

# WNDC



# Political Dispatch

Newsletter | April 2020

From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Karen Pataky, Chair

## PERSPECTIVES

### Two Tuesdays—What to Remember

Joe Biden won overwhelmingly in the South Carolina Democratic Party primary February 27, having plummeted to as low as fourth place in the first three democratic party primaries. The result was a great Super Tuesday. A result of his great Super Tuesday was that major primary opponents dropped out of the primary race and endorsed his candidacy. As a result of that Super Tuesday, he had a fantastic primary day on second Super Tuesday, March 10, including winning in the delegate-rich state of Michigan, where his opponent, Senator Bernie Sanders had beaten Hillary Clinton in 2016.

The press seemed uncomfortable dealing with a space-launch size rise for Joe Biden in landing this summer's nomination. It has already gotten back to its regular comfortable parameters of discourse after South Carolina by talking about demographic groups and how they add up in the nomination race, and with endless second Super Tuesday comparisons with 2016 elections.

However, we need to remember two factors about Super Tuesday I and the lead-up to Super Tuesday II. First is the serious, dramatic, and compelling statement by Congressman James Clyburn, urging his fellow South Carolinians to vote for Biden. This wasn't just Clyburn's position as an African American charging up the African American vote for Biden. Clyburn almost single-handedly brought a new leading message into the Democratic Party nomination race: the need for an America united behind its core values of decency, integrity, and empathy. Clyburn wanted all who heard him to know how important Biden's empathy and kindness for Clyburn's late wife Emily was for him. How he identified these core values with the greatness of America.

"We don't need to make this country great again. This country is great. That's not what our challenge is.... Our challenge is making the greatness of this country accessible and affordable for all.... This country is at an inflection point," he went on. "It is time to restore this country's dignity, this country's respect. That is what is at stake this year, and I can think of no one better suited, better prepared. I can think of no one with the integrity, no one more committed to the fundamental principles that make this country what it is than my good friend—my late wife's great friend—Joe Biden."

Clyburn spoke directly to the danger posed by the denigration of decency and goodness in a Trump political culture. "Some folks tend to confuse goodness with weakness." "Some folks," meaning President Trump.

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We need a daily “empathy watch” for Donald Trump. It certainly would be good to underscore his almost daily identification of goodness and empathy with weakness—like putting children in the cages on the border. It is true that Trump might think of them as subhuman, brown-skinned, Latinos, and therefore interpreting caging them as just another example of Trump’s justified racism. But, that interpretation would not apply to the Americans caught on the cruise ship Crown Princess. There were coronavirus cases on board. Trump didn’t want to let it land so that people on board could be properly processed for treatment or quarantine. He obviously thought people would understand when he said he didn’t want them back in the country because that would raise the statistics on the prevalence of the virus. That would be against his personal interest—the stock market. “Goodness is weakness.” People on the ship were not a target for empathy because he clearly doesn’t know how to feel or to think how he should feel.

Perhaps because Trump’s lack of empathy is so obvious, Joe Biden hasn’t had to direct his pro-empathy messages in terms of Trump’s deficiencies or to cover his messages with the “respectable” argument that at the end of the day it’s all about our national security (although that is perfectly true). He has been able to use it as part of his call for Americans to understand that we are a people united, above all by our values.

The second message to remember about the “Two Tuesdays” is just how big the news was and is. It is important to keep the scale of an event up-front with the American people in reporting. Unfortunately, the media isn’t going to say, “I am talking about little events today; the big event was....” Journalists are not going to lead their stories with, “Remember we are living in the aftermath of South Carolina.” But that is the truth.

—Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair, PPC Democracy and Human Rights Task Force

## TASK FORCE REPORT: Gun Violence Prevention

### Gun Violence Safety Action—at the State Level

**Virginia** had a very successful legislative session! Most of Governor Northam’s gun safety package passed both houses this session, except for the “ban on assault weapons.” Bills include: Background Checks; One-Handgun-A-Month Purchases; Red Flag (allows law enforcement to temporarily prohibit someone at risk to themselves or others from purchasing or possessing firearms); Extension of Firearms Prohibitions for Those under Protective Orders; Lost or Stolen Guns Reporting within 48 Hours; More Authority for Local Governments to Enact Gun Laws; and More Protections to Keep Unsecured Weapons out of the Hands of Children and Teens. All of these actions resulted from the recent VA state elections and the “new” Democratic leaders with Governor Northam. WNDC Virginia members, email or call your state legislators, congratulate them, and thank them for a job well done!

**Maryland’s General Assembly** is also working long and hard on closing the “loopholes” in existing gun legislation and getting important gun safety bills completed before the end of this legislative cycle in early April. Further, they are dealing with the limitations of the COVID-19 situation in wrapping up committee priorities and getting them through conferencing, to the floor for a vote, and then to Governor Hogan. By the time you receive this newsletter, the Background Checks bill (HB 4 and SB 208), impacting the transfer of shotguns and rifles, as well as the purchase of them online, should be written and signed into law.

The WNDC Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention sent out alerts to MD members to push these actions through the State House and Senate. We also tweeted messages, urging passage of these bills in both chambers. (Please let us know if you received feedback from your state legislators after responding to our Alerts via email or tweet. Email: Ellen McGovern, WNDC TF GVP, Chair, at [ellen.mcgovern@gmail.com](mailto:ellen.mcgovern@gmail.com)).

#### FEDERAL LEGISLATION

No action, unfortunately, as expected. Majority Leader McConnell and his Republican colleagues have set the lowest bar, not only for gun safety bills but all bills for all Americans. H.R. 8, the Bipartisan Background Checks bill, still awaits action in the Senate, more than 365 days to date!

## 2020 ELECTIONS

The Task Force to Prevent Gun Violence is working with WNDC's GOTV Task Force and Winning Wednesdays, which went "virtual or social distancing," March 25, given the COVID-19 situation. Check the WNDC website for updates.

## GVP TASK FORCE PARTNERING

WNDC's GVP Task Force signed the following:

- Pledge (with more than 20 organizations—and growing) to reduce gun deaths by 50% within 10 years.
- Letter to strongly oppose the Administration's new rule, published January 23, 2020, which significantly weakens regulation and oversight of firearms exports; to oppose the transfer of the oversight function from State to Commerce Department; and to oppose the transfer of technical information and blueprints for potentially undetectable 3-D-printed guns (more than 100 groups).

**JOIN** the GVP Task Force! A large group of new club members have expressed interest in the GVP, and we are very excited! Moreover, we welcome other general members and Young Dems too. We need you!

—Ellen McGovern, Chair, Task Force to Prevent Gun Violence

# Ignorant and Dictatorial

In 2017, #45 came roaring into Washington, DC determined to establish a CEO-driven presidency. He did not know our Constitution or separation of powers, nor how our legislative process works. He still doesn't.

In contrast, in 2014, President Obama declared the Ebola virus a "security risk." He conferred with other countries, and he appointed a medically knowledgeable "Ebola Czar" to supervise and keep the American public informed. The budget of \$145 million included a stable CDC group that would be prepared for the next. As soon as Trump took over, John Bolton, having no medical expertise, fired the "Pandemic Czar," and 700 CDC employees. Tax cuts for corporations and billionaires were more important.

But 3 years later, we are on the front end of a coronavirus pandemic unseen since the Spanish flu of 1918, which killed 50 million people, including 675,000 Americans. And we are receiving our medical information from a president who makes things up. Our Trump-appoint "czar" is Vice President Pence, who also knows nothing, yet all information must come from him. Fortunately 319 "Donor Groups" have pledged over \$8.3 billion to China and middle income countries. But, Trump has alienated most other countries, so we must finance care of our fellow citizens ourselves. Fortunately, Congress upped Trump's requested \$2.5 billion to fight the impending pandemic to \$8.3 billion. Things we have to do include:

- All persons must be tested for COVID-19 virus and the testing shall be free.
- We need a coherent plan to isolate persons known to be infected in their homes.
- Because hospitals will be swamped, we need to expand 24-hour telephone access to medical personnel.
- Patient care facilities must have equipment to protect physicians, nurses, and other health care workers.
- Elective surgery must be postponed.
- Health care personnel's vacations will be cancelled.
- Production of N95 face masks must be increased ASAP. Most facilities have only a 24-hour supply.
- All emergency personnel, police, and firefighters must have N95 face masks and gloves.
- Medicaid must be expanded so people not covered by insurance can receive health care funding.
- Employees must be allowed to telecommute, and workers who cannot telecommute must be paid the equivalent of sick leave.
- Students of all ages must have access to remote schooling. Accordingly, we must buy laptops for impoverished students.
- Students who are fed at school will need alternative plans to receive adequate nutrition.
- All infected adults must be paid whether or not they have paid sick leave.
- Adults who care for infected children or adults must also have funded sick leave.
- All large gatherings must be cancelled, and smaller gatherings must have adequate air flow between attendees.

This is the beginning. We have been warned. We know how we must behave and care for one another. Now we have to force the President and members of government to meet their responsibilities

# Gas Is Not Green—Part I

## Part II on gas and plastics to follow next month

*Climate Change.* Some years ago, Texas oilman T. Boone Pickens was advocating switching from oil to gas, citing gas as a cleaner-burning fuel and calling it a useful “bridge” for moving away from oil dependence. A gas-powered vehicle generally emits less greenhouse gas (GHG) than a gasoline-powered vehicle. Indeed, the boom in horizontal drilling and fracking to tap gas reserves in shale has made fracked gas a cheaper fuel than coal and oil. In 2020, however, fracked gas is a bridge to nowhere, as climate change has become a worldwide emergency. We need to exert every effort to move rapidly away from gas, including incentivizing more electric vehicles, not vehicles that run on fracked gas, ensuring that new buildings are all electric, and planning for converting existing buildings from gas to all-electric power.

Fracking sites emit methane, a more powerful GHG than carbon dioxide. The current administration is exacerbating these harmful emissions by rolling back regulations to reduce these emissions. Pipelines are leaky: studies in the Boston area have identified hundreds of leaks and explosions in the Merrimack Valley near Boston and in the Washington, DC area, which dramatically illustrate the immediate danger of explosions from leaks in populated areas. Pipelines across the country are aging, resulting in the likelihood of increasing numbers of leaks and explosions. “As much as 4% of all gas produced by fracking is lost to leakage, and those releases appear to have contributed to recent sharp increases in atmospheric methane.”<sup>1</sup> Replacing these old pipes with new ones will be very costly: It makes more economic sense to substitute electric grids for new pipelines, and to move rapidly to powering our communities with electricity from clean sources.

*Pollution.* Fracking sites produce significant pollution<sup>2</sup>—contamination of ground and surface water from the chemicals used to extract the gas, noise and light pollution, radiation releases, and emissions of carcinogenic chemicals (such as benzene and formaldehyde) from compressor stations along pipelines. The DC Sierra Club’s recent fact sheet<sup>3</sup> shows the surprisingly significant indoor air pollution from gas stoves, water heaters, and heating systems. Burning any fossil fuel releases pollutants. A principal indoor emission from burning gas is nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), exposure to which is linked to increased respiratory problems, especially asthma. EPA research links long-term exposure to NO<sub>2</sub> to certain cancers. To protect against inhaling NO<sub>2</sub> emitted by gas stoves, use a ventilated hood, or better, go electric. New technology has greatly improved electric stoves and heat pumps.

*Biogas.* Gas utility companies have been promoting the use of biogas as a green alternative. Biogas is largely derived from livestock manure, landfills, and municipal waste (garbage). Unfortunately for this argument, biogas is still a greenhouse gas, i.e., largely methane, even if it is not derived from fossil deposits. Further, these resources are limited. Current information indicates that no more than 10% of current gas usage would be available from biological sources. Biogas is no bridge to our immediate need for carbon reduction.

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<sup>1</sup> New England Journal of Medicine, Jan. 9, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> DC Sierra Club, Natural Gas: A Major Source of Indoor Air Pollution

—Jean Stewart, Chair, Earth and Environment Task Force

