

# WNDC



# Political Dispatch

Newsletter | October 2019

From the Committee on Public Policy and Political Action

Karen Pataky, Chair

PERSPECTIVES

## Beyond an Impeachment Inquiry

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has announced she is launching a formal impeachment inquiry in response to reports that President Trump withheld aid to Ukraine while pressing it to investigate Joe Biden and his son. The six Committees investigating Trump's actions are to continue their work "under that umbrella of impeachment inquiry." New developments are being reported daily, and the list of people potentially implicated continues to grow.

The event is earning the serious attention it deserves from our national leaders and institutions. But downplayed, rightfully so for now, is how this represents a continuation of the behavior that has posed an extreme threat to our leaders and our democracy. Many politicians, activists, citizens, and members of marginalized communities believe that exercising their First Amendment rights and fulfilling their patriotic duty to participate in our democracy may come at the price of safety for themselves and their families. They fear the president will either tweet about them (implicitly or explicitly), which will result in subsequent communication or action by extreme violent actors that will threaten their security and health. They also fear his amplifying existing rhetoric by those extreme actors, ginning up even more hatred and threats against these articulate Americans deeply committed to this nation.

**The pressing question is what to do about this fascism.**

1. The first thing is to acknowledge it. It is scary to understand that a major determinant of this election, our movements, and the operation of the press and leadership will not be the careful crafting of policy for people of America, this nation, and the planet at large. Instead, it will be whether the official and unofficial leaders championing these actions feel empowered and safe to speak (as well as whether those who support them will be allowed to vote). We have long understood terms like "banana republic," the record of corruption in many African nations, and the dehumanizing language of Hitler and other authoritarians that have preceded the rise of fascism and the killing of intellectuals and opposition as things that happen elsewhere. But we must accept that our country is no longer what it was. We are not immune to such threats or realities.
2. Second, we must openly speak about it. One cannot represent tweets or threats as a one-offs. They must be seen and covered in the press as an integral part of a larger picture. Institutions have been accustomed in many ways to believe that a fair fight over ideas using the judicial system and other means of government will bear significant fruit, and that human rights is best left to organizations of letter writing and negotiating with governments who won't be economically pressured to sacrifice human rights. But this is much less true than before.
3. Third, we must openly stand by the people and institutions that are targeted. The "which side are you on" question is real and pertinent. We must answer it now in our local, national, and international communities.

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4. Fourth, we must recalculate how and when we want to fight this fascism. Is impeachment, which many Americans have opposed, appropriate? (And if and what we oppose, we must do even in a thought experiment in which we substitute our least favorite leaders using their words, and substitute those institutions and populations we support, e.g., white invaders or the potential foreign investigation of a Republican president's son by a Democratic president.) This is America. We're not on a particular politician's team; we're playing for this nation.

5. Lastly, we must examine tools and implicit bias of institutions and ensure that we are effectively fighting the silencing of political critics, and the stunting of our democracy. A recent article said white Americans—btw responsible for more extreme violence than Muslims—would never allow themselves to be treated like Muslims have been in the supposed quest to identify terrorist activity. Really? So how should we recalibrate our institutions? Why do different groups get different rules on technology activity? Those leaders who have made their money on technology must have more money than more than 1 billion people. How can we make sure their funding of most institutions does not interfere with our ability to safeguard our nation and its citizens and residents? to do about this fascism.

Our democracy is at stake. Those who embrace their First Amendment rights and patriotic duties—so urgently needed now—are being silenced with the complicit agreement from the very top. Those who seek to challenge the president politically are subject to having their record lied about and their families targeted by extreme actions of foreign or domestic actors. This country and its people have undergone many crises. We have come through stronger from the battle for our nation's ideals and future. This time, too, I trust we will.

*Member, Public Policy & Political Action Committee*

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# TASK FORCE REPORT: Gun Violence Prevention

## Gun Violence in America—Will Senators Follow Their Constituents and Act?!

People say the Congress doesn't respond, but let's be specific here! The Senate doesn't respond; the House does! The second week of September the House Judiciary Committee marked up three bills, which should be on the House floor by early October. They are: 1. the Red Flag or ERPO (Extreme Risk Protective Order) bill; 2. the bill on "high-capacity" magazines; and 3. the hate crimes bill, i.e., those convicted of a misdemeanor hate crime are prohibited from possessing guns.

## Democratic Forum on Gun Violence

October 2 in Las Vegas will be a big night for the Democratic presidential candidates! Giffords and March for Our Lives will host the 2020 Gun Safety Forum in Nevada. The forum will be convened a day after the 2-year anniversary of the Las Vegas shooting that left 58 people dead and more than 489 injured. The WNDC will stream the forum during the October 2 Winning Wednesday activities.

## Corporations State Their Position

As the Washington Post reported, "Corporate America calls on the Senate to pass gun violence laws!" Senate Majority Leader McConnell has not listened to the more than 90% of Americans who support common-sense gun measures. Will Corporate America change his tune? "Doing nothing about America's gun violence crisis is simply unacceptable and it is time to stand with the American public on gun safety," wrote the CEOs of 145 companies to Senate leaders. They urged an expansion of background checks on gun sales and enactment of a strong "red flag" law. Levi Strauss, Twitter, Uber executives, and others said they were writing out of a sense of "responsibility and obligation to stand up for the safety of our employees, customers, and all Americans in the communities they serve."

This letter follows the decision of Walmart and CVS to prohibit firearms from being openly carried in their stores. Walgreens, Kroger, TOMS, Dick's Sporting Goods, L.L.Bean, and REI, along with Citibank, Amalgamated Bank, BlackRock, PayPal, Facebook, and Salesforce, to name a few, joined the group. WNDC urges all members to frequent these businesses, and thank them for supporting gun safety!

*Ellen McGovern, Chair, Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention*

# Trump's Foreign Policy: Democracy and Human Rights

## G-7 Meeting with Allies in Biarritz

President Trump's performance at the G-7 meeting in Biarritz in July—like all his reality show performances—is quickly wiped from our assaulted memory banks. If, after 3 years, we still have functioning brains to access we should, however, store away one more item on the list of harms he is doing, not only to America, but to the world.

In all of the commentary on his behavior at the G-7 meeting, there has been no mention of human rights and democracy, certainly not from the President's lips. Marvelous to say, Trump was being consistent: he has no interest in human rights and democracy.

## Trump and the Expulsion of Russia from the G-7

Trump told the G7, not for the first time, that he wants to invite Russia back into the G-7. Current members of the G-7 are the democracies Germany, Canada, Italy, France, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Russia had been expelled because Russian President Vladimir Putin violated the nation of Ukraine's sovereignty by annexing Crimea. This action was a violation of international law. It was thus in the clear interests of the democracies in the G-7 to take the action they did.

If Trump had been able to separate his personal interests from US interests he would have seen his allies' position favorably. This international law against the invasion of sovereign nations has benefitted the US in the past. As just one example, when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, old and new US allies beefed up support through their alliances for the defense of nations whose sovereignty was violated. Democracy was enshrined in articles in numerous regional organizations. Colin Powell, as US Secretary of State, attended a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) that added an article allowing military action by members to defend a member state whose democratically elected government had been overthrown by a coup. That change gave the US the support of the OAS and of the United Nations (UN) when the US invaded Haiti in the wake of such a coup.

Discussion at the G-7 meeting of Trump's proposal to invite Russia back in couldn't have avoided reference to the violation of sovereignty that was the reason for Russian expulsion, a discussion Trump would have met with a blank stare. Trump thinks dictators are strong, so grabbing Crimea would have struck him as admirable. Putin's invasion would not have disturbed him had it been pointed out.

## Trump and the G-7 Alliance: Supporting Human Rights and Democracy

A violation of national sovereignty as a trigger for expulsion from an alliance of democracies as an issue is not the same as a nation's performance on human rights and democratic actions and values. What is the same is that a violation of sovereignty and a violation of human rights and democracy is a refusal to abide by international law and norms, formally adopted by alliances of democracies and indeed by the UN. For Trump refusal to be restrained by laws or norms is strength. Strength is his position as Donald Trump, and he has identified his strength as identical to US strength and interests.

The G-7 meeting reached an absolute nadir in Trump's obsequiousness towards dictators such as North Korea's Kim Jong-un, without any signal that the North Korean's horrendous human rights violations are a legitimate subject of concern.

It is no surprise the Trump's G-7 colleagues did not hear about his human rights initiative. In July, Secretary of State Pompeo announced the creation of a Commission on Unalienable Human Rights. The launch met with immediate critiques from human rights organizations. Secretary Pompeo is a religious fundamentalist who called religious freedom "our first liberty here in the United States" and referred to "God authored rights and liberties." Little has been heard of this initiative since its launch and certainly not in discussions at the G-7, where the Trump/Pompeo identification of human rights with religious fundamentalism and authoritarianism would have been an anathema to the G-7 members.

## Democracy and Dictatorship

The important alliances of democracies should have been made more explicit in commentary on the important discussions of the trade war with China at the G-7. Analysis in the media of the strengths and weaknesses of each side should have talked about the benefit to Chinese Premier Xi Jinping of having installed himself as dictator for life. It is certainly not an accident that the flurries of tweets and pronouncements included one expressing Trump's desire to extend his second term in office. Why can't he have the dictatorship tools that Kim, Vladimir, and Xi have? For Trump democracy is weakness.

Trump seems unconscious of how strengthening democracy and human rights helps not only the US but all advanced and developing democracies. Perhaps that strength is outdone by Trump's vision of himself and God (a step or two behind) leading the charge.

*Elizabeth Clark, Chair, Human Rights and Democracy Task Force*

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## Climate Change & the Oceans

In September 2019, the United National Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate. The report warns that ocean warming is accelerating twice as fast as anticipated for the past 25 years and sea levels are rising more quickly than anticipated as ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica melt. The report also discusses the previously unknown phenomenon of marine heatwaves, which kill marine populations. Coastal economies that rely on fish and other seafood are already impacted. However, the IPCC concluded, if greenhouse gas emissions are immediately cut, some impacts of ocean acidification could be avoided this century. Read the full report at <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/home/>.

*WNDC Task Force on Earth & Environment*

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Join us every Wednesday from 6-8 pm, from now until November 5, 2019 as we work to mobilize Democratic voters for state elections across the country. The GOTV Task Force's Fall 2019 Candidates and strategy was circulated as a part of October's newsletter.

If you can't make Winning Wednesdays, there are still ways to help!

1. **Contribute** to support the WNDC's Get Out the Vote activities
2. **Contribute** to the candidates
3. Donate stamps, old laptops or tablets to help us with Winning Wednesday activities