

WNDC



Political Dispatch

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From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair

The Committee on Public Policy and Political Action and its task forces are thrilled to welcome the new Democratic majority in the House of Representatives. We will move swiftly to put our support and analytical resources behind new legislative opportunities and actions, necessary to uphold American values and interests.

Legislative Priorities for the 116th Congress

The Task Forces of the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action are developing legislative priorities for the incoming Congress. The first two of these - Gun Safety and Health Policy -- appear here.

Gun Safety

Support:

- Support legislation to require universal background checks, expanding them to include firearms sold at gun shows, over the Internet, and private sales;
- Support renewal of the Federal Assault Weapons Ban (expired in 2004);
- Support legislation to remove weapons from domestic violence abusers' access to firearms, including ERPO (Extreme Risk Protective Orders), sometimes called: Red Flag laws.
- Support legislation to ban large capacity ammunition magazines;
- Support legislation to ban bump stocks, allowing semi-automatic weapons to function like automatic weapons; and
- Support repeal of the Dickey Amendment, which prevents research on gun violence by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Oppose:

- Oppose the National Concealed Gun Carry Reciprocity Act, which allows those states with the most stringent requirements to be subverted by those with more lenient regulations;
- Oppose any agenda to force guns in our schools;
- Oppose the Hearing Protection Act, legislation to legalize gun silencers; and
- Oppose the Second Amendment Enforcement Act, legislation to erode DC's gun laws.

State and Regional Action - Monitor and Promote:

- Monitor the implementation of policies to remove domestic violence abusers' access to firearms, including the ERPOs and Red Flag laws at the state level, and promote this program/law with other states to encourage them to learn about, pass, and implement such laws and programs; and
- Monitor and promote Regional solutions through multi-state coalitions such as "States for Gun Safety," which recently formed among Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Delaware, New York, and New Jersey.

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

Legislative Priorities cont'd

Health Policy

- Pass legislation needed to repair, restore, and improve the Affordable Care Act
- Fight state level initiatives to make abortions illegal and to withhold women's contraception
- Prevent theft of Medicare funding
- Prevent theft of Social Security funding
- Legislate adequate funding for Veterans care and prevent privatization of VA
- End "religious freedom" mandates that allow discrimination against women's reproductive services, refusal of care for LGBT citizens, and refusal of care for non-citizens
- Create evidence-based and fully fund federal programs to prevent opioid deaths
- Create evidence-based and fully fund state level programs to prevent gun deaths
- Create national program for medical oversight of care for immigrants held captive in tent cities

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

Let's Finally Get Equal Rights ...

The Woman's National Democratic Club in December celebrated the potential for mandating equal rights for women only 242 years after this nation's independence. A panel of women long involved in the fight to pass the Equal Rights Amendment spoke about successful paths forward for a law that would provide for the same high standard for discrimination based on sex as exists for national origin, religion, and race. Even one simple example illustrates how vital it is: the often quoted 78 cents on the dollar for women's pay to men's pay does not include benefits, pensions, and bonuses; and working women of color are disproportionately affected.

Longtime ERA warrior Ellie Smeal recalled how after the Equal Rights Amendment was passed women went to the headquarters of the National Women's Party at the now-Sewall Belmont House to celebrate with suffragist and co-author Alice Paul. Now just one more state is needed to bring the total to 38 states, and there is great optimism about Virginia becoming the 38th state. But, as legal expert Wendy Murphy explained, even if Virginia passes it, bringing the total to 38 states, well thought out legislative or judicial paths forward will be necessary to make this vital bill law.

--Veena Trahan, Chair, Global Women's Task Force

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC POLICY & POLITICAL ACTION

The Committee on Public Policy & Political Action has an ambitious agenda planned for 2019 with the new Democratic majority in Congress. We hope you'll join us at our next meeting, Thursday, January 17, at 5:30pm. Contact one of the task force chairs listed here to get involved with issues of particular interest to you.

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Two Presidents and the Value of International Alliances

George H. W. Bush Knew that America Was Stronger When Leading Effective Alliances

"We don't want an America closed to the world"
—President George H.W. Bush

The goal of President George H.W. Bush was that America be a leader of the free world—one of many in a coalition of democratic states. He believed in the importance of democracies if you want to do things in this world.

President Bush should be forever celebrated for the way he ended the Cold War. When the Berlin Wall came down, he did not do as President Trump would certainly have done: stand up in the midst of the rubble and say "This was me, I won." Bush handled the historic moment very carefully, knowing that there would be a great danger of violence and chaos in the wake of the end of the Cold War if the West did not play a subtle game. Very few were predicting at the time that East and West Germany could reunite or that the electoral victory in Poland of the Solidarity movement leading to Polish independence would be allowed to play out. It also was not a given what role NATO would play post- Cold War.

Bush not only negotiated the end of the Cold War helping with American leadership to create a strong NATO and an united Germany but he also supported the international rule of law at the time the U.S. led the first Gulf War. The UN and the international community supported the war because Saddam Hussein had violated the international rule of law on the violation of national sovereignty and the brilliance of President Bush was that he stopped the war after succeeding in expelling Saddam Hussein from Kuwait and restoring their sovereignty.

President Bush also exemplified a value that greatly helped in exercising U.S. leadership in the world and that was a respect for public service. Nobody thought that President Bush was out for himself in his international actions. It was a fitting tribute to him when one of the things he did in retirement was to found the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University.

What could stand as a greater contrast with President Bush's values, service, and accomplishments than President Trump at an international conclave where he shuns democratic leaders and the autocratic leaders he most wants to be close to are two murderers, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince MBS and Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Trump Wants America to Stand Alone: G20 Summit

President Trump came to office pledging to break down the status quo when it comes to American trade policy, threatening to withdraw the US from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to overturn Washington's traditional policy of American economic engagement with China.

From the perspective of America's trade partners and investors at home and abroad, it was clear that if President Trump would carry out his threats, leading to trade wars between the U.S. and its two leading continental allies and the world's second largest economy, the consequences for the entire global economy would be devastating.

At the G20 meeting, it appeared that the US and China had taken a step back from a full-blown trade war, which was clearly a piece of good news for the markets that have been celebrating it this week. Putting it in different terms, the alternative to the pause in the trade battles would have been growing tensions between the two countries.

After threatening for several months to take that step, President Trump did seem to make a concession by agreeing to postpone his threat to increase tariffs on \$US200 billion on Chinese goods to 25 percent from 10 percent.

The Chinese have apparently agreed to purchase more American agricultural products and to give US firms more access to the Chinese markets, but without making it clear how they were planning to fulfill these pledges.

However, it's not clear how negotiators from the two governments would be able to reach within 90 days a series of agreements on complex issues, including allegations that the Chinese engage in theft of intellectual property and that they are failing to follow through on an anti-cybertheft commitment, not to mention American demands that China stop forcing US companies to share their technology as a condition for entering their markets.

-- Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair, Committee on Public Policy and Political Action, and Alyn Hadar, Chair, Task Force on Foreign Policy

It's Even Worse Than We Thought— But There Is Hope

A Dire Outlook

Three reports on climate change have recently been issued, and each one is like a punch to the gut. In spite of 45's "gut" telling him that climate change isn't real, these scientifically based findings show the near-term changes coming to our earth if immediate and drastic action isn't taken on a global basis. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the National Climate Assessment reports present detailed evidence of the climatic changes already taking place, and show that we have approximately 12 years to slow the rate of greenhouse gas emissions before the earth reaches a point where we can no longer stop the warming trend. According to these reports, the amount of temperature rise must be limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius (approx. 2.5 degrees Fahrenheit) to keep the earth livable. At the December international climate meeting in Poland, Sir David Attenborough said that if this limit is not achieved in the next few years, human civilization could topple and great numbers of animal species could go extinct. The third report (1) confronts us with the frightening news that worldwide carbon emissions in 2018 have risen after two years of relatively flat emissions levels.

Over the 3 1/2 billion years of life on earth, five major extinction events have occurred, some more wide ranging than others. But in each event, no matter the cause or how many species disappeared, the dominant species always became extinct, like the dinosaurs in the extinction event of 65 million years ago. The current dominant species is homo sapiens—us.

In the face of these urgent warnings, we hear that not only does 45 choose to be utterly ignorant of this clear and present danger, but also so does his party. GOP leaders are following POTUS in denial, if not of actual climate change, but of the fact that it is primarily caused by human activity. This means that none of these leaders will support taking any of the significant actions needed to reduce the US carbon footprint and to build in resiliency for vulnerable communities already suffering from the disasters driven by climate change. The administration is actively making the situation worse by withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement, and rolling back every regulation designed to reduce America's emissions of greenhouse gases.

Some Light Ahead

In the face of the GOP's stubborn refusal to accept reality, many state and local activists and political leaders are not waiting to take action. Here in DC, a coalition of several dozen environmental groups have been conducting for over two years a campaign for bold action. Endorsed by the WNDC Board of Governors, this campaign included collecting over 10,000 petition signatures, lobbying City Council members, holding meetings with Council staffs and business representatives, and holding rallies. This culminated with the introduction this July to the City Council of the Clean Energy DC Omnibus Act of 2018 (2). As of this writing, it was passed unanimously in its current version on the Council's first vote. The second and final vote is scheduled for December 18th.

The Clean Energy Act is one of the most forward-looking plans for carbon reduction in the US, even surpassing California's plan. If passed in its present form, the Act would require 100% of the city's electric power to be purchased from renewal sources, like wind and solar, by 2032. Since 75% of DC's carbon emissions come from buildings, the Act establishes strong building energy performance standards on new and existing buildings including those of 10,000 square feet and up by 2026. It increases by a modest amount the fee we already pay to the Sustainable Energy Trust Fund for electricity and natural gas, and adds a small new fee for fuel oil, much of which will go to assist low-income rate payers. Finally, it ties the amount of vehicle excise taxes we already pay to vehicle fuel efficiency, with electric vehicles exempted from the tax.

So while we face a frightening present and future, many Americans aren't waiting for federal action, including here in the nation's capital. All of these signs of hope are examples of thinking globally but acting locally, perhaps the best way of taking on such an enormous challenge.

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

(1) *the Global Climate Project, a network of European scientists*
(2) *Introduced by CM Mary Cheh and co-sponsored by several Council Members.*