

WNDC



Political Dispatch

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From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair

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Building a Wall: A Distraction from Republican Goal of Privatization

Trump may have to find a new threat to use as leverage to get his way other than a shutdown. But “his way” should not be understood as “building a wall.” Trump and his surrounding team of “money men” want radical privatizing of our economy. It was almost a surprise that during the shutdown they did not get out to preach the gospel of privatization, as another way to pitch the destruction of government.

In evidence: On February 13 last year the *Washington Post* carried an article “Infrastructure Plan would sell National, Dulles airports.” The aim of the Administration’s plan was to cut infrastructure spending - the plan proposed a \$168 billion cut over 10 years - while promising improvements. In addition to selling Dulles and National, massive cuts in federal dollars would hit major US infrastructure such as the power transmission assets of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Southwestern Power Administration.

The infrastructure plan was released on the day before the *Post* story appeared. The Administration also reintroduced a separate plan that proposed to take the air traffic control system out of government hands, a plan that had been blocked in Congress the year before. Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said of the plan, “It is like a Hollywood facade...the lack of direct investment would leave out large parts of America.”

Administration top officials are ideologically privatizers, their goal mostly to get out of paying higher taxes. To prove anything more for their ideology they would have to be capable of self-reflection. And they are not. They themselves are proof that a business background is no vote for the ability to get things done for Americans in the nation and in its communities, They don’t understand why they should even be concerned about a broader community or anything that can’t be put into a narrow objective of profit and self-interest. They are so habituated to denigrating actions that bring diverse communities closer together they may actually believe and assume that public servants are losers and that government does nothing but pass regulations big business doesn’t like. They may actually believe their scripts to the point that they don’t try to find out what government does. Theirs is an ideology based on ignorance.

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

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Gun Violence: Newsworthy Actions We're Monitoring

Legislative Action

On February 6, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerry Nadler (D-NY) held the first hearing on gun safety legislation in nearly a decade. Entitled "Preventing Gun Violence: A Call to Action," the hearing was the first in a series of scheduled actions on H.R. 8, "The Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019." The day's proceedings captivated audiences on both sides of the issue, but particularly resonated with those of us who have for years advocated for common-sense gun reform. Markup of this legislation, plus H.R. 1112 (closes Charleston loophole of "delayed denial" where federally licensed dealers can sell guns if three business days pass without a verdict from the FBI) was held on February 13, the day before the February 14 anniversary of the Parkland, Florida, mass school shooting. As of the newsletter deadline, the goal to get the bill to the House floor by the end of February was still on course, while Senator Pat Toomey (R-PA) provided some optimism for passage in the Senate.

Our Task Force marked the Parkland one-year anniversary with a statement and physical sign in front of the Club that reads:

"We'll Never Forget Parkland"
February 14, 2018

SCOTUS to Hear Second Amendment Case

The Supreme Court recently announced that it will hear its first Second Amendment case since 2010. Entitled *New York State Rifle and Pistol Association Inc. v City of New York*, this lawsuit has the NRA and other plaintiffs taking on a New York City law that prohibits individuals in possession of a "premises" license from carrying guns in public spaces beyond their own property. In a recent article for Giffords Law Center, Kathleen Toohill explains that a "premises" license is the narrower of the two types of firearm licenses the city offers and that "while the law at issue applies only in New York, the case raises general questions about how Second Amendment cases are decided that could have a broader impact."

There has been widespread concern that this more conservative SCOTUS majority might start chipping away at common-sense gun regulations at the expense of public safety. Gifford's Hannah Shearer states that although any impact of a decision in this case will be limited, "this moment is a reminder to the Supreme Court that eroding strong laws is out of step with the overwhelming majority of the American public who support measures to make our communities safer."

It is expected that SCOTUS will hear the case in October and that a ruling will come down in 2020.

Website Launched to Help Disarm Domestic Violence

In November, a collaborative project by several gun violence prevention organizations culminated in the launch of a website called "Disarm Domestic Violence." This site provides useful and easy-to-understand information for victims regarding restraining order firearm removals without them having to conduct lengthy legal research on their own. To check out the "Disarm Domestic Violence" website, visit www.disarmdv.org.

Community Justice Action Fund Launches "Building for Us"

The Community Justice Action Fund recently launched "Building for Us," a five-year national advocacy campaign built from the grassroots to hold elected officials and community leaders accountable for ending gun violence in communities of color. Get involved by going to www.cjactionfund.org/campaigns.

We invite you to join our task force efforts. In this connection please contact either Shelly Livingston at sliving7@yahoo.com or Ellen McGovern at ellen.mcgovern@gmail.com. Our task is big, but each person can make a difference!

--Shelly Livingston and Ellen McGovern, Acting co-chairs, Task Force to Prevent Gun Violence



Bill on Ethics and Voting Rights: New House Voices Shake Things Up and Veterans Hold the Line

Strategically using their 2018 victory at the polls, Democrats moved to reaffirm American ethics and values. They did so by creating HR 1, a bill addressing voting rights, ethics, and campaign finance -- "the most sweeping, pro-democracy legislation in 50 years," noted Robert Weissman, the president of Public Citizen, at the press conference to introduce the bill. Among other actions, it would create a federal holiday for election day, expand early and mail-in voting, and restore rights to the formerly incarcerated.

The need for this legislation is stark, as House Oversight Committee Chairman Elijah Cummings (D-MD-07) noted in his opening statement at hearings on the bill. He recounted his shock in reading the judgment of the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals about a move by the 2016 North Carolina legislature. The legislature requested data on how different races used the various registration and voting methods offered by the state. Once in receipt of the information, they restricted voting in five different ways, all of which disproportionately affect African-Americans, in ways characterized by the 4th Circuit federal judges as targeting this population with surgical accuracy.

Senator McConnell characterized HR 1 as "a power grab." Given how the NC legislature arrived at restrictions on voting methods, who really is making the power grab?

It was precisely this point that newly elected Congresswoman Ayana Pressley (D-MA- 07) – one of the first African-American women elected to represent New England – made later in the hearing. "You got us again!" she offered as a rejoinder to Mr. McConnell as she proudly restated the intent of HR 1 to ensure enfranchisement, to "engage more voices and to empower them in this democracy."

A similar desire to rectify our "fundamentally broken" system was evident in another newly elected Member of Congress's questioning. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14) used a hypothetical situation of a "really, really bad person" who wanted ultimately to create laws and regulations that would increase his or her ability to make money. She was able to show that there essentially are no campaign finance or ethics rules preventing this situation – and did so in language that demystifies Congress and makes its workings accessible and relevant to ordinary Americans.

WNDC and other grassroots activists worked hard in 2018 to flip the House and fill it with hardworking, ethical, and strategic Members such as these. This hearing – both its content as well as its style – show the power of that work. We look forward to more such ethical oversight and accountability in government, and to supporting the Members of Congress who are leading this charge.

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

The Truth about Abortions

So conservatives are resuming their dishonest attacks on both abortions and all contraceptive methods in hopes of rallying their voters for 2020. Most recently, Trump and his clone mouthpieces have created hideous fictional scenarios about "late term abortions," in which abortions might occur "up until the time of delivery."

Some facts:

The customary period of pregnancy gestation (time in the womb) is around 40 weeks. 92 percent of all abortions occur before 14 weeks gestation. 6 percent of abortions occur before 20 weeks. Only 96 pregnancies were terminated after 20 weeks in the total area of the United States in 2016. Of those 96 pregnancies, 53 were associated with multiple severe, life threatening fetal malformations, and the remaining abortions were due to severe illness in the pregnant woman herself. Since normal pregnancy gestation is 40 weeks, the abortions occurring after 14 weeks are properly labeled "second trimester abortions," not "late term abortions." "Late term abortion" conjures up a live fetus that would be salvageable if not for the pregnant woman's cruelty or dimwittedness. But at 23 or 24 weeks gestation, even a normally developed fetus may well not survive, even with enormous medical support, and the fetuses who are aborted generally have multiple, severe birth defects. Additionally, the woman needs to be heavily sedated to allow the muscle relaxation necessary to avoid permanent damage to her uterus. As expected, the fetus is also sedated.

Women and their families must make heart wrenching decisions when found to be expecting a fetus with extensive and severe life threatening abnormalities. Or the woman herself may lose her life when diagnosed with heart failure, eclampsia, highly malignant cancer, kidney failure, or other severe illness as the pregnancy develops. No one outside the immediate family has the right to make judgments about whose life is most worthy.

And these new verbal attacks and rallies against abortion providers by religious zealots are extremely dangerous. Four American physicians have already been murdered and a dozen other abortion clinic employees have been killed during 1993, 1994, 2007, and 2015.

Everyone is welcome to their own beliefs. But our Constitution is supposed to protect us all from being forced to comply with other persons' religious dictates. The lies that the right wing are screaming about second trimester abortions may help get out their votes for 2020, but more medical personnel and patients may die as well.

Recommended reading: *Life's Work: A Moral Argument for Choice*, by Dr. Willie Parker. Now also a YouTube video of the same name.

--Karen J. Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force

Government Shutdown: Short- and Long-term Effects

Although we avoided another government shutdown, we remain painfully aware of the economic impact the month-long shutdown has had on the 800,000+ government workers, contractors, and their families. The fact that this all began on the heels of the Christmas holiday seemed particularly callous. What many thought would amount to a few extra days off work, instead stretched out to more than a month out of work. Faced with another possible shutdown, jobs that used to be regarded as stable, and for many an entree into the middle-class, are now associated with disdain and instability. Economic uncertainty for many has, sadly, become the new norm. The economic impact of shutdowns can be calculated in dollars and cents, but it is difficult to quantify the psychological impact these disruptions can have on the workers, their families, and, especially, their children.

We know that children thrive in an atmosphere where there is certainty and consistency. Being able to depend upon one's environment for comfort, shelter, and sustenance are the necessities that all children need. When families are faced with economic uncertainties, stress and anxiety may be the unfortunate outcomes. This stress and instability within the family can have a deleterious impact upon children, negatively affecting their sense of security and stability.

The negative impact of the government shutdown goes without question. However, what else might children be learning? Might they also learn about resilience? Resilience is defined "as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity" (American Psychological Association).

Organizations and neighbors have banded together to help their families. Their own families may have volunteered to assist other people in need. World-renowned chefs have cooked meals for their families, churches have been providing food and care packages, and day care centers have been trying to work out payment plans so families can pay their bills. Children may have observed that, despite difficult times, people can come together and provide one of the most powerful and protective measures to counteract stress and anxiety: a caring and supportive social system.

We hope that the government continues to remain open so that government workers, contractors, and their children can move forward working and leading productive and healthy lives.

--Dianna E. Washington, Ph.D, Chair, Education and Children's Issues Task Force

Women in the U.S. House of Representatives

1969:	1989:	2009:	2019:
6 Democrats 4 Republicans	16 Democrats 13 Republicans	56 Democrats 17 Republicans	89 Democrats 13 Republicans

Note: Data drawn from the *History of Women in the U.S. Congress*, Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University