

WNDC



Political Dispatch

June 2021

DEMOCRACY, VOTING RIGHTS, AND GUN VIOLENCE *From Ellen McGovern, Chair, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force*

Why are they intertwined? Why do they depend on each other? Why are they individually and collectively so important?

Kris Brown, BradyUnited President, alluded to why when she celebrated the US House passage of HR 1, For the People Act of 2021: “More than 90% of Americans want stronger gun laws. By ensuring a more representative democracy, we can get closer to passing laws that put people first.”

Americans know our democracy has been assaulted—both its institutions and its elections—over the last year. We need reforms in voting rights so that the will of the people can become the law of the land, and that includes gun violence prevention. Brown reminds us that “these reforms [voting] go to the core of our ability to create a democracy and address America’s gun violence epidemic.”

Bipartisan America supports common-sense gun solutions, such as universal background checks. However, federal action on these policies has not caught up with the needs and wants of its citizens.

Nearly 40,000 Americans die from gun violence every year, and this trend continues and is growing in many of our states. More than ever, citizens who want to exercise their right to vote are challenged by access, ease, and safety. Ultimately, the vote is key to enacting common-sense gun laws.

For decades, the gun lobby has positioned guns as an important defense against criminals, immigrants, and terrorists. It has engendered fear in many Americans and has profited from it. Furthermore, the gun lobby helped block and remove most gun laws on the books, arguing that more guns make us safer.

Common-sense gun laws,” according to Gabby Giffords, “are not only fully in line with the Constitution—they’re also supported by the vast majority of Americans.” Moreover, Giffords says, “democracy isn’t an end result—it’s an evolving, constant process, and it requires all of our active participation when exercising the right to vote, legislate, or peaceably protest. The future of our country depends on it.”

A strong and evolving democracy protected by the American electorate will generate sound and reasonable gun violence prevention laws for all! As the Washington Post’s April 17, 2021 editorial, “It doesn’t have to be this way,” states. “No single law will prevent all gun deaths, but there are common-sense measures that would help.”

Coming Soon ~~ Wear Orange, JUNE 4th, Friday, “National Gun Violence Awareness Day,” and the entire weekend. Check all WNDC social media platforms for activities and join DC Moms Demand Action

COMBATING SYSTEMIC RACISM IN PUBLIC HEALTH

From Rosalyn Coates, Chair, Racial Equity Task Force

On April 8, 2021, Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, declared racism a serious public health threat. This is a governmental acknowledgement that certain policies and practices are in place for the purpose of denying equal access to rights, privileges, benefits, and services based on race and ethnicity. This acknowledgement is welcomed, but long overdue. The devastating impact of systemic racism has resulted in higher rates of preventable illnesses, disabilities, and deaths in communities of color. It will take sustained and purposeful acts to eliminate the structural barriers that lead to racial and ethnic health disparities. Dr. Walensky has taken on a commitment to “accelerate [CDC’s] work to address racism as a fundamental driver of racial and health inequities in the United States.”

Several bills are pending in the House and Senate that address racial and ethnic disparities in health care. Congresswoman Lauren Underwood (D-IL) has introduced HR 969, the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021. The Act is a compilation of 12 bills that seek to save lives and end racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes. Among other things, the bill will: 1) provide funding to community-based organizations that are working to improve maternal health outcomes and promote equity; 2) grow and diversify the perinatal workforce to ensure that every mom in America receives culturally congruent maternity care and support; 3) invest in digital tools like telehealth to improve maternal health outcomes in underserved areas; 4) promote innovative payment models to incentivize high-quality maternity care and continuity of insurance coverage from pregnancy through labor and delivery and up to 1 year postpartum; and 5) invest in community-based initiatives to reduce levels of and exposure to climate change-related risks for moms and babies. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) introduced S 346, the Senate companion bill.

Two additional bills seek to amend the Anti-Racism in Public Health Act of 2021 to provide for public health research and investment into understanding and eliminating structural racism and police violence. The bills are: S 162, introduced by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and HR 666, introduced by Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (D-MA).

Interestingly, Dr. Walensky’s declaration of April 8 carries out two of the provisions of the anti-racism bills: she calls on the CDC to declare racism a public health crisis, and on the agency to contribute to a national global conversation regarding the impacts of racism on the health and well-being of the United States and the world. As part of this effort, the Center has launched a new website, “Racism and Health” (<https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/racism-disparities/index.html>), which will serve as a hub for a public and scientific discourse about racism and health.

The WNDP Racial Equity Task Force is in the initial stages of planning a program to explore the impact of racism on access to quality health care in the US. Stay tuned for more information.

COVID PANDEMIC COMPLICATIONS: AMERICA'S "HAVE NOTS"

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

This week's "Jobs Report" did not show the desired increase in numbers. Wall Street and Conservatives immediately brought up that historic trope that all/any financial assistance from the federal (or state) governments encourages workers to "stay home and watch television," rather than return to work. The myth that all jobless citizens are just lazy is repeated by dozens of columnists and media commentators who would deny most federal assistance that might be paid to workers who remain in the low-wage category. Our America is now more clearly divided by two entirely different life situations.

Millions of us have the luxury of working from home. This group continues to receive salaries while safe from crowded and infectious work environments as well likely infectious public transportation. All their supplies can be delivered by fellow Americans who risk their lives and their family's lives very day to pack and deliver luxuries as well as food and medications.

The front-line (AKA have nots) citizens must work in warehouses or meat-packing plants or delivery vehicles that do not mandate appropriate PPE or proper distancing, and must deliver as demanded even if recipients refuse to wear masks. During the early days of vaccine availability, it has been enormously difficult until recently for our front-line workers to gain access to the vaccines.

Also overlooked is the likelihood that a potential worker might be caring for children or elderly family members or be ill themselves. We have seen so little regard for workers that many hospitals have told nurses who became COVID-positive to continue working until symptoms MIGHT develop. And those same hospital workers are required to reuse PPE masks, gowns, and gloves.

We must continue to push back on conservatives and corporations that reap huge profits while treating fellow citizens as expendable because they are not in the fortunate work-from-home class. A final note, most of us who must venture out of the safety of our homes in order to pay rent or maintain house payments are female and darker skinned.

STILL BAD AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

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

If you are surprised at the comprehensive national campaign to get the Republican legislatures in the states to pass voter-suppression legislation, look no further than the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). That organization, funded by the Koch brothers, surfaced when Trayvon Martin was killed in 2012. Trayvon's killer, George Zimmerman, got off because of legislation called "Stand Your Ground," which basically allows the defense of feeling any degree of threat as the reason for your taking out your gun and killing somebody. Zimmerman was acquitted.

ALEC did get some negative profiling and even lost some corporate sponsors, for a time, but by now ALEC has been back as a national dark money power for years. It has been doing the same thing it did—pushing Stand Your Ground and offering Republican-controlled state legislatures ALEC-drafted bills—ready to pass—that suppress or nullify voting rights and protections. Some perspective on ALEC's continuing impact can be seen in the fact that, along with Heritage Action, another right-wing organization, it hosted a strategy call with Senator Ted Cruz. The goal is to organize opposition to HR 1, the voting rights bill supported by President Biden. We must fight this opposition and Stand Our Ground behind American democracy and voting rights.

Next PPC meeting:

The June PPC meeting will be held in the WNDC Garden at 5:00 pm on Monday June 7, 2021. We will make arrangements for call-in attendance for those who cannot attend in person.

Note: The preceding Commentary may not represent the precise positions of every member of WNDC. We welcome feedback.

