

WNDC

Political Dispatch

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From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Stop Demonizing Government: The Story Continues

In the October Political Dispatch we carried an article entitled "Stop Demonizing Government." One example we highlighted was the experience in three towns north of Boston where gas mains exploded in a significant number of homes, driving thousands of residents out as fires raged. It turned out that the gas mains were installed by a company, Columbia Gas, whose parent company was NiSource in India. One month later more than 7,500 gas meters are still shut off, leaving residents without heat, hot water, or cooking gas. According to investigations by the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, minutes before the explosions the Columbia Gas monitoring center in Columbus, Ohio, received two high pressure alarms for the South Lawrence gas mains. The report places the blame squarely with the company. The work package did not account for the location of the sensing lines or require their relocation to ensure the regulators were sensing actual systems pressure. The Department is hiring an independent evaluator to examine the safety of the actual gas distribution and ordered Columbia Gas to stop work.

Comment

I want people hired by the Massachusetts Department of Public utilities monitoring, regulating, and installing gas lines. They will be accountable to individuals living in the area, who vote for the government that oversees that department. It is a question of both efficiency and safety. We cannot keep outsourcing essential services to private companies whose main motivation is profit.

And what about the story about a girl electrocuted in MGM National Harbor

Faulty wiring has been cited in the early investigation of a 6-year-old's electrocution at MGM National Harbor. That faulty installation, combined with other flaws in how wiring and the handrail were hooked up at the Maryland complex, enabled 120 volts of electricity to be jolted into the girl — 10 times the amount that should have been powering the handrail lighting, according to the early findings. The incident happened in June and the girl is still in the hospital.

The failures, investigators said, stem from "major" code violations that should not have passed the permitting and inspection process.

MGM National Harbor is now owned by MGM Resorts International, a far, far reach for investigators or regulators or the voters in Maryland.

And more

Or what about the story of bus drivers losing their pensions when they work for the new privatized DC Bus company, Circulator Bus. Circulator Bus is the DC bus system owned by a mega corporation headquartered in the UK. When Circulator Bus took over, bus drivers saw a decrease in wages. They also don't get the same pensions they got before.

Or the story that the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority wants to privatize the completion of the Silver Line Metro, explicitly to save money in canceled or reduced pensions for the union members building the line.

Think through this as a Trump supporter. Government is bad because "I don't want anyone to tell me what to do. Putting things in the private sector means leaving things to the individual, the kind of freedom I want. And the rich will have more to pay out, won't they?" Well, no. The rich corporate owners of Circulator Bus can well afford good wages and pensions but squeezing every last penny from workers is the name of their rich guy game, so they won't do it.

-- Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair, Public Policy and Political Action Committee

Finding Hope at the Border

As this Administration continues to devise ways to separate immigrant families seeking asylum in this country and thwarts their efforts to remain here, groups are organizing to combat this inhumane treatment. This past August I had the privilege to participate in a small delegation of volunteer attorneys going to Port Isabel Detention Center at the southern Texas border to provide legal assistance to asylum seekers detained at the Border. For one week, we empowered individuals to fight the injustices they faced and to fight for a life with their family in safety and freedom.

The delegation was organized by HIAS, an organization devoted to protecting refugees around the world. HIAS partnered with The South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (Pro Bar), located about 30 minutes from the detention center. We were nine in our delegation- five lawyers and four interpreters; seven women and two men. We spanned the generations from ages 22 -72, all sharing the same zeal to help those we were about to meet behind the locked doors of the detention center.

All our clients were men seeking asylum in this country. All had been separated abruptly from their children who were detained in other states. Most of these men were from Honduras, fleeing persecution by the drug cartel with no protection by the police. They had witnessed the murder of multiple family members and friends or had been directly threatened themselves.

Our clients knew where their children were detained and were able to speak to them by phone. Yet, there were no plans in place for their reunification. Instead, reunification appeared to be on hold pending our clients' release or deportation, if the children were to return with them.

All our clients faced the prospect of deportation unless they passed a "credible fear" interview with an asylum officer, convincing the officer that they were fleeing from persecution as a result of being a member of a targeted social group; and could not find safety anywhere in their home country.

This interview has high stakes for the asylum seeker- the chance for release in the United States pending a permanent asylum hearing, or deportation to a dangerous country with greater restrictions on seeking asylum in the United States in the future. Yet the detainees received no guidance from the US government regarding this interview. This is where we stepped in, helping clients prepare for the interview by identifying key facts to meet the legal tests, and appealing orders that had found no credible fear. Appeals were often based on the argument that our clients had been presented for interviews at times when they were under severe stress from separation from their children and were given no notice or explanation of the process.

The interview preparation and successful appeals brought hope and staying power to the detainees. On our last day a client hearing about another detainee's positive interview said that for the first time he had hope.

-- Ruthanne Miller, WNDC Member

Activism unleashed! Join the crucial Get Out the Vote activities at WNDC

The November 2018 midterm elections require effort like few others have. WNDC has engaged this campaign season with determination and strategy.

Here's a snapshot of what we're doing. Join us. Pick at least one thing from the list below to do, and to encourage friends and family to do as well. Don't wake up on Wednesday, November 7, and wish you'd done more.

- Check out the 45+ amazing candidates at democraticwoman.org/public-policy/gotv/gotv-candidate-watch whom WNDC is proudly supporting. All are talented, ethical leaders, but many are political newbies. Help them win now so we get our democracy back in the future.
- WNDC president Nuchhi Currier challenged WNDC members to raise or donate \$500 each for the elections. Read her letter at democraticwoman.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Oct-2018-Presidents-Letter.pdf and join your sister WNDC members in meeting the challenge. So far WNDC has raised close to \$40,000 for candidates and other election activities.
- Discover the WNDC one-stop shop for election information at democraticwoman.org/mobilize-4-midterms, including many e-tools for you to get active.
- Looking for in-person action to supplement your on-line work? Join the hundreds of people who have been phonebanking, postcarding, and now textbanking at WNDC every weeknight, particularly on Winning Wednesdays from 6-9 pm. See the list of events here: events.mobilizeamerica.io/wndc .
- Join the dozens of WNDC members who have contributed to the urgent, tax-deductible push by **Vote.org** to get out the college vote. Read more here: democraticwoman.org/public-policy/action-alerts/2018-2
- Worried about voter intimidation and suppression? Join the WNDC voter protection team. Read more here: democraticwoman.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Voter-Protection-Training.pdf

For this midterm election: Donate, Volunteer, and, of course, VOTE.

Heading into Election Day: Anger, Fear, and Determination

I'm angry. Actually, I may be more than that. I'm mad as Hell. No, damn it, I am viscerally nauseous all the time, and I can't take it anymore!

When PPC Chair Betsy Clark asked the task force chairs to write about the issues we cover and how they relate to the upcoming midterms for this issue of the Political Dispatch, I knew I couldn't just address sensible gun reform. There's just too much else that's been festering under my skin; to wit:

- It's NOT okay for this so-called President and his Secretary of State to provide cover for a gruesome murder of a US resident in the face of overwhelming evidence that directly implicates the regime of Saudi Arabia. This is nothing but a rubber stamp for mafia-style behavior and another example of accepting the word of another autocratic thug over our own intelligence. The *Washington Post* editorial on October 17 called for an independent international commission to determine the truth. "Until the full truth about Mr. Khashoggi is disclosed, U.S. businesses should shun the Saudi regime and Congress should block all military sales." In the meantime, 10 Democratic Senators sent a letter to the White House demanding information on all Trump family business ties to the Saudis. I won't hold my breath, though, as I doubt answers will be provided. And No, it is NOT okay for family financial interests to dictate foreign policy! As a matter of fact, it's extremely unethical for the Trump family to rob the U.S. Treasury to pad the family private fortunes, period! That's called Kleptocracy!
- It's not normal to constantly demean women by calling them "Horseface", "Pigs," or "Dogs." This behavior smacks of that of a prepubescent boy bully. What kind of adult acts this way? Only one acting like a vicious rabid animal himself, I proclaim!
- It's devious and evil to saddle the country with potentially historic deficits brought on by massive tax cuts for the very wealthy, only to then blame such deficits on safety net spending programs which help the middle class and poor. And if we don't change Congress, Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid will most certainly be slashed.
- It's outrageous to call female sexual assault survivors protesting a SCOTUS nominee "extreme dangerous mobs" yet consider it perfectly acceptable to encourage your pep rally attendees to "knock the crap out of" counter-protesters or to "punch them in the face!"
- In a Democracy, it is sick and twisted when one side goes to great lengths to prevent people from voting in certain states like North Dakota to suppress the native tribal vote or in Georgia to disenfranchise African American voters out of fear your party stands to lose if you don't. That citizens who want to participate in our democratic process are prevented from doing so is autocratic. It's called cheating and stealing, and we need to call it what it is!
- It's simply inhumane to treat fellow human beings fleeing violence in search of a safe haven like caged animals and to separate them from their families. As I stated in an earlier action alert, "Why is our nation intent on breaking immigrant hearts just because of their belief in the best of America, or sadly of what it used to be?"
- It's criminal that agencies are filled with political cronies -- corporate termites determined to eat away at the foundations of those entities. Further, it's unacceptable that there is rampant ethical misconduct by virtually every cabinet member under this regime, and now #45 just announced he is replacing the usual independent Inspector General at HUD with his own appointee! This is what dictators do!
- I am frightened and angry that ambassadorships remain vacant all over the world and our traditional allies have been alienated. Yes, I'm sick to my stomach of a so-called President who lies constantly, who delights in mocking and belittling his opponents, even as he embraces dictators and despots; who dismantles environmental protections even as scientists sound an increasingly urgent alarm about climate change. Science is not about belief -- it's about evidence, damn it!

This monster is impulsive, cruel, and crass. His bottomless vulgarity, abysmal ignorance, and reckless policies are dooming us and sending the wrong signal to our children and grandchildren. Tragically, he doesn't understand the job and he doesn't care to learn, and as a malignant narcissist he's mentally unfit for office. Under the Constitution it's the job of elected legislative branch officials to provide checks and balances on this Executive Branch run amok. The ones currently in power have refused to do so. We have to change that.

I am petrified of what I see as creeping fascism. Republican op-ed columnist for the *Washington Post* Michael Gerson doesn't think we are there yet, but concedes the danger is indeed present, particularly the "legitimacy of fascist modes of thought in the Republican Party." He wrote today (October 19, 2018) that one specific event could quickly "heighten" this danger -- that Republicans are able to somehow keep control of both the House and Senate, leaving #45 unchecked. He warns that the "boor, the bluffer, the bully would be a political colossus. Then the language of fascism might become less theoretical. Then alarmism would be realism."

That fear alone is enough to shift my GOTV activities into high gear these last days before the election.

Yes, I'm angry and scared to death -- but I'm also super determined because...

On November 6, I want to repudiate -- not validate!

Let's Get Out the Damn Vote, Ya'!!!

--Shelly Livingston, Vice Chair, Committee on Public Policy and Political Action, and Acting Chair, Task Force to Prevent Gun Violence

Obama Clean Power Plan erased by fake "Clean Energy Rule"

Just because the dreadful Scott Pruitt is finally gone from 45's EPA doesn't mean that the environment is any safer. Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler is a former lobbyist for the coal industry and was a staffer for climate change denier Senator James Inhofe (R-OK). On August 21, Wheeler's EPA proposed the "Affordable Clean Energy" (ACE) Rule, designed to provide \$400 Million annual reduction in the "compliance burden" on energy producers by giving states great flexibility in setting pollution standards, effectively ending Obama's forward-looking Clean Power Plan.

The Sierra Club says that ACE would not only produce no climate benefits by weakening limits on carbon emissions, but in prolonging the lives of coal-fired plants, would result in worsening public health problems. This is because coal-burning plants emit a variety of pollutants into the atmosphere, such as sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, ozone, and particulate matter (soot). Coal ash holding ponds with concentrated toxins (arsenic, lead, mercury) are subject to leaks and spills into ground water and rivers, especially during the increasing number of flooding events.

States would no longer be limited by federal requirements on power plants for carbon reduction or controls on pollutants. "By the EPA's own calculations, that increase in pollution would cause up to 1,400 premature deaths each year." There would be increases in lung diseases and heavy metal poisoning, in addition to the many health harms from climate change itself "that doctors are already seeing among their patients."

Calling such a plan "affordable" and "clean" is more of 45's trickery. Calling it "affordable" to hang onto coal-burning power plants instead of moving to less-expensive energy sources, and calling plants that generate toxins and soot "clean," are smoke screens to hide increasing and very expensive public health and environmental damage, just to provide small-bore savings for the fossil fuel industry.

But wait, there's more — a deluge of recent proposals and campaigns designed to shut down efforts for a cleaner earth:

- introducing proposals to weaken the way radiation exposure is regulated, under the incredible claim that some radiation exposure is actually good for us, like sunlight ;
- introducing a similar proposal with similar laughable rationale to allow more exposure to mercury;
- allowing continued use of hazardous chemicals like chlorpyrifos, a neurotoxic pesticide that damages brain development in children;
- contesting a court decision to ban Monsanto's infamous weed killer glyphosate, linked to cancer;
- delaying and suppressing studies on the health effects of non-stick PFAS chemicals and formaldehyde;
- taking two extreme steps in one week to roll back commonsense safeguards against methane leaks from oil and gas extraction (methane is a greenhouse gas much more powerful than carbon dioxide.)
- proposing a rollback of regulations designed to stop leakage of refrigerant gases (hydrofluorocarbons, or HCLs), another very potent group of greenhouse gases.
- freezing the current fuel economy standards on vehicles, thereby favoring more gas guzzlers on the road, another tactic—this one well publicized—to benefit corporations while increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Last but not least is 45's nomination to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) of "a far-right coal hack, Bernard McNamee, as part of [45's] long range plan to prop up the dying dinosaur that is coal." McNamee also has been very active in denying the reality of climate change. FERC has been a nonpartisan agency that regulates the transmission and sale of electricity and natural gas in interstate commerce, along with the transportation of oil between states. With McNamee's appointment, FERC will now become "a partisan arm of the GOP's war on a more sustainable future."

We must fight back against this storm of attacks on our health and the health of our planet: submit comments to proposed regulatory rollbacks, testify at hearings, and support candidates committed to defend our earth.

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

