

LISTEN BUT ACT

From Elizabeth Clark, Chair, Human Rights & Democracy Task Force

President-elect Joe Biden has done an admirable job in launching his transition, most especially in the speed with which he is coming up with important plans and actions. He has managed to integrate his powerful launch under the overall message of a reach-out to Republicans—"listening to the other side" with a message of "moral clarity and unity," as one commentator put it. But his exact choice of words is significant. Words count. Biden used the word of finding "commonalities." "Cooperation" is another big label.

He did not use the word "compromise." "Compromise" implies changing a Democratic position or principle by accepting part of the Republican position for some very specific action. Finding commonalities and cooperation can be reaching for new areas or new ways of looking at things and fits into his "Building a Better America" umbrella.

Immediately after making his victory speech—with no mention of "compromise" with Republicans—he said that he would be coming up with actions on his four primary objectives: climate, COVID-19, the economy, and racial equality. He then, in effect added the priority of bridging our national divide.

The reaction of Senator Mitt Romney was, perhaps unintentionally, a good sign of how effective he was being. Romney immediately criticized specific aspects of Biden's climate policy saying that, among other things, Republicans would be against closing down coal, gas, and oil and other parts of the Democratic climate position. But Biden in effect could launch those policies with no openness to "compromise" without seeming to violate his searching for common ground. One reason would be because he was making these announcements before he would be in a position to actually take any specific actions. He is doing what he can do now. He doesn't need the Senate.

When he says on the first day in office he will rejoin the Paris Climate Accord as well as the World Health Organization, he is launching a policy that when he puts it into effect will come as no surprise, and since most Republicans have very little interest in foreign policy will probably not cause much opposition (except, for the Evangelicals, Jerusalem as Israel's capital). He will seem to have not violated his pledge to work with the other side and listen to the other side. He will change how he handles the pandemic, as he has said, with empathy plus science and ethics. This too will not seem like a slap in the face to Republicans, even if it is an enormous change of course from Trump's.

Biden must be careful that his audience of Democrats doesn't take this clever introduction of bold new measures, married with eloquent sincere rhetoric and actions of conciliation with the other side, to literally sanction watering down essential policies and actions. There may be some Democrats who think is OK to check its progressive wing by giving Republicans a pass on keeping their Senate majority. But Democrats should be leaders, not followers. We should fight to win the Senate.

GVP TASK FORCE REPORT

From Ellen McGovern, Chair, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force

TAKE BACK THE SENATE. The GVP Task Force is excited about the Arizona and Colorado US Senate victories with Mark Kelly and John Hickenlooper, respectively, but overall disappointed that we didn't "take back" the US Senate. We will persist and join forces with our GOTV Task Force and Winning Wednesdays to bring Georgia's 2 Senate seats to the blue column. The runoff elections, January 5, 2021, for Jon Ossoff and Reverend Raphael Warnock, are priorities now through the new year!

BIDEN/HARRIS TRANSITION TEAM. WNDC signed a letter to the Biden/Harris Transition Team with 60 recommendations for executive actions that address all aspects of gun violence across the federal government and that confront this public health epidemic. The 9 categories of recommendations are:

1. Identify gun violence prevention as a priority issue;
2. Address gun violence as a public crisis;
3. Strengthen the background check system;
4. Enhance oversight of the gun industry;
5. Implement measures to end police violence;
6. Implement measures to address domestic and international gun trafficking;
7. Focus on firearm suicide;
8. Ensure the safety of all students; and
9. Disarm armed white supremacists and protect peaceful protests and voting.

To date we have 25 signatories (but others are still signing as we draft this PD) including Brady, Giffords, Amnesty International, Global Exchange, Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and North Carolinians Against Gun Violence. Look at the GVP section of the WNDC website for the "signed Letter" with the recommendations.

REGIONAL UPDATE

Virginia Policing Reform. Virginia wrapped up its special legislative session with House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn (D-Fairfax) saying that Virginia is now a national leader with its efforts to pass necessary improvements to policing and criminal justice. Among the police reform measures are: police oversight, along with funding for police body cameras; ban on chokeholds and no-knock warrants in most situations; minimum training standards for law enforcement agencies across the state; option to create civilian review boards with subpoena to investigate alleged police misconduct. Virginia WNDC members should monitor these critical actions and support your state legislators and Governor Northam. Thank them for all these successes during this challenging COVID legislative cycle!

Maryland Policing Reform. October 8, 2020, a bipartisan panel composed of Maryland lawmakers made recommendations for policing policies for the first time since the killing of George Floyd. These efforts came against the landscape of nationwide protests to address racial injustice and police brutality. House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones (D-Baltimore) created the work group to provide recommendations for what legislation should be considered during the 2021 General Assembly session in January. The work group supported statewide body cameras and use-of-force policy. Other key recommendations: repeal the law enforcement officers' bill of rights; ban chokeholds; restrict the use of no-knock warrants; and enforce criminal penalties against officers who violate the use-of-force standards.

Maryland WNDC members should watch the MD General Assembly in January 2021 to see what happens. Make your voices heard!

On Capitol Hill, US Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) plans to introduce The Community-based Response Act, which is directed at reducing the number of mentally ill people killed by law enforcement officials. Van Hollen said that, while 3% of US adults suffer from mental illness, the mentally ill make up almost half of all fatal police encounters. Van Hollen's bill, co-sponsored by Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA), would create a grant program through DHHS that would allow municipalities to create community-based emergency response programs to report incidents where individuals are experiencing mental health episodes, thereby removing law enforcement from the situation.

Task Force members: No December 2020 meeting

TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS

From Jane Elkin, Chair, and Cynthia Efird, Member, Foreign Policy Task Force

Iran and the 2015 Nuclear Agreement

Iran has taken advantage of the Trump administration's withdrawal from the 2015 Nuclear Agreement and begun to build up its supply of enriched uranium. The Trump Administration has tried, without success, to strong-arm Tehran into signing a new nuclear and security deal and to end its support for terrorism. Biden has called for Iran to resume compliance with the offer of a return to the 2015 multi-lateral Iran nuclear agreement. Whether this tactic is successful or not, it will bring the United States back into line with its European allies and end US isolation on this issue.

The New START Nuclear Arms Treaty

Although Russia has indicated that she would accept the terms of The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which expires in February, the Trump administration is demanding concessions on unnecessary additional verification measures. The START Treaty is the bilateral nuclear arms reduction agreement that was entered into in 2011 between Russia and the US. The Biden administration should reach out to internationally minded Republicans and recreate the bipartisan coalition that makes arms control a priority. After the renewal of the New START Treaty, other arms control measures trashed by the Trump administration can be renegotiated.

Confronting an Emboldened China

- The Trump administration's transactional and erratic reactions in Asia have increased China's clout over the past decade. The role of China in conflict-affected countries will increase if the US continues to devalue cooperation with allies and friends, especially the Quad—Japan, India, Australia—and international organizations such as WHO. Through aggressive military, trade, and influence actions China has made inroads in regions such as North Korea, Burma, Africa, and even Latin America.
- Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party have returned to the Mao-era intolerance for opposing views with little push-back from the US. Muslim-minority Uighers have been confined to concentration camps. A new Beijing-imposed national security law in Hong Kong threatens to end the autonomy that under international treaty should continue until 2047. Chinese authorities have harassed, threatened, and kidnapped Chinese academics and students abroad for opinions expressed or unwillingness to assist Chinese influence efforts.
- The Trump administration has exerted sporadic export controls over Chinese telecom-equipment manufacturers because of fears of espionage. Chinese scholars are being increasingly harassed because the Justice Department and government agencies that fund US scientific research believe the Chinese government is trying to acquire US research. But these efforts have been poorly coordinated and inadequately explained abroad. The trade balance has not improved. In fact, Chinese shipments of virus-related products have overall contributed to an increase in Chinese exports to the US. And, Chinese cyber-stealing continues.

- Instead of this on-again, off-again approach to combat Chinese Wolf-Warrior diplomacy, senior Biden foreign policy advisors call for a return to a balanced approach that focuses on stability, both in the straits between Taiwan and mainland China and in the South China Sea. Michelle Flournoy (How to prevent a war in Asia. Foreign Affairs, 06/18/20), for instance, advocates the reestablishment of a regular US–China Strategic forum. She notes that “deterrence depends on the clear and consistent communication of interests and intent...” An even hand by the US will lead to a more secure US and a more collaborative effort with our allies in East Asia.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO DECIDES, WHO PAYS

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

President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris have the top responsibility for the safety of all American people from illness and death via this highly infectious and airborne international virus. As of this Veterans Day at least 241,627 Americans have died from complications of this coronavirus. At least 10,334,475 persons are known to have contracted the virus. But both numbers are likely much larger because the Trump administration has neither advised nor made available the appropriate tests to track known exposures. Texas is the newest area of COVID-19 victims. They are overwhelmed and now have mobile morgues on standby.

Nurses and respiratory therapists are “drowning.” Hospitals have furloughed nursing staff to save money lost by lack of elective surgeries. Patient survival is likely to suffer because remaining staff are forced to work with a higher nurse/patient ratio. One nurse caring for four patients on ventilators is disgraceful. (Compare this situation to the “royal treatment” provided for DJT at Walter Reed.)

The current CDC spokespersons recently notified hospitals that nursing staff newly COVID-positive will be allowed to continue working “as long as they are asymptomatic.” *No coercion at all.* News of vaccines is hopeful but a long way from making a real difference.

So the Biden/Harris team is already strongly encouraging cities and towns to “distance,” and wear masks. And testing will need to be widely available and mandated with isolation enforced for new “positives.” And, yes, isolation should be compensated by employer funded sick leave. We must follow with contact tracing, which could provide many new jobs.

President Biden and Vice President Harris know better than to spew lies about “herd immunity.” They care about all of us and will follow science in making all decisions. Yet again, we Dems have to “clean up the mess” left by a Republican President.



1526 New Hampshire Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036 | (202) 232-7363

www.democraticwoman.org