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From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Trump Poison Seeps into America

Democrats scored a major win in the midterm elections. Real celebration can start when they assume power in the House and legislate and perform their legislative oversight functions. Perhaps most important will be their leadership's visibility as individuals. They will be anti-Trump models in the House, constantly reminding Americans of the importance of ethical character. This election did not push back hard enough on the Trump rot. It is still okay to praise people for being "smart" when they use a strategy that relies on open lying.

The winner of the Florida Senate Race, Rick Scott, referencing "unethical liberals," announced that there had been fraud in counting the ballots in Broward County in Florida. His own election officials could site no accusations of fraud that they had received or any reason to believe that there had been fraud. Scott was guilty of two unethical acts: Making an un-substantiated accusation of fraud for political reasons, and using denigrating slurs of amorality to apply to large percentages of the American resident in Florida. It wasn't quite as broad an insult as Trump calling the whole Democratic Party an "evil mob," but it was cut from the same cloth.

In this moment we are seeing on our televisions what amounts to constant pressure on the Democrats not to go "too far" now that they have taken back the House. There is almost an assumption that they should limit what they say and do to in trying to solve problems in a bipartisan manner. Indeed, everybody is agreed that there is the need for infrastructure funding so there are definitely areas where this House should be ready to pursue a bipartisan solution. This does not mean that the Democrats all of a sudden have to become weak. Certainly they can push back at the kind of rhetoric that they are being subjected to. There is no reason that they can't lead into some statement by reminding audiences that it is unacceptable to accuse millions of individuals of being "unethical," or engaged in fraud when there is no substantiation for it. As we move into this new era Democrats should resist pressure to be put on the defensive. They should come into every interview with big smiles on their faces and talk about all the positive things in the House now that they have the majority.

Michigan's Representative Debbie Dingell was asked in an interview about subpoenaing President Trump's tax returns. She did not answer that question but immediately started talking about a "positive and bipartisan" agenda, justifying her approach by saying she was only going to be interested in what the American public wanted. Clearly avoiding divisiveness entailed not subpoenaing Trump's tax returns and was justified by a reference to American's desires. This approach sounds good and politically smart. However, Americans don't know very much about what Trump has done and if they find out that he has broken the law and politicians like Dingle say that we should "move on" that might become conventional wisdom. We should say that moving on is not the right thing to do because, among other things, it would violate the US Constitution. America needs to have pride in its democracy and in democratic institutions, so don't "move on."

The incoming Congress should definitely investigate an issue no one has mentioned: how could it be correct for American taxpayers, including members of the Democratic Party - the "evil mob" taxpayers - to pay for Trump campaign trips, which have had nothing to do with fulfilling his job as President of the United States. It is like any business dealing for personal gain he would have done in the past. It is certain that he sees the presidency as a way of further enriching himself in terms of money. And it is okay for me to pay him for enriching himself?

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

“Really Smart” to Lie

Brian Y. Silber, a lawyer, went through an exhaustive manual recount this summer when a Broward County judge he represented seemed to have lost on Election Day — only to wake up the next morning to find that he had taken the lead. It took two days to get a new result, he said, and that was with about a quarter of the number of ballots that now must be reviewed.

“I would be shocked, really shocked, if there was evidence of fraud, conspiracy, anything illegal or evil,” Mr. Silber said. “What I genuinely believe is that elections officials, for whatever reason, are not getting it done on time. That’s a combination of poor management, underfunding and understaffing.”

The problem has been going on for years, he said.

He said Republicans had a savvy — albeit misleading — strategy to convince supporters in advance that any loss would be attributable to misdeeds by Democrats.

“It’s really smart on the G.O.P.’s part,” Mr. Silber said. “They know there is no evidence of fraud.”

In talking about how really smart the GOP has been to lie like Trump or Scott in his accusation of fraud is to aid and abet the destruction of our democratic institutions to make way for autocratic institutions.

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

Trump Administration Wants to Withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

*For Man's been endowed with a mushroom-shaped cloud
And we can be certain that some lovely day
Someone will set the spark off...and we will all be blown away
Tom Lehrer – They're Rioting in Africa*

On October 20, 2018, President Donald Trump announced that his administration planned on withdrawing from the INF Treaty, which was signed by President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev (USSR) on December 8, 1987. The Senate ratified it a year later.

The Trump Administration, as did the Obama Administration, has accused Russia of violating the Treaty. According to experts, Russia has tested and deployed a ground-launched cruise missile of intermediate range, although Russian officials repeatedly deny that; instead they assert the US has violated the treaty.

When speaking with reporters, Trump said, “Russia has violated the agreement. They’ve been violating it for many years. I don’t know why President Obama didn’t negotiate or pull out.”

Some experts support Trump’s move, stating that when the INF Treaty was signed, the supply of intermediate-range missile was limited to the U.S., Soviet Union, and European NATO members. However, since that time, new powers, for example China, which didn’t sign the Treaty, have developed and tested intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles.

Others have criticized the way Trump has handled the INF withdrawal. It sends a signal of “unilateralism to the rest of the world and that undermines trust in the U.S. commitment to treaties.” Jim Miller, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy during the Obama Administration, said that “the rollout of this decision put the U.S. in the position of being the one that will have killed the treaty, and that will be detrimental to our ability to work not just with Russia or China, but our allies as well, and it will be detrimental to our ability to sustain the New START Treaty, which is even more in the U.S. interest than the INF treaty.”

Some pundits think Trump’s threat may be a negotiating tool to get the Russians to comply with the INF Treaty. And NATO seems to support a tougher stance against Russia on INF compliance.

Yet, a US withdrawal from the INF would constitute another retreat from international institutions, which might undermine other longstanding international arms control regimes, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and encourage other countries to pull out and take care of themselves.

The end of the INF Treaty will make the world less safe, which is why the US should work with its allies to save it.

--Alyn Hadar, Chair, Task Force on Foreign Policy

Clapper Weighs in on Trump's International Missteps

Report

James Clapper, former US Director of National Intelligence appointed by Pres. Barack Obama, former director of Defense Intelligence and author of the recently published book, *Facts and Fears*, spoke to a luncheon at the WNDU on November 8.

Clapper discussed a number of hot spots in US international relations, in particular giving Trump poor marks for North Korea where Trump "squandered an opportunity." According to Clapper, Trump didn't read the signs Kim Jung Il was sending that he needed to feel secure from attack and invasion and needed some action from us to give that reassurance. He felt he had made a big gesture in pulling any missiles out of his latest parade and that we should have understood the importance of the signal. The U.S., Clapper said, could have had a win-win if we had established an interest section in North Korea. Instead all Trump can talk about is sanctions. South Korea, on the other hand, sends exactly the right message to the North that all we want is a more benign relationship.

Clapper said that the President mis-characterized the Intelligence community briefing on Russian interference in the 2016 election: "We never said that Russian meddling had no impact." For Clapper, the Russian interference was uniquely disturbing.

Clapper made a strong case against attempts to privatize military intelligence and a case for robust USIA funding. He suggested, looking at his audience, that we "organize some sort of truth broker."

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

Paradigm Shift?

Despite initially seeming like a disappointment, the midterm results continue to grow in our favor. How much change actually occurred in these midterms? What kind of change is it? What will it take to create a real, lasting shift in our country? You be the judge, not only of the midterm results but of our way forward:

Our current electorate

- More than 110 million voters turned out on November 6, the highest midterm turnout in 50 years.
- 31% of 18-29-year-olds voted, up 10% from 2014, the highest in 25 years.
- 90% of African-Americans voted Democratic.
- 69% of Hispanic voters went Democratic (73% among Hispanic women), with about a quarter of them saying they were voting in a midterm for the first time. (Pew Research)
- 9 Congressional seats in districts with 10%+ Hispanic population flipped red to blue. (Pew Research)
- 49% of white women voted for Democratic candidates and 60% of white men voted for Republicans, creating an 11-point gender gap among white voters.
- More voters were purged from voter rolls between 2014 and 2016 (16 million) than between 2006 and 2008 (12 million).

Our future electorate

- Florida voted to restore voting rights to ex-felons, affecting up to 1.4 million voters; Maryland, Nevada, and Michigan are working towards laws that would enable same-day or automatic voter registration. Yet Arkansas and North Carolina are restricting voters through court- and other mandated ID measures.
- Four Democratic state Attorneys-General took over GOP-held positions: Colorado, Michigan, Nevada, Wisconsin.
- Democrats flipped GOP-held governorships in seven states, two of which are both battleground and very gerrymandered states (Wisconsin and Michigan)

Our issues and candidates

- In 5 of the 6 races in which gun safety groups invested the most money, the gun safety candidate won; however, overall 108 NRA-backed candidates won (the Trace)
- Washington voters tightened gun safety measures, including instituting a 21-year age threshold for purchase of firearms.
- Idaho, Utah, and Nebraska voted for Medicaid expansion... but Nebraska voted Democratic Senator Heidi Heitkamp out of office.
- Arkansas and Missouri passed ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage, improving the paychecks of 900,000 voters... but Missouri did not re-elect Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill.
- Massachusetts passed the first law prohibiting gender-based discrimination in public places, protecting transgender people.
- 255 women ran for office. Almost half of Democratic women won their races, and about a quarter of Republican women won theirs (Brookings Institution). Over 100 women now will enter Congress... but that's out of 535 seats.
- Over 50% of candidates endorsed by Obama and Biden won their races, and 66% of Sanders' picks. 28% of the candidates endorsed by Trump won their races.
- Newly elected officials are a list of firsts, some for the country and others for their state: first Native American women, first women of color to represent New England, first openly gay governor, first Muslim women, first Hispanic woman from Texas, and more.
- Down ballot races showed similar changes, such as the 17 black women judges elected in Harris County, TX.

--Melinda Burrell, Co-Chair, Task Force on Elections/GOTV

Congressional Wins and Citizen Activism: Optimism on Rise for Action on Common-sense Gun Reform

Almost all the candidates endorsed by leading gun reform advocacy groups were elected on November 6, with a few still to be determined, indicating a “cultural shift” away from the NRA and toward gun safety as a top electable issue. As a matter of fact, at least 15 Democratic House candidates proudly bearing their “F” ratings from the NRA defeated Republican candidates with “A” NRA ratings! (*Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2018) As the Giffords PAC proclaimed after the election, “The House majority is now in lockstep with the majority of the American people in the belief that our schools, our churches, our places of work, our streets should be safe from gun violence.” The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence said, “We have an opportunity to draft, pass, and implement life-saving legislation and keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals.”

Realistically, of course, the NRA isn’t going anywhere and will most likely try even harder to obstruct any attempts in the House to pass meaningful reform. As to the Senate, it has been reported that Republican Senator Pat Toomey from Pennsylvania is still interested in finding a path forward for universal background checks legislation, but “Obstructionist Mitch” will most assuredly refuse to consider any legislation passed by the House UNLESS somehow the pressure from the public and from House members is enough for Senators to reassess whether the price of thwarting progress is too high. Perhaps then there just might be a chance for cooperation. Whether or not that happens, one thing is certain: Democratic House members will want their Republican colleagues to go on record against a majority of voters in the country who favor common-sense gun safety reform legislation.

Meanwhile Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi promised after the latest mass shooting in California to move quickly to consider such gun legislation next year, suggesting universal background checks would be the first approach. Democrat Mike Thompson of California will be reappointed as Chair of the House Gun Violence Prevention Task Force and has already indicated that he will introduce legislation in the first weeks of the 116th Congress, mandating background checks on all gun sales. Likewise, Rep. Jerrold Nadler (NY), the incoming House Judiciary Committee Chair, stated he will work expeditiously to get this legislation reported out of committee.

Alas, we must never forget the vital role the student activists at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, has played in affecting this cultural shift away from the NRA and toward gun reform. And joining these student voices after the latest horrific mass slaughter of fellow human beings in Thousand Oaks, California, are thousands of physicians and other medical professionals, crying out with one voice that gun violence is indeed a national public-health crisis. After being admonished by the NRA to “stay in their own lane,” these health professionals began tweeting under the hashtags *#thisisourlane* and *#thisismylane*, sharing personal stories about desperately trying to piece bodies back together again after gun violence or having to tell hysterical family members that their loved one will never come home again. Here are two examples of these many tweets:

I am an experienced critical care nurse. I have had to hide blood & brain matter on stretchers from parents. I have had to wrap these damaged skulls with cling gauze to keep the brain matter from spilling out. This is the reality of gun violence.

As a rehab doc, let me mention lifetimes in wheelchairs with SCI, useless arms from brachial plexus destruction, colostomies from belly destruction and years of dependence with TBI.” (note: SCI: spinal cord injuries; TBI: traumatic brain injuries)

Our Task Force to Prevent Gun Violence stands with groups like the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence et al, student activists, and health professionals. We want to work with them so that together we ensure these elected and re-elected legislators will work to their fullest potential to make us all safer, in particular by expanding background checks; reinstating the assault weapons ban and ban of high-capacity magazines; and passing extreme risk protective laws (ERPO or “red flag” laws).

I have acted as chair of this task force off and on since December 14, 2012, when a deranged man with easy access to weapons from his home gunned down twenty innocent children and six adult educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. A year earlier, as Chair of the Public Policy Committee, we responded to the horrific events in Tucson, when Rep. Gabrielle Giffords at the time remained unconscious and in critical condition from an assassin’s semi-automatic gun rampage, which claimed the lives of six other innocent people and injured many more as they attended one of her many “Congress on the Corner” constituent events. These events have been followed by so many like them, yet our federal legislators have been too cowardly to act.

Finally, for the first time in such a long time, we have a powerful and positive path forward. Let us stay focused and not get lost along the way. Please contact me at sliving7@yahoo.com if you would like to get involved with our task force.

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