

WNDC



Political Dispatch

Newsletter | February 2019

From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair

Legislative Priorities for the 116th Congress

The Task Forces of the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action are developing legislative priorities for the Democratic Congress. This one on the Environment follows the ones on Gun Safety and Health Policy that appeared in the January 2019 Political Dispatch.

The Environment

In the face of existing climate change disasters and the imminent threat (within 12 years) of reaching a tipping point on greenhouse gas emissions, the Green New Deal has emerged as a legislative priority: it is currently a package of proposals advocated by the Sunrise Movement (a youth environmental movement), the Sierra Club, numerous other environmental groups, and newly-elected Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, who will likely introduce the package soon after the new year. We support the Green New Deal*.

The package would include:

- Reestablishment by the House Speaker of a special committee to work on climate issues (*already announced: on December 28, Speaker-Designate Pelosi announced that Congresswoman Kathy Castor of Florida will chair the new Select Committee on the Climate Crisis*).
- Appropriation of Green New Deal funds.
- Promotion of green jobs.
- Incentives for targeted investments in renewable fuels (e.g., wind, solar) for electric energy production; in energy and resource efficiency; as well as in microgeneration.
- Legislation and funding for modernizing the electric grid, particularly by incentivizing development of local distributed energy grids.
- Setting strong building efficiency standards for new and existing buildings, to include Green New Deal funds for retrofitting existing buildings.
- Stimulation of development and use of electric vehicles.
- A directed tax on the profits of oil and gas companies with proceeds being invested in renewable energy and energy efficiency.
- *From the desk of Speaker Pelosi is the following policy priority: "by repealing the tax breaks to multi-national oil companies, we can reduce the deficit and invest in clean energy jobs here in America."*
- Low-carbon infrastructure redevelopment in order to create jobs.
- Financial incentives for green investment and reduced energy usage, including low interest rates for green investment.
- A Global Marshall Plan Initiative to assist poorer countries in coping with climate change, and to fund transition to a society free of fossil fuels and other measures that aim to preserve the biosphere.

-- Jean Stewart, Chair, Earth and Environment Task Force

*Information on the Green New Deal has been drawn from reports from CNN and Wikipedia, plus local DC clean energy initiatives.

Energy, Creativity, and Commitment Already Visible in the 116th Session of the House of Representatives

The new Members of Congress already are making a splash, and WNDC is proud of its successful efforts to bring so many into office. This was powerfully visible at the reception WNDC held for women Members of Congress. Congresswoman Jackie Speier (D-CA-14) recounted how she spearheaded the effort to revamp the sexual harassment policies of Congress, which were just finalized after languishing for years. Congresswoman Kim Schrier (D-WA-08), a pediatrician, noted how, every day since the new House was sworn in, it had passed and sent up to the Senate some version of a bill to end the shutdown. After failing to get a response, the newly-elected Members of Congress went as a body over to the Senate with a letter to Senator McConnell urging him to act on a solution.

These actions seem to represent the new House dynamic. Most of these new Members of Congress appear down to earth, up on all the issues, and together as a freshman class - particularly the women. Such teamwork will be crucial, not only for delivering votes on important issues, but, more importantly, for conceiving of and having the courage and collective power to try new approaches in this time of deep division.

Of course, even though in office only a month, these new Members of Congress already are having to think about their next elections. WNDC is gearing up to support them -- and others -- once again. When asked about what support they need, Congresswoman Cindy Axne (D-IA-03) urged people to get involved in campaigns directly, but also to boost Members of Congress's social media presence. Poignantly, noting the extra barriers facing women in politics, she thanked the women who'd brought dinners over for her, so that she could "feel like I'm still able to be a mom." Here's to more moms in Congress!

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

Speaker Pelosi Delivering on Promise of Gun Violence Action: How WNDC PPC Task Force Plans to Help

As promised, Madam Speaker delivered promptly after the opening of the 116th Congress on legislation to curtail gun violence, something that has been way too long in coming. On January 8, the House ceremoniously introduced H.R. 8, "The Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019," legislation requiring background checks on all gun sales, unveiled in remembrance of the horrific shootings in Tucson on January 8, 2011, in which former Representative "Gabby" Giffords was a victim. She miraculously escaped death and was in the House Chamber for this event eight years later.

Other Legislation Introduced Requiring our Immediate Attention:

S. 42, Senate companion legislation to H.R. 8
H.R. 569, closing a dangerous loophole known as the "Boyfriend Loophole," through which certain domestic abusers can obtain and keep guns (A companion bill also will be introduced in the Senate by Sen. Klobuchar.)

Plans for Congressional Consideration:

It is our understanding that, as of now, both the House Judiciary Committee and the separate special Task Force chaired by Rep. Mike Thompson plan to have completed hearings and markup on H.R. 8, with subsequent Floor action by February 28. As we've said before, it is hoped that pressure from the almost 97% of the American public who support universal background checks and from House members will be enough for Senators to reassess whether the price of thwarting progress is indeed too high. Action on other legislation is unknown as of now.

Task Force Update and Plans for Immediate Action:

- Expand our coalition efforts with additional gun safety reform advocacy groups, hoping to increase our knowledge and sharing of information re: upcoming panel discussions, conference calls, legislation status at both the state and national levels, action alerts, etc.;
- Send letters of endorsement on select pieces of legislation to appropriate congressional committees and leadership;
- Lobby members of the House and Senate to cosponsor H.R. 8 and S. 42;
- Organize a WNDC speaker program; and
- Continue to issue action alerts and statements/resolutions as warranted

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 large, but no amount of effort you can contribute is too small.

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

Correction: In the January 2019 Political Dispatch, we inadvertently omitted the Earth and Environment Task Force from the listing of PPC Task Forces. Jean Stewart, jean.stewart@rcn.com, is chair. We regret the error.

Recommendation from the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action: National Climate Assessment 4

The National Climate Assessment 4, presented at the WNDU speaker luncheon on January 10 by Dr. Fred Lipschultz, one of the authors, is a gold mine of information on the state of climate change in the US as of November 2018. Volume I presents an assessment of the physical science underlying the report, but Volume II is the most valuable for policymakers, candidates for office, advocates, and other leaders. It contains detailed and recent information on impacts, risks, and adaptations to climate change, with chapters on the state of climate change nationwide, and deep data-based dives into the specific status in each of 10 areas of the country. Each of the 10 regional chapters contains information not only on the specific climate change damages now occurring, but also on some of the adaptations that some states and cities are taking to respond to existing and future threats, and to limit risks through reductions in carbon emissions.

The Committee on Public Policy and Political Action (PPC) recommends that this report, specifically Volume II, be made available to Democratic candidates for office at all levels to use in their campaigns. The data and case studies should prove invaluable in convincing voters to support these candidates' environmental policies.

The link to Volume II is:

<https://nca2018.globalchange.gov>.

(A separate link to case studies developed by NOAA of adaptation and mitigation is:

<https://toolkit.climate.gov>, but is currently unavailable due to the partial government shutdown as of 1/14/2019.)

--Jean Stewart, Chair, Earth and Environment Task Force

Degraded Discourse

Democrats are pretty good at expounding on a long list of outlandish and usually despicable statements and actions of the man living in the White House, but the corruption of our national discourse has permeated everything we say. In the face of major dangers to our country it doesn't seem worth the time to parse out phrases. I believe political culture does affect our psyches. We should be vigilant about picking up ways of speaking that reinforce bad ideas. A couple of examples:

The newly elected U.S. Congressman from Long Island, Max Rose, has been widely interviewed. One question always asked is why he voted against Nancy Pelosi as House Speaker. His answer is always that "I stick to my promises." A second question is always about the shutdown. In inveighing against the pain caused by the shutdown, he says that he is donating his salary to charity rather than take the pay when others are suffering. On the face of this it looks like positions to applaud. This is, after all, not a Trumpian campaign promise to build a wall, done to nail support with a promise mantra. From another angle it is supporting Trump's mantra. Maybe "Keeping Promises" is not a good thing to promise. After all, "Life Happens." Are we supposed to ignore what happens outside of our front door, in our country and in our world because we "promised" under different circumstance to do a particular thing. Voting against Nancy Pelosi doesn't fit the structure of being open to changed circumstances. He is acting immediately, before circumstances could plausibly change. By making it a big deal that it was "promised," Rose is confirming that we should always judge people by whether they keep promises. Nothing else counts. Not so.

Giving his salary to charity similarly looks like an unalloyed good thing. However, that fits a Trumpian mania too. Government is bad. Private business should run everything, even if, like his "foundation" or college, it is just a rip-off scam. If people are hungry, let them go out and beg like in a Charles Dickens novel, where some rich individual can decide to give him money for food – it's the rich person's decision. The poor person should have no power. There is no such thing as common humanity. So think of a new way to beat up on Trump's shutdown, and get public servants back where they should be: doing essential - and cost effective - functions that make us all safer and better and moral.

The average consumer of the media probably thinks it's a great idea when interviewees and all mater of commentators use the line to persuade Trump to drop his idea of declaring a national emergency that "the next national emergency might be climate change, when the Democrats are in power." This is a bad rhetorical device, even if everyone thinks it is clever. If you are a Democrat or any reasonable individual you must accept that climate change doesn't care about Republicans and Democrats. It is happening to us all. This line is saying that climate change is for Democrats, the Wall is for Republicans (with the inference that Democrats can't possibly be for "border security" if they aren't for the Wall). We are buying into the politicization that has polluted American politics. Trump supporters will vote for anything he says.

The people hearing this line frequently ask, so "why isn't he listening to this argument, it's so reasonable." It is possible that there is a scarily sinister answer to that question. Donald Trump is going to declare a National Emergency and never let it go (next stop, bombing Iran?). Under his national emergency there might not be a 2020 election, or, having taken on more autocratic power under the emergency, rigging the election might strike him as an appealing way to stay in his position as President, and thereby avoid a criminal indictment - all too likely to happen when he is a private individual. (Note: This is why I favor trading a pardon for his resignation.)

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

Government Shutdown: Cruel for All and Lethal for Many

The Putin directed cabal of Donald Trump, his abject Republican disciples (along with two “yes men,” one Independent and one Libertarian), plus the expansive right wing media have engineered the destruction of our federal government’s functioning under the façade of #45’s demand to “build the wall.” The Putin/Trump regime has captured the loyalties of roughly 36% of the (mostly white) American electorate. Both racist and religious hatreds have enabled Donald Trump to shut down the functioning of vast areas of our national government.

Over 800,000 government workers and their families have already missed an entire two-week paycheck. For many middle class workers, that is the rent or mortgage paycheck, and many can be at risk of becoming homeless in another month or two if our government does not resume operation. Even worse, now some workers are being forced to return to work WITHOUT BEING PAID.

Tragically, most Trump supporters do not feel empathy for their fellow Americans because “Government workers” have been portrayed as “lazy and shiftless” since the era of President Reagan. The “lazy and shiftless” fits with many flyover country Americans seeing the federal government as located only in the District of Columbia, and populated largely by citizens of color.

Government workers are showing up at food banks for the first time in their lives. And we must also assume that many of our neighbors will become seriously ill and some may die because they are not able to pay for doctor visits, medications, oxygen, physical therapy, etc. Some of our neighbors with serious chronic diseases will likely die prematurely because their medical care will be unaffordable and families will be destroyed.

In addition, about 200 fellow Americans may lose their final chance at life sparing cancer clinical trials provided at the NIH (National Institutes of Health). The clinical trials are on hold until the shutdown ends. Meanwhile, their no longer treatable cancers continue to spread.

Surely this shutdown is “Cruel and Unusual Punishment” for all Americans.

--Karen Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force

(Note: The shutdown may have ended by the time of this publication. That will not end the damages it has done, including those discussed in Pataky’s commentary.
-- Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair, Committee on Public Policy and Political Action)

MONEY TALKS and so should you

Many of us face a dilemma about our involvement in the world and how we can change what is happening for the better. If this is a question that you ask yourself, then I suggest you read on. Shareholder activism describes the actions many investors take to press corporations to improve their social and environmental practices—using their status as part owners or clients of companies as leverage.

The primary tool that shareholders use is the shareholder proposal, a request to corporate management for information or a change in company policy. These formal requests appear on a proxy ballot, which is mailed to shareholders who may vote by mail, electronically, or in person at the company’s annual meeting. Shareholders also may discuss those issues with corporate managers and ask for changes they want to see.

Responsible investors often introduce and support socially responsible investing and shareholder resolutions, in coalition with socially responsible mutual funds and pension funds. The downfall of apartheid in South Africa resulted from the divestment of pension funds by universities, religious groups, and local and state governments. In 1990, investors pulled their money from any company doing business in South Africa and soon the South African government knew its path of oppressing Black Africans was economically unsustainable.

Divestment means taking your money out of a particular investment. The goal is to do so in coordination with others, to send a market signal to a company or industry that its actions are unsustainable and harmful and that investors and customers want it to change its course.

Individuals must remove their funds from companies that fund fossil fuels (e.g., Bank of America and Wells Fargo) and demand that these companies take climate change more seriously. Major oil companies like Shell are citing divestment as a material risk to their business.

Investors are pulling their funds out of private prison companies such as CoreCivic and GEO Group. Both companies subject incarcerated people to harsh conditions, brutal treatment, and poor nourishment, which are human rights violations. And finally, after much pressure, BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager of funds, stated it will speak to weapons manufacturers and retailers in which it invests “to understand their response to the Parkland shootings in Florida.” Divestment must be directed to companies that are involved with ICE policies of separating families.

Each of us must undertake our “due diligence” to assure that our money is not contributing to bad and destructive policies that violate all of our values. Speak to your bank manager and your financial advisors and use your money to promote social and economic justice.

--Marcie Cohen, Vice President for Administration and Guest Contributor