

# WNDC



# Political Dispatch

October 2020

## THE RACIST UNDERBELLY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

***From Jean Stewart, Chair, Earth & Environment Task Force***

Most Americans seem to “get it,” that climate change is for real. At the time of this writing, wildfires rage across the West Coast and a very wet hurricane is moving toward the Gulf states. A news bulletin reports that a significant part of Greenland’s ice field is crumbling into the sea, at a rate matching scientists’ worst projections. Since climate-driven disasters cut across racial and economic lines, a closer look is needed to see the injustice that is an inherent part of this Crisis.

*The Washington Post* (September 11, 2020) carried a front-page story about a Latino community in Oregon destroyed, with no warning, by a fast-moving wildfire. This was a community of many trailer and RV parks, and small businesses. Most of it is now ashes. In Washington, DC, a recent downpour caused flooding in many homes in one of the majority-Black parts of the city: and the flooding isn’t just water, it’s raw sewage. Climate-driven disasters have a heavier impact on communities of color in this country, because of their more vulnerable locations, fewer economic resources to begin with, and higher rates of pre-existing health conditions like asthma and cardiovascular disease. They are also often the last to get adequate disaster assistance. Who is more likely to have good insurance, decent bank accounts, easy access to food sources, access to rebuilding loans, and affordable medical care? Usually majority-White communities.

Racism underlies so much of how our country addresses problems, and it is now clear that it underlies the unequal impacts of the climate emergency. It is also true of how climate disasters are driving human misery in the world as a whole, since the countries now suffering the most from drought, flooding, and heat waves are countries with majority populations of people of color, what 45 infamously called “s—t-hole” countries. Armed conflicts in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa are exacerbated by migrations of people from drought-stricken regions. Soon will come migrations of people whose lands are disappearing as the sea level is rising. Simultaneously, richer, Whiter countries in Europe and here in America see political capital in rejecting immigrants.

Although humanity as a whole bears heavy responsibility for the drastic increases in greenhouse gases (GHGs) that are driving the climate emergency, it is the prosperous, majority-White nations that have been the major contributors of GHGs since the start of the Industrial Revolution. Giant fossil-fuel corporations, and those of us benefiting the most from GHG-producing energy, have contributed the most to global warming, while lower-income communities have suffered the worst impacts.

Under this administration, the US has abandoned its traditional role of global leadership in addressing crises. The federal government has abandoned lower-income communities to whatever help cash-strapped state and local governments can provide. This is systemic racism, here all along, but made significantly worse since 2017.

Hope is on the horizon: a new and broad recognition across racial lines that racism is rooted in our national life, and all of us need to join together to eradicate it. Finally, a wide and deep conversation is beginning on the sources of racism, along with a new willingness of many White people to learn about the extra burdens imposed by our economic, political, and cultural system on people of color, and new energy among White people to join the struggle against racism. American environmental groups, embarrassingly mostly White, are waking up to a sad history of racial discrimination and are working to end it.

A wide coalition of people of all races is beginning to bond together to address the twin catastrophes looming over the continued existence of the human race: the climate emergency and the racism crisis. With the 2020 election around the corner, we can all change our country back to being a world environmental leader, and move forward into becoming an anti-racist country. The first thing we must all do is VOTE! Vote like our lives depend on it, because they do.

*PD continued on next page*

## FORCED STERILIZATIONS IN GEORGIA ICE FACILITY

**From Karen Pataky, Chair, Public Policy & Political Action Committee, and  
Chair, Health Policy Task Force**

Brutality against women who are not rich, not white, not native English speakers, and who have no advocates outside the prison facility has erupted in Ocilla, Georgia in an ICE “detention facility” AKA prison. The LaSalle South Corrections Center is run as a private (for profit) prison, which is part of the Irwin County Detention Center.

A courageous nurse, Dawn Wooten, is the whistleblower who noted both that multiple detainees had had hysterectomies without their consent and who stated they had not understood the reasons for their hysterectomies.

The hysterectomies were done by Dr. Mahendra Amin, a gynecologist from the Coffee Region Medical Center, who had been charged with Medicare and Medicaid billing fraud in 2015. The settlement with Georgia prosecutors exceeded \$500,000. But the facility has continued to refer female patients to Dr. Amin for all gynecologic concerns.

Ms. Wooten reported her concerns to “Project South,” a prison watchdog group. Other groups are also following this story including Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, and the Immigrant Support Network. The matter has also been reported to the Office of the Attorney General of Homeland Security. US Representative Pramila Jayapal recently visited the facility and spoke to some of the women. We can assume she will continue investigating every one of the women’s concerns, and will seek redress.

Tragically, forced sterilization of women imprisoned in mental hospitals, facilities for the handicapped, or migrant centers is not new. Hysterectomies are a lucrative source of income for physicians, and in addition not having to purchase menstrual products or provide birth control for inmates saves money for the detention centers.

Preventing the spread of COVID in the LaSalle Correction Center is similarly substandard—sparse COVID testing, secrecy, PPE shortages, and general lack of cleanliness are standard. Tragically, our overall disdain for fellow humans seen as “other” has hardened too many souls.

## FIGHTING VOTER SUPPRESSION

**From Melinda Burrell, Chair, GOTV Task Force**

The GOTV Task Force is increasing attention to voter suppression and the concomitant need to protect the vote. We’re working with Arlington Dems to recruit people to observe the polls and work on voter hotlines. We’ve been working with Field Team 6 to call voters who’ve been purged from voter rolls to encourage them to re-register. We are bringing in various speakers to talk to us about voter-protection issues, from the AZ Secretary of State to scholars such as Lawrence Douglas. We support the election-related activities of the Gun Violence Prevention Committee and the Program Committee.

We’ve raised over \$6,000 so far through raffles and donations, which are used to support the invaluable work of our GOTV intern as well as to buy supplies such as postcards and stamps. We are currently considering a program to support people to travel to battleground states to be poll observers or canvassers.

To learn more about how you can get involved in GOTV efforts, visit [democraticwoman.org/gotv](http://democraticwoman.org/gotv) and also be sure to see p. 7 of the October Newsletter and the Special Issue on WNDC-Supported Women Candidates



**JOIN YOUR SISTER RESISTERS!**

Each Wednesday, WNDC leads a virtual activist event from 6:00-8:00 pm, where we hear quick, up-to-the-minute election analysis from campaign representatives, then use our new knowledge to reach out to voters in key states. Our **Winning Wednesday** events have generated hundreds of calls and texts and over 6,000 letters to voters. We’re making a difference! The first two weeks of October will be the most important for letter-writing, but we’ll continue texting and phone banking through October 28! Join us!

**How do I join?**

- Check the [events section of the WNDC website](#) to register for the Zoom event every Wednesday from now through the election, from 6:00-8:00 pm.
- The Winning Wednesday team will send you a confirmation email.
- On the afternoon of the event, you will receive a reminder email with the Zoom link—just click and join!



**SPECIAL ISSUE:  
WOMEN CANDIDATES 2020**

**MEET THE WNDC-SUPPORTED  
WOMEN CANDIDATES**

## GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION TASK FORCE REPORT

### ***From Ellen McGovern, Chair, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force***

NRA While their leadership is weakened, membership dropping, and legal suits mounting, they still have their trade association, The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). According to Newtown Action Alliance, the trade association for the firearms industry announced that the firearms manufacturer Smith & Wesson contributed \$500,000 to its “#GUNVOTE voter registration and education campaign.”

American Outdoor, formerly known as Smith & Wesson Corp, is among the largest gun manufacturers in the US and its semi-automatic military-style AR-15 rifle, according to Newtown Action Alliance, was used in the Parkland, FL, high school shooting; the movie theater shooting in Aurora, CO; and most recently in the Kenosha, WI, killing of two protesters and injuring another. Help us defeat the NRA and the NSSF in the swing states by supporting GOTV's Winning Wednesdays and related activities. As our GVP partners say: “Nothing matters more than this Election! It's a consequential Election for the gun violence prevention movement.”

**GUNS & DEMOCRACY** Giffords reminds us again that our “democracy” is being threatened, but this time by gun violence! Armed protesters are showing up in DC, OR, WI, and MI, at Black Lives Matters and other social justice protests. These armed protesters inspire fear and limit free speech. We must exercise our voice at the polls! Reach out wherever and whenever you can—with friends, relatives, colleagues, and former colleagues all over the US to vote.

**GUNS & DC STATEHOOD** The Nation's Capital last year had its highest number of homicides since 2008. A majority of those 166 murders, were from gun violence. Brady United cautions that this year, the District is on track to be just as deadly! A majority of the victims are expected to be Black men. What makes matters worse is that the District still is not a state, and thus, it lacks serious congressional access. District residents do not have direct contact with Congress to address issues of gun violence, nor urge support of common-sense gun legislation. Inform your contacts everywhere about Cal Cunningham, who is running for the NC Senate and who supports DC statehood, as well as identify other Senate and House candidates who support statehood.

**TAKE BACK THE SENATE** Congratulations to the GVP Task Force, GOTV members, Club members, friends, and family, for your outstanding support of NC Cal Cunningham's Turn the Senate Blue event. We did it! We surpassed all expectations, and successfully met our goal and the campaign's goal—\$20,000!!

### **WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE STATES**

#### **Virginia**

A special legislative session was convened in Richmond, in late August to tackle police reform after the brutal killings of several Black Americans at the hands of police officers. Bills on track to pass both chambers, according to the Washington Post, would: ban no-knock warrants (which allow police to enter a home without announcing themselves), and neck restraints. Also, both chambers agree to require police to intervene when another officer uses excessive force. We will follow the outcomes of this special state session in the WNDC November Newsletter.

#### **Wisconsin**

Governor Tony Evers called for a special legislative session on reducing police brutality and gun violence after the shooting in Kenosha of Jacob Blake by police officers. However, the Republican-controlled legislature, with few in attendance and no debate, quickly adjourned the session. Deja vu, Virginia all over again, but the VA Republicans lost their state seats in the next election and control of the House! Supporting Wisconsin community groups and national organizations like Amnesty and March for Our Lives, WNDC signed the petition to pressure the state legislature and governor to consider a proposal of policing bills and funding for mental health services. (At this point, WI citizens will have to wait until the next legislative cycle in 2021 to take up these bills.)

**GVP TASK FORCE** No October meeting. The focus is on Election 2020.

## FREEDOM HOUSE REPORT

### *From Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair, Human Rights & Democracy Task Force*

Michael Abramowitz, President of Freedom House, spoke to the Club on August 4. Freedom House was co-founded by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1941, as an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy in the world. It is best known for its work documenting the threats to freedom through a series of annual surveys on political rights and civil liberties, the most well-known of which is called Freedom in the World.

Abramowitz told his WNDC audience that a key finding from Freedom in the World this year was the deterioration of freedom in more than half of all established democracies over the past 14 years. He said of great concern is a decline in freedom in the United States over the past decade or so, noting that the negative democratic trend predates President Trump but has grown worse during his years in office. Freedom House has been concerned about his attacks on essential institutions and traditions including the separation of powers, a free press, an independent judiciary, the impartial delivery of justice, safeguards against corruption, and, most disturbingly, the legitimacy of elections.

While noting that it was impossible to be sure about COVID-19's long-term impact on democracy, Abramowitz concluded with a few generalizations—not all of them gloomy—on the future:

1. Repression will continue. We've seen the initial wave of restrictions, but there will likely be two more phases: a spike across the global south as the virus spreads there, and then a long tail during which the most authoritarian leaders continue to invoke health concerns to bend society to their will. Just like the economy, the impact of the coronavirus on global freedom will be felt for years to come.
2. Democracy is going to look different than it does now, but that won't necessarily make it weaker. Elections will adapt—they might take place over more days or mostly at home—but eventually they will take place. Campaigning will move more online and to broadcast media. Ultimately, massive campaign rallies are not critical to democracy.

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Karen Pataky, Chair of Public Policy & Political Action Committee is pleased to announce that Jane Elkin will Chair the Foreign Policy Task Force.

The next Public Policy & Political Action Committee meeting will be held Monday, October 5, 2020 at 5 pm. All WNDC members are invited to attend.



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