

WNDC



Political Dispatch

Newsletter | April 2019

From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair

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Dizzying Pace of Activity Addressing Gun Violence on Capitol Hill

Honestly, there's been so much activity around the issue of common-sense gun reform on Capitol Hill the past month that our heads are literally (well almost) spinning. Let us try to break it down for you:

- Keeping its promise, the House passed two bills the end of February to rein in gun violence. On February 27, the House overwhelmingly passed H.R. 8, "The Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019," which will close the current loopholes in existing law by expanding background checks to include so-called "private sales" occurring at gun shows and over the internet. Currently, about 25% of gun sales involve no background check. The next day it debated and passed H.R. 1112, "The Enhanced Background Checks Act of 2019," which closes the Charleston loophole of "delayed denial" where federally licensed dealers can sell guns after three business days even if a background check has not yet been completed. It is through this loophole that the killer of nine people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, was able to obtain his firearm. This legislation extends the initial review period from three to ten business days.
- Attention now shifts to the Senate, where, in spite of McConnell's objections, pressure from all angles is being applied to force a debate in that body on S. 42, the companion bill to H.R. 8. As our WNDC Tweet stated, the House respected what 97% of Americans support instead of what the gun lobby demands of the politicians it controls. The Senate needs to do the same. In this connection, we invite you to join our task force and D.C. Moms Demand Action for Thursday evening "phone banking happy hours" from 6:30-8:30pm at WNDC. In addition, our task force plans to work with our WNDC National members, asking them to demand action from their Senators at in-state town hall meetings, and through phone calls, emails and letters.
- Sen. Lindsey Graham, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, announced his committee will hold a hearing on gun violence March 26. The hearing is expected to cover the "extreme risk protection" or "red flag" laws that many states have passed. "ERPO" laws give judges the power to temporarily keep guns away from those who show signs of harming either themselves or others and is the type of law that might have prevented the Parkland, Florida, massacre. We're also hoping that Democrats use this opportunity to address universal background checks legislation, pending in the Senate.

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- On March 13, both the House and Senate came together to introduce legislation addressing purchases of ammunition. Named after Jaime Guttenberg, one of 17 killed in Parkland, Florida, “Jaime’s Law” will require universal background checks for ammunitions sales, with some select exceptions. It’s time to close the #AmmoLoophole!
- On March 7, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held a hearing to address the public health emergency of gun violence, specifically the ability of the CDC to conduct research. Chairwoman DeLauro had this to say: “It is time we support public research of gun violence too. We did until the Dickey Amendment in the 1990’s. It did not ban the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from researching. However, it had a chilling result, severely discouraging it.” In this connection, the WNDP Board is expected to approve our request to have the Club sign on to a large coalition letter urging Congress to appropriate \$50 million in the FY 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies bill specifically for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health to research gun violence. The country needs appropriate and evidence-based solutions, and this can only happen when there is adequately-funded research.

-- Shelly Livingston and Ellen McGovern, Co-Chairs, Task Force to Prevent Gun Violence

Teacher Strikes: Round 2

The first quarter of 2019 has been marked by several major city teacher strikes. Just as in 2018, teachers, students, and their supporters have taken to the picket line to strike against a variety of issues pertinent to their school systems across the nation.

In 2018, the Labor Department reports that 485,200 workers were involved in “major work stoppage.” A large number of those strikers (373,000) were teachers! Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, reflects on the differences between last year and this year: The strikes in 2018 tended to center on reduced school funding and low teacher pay. This year, there is more of an effort to “defend public education” and push back on initiatives that attempt to derail the public school system.

In January, teachers in Los Angeles went on a week-long strike not only fighting for salary increases and reduced class size but also demanding a moratorium on new charter schools.

In Denver, teachers went on strike in opposition to a pay-for-performance bonus system that purports to increase teacher pay based on student performance. Although voters had endorsed this system years ago and money was allocated to it, teachers now find the system too cumbersome and feel there is a lack of transparency with their pay year-to-year.

Teachers in West Virginia took to the streets again in 2019 to protest a bill that would bring charter schools to their state. In addition, this bill would have authorized vouchers, an educational savings account, for families to use for private schools. The teachers and their union are vehemently opposed to these initiatives and remained on strike until the lawmakers adjourned, effectively killing the bill.

Maryland Teachers March for Increased Funding

Closer to home, thousands of teachers and students descended on Annapolis, Maryland, for the “March for Our Schools” rally in an effort to convince lawmakers to increase funding for education. A bill introduced in the House of Delegates asks for one billion dollars over the next two years to fund many of the recommendations set forth in the Kirwan Commission, a report that looked at improving Maryland schools by increasing teacher salaries and providing free, full-day pre-kindergarten programs to low income families.

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

SHAME ON OHIO for Stealing Title X Funding from Planned Parenthood Clinics

The Supreme Court of Ohio has just agreed with the perpetration of a cruel political stunt against working class and poorer women and their families. The diversion of Title X dollars from Planned Parenthood Clinics to Christian “faith based” clinics under the guise of preventing abortions is religious and classist bullying. Far right conservatives also will be fulfilling another long-time desire, which is to repurpose that Title X taxpayer money to private Christian “faith based” clinics.

At a national level Planned Parenthood provides medically sound and evidence-based gynecologic and STD care for 41 percent of working class and poorer women (and some men). Existing community clinics are already understaffed and too few in number, so many women will be forced to omit standard gynecologic and STD care. Many gynecologic cancers will go undetected and STD’s, including HIV, will spread.

Enter “faith based” gynecologic clinics/pregnancy counselling centers, which will expand with the infusion of the “stolen” Title X taxpayer monies.

The “faith based pregnancy counseling” that occurs discusses only parenthood and adoption. If the woman asks about abortion, she will be given frightening false information such as: abortions increase the risk of breast cancer, abortions cause severe psychologic problems, abortions lead to drug and alcohol abuse, and abortions cause sterility.

Additionally, “faith based” clinics mandate “Natural Family Planning” (AKA “rhythm,” “calendar method, pH testing,” etc.) as the only acceptable method of preventing pregnancy. NFP is the least effective contraceptive method, with a failure rate of over 50 percent; obviously not the best way to prevent unplanned pregnancies and thus not the best way to prevent abortions. Medically accurate contraceptive counselling must include NFP plus the full range of all other safe and effective methods to prevent unplanned pregnancies.

“Faith based clinics” should not qualify for public funding because the medical information provided to their patients is not accurate and does not reflect the medical standards set by ACOG (the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology). Most Americans would not allow taxpayer funding for any other category of patients to be treated by substandard health care agencies. AND religious dictates must never intrude into the doctor-patient relationship.

Let’s be clear. Planned Parenthood is not the sole institution that provides abortion services and best practices contraception for American women. Middle class and affluent women will continue to receive their own safe and effective abortions and medically sound contraception from private physicians (and hospitals when medically necessary) because they have their own ability to pay.

Therefore, safe abortions and appropriate birth control will continue to be available for some women, BUT not available for all women. Not very “all people are created equal.” Historically having one standard of care for the economically comfortable and a different standard for less fortunate women would be labeled a caste system and not considered acceptable to most Americans.

We must continue to have only one standard of care for all American women and their families. And we must adhere to our Constitution by continuing the separation of Church and State.

Full Title X funding for Planned Parenthood must never be interrupted. Ever!

--Karen Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force



How Did We End Up Debating Whether the U.S. Puts Children in Cages? It Started in 1996

Within 24 hours of Kristen Nielsen telling lawmakers that “There was no parent deported, to my knowledge, without multiple opportunities to take their children with them,” CNN revealed that 471 parents were deported without any opportunity to reunite with their children. The international community has condemned the United States’ actions as in violation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While we can, and should, assign blame to the Trump Administration, we must reverse the legislation that created the path for the current atrocities against immigrants and refugees seeking safety at our border.

We started on this path 23 years ago with the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act and Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. In 1996 the United States instituted the individual tax identification number so immigrants without a social security number would pay taxes on their wages. That same year the PRWORA—which is the farthest-reaching social policy legislation in force today—barred immigrants with legal documentation for residency from any federal social assistance for five years. The IIRIRA created massive barriers to seeking refugee status in the United States that were also condemned by the United Nations. More relevant, the IIRIRA sparked the policing of immigrants and surged deportations. While different, both of these laws sought to circumvent the rights laid out to all people established in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Since 1996, Congress has tried and failed to enact immigration reform. The perpetual failure might cause some to leave Congressional action alone and seek remedy from other branches. Our knowledge about the 471 parents whose children were essentially kidnapped from them at the border and put into cages came from avid work of non-profit organizations who are seeking justice through the courts. Judiciary relief is necessary, but insufficient, to change our inhumane treatment of immigrants at and within our borders. The Supreme Court is unusually deferential to Congressional prerogative in areas of immigration -- meaning that only Congressional action through legislation that overrides the 1996 framework will be sufficient to right our ship.

The Trump Administration highlights the unspeakable pain and suffering that can be caused by the Executive Branch within the current immigration legal framework. It is vital that our representatives not only continue vigorous investigations of the Administration’s current atrocities but also seek to enact legislation that overrides the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act and welfare reform clauses that cause immigrants and refugees to suffer unnecessarily in the United States. We cannot give up the fight for Congressional action to treat humanely people seeking to enter our country and those already living here.

--Mariellen Malloy Jewers , Member, Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Spring Into Action!

We won! Now let's win more!

Thanks to the incredible efforts of activists like you, in 2018 we took back the House. We're already seeing results: strong oversight, gun safety legislation, climate change action, pushback against voter suppression, and more.

Let's keep going!

WNDC is bringing back Winning Wednesdays. We'll be open from 5-8pm on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of every month. Join us as we take on special elections this spring and summer, and then crucial state-level elections (including VA) in November.

We'll be texting, phonebanking, and postcarding for Blue Wave elections such as Judge Lisa Neubauer for Wisconsin's Supreme Court, Dan McCready for NC-09, and others. Bring a charged phone and your laptop/tablet for phone- or text-banking!

**Join us for these Spring
Into Action dates:**

March 27

April 10

April 24

May 8

May 22