

WNDC

Political Dispatch



August 2020

From Ellen McGovern, Chair, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force

The GVP Task Force convenes a Zoom meeting on Thursday, August 13 at 5:30 pm.

SUMMERTIME AND GUNS—POP, POP IN URBAN AMERICA

COVID-19 continues, while gun violence never went away! The public and media just awakened, while neighborhoods and communities, from DC, Chicago, Atlanta, to LA, were in its midst. Many politicians, according to Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, attempt to blame this increase on Black Lives Matter protests and gun safety laws, but we know better. In fact, COVID-19 has exacerbated existing situations that contribute to skyrocketing gun violence in America, especially in the Black and Brown communities. All of this started before George Floyd's murder. Recent gun violence is a likely result of factors, such as lack of opportunity in these areas of disadvantage and ongoing economic crises; gun violence intervention programs experiencing horrific challenges and losing resources with an expanding workload; and crime trends always increasing during warm weather days of summer. Let's support these Black and Brown communities, not with more police, but with grassroots support.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

"Policing"—US House passed H.R. 7120, Justice in Policing Act (116th Congress, 2020): a bipartisan comprehensive policing reform bill. However, the US Senate did not have the votes to bring their streamlined bill to the floor. By the time you receive this newsletter, Congress will be back from its recess. We are hearing there will be a new push for action in the Senate. Republican Tim Scott (SC) is working with Democrats Kamala Harris (CA) and Cory Booker (NJ) on a workable bill with House members. Fingers crossed! (Policing and gun violence go hand in hand.)

VIRGINIA

What "historic" gains in Virginia this legislative cycle! However, the gun rights groups kept on pushing its far right agenda, and extremist groups still tried to block implementation of the "background checks" legislation in Virginia. But the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence could fortunately report that a Virginia judge denied the request of gun rights groups to overturn this legislation. We thank the state's Attorney General, Mark Herring, for his successful legal defense.

From Jane Elkin, Health Policy Task Force

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND HEALTH CARE

The pandemic has made abortion harder for women to access in some states, including Texas, since abortion was deemed not essential. The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) doesn't have to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in order to make it difficult for women to access birth control and abortion.

Continued on next page

Health Policy Task Force "Reproductive Rights and Health Care" continued

On July 8, SCOTUS ruled against the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive coverage mandate. Women employed by companies with religious or moral objections will no longer have access to FDA-approved birth control through their employer-sponsored health insurance. And this despite the National Women's Law Center report that increased access to birth control reduces abortion rates nationwide.

But, the news is not all bad: On June 20, SCOTUS struck down a Louisiana law that doctors performing abortions must have hospital admitting privileges. Dentists and dermatologists don't need admitting privileges.

The Turnaway Study: Ten Years, a Thousand Women, and the Consequences of Having—or Being Denied—an Abortion, a new book by Diana Green Foster, compares women who had an abortion after an unintended pregnancy with women who were denied an abortion because they missed the deadline. There were large differences in economic well-being and domestic violence over time between the two groups. Foster states, "There's more at stake than just women's bodily autonomy. Abortion is about a woman's chance of having a good life and the well-being of her future children."

From Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair, Human Rights and Democracy Task Force

FIGHTING THE IDEOLOGY OF INEQUALITY

If you don't believe that human beings are of equal spiritual value then you don't have to care whether they get treated equally in terms of the COVID pandemic. And since the premise of government safety net programs is equality, if you are as fanatically opposed to government as Trump and his officials are, then you have even less reason to care about whether people are being treated equally. Take a recent story in the *New York Times*, about tycoon Rupert Murdoch, recently retired in favor of his son from his Fox News and business enterprises. At the same time the Fox News was talking about the "coronavirus impeachment scam," Robert Murdoch was calling off his birthday party on the grounds of the risk of catching the virus.

Do not call this hypocrisy. If you don't feel connection with the people who will catch COVID because of the messages that your media empire sends out, then it doesn't matter what you do. Not only is there no "we are all equal in God's eyes," but quite the reverse: the people who will be taken away by the virus are inferior people, either people of color or the elderly. After all, it was Donald Trump who said that the virus really should be allowed to go through the population like a wave and if it took away disproportionately elderly people, then they should think of themselves as warriors in a war and happy to die for the better good.

Trump has responded to his C-suite friends in the meat-packing business by banning unions and lifting regulations, leaving workers ever more vulnerable. CEOs don't need help, so why aren't they instead raising the minimum wage? Some in the class of billionaire owners belong to religious fundamentalist groups. If their religious belief is that God has decided who is rich and who is poor, has God also decided that the rich should refuse the poor a living wage, and that God wants the rich to actively suppress others? This is the nadir of an inequality doctrine. Trump has made everything so much about himself—one person—that it is not easy to see the underlying ideology, which is against equality and not just pro brute force authoritarianism.

Human Rights and Democracy Task Force "Fighting the Ideology of Inequality" continued

The COVID crisis exacerbates this war against equality. Under COVID we are not all equally in danger. A large percentage of the deaths are absorbed by the elderly population, and instead of feeling that we should care for them, because they are of equal worth to us—our mothers, our grandfathers—we have basically accepted the Trump "let them go" argument. Trump is also happy to keep up a racist view that people of color are dying at a greater rate because of their own bad choices.

We must fight their lack of information on this strange age/proclivity aspect of COVID. A recent interviewer on MSNBC spoke with a 21-year-old Florida resident who came back from enjoying an evening in the bars because of the re-opening. As a result, everybody in the household was infected and his father was hospitalized. Obviously some people remain unaware of the difference between COVID and the flu. Information is important to us all!

From Karen Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force

WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO DECIDES, WHO PAYS

"The people in power right now are too comfortable with other people's deaths." Rev William Barber, Poor People's March

As we approach the sixth month of COVID-19, we are reminded of our other plague: systemic racism.

In mid-July the official count of cases per the Centers of Disease Control (CDC) was 3.5 million, which is admittedly low because there were hundreds of deaths in elder care centers not considered until a "whistleblower" in New Jersey complained to his local newspaper. Even now, many nursing homes do not "bother" doing COVID-19 tests on residents who have died. Following ethnicity is difficult because not every death is specifically listed as Black, LatinX, or Native American. But the general consensus is that Black Americans and LatinX people are twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as Whites. In New Mexico, specifically, half of all COVID-19 deaths were Native American.

It is no surprise that people of color are more likely to sicken and to die than Whites. They are more likely to face economic hardship, to work in industries that expose them to coronavirus, and to suffer from chronic health problems.

In western states with meat-packing plants, Senator Debbie Stabenow (MI) sought information re: compliance with OSHA recommendations for safer work places, but USDA officials had no information and she was not allowed to tour the facilities. Of 5 million meat plant workers, supposedly only 86 have died from COVID-19. Records seem sparse.

Many people remain resistant to wearing masks and social distancing. Texas is reported to have dozens of emergency refrigerator trucks as standby mortuary vehicles. All of these areas continue to have inadequate supplies of PPE.

In mid-July, the Trump administration chose a new route to deal with questions of new COVID-19 cases and deaths by shutting down reporting of these critical facts to the CDC. Instead, all of this data will go to Health and Human Services and will NOT be available to the public. The lack of PPE and the abundance of secrecy are hideous and cannot be allowed to continue. We must vow to call our Senators and Representatives and remind them that the CDC should continue as the site for disease data.



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