dissent are the tenets of authoritarianism.

With breathtaking disregard for fiscal responsibility, we now have an enormous budget deficit resulting from unforgivable tax cuts for corporations -- both domestic and foreign -- and representatives building a caste system in the United States by removing the inherited wealth tax, fair wage enforcement for overtime pay, and safe working conditions. We know what the choreographed next steps will be. Republicans will take education, infrastructure, and land out of the public's hands. Republicans have planned to privatize public education (which will include religious indoctrination), privatize health care, and privatize public works such as road building, water resources, etc. Public lands will be raped and pillaged for oil and gas.

Next we will hear feigned outrage by Republicans for Republican engineered "deficit spending." Their solution to their self-inflicted deficits will be to abolish Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, and Social Security as we know it!

Part of the strategy to defeat democracy is to overwhelm the senses with anti-democratic proposals and legislation. Lincoln said it best: "My right to swing my fist ends where your nose begins," but to a bully like #45 this long cherished value is lost. #45 has reversed 300 years of "separation of church and state" by dictating that health care workers, teachers, police, and other public servants may withhold service to fellow Americans whose religion, skin color, country of origin, medical condition, immigration status, or sexuality might be offensive to them.

All Americans must recognize #45 and his Republican disciples' autocratic vision for America. Anyone who swears allegiance to a party or President instead of to country is wrong. Let's remember our Declaration of Independence states we are all created equal.

We Democrats must resist oppression by multinational corporatists, religious extremists, militarists, and their wealthy and well connected acolytes.

We must elect candidates at all levels of government who represent all of our fellow citizens. We must take back our country for ourselves, our neighbors, and future generations.

-- Karen Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force, and Mariellen Jewers, Member, PPC

The State of Reproductive Health Care and the Way Forward

Reproductive health service provision is under threat in areas where health departments depend on Planned Parenthood for performing routine tests and counseling on family planning. This is true in both rural and urban communities, though urban communities are more likely to have alternative service providers, whereas rural areas are more limited. In states like Ohio, Iowa, and Utah, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) would have to at least triple their contraceptive client caseloads to cover the number of clients that would no longer be able to receive care at Planned Parenthood (Hasstedt, 2017).

Such a scenario does not even begin to speak to the gap that would be left in breast and gynecological preventive care. Such services are essential, particularly for women of color: the American Cancer Society reports that black women are 20% (in Nevada) to 66% (in Louisiana) more likely to die from breast cancer than white women (DeSantis, Ma, Sauer, Newman, & Jemal, 2017). Adolescents are disproportionately affected by this diminished access to providers who counsel and prescribe contraceptive methods; while 4.7 million teens aged 15-19 report needing access to contraception, only 1 million were able to access it (Frost, Frohwirth, & Zolna, 2016). School-based health centers provide a great deal of information about sexual and reproductive health, but only a third are permitted by state regulations to provide contraception (Boonstra, 2015).

As Democrats, we support full federal funding of Planned Parenthood and recognize that many women depend on reproductive health services provided there. We also recognize the importance of school-based health centers that can provide contraception to the teens they serve, and provide far more than abstinence-based sexual health counseling.

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

Sources:

Boonstra, H. D. (2015). Meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents in school-based health centers. *Guttmacher Policy Review*, 18(1), 21-26.

DeSantis, C. E., Ma, J., Sauer, A. G., Newman, L. A., & Jemal, A. (2017, October 3). Breast cancer statistics, 2017, racial disparity in mortality by state. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*, 67(6), pp. 439-448.

Frost, J. J., Frohwirth, L. F., & Zolna, M. R. (2016). *Contraceptive needs and services, 2014 Update. Needs & Services 2014.*

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A Shout out for Good News!

Republicans Halted in Bid to Redraw Pennsylvania District Lines to Favor Republicans

Last month, the Supreme Court of the United States refused to hear a case brought by the Republican Party of Pennsylvania to overturn a lower court's decision that the state's congressional district lines must be redrawn due to partisan gerrymandering. The Supreme Court's decision means that the state must continue with the redrawing of district lines, keeping partisan gerrymandering out of it. This is the second time this year that partisan district lines have been overturned by the courts, with North Carolina's partisan map struck down in early January.

WNDC Campaign Messages

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 everywhere. 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 the Environment, written by the Earth and Environment Task Force.

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

Democratic Positions on the Environment

We Democrats believe in a livable world for us and our children. We believe that all Americans deserve clean air, clean water, and healthy soil. To that end, we urge our representatives at all levels of government to:

- Enact a carbon tax on fossil-fuel based energy. Use the revenue to reimburse middle- and lower-income Americans for their share of the energy tax, and to invest in clean energy sources.
- Provide all Americans with clean drinking water by removing lead and other toxins from municipal water supplies.
- Eliminate toxic waste from mining, drilling, and manufacturing, which pollute our rivers and streams, and drastically limit particulates in our air.
- Make it illegal for energy and chemical industry lobbyists to take key jobs in government agencies with environmental missions, e.g., EPA, Interior, Commerce, and USDA.
- Promote the restoration of the EPA's integrity by re-hiring and hiring reputable scientists.
- Establish grants for research and education on sustainable farming methods.
- Provide budgets and grants for disaster relief and resilience measures to minimize the dangerous effects of climate change. Stimulate the development of clean road, air, and sea transport.
- Re-establish strong fuel economy requirements for all vehicles.
- Stimulate wider availability of reasonably-priced electric vehicles.
- Recommit to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, working cooperatively and creatively with the countries of the world to achieve and exceed the Paris goals of carbon reduction.
- Recommit to providing aid to developing countries to mitigate and reduce the detrimental effects of climate change.
- Recognize that the greatest threat to the environment and all peoples remains the unrestricted proliferation of nuclear armaments.

Short Takes

Feeling Good about the Community Called America

On July 20, 1969, the National Space Agency's Apollo 11 landed on the moon with Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong poised to step out onto its surface. I watched the walk on the moon on television with my two small children. I heard the words, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." It was thrilling. I thought I put them there. It was my triumph. This was my country's action and the fulfillment of my President's, President Kennedy's, great vision. I am a voter, an active part of the American community. The President is accountable to me. His achievements are my achievements.

When Space X CEO Elon Musk launched his Falcon Heavy with his Tesla Car as a passenger, I was mildly interested but not excited. Of course, it is true space exploration is no longer new but, beyond that, in the world the billionaires are building I can and do admire great entrepreneurs but am only a spectator or consumer. I am not part of a community or part of an achievement. With low taxes on the very wealthy (the Tax Plan), I should claim a shred of credit for Falcon Heavy! 17 Intelligence Agencies Testify in Congress February 13: All agree Russia sees its 2016 efforts to influence our elections as a success and is targeting our 2018 elections with similar goals. The FBI Director Christopher Wray testified that the FBI is undertaking specific actions to counter Russian meddling but that President Trump has not specifically directed them to do so.

The Militarization of America

Defense Secretary John Mattis supports full scale "modernization" of American's military. This includes a nuclear weapon we would threaten to use to intimidate opponents and that is described as "low yield." As acknowledged in a February 7, 2018, *Washington Post* report, this "low yield" weapon, if used, would cause the amount of devastation that incinerated Hiroshima in the Second World War. A statement from the disarmament group "Ground Zero" said the US withdrew low yield nuclear weapons deployed during the Cold War, among other reasons, because of "their potential to spark a nuclear exchange."

The federal government is not only about the military. But the position of Trump supporters is that strengthening America through good health, good education, good wages, good transportation, and good housing should either be done by private charity or at lower levels of government.