

# WINDC



# Political Dispatch

Newsletter | March 2020

From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Karen Pataky, Chair



## PERSPECTIVES

### Money Corrupts Our Democracy; Money Corrupts Our Press

We Americans may have a free press—but there is less of it. A lot less of it. According to one reputable academic source, 1800 local papers have closed since 2004, and nearly a third of local papers are owned by 25 companies. Reporting in the media industry has to focus on the bottom line of money.

Quite apart from billionaires buying big media, it is no wonder that the short-staffed press and media can't do their job. That is why we aren't getting the reporting we need on the domination of corporations, and political influence. Take the failure of the Democratic Party app used to manage the Iowa caucuses. It was a new app produced by a new firm called Shadow. With simple Google research, I found that Shadow is financially linked to a new entity, Acronym. A Google search of Acronym revealed that the Obama 2008 campaign manager, David Plouffe, is on the Acronym Board. It was days later before a news reporter finally did the research that took me ten minutes. Nevertheless, that significant fact was not initially pursued. What was tentatively reported was the fact that the new app had not passed any serious efficacy test. The motivating factor was that it had to be finished and in the hands of the Iowa Democratic Party on time. Thus, it's not surprising that the media gave us gray and foggy information. By now, weeks later, no one is interested. We citizens should have received the most scrupulous, exhaustive, and timely reporting on the lift-off of the Democratic Party's presidential campaign. But we weren't.

At least the Shadow app's failure in Iowa did not cause mass deaths or threaten the health of a major American economic pillar, the Boeing corporation. The tally is now 398 casualties from Ethiopian and Indonesian 737 MAX flights and does not count casualties from a 2009 Boeing crash in the Netherlands. Like the Shadow app reporting, however, efforts to suppress key facts got built into the system. The very first accounts of the Boeing crashes reported that Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao, had been, appropriately, the lead government official overseeing US response. One of her actions was to personally fly this type of 737 after the second crash in Ethiopia, explicitly to reassure the public that the plane was safe. And, she might have succeeded, had not Europe grounded the 737 MAX and had we not followed suit. After this initial report, Chao's name disappeared from the almost daily subsequent reporting. The reporting got less and less concise on just how little FAA oversight there was as Boeing developed systems for its latest 737. In fact, the FAA deputized Boeing employees to perform the company's safety investigations on this plane! Only now, when the Netherlands is reinvestigating a 737 crash from 2009 (involving a predecessor to the MAX) does there appear to be more attention to whether these newest 737s should be cleared to fly.

The revelation of the lack of oversight by official US government entities charged with overseeing our transportation safety has been reinforced by the helicopter crash that killed basketball star, Kobe Bryant. There, too, questions have been raised about attention to costs and profits that derail correct safety inspections. Retired engineering professor and former FAA consultant, David Hoepfner, was quoted in *The Washington Post* (February 9, 2020) that “we haven’t done all the things in design reliability or integrity of the helicopter that we need to do.... The system is driven by money and greed so that it tends to take preference even over safety.” Among the specifics: although Bryant’s pilot was authorized to fly using instruments, Island Express Helicopters did not permit flights using instruments, because, according to another quoted former FAA investigator “they can be costly.” The helicopter also did not have a black box, which was not required, so that finding out what alarms may have sounded prior to the crash will not be possible.

Trump wants money considerations to rule, whether for corporate regulation or regulation of elections. We see evermore clearly how our national and individual security suffer and will worsen under Trump. Citizens act through elections to make institutions that, through elected lawmakers, will protect their security, interests, and values. This power of the people is under threat and Democracy is gravely endangered.

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

## TASK FORCE REPORT: Gun Violence Prevention

### Legislative Updates

VIRGINIA & MARYLAND

Action on the gun violence prevention front occurs at the state level! We are seeing Virginia make tremendous headway in the race to stop gun violence. To date, the VA House has passed five of the gun safety measures that Governor Northam sent to the state legislature in January. Even the ban on assault weapons was passed by the full House. The VA Senate, while voting down two gun-safety bills so far, might still have some positive action in the days to come. By the time this report is published, we will know the full story on the success of gun safety in VA!

Maryland’s General Assembly is also producing positive results on gun safety. Its mission is to close the loopholes in several of the bills passed last year. MD is well ahead of Virginia as it refines and strengthens existing legislation on the books. So far, the MD House has passed H.R. 4, the Background Checks bill, which impacts the transfer of shotguns and rifles, as well as online purchases. The MD House is now waiting on the MD Senate to get their companion bill, S.B. 208, out of committee and onto the Senate floor. Again, by the time you read this report, it should be done. (Please let us know if you received feedback from your state legislators after responding to our alerts via email or tweet.)

### Annual Gun Law Scorecard Shows Progress

Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence released its Annual Gun Law Scorecard in the middle of February. Giffords indicates that for the first time in the Scorecard’s history, more Americans live in A states than F states. However, this year’s Scorecard highlights the fact that the nation’s crazy quilt of gun laws leaves all Americans at risk of gun violence, as firearms are trafficked from states with weak gun laws into states with stronger ones. Check out the Scorecard to find your state and its neighbors. <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/scorecard/>

### Join the GVP Task Force!

General Members and Young Dems—We need you! Next meeting is MARCH 5, THURSDAY, 6 pm!

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