

# WNDC



## Political Dispatch

Newsletter | June 2019

From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair

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### WNDC Public Policy and Political Action Committee Denounces Presidential Veto of the Yemen Resolution

On May 2, 2019, the U.S. Senate failed to overturn #45's Veto of the Yemen Resolution (S.J.Res.7), which sought to end constitutionally-murky U.S. support to a Saudi-led military intervention in the Yemeni civil war. As a result, U.S. arms, logistical support, and intelligence will continue to fuel a campaign that is responsible for an estimated 17,879 Yemeni civilian injuries and deaths to date, and to exacerbate one of the worst famines and humanitarian crises in over 100 years.

**U.S. and Saudi involvement in the Yemeni Civil War:** Since 2015, the U.S. has provided arms, logistical support, and intelligence to a Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi rebels, who are responsible for ousting the (pro-Saudi) President of Yemen, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Our backing of the Saudi-led intervention is purported to be a move intended to curb the expansion into the region of Iran, which backs the Houthis; however, U.S. continued support of Saudi Arabia is fueling a crisis. According to independent data collection projects like the Yemen Data Project, the Saudi-led military intervention—consisting of ground troops deployed in Yemen, a naval blockade, and bombing raids—has resulted in a severe humanitarian disaster. As of April 2019, there have been nearly 17,879 civilian casualties.

The Saudi-led coalition has also destroyed health centers and other civilian infrastructure like water and sanitation systems, contributing to the spread of diseases like cholera and violating international humanitarian law. The war has also contributed to one of the worst famines in recent history. The Naval blockade and several blocks of airports receiving aid deliveries have left 78% of Yemeni's without enough food, medical supplies, and other necessities. Over 3.3 million children and pregnant women are suffering from acute malnutrition. The crisis has been especially devastating for children. As of November 2018, 85,000 children under the age of 5 had died of starvation.

**The Yemen Resolution.** The bipartisan Yemen Resolution was reintroduced this Congress in January 2019, invoking the 1973 War Powers Act, which gives Congress special powers to halt military campaigns not authorized by Congress.

The escalating humanitarian crisis and the brutality of Saudi-directed murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi have put increasing pressure on Congress to reconsider U.S. support to Saudi Arabia; the Yemen Resolution passed both the Senate and the House in March, with seven Senate Republicans breaking with their party to vote in favor. However, #45 vetoed the Resolution in April, and Republicans in the Senate voted to uphold (54-45) the veto on May 2.

WNDC's Public Policy and Political Action Committee condemns #45's veto and the failure of Congress to override that veto. We now urge immediate congressional action on alternative legislative options to end our country's involvement in Yemen's brutal civil war.

-- Nicole Amaral, Co-Chair, Foreign Policy Task Force

# WNDC Resolutions Presented to the National Federation of Democratic Women

These resolutions, approved by the WNDC Board of Governors on April 17, will be presented as WNDC resolutions to the National Federation of Democratic Women conference in Albany, NY, in June. Two additional resolutions, Foreign Policy Resolution Affirming Preservation of Global Alliances and Foreign Policy Resolution Affirming Preservation of INF Treaty, appeared in the May Political Dispatch.

## Resolution Supporting Public School Teachers' Pay Increase

Whereas: There is a national teacher wage gap with public school teachers averaging about 11% less in salary than their peers in similar professions. Teachers often have to work second jobs in an effort to have their economic needs met; and

Whereas: Many high quality graduates do not even consider teaching as a viable profession citing low teacher pay, poor working conditions, and limited career advancements as deterrents; and

Whereas: Many states have a critical teacher shortage, especially in areas serving low-income students and/or students of color. Teachers of color make up less than 20% of the overall teacher pool, yet students of color make up more than 50% of the public school population.

Therefore, Be it Resolved: That the National Federation of Democratic Women supports a universal pay raise in teacher salaries across the nation in an effort to increase the quality of teacher candidates, decrease attrition from teaching, and improve the overall status of the education profession.

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

## Resolution Supporting Steps to Address Climate Change

Whereas: Climate change is accelerating more rapidly than realized even one year ago, and having damaging and costly effects on communities and public health across the United States; and

Whereas: The Administration is pushing to increase production of fossil fuels, abolishing a wide variety of regulations limiting greenhouse gas emissions, and cutting funds for programs to mitigate climate change and to provide relief for victims of climate-change-enhanced natural disasters;

Therefore, Be it Resolved: That because climate change is an immediate threat to the life and health of communities across the U.S., and to our national security, the National Federation of Democratic Women gives its full support to immediate steps to reduce our carbon footprint, and will support candidates and lawmakers committed to taking immediate and strong action to slow climate change and mitigate its effects.

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

## Resolution Supporting Action to Address Gun Violence: Universal Background Checks

Whereas: It is an unacceptable and avoidable national tragedy to lose close to 40,000 lives annually to gun violence; and

Whereas: Because of current loopholes in existing law, 1 in 5 gun sales in America is conducted without a background check where no questions are asked, while a 2018 study showed that 97% of all Americans support expanding background checks to include so-called "private sales" occurring at gun shows and over the internet; and

Whereas: The U.S. House of Representatives on February 27 overwhelmingly passed H.R. 8, "The Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019," requiring that all gun sales be subjected to a background check. Unfortunately, Majority Leader McConnell has thus far refused to allow S. 42, the Senate companion bill, to be brought to the floor of that body.

Therefore, Be it Resolved: That the National Federation of Democratic Women hereby supports the passage of legislation requiring expanded background checks as a common-sense approach to help keep guns out of the wrong hands and furthermore urges an immediate debate on this legislation in the U.S. Senate so that the will of a sound majority is respected as it was in the U.S. House.

-- *Shelly Livingston and Ellen McGovern, Co-Chairs, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force*

## Resolution Supporting Protection of Social Security's Disability Insurance

Whereas: The average person receiving Social Security disability benefits has worked and contributed to Social Security for 22 years; and

Whereas: The current Administration seeks to cut benefits to disability insurance that will leave millions of disabled workers, their spouses and their children destitute. Further, failure to expand Social Security's tax base—total wage earnings subject to the payroll tax up to the taxable maximum—jeopardizes our promise to all workers that pay into Social Security to politicization and uncertainty; and

Whereas: Eliminating the taxable maximum would be administratively simple: workers currently paying FICA all year would continue to do so; for those currently paying FICA tax for only part of the year, the FICA tax would be applied all year. Note that the Congressional Research Service estimates that eliminating the taxable maximum and including these additional earnings into the benefit calculations would ensure Social Security benefit payments through 2078.

Therefore, Be it Resolved: That the National Federation of Democratic Women supports eliminating the taxable maximum to the FICA tax each year and to including these additional earnings into the benefit calculations.

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

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## Fighting for Reproductive Justice with Perseverance: “Come Hell or High Water” Julie Burkhart, “TRUST WOMEN”

On Tuesday, April 16, 2019, the WNDC hosted Julie Burkhart, who shared her frightening and courageous story of fighting for women's rights for safe abortions and effective birth control after the assassination of Dr. George Tiller on May 31, 2009, by reopening his clinic in his honor.

Dr. George Tiller was a respected gynecologist, as was his father before him for several decades, in Wichita, Kansas. He was targeted specifically by anti-abortion zealots because he provided first trimester and second trimester abortions. (We avoid using the medically inaccurate and inflammatory label “late term abortion.”) Dr. Tiller was targeted twice. He recovered from the multiple gunshot wounds of his first assassination attempt in August 19, 1993. But on May 31, 2009, a different anti-abortion terrorist succeeded in assassinating Dr. Tiller while he was worshipping at his family church.

After the horrific murder of Dr. Tiller, friends, colleagues and the community encouraged Ms. Burkhart to reopen the clinic that had served women for decades. “It's never too late to do the next Right Thing” had been Dr. Tiller's motto, and so “Trust Women” was founded with the mission: “All people should have access to the health care they need regardless of where they live or their ability to pay.”

But it took four years of “eating dirt” to reopen the clinic. After purchasing the site from Mrs. Tiller, an enormous renovation had to be undertaken. Two years passed before a physician was found who was willing to put his life at risk by performing abortions. Trust Women had difficulty securing bank loans; the antiabortion zealots protested at the homes of clinic staff and videotaped them. Anti-abortion militants harassed construction workers and yelled at vendors delivering supplies and medical equipment to the clinic. And there was an attempt by anti-abortion zealots to change the zoning in order to disallow a medical office on the site.

The Wichita clinic in which Dr. Tiller and his father had served women did reopen and continues to serve women and their families. However, protests and harassment continue to be part of everyday life for clinic workers and patients.

“Trust Women” has also expanded. In 2014, Oklahoma City was the largest city without an abortion provider. So in 2016 the first abortions in 40 years were again available to women there by Trust Women. Similar threats and constant harassment occurred prior to the clinic opening and continue to the present day.

With the election of Donald Trump and the sweep of Republicans into the House and Senate and the plethora of state level TRAP laws (Targeted Regulations against Abortion Providers), “Trust Women” expanded into Seattle, Washington, in June 2017. The clinic in Seattle will serve as a fallback for patients in Oklahoma and Kansas who might again be prevented from having safe abortions because of the current spate of new anti-abortion laws being enacted at many state levels.

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We cannot underestimate the current level of danger for women who want abortions and for the physicians and other clinic staff who go to work every day to provide abortions and contraception. The past 35 years reveal a history of shootings, murders, bombings and arson at women's reproductive health centers all over America.

President Ronald Reagan was the first president to invite the religious right anti-abortion and anti-birth control activists into his presidency and encouraged congress to do the same for the political purpose of awakening a complacent electorate to vote Republican. He and his successor, President George HW Bush, enabled the Republican Party to "weaponize" anti-abortion fervor into voter turnout. Tragically, but not surprisingly, the resulting militancy has been accompanied by terrible murders, bombings, and arson in many states.

In all, since, 1993, 11 abortion clinic workers have been murdered. In addition, there have been 17 other attempted murders, plus 42 clinic bombings and 186 clinic arsons.

- Dr. David Gunn, of Pensacola, Florida, was the first physician to be murdered on March 10, 1993.
- Dr. John Bayard Britton and a clinic volunteer, James H. Barrett, were murdered in Pensacola on July 29, 1994.
- On December 30, 1994, two Planned Parenthoods in Boston were attacked by gunmen who murdered two receptionists, Shannon Lowney and Lenore Nichols.
- Dr. Barnett Sleppian, of Buffalo, New York, was murdered in his home October 23, 1998.
- Dr. George Tiller was murdered in his church in Wichita, Kansas, May 31, 2009.
- On November 27, 2015, the Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado Springs, Colorado, was overtaken by gunmen who murdered a police officer and two nurses. Nine other people were wounded.
- A nail bomb was planted at a Planned Parenthood facility in Birmingham, Alabama, January 20, 2018. Robert Sanderson, a police officer working as a security guard, was killed when the bomb exploded.

During Ms. Burkhart's presentation, attendees discussed the current very dangerous political climate. The encouragement of violence in general and the known history of murders of abortion providers plus the enthusiasm of the anti-abortion movement to enact creative anti-abortion laws such as "fetal personhood" and "heartbeat bills" call for even more courage from all who believe in social justice. There are now 300 bills in 37 states that place restrictions on abortions, and one state threatens to enact the death penalty for women who have abortions.

We must hold our politicians to the standard of NO restrictions on abortion and full availability of contraception for all women. We must improve access to abortions everywhere, especially in "abortion deserts" by: 1) encouraging new physicians to learn how to provide abortions 2) expanding telemedicine to facilitate better access to medical abortions, 3) working at state levels to expand the practice standards for nurse practitioners, midwives and physician assistants to provide medical abortions. 4) encouraging women to share their abortion and birth control stories in small gatherings to destigmatize women's choices, and 5) getting out the vote and raising money for candidates in all states who support abortion and birth control.

Trust Women and Dr. Tiller's legacy are approaching their 10th anniversary. Over 18,000 patients have been served, and more than \$300,000 has been raised to pay for abortion services in Kansas and Oklahoma. The Woman's National Democratic Club thanks and salutes Julie Burkhart and Trust Women for unmatched courage and perseverance.

--Karen Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force

June 7 is National Gun Violence Awareness Day. Wear orange in support of common-sense gun reforms that make us all safer. Spread the word, and post a photo of yourself in orange on your social media accounts, with a message about why you want to raise awareness about gun violence in our country. Use hashtag: #WearOrange.

Join DC Moms Demand Action Against Gun Violence "Happy Hour Phonebanking" on WNDC regular Winning Wednesdays this summer! June 12; July 10 and 24.