



# WASHINGTON NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

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## Civil Dialogue in an Election Year: Engaging with Candidates

What does it mean to be an active participant in our democracy?

Exercising — and protecting — the right to vote is part of the answer. Voting is an essential way to hold elected officials accountable and have input on who represents you in government. But, while voting is necessary for democracy, it isn't enough.

Democracy is happening every day, in the way you effectively share your views and build relationships with your elected leaders (see FCNL's February newsletter). It is also happening in the way you engage with the candidates, now, during the election season, so that your concerns can influence their agendas going forward.

Between now and November 8, Election Day, candidates are working to secure your vote. They're auditioning, if you will, for the role of your representative, senator, or president. They want to convince you that they are the best candidates for the job — and that gives you opportunities to share with the candidates what matters to you. They're listening. What are they hearing from you?

Whether you ask a question at a small house party, at a large rally, through social media, or in a letter to the editor, it matters that you express your point of view. Your questions, taken together with the other interactions the candidates have on the campaign trail, influence their views of the electorate and what will be expected of them if or when they take office. It helps others in your community to consider the issues you raise.

As a nonpartisan organization, FCNL does not endorse candidates or make recommendations on who you should vote for. We encourage you to use the information you gather from candidates, through their response to your and others' questions, to make an informed decision about which candidates align with your views and values.

In an election season where insults, vitriol, and polarization feed the media, the way you ask your question takes on particular importance. The questions you'll find in this newsletter, and on our website, are meant to help you approach candidates with a listening ear and an inquisitive heart. Rather than trying to trap the candidates into an embarrassing admission or unfortunate phrase, we encourage you to model the kind of civil dialogue that we strive for in all our interactions. We ask candidates how they will support diplomacy, oppose violence, and work across the aisle to make difficult decisions about our country's future. Our interactions with the candidates can model the values of respect and peaceful dialogue.

Engaging with candidates is also an important part of relationship-building, a theme that carries through much of FCNL's advocacy work. Candidates running for state office or Congress can be particularly accessible to their potential constituents. We encourage you to take advantage of that access to ask questions, share what matters to you, and start a relationship that you can build on after Election Day. [!\[\]\(95b425611cbd2b8716a140cf67c81822\_img.jpg\)](#)

Find out who's running in your area, see more questions, and get ideas for how to engage at [fcnl.org/election2016](http://fcnl.org/election2016)

## Ideas for Using these Questions

We offer these questions to help you raise peace and justice issues during this election season. You can find more advice on engaging with candidates at [fcnl.org/election2016](http://fcnl.org/election2016).

- » **Ask the question in person**, at a candidate forum, or at another event.
- » **Organize** with several others in your community to attend different candidate events and consistently ask about the same issue. This strategy is known as bird-dogging.
- » **Write a letter to the candidates.** See [fcnl.org/election2016](http://fcnl.org/election2016) to find postal and email addresses for candidates and sample messages based on the questions in this newsletter.
- » **Write a letter to the editor.** Include candidate names in your letter, and let us know if your letter is published by emailing [letterstotheeditor@fcnl.org](mailto:letterstotheeditor@fcnl.org).
- » **Engage with the candidates on social media.** Campaigns closely monitor what people are saying on Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms about their candidates. You can also use social media to find out about public events candidates are attending.

Extremist groups such as ISIS have continued to emerge despite the money and attention our country lavishes on military responses to violence. Our country must invest in diplomacy, development, and support of local peacebuilding programs to prevent violent conflict. Would you make funding for these peacebuilding initiatives a priority if you are elected?

Pivot to Peace:  
Demilitarize  
Foreign Policy

The military is often the face of U.S. foreign policy, Yet violent extremism is on the rise; in 2013 alone, the U.S. State Department reports that extremist attacks increased by 43 percent.

Groups such as ISIS cannot be bombed out of existence. Violence thrives in conditions of poverty, oppression, corruption, and scarcity of resources, which military action can't effectively address.

It's time to put peacebuilding and violence prevention at the center of our foreign policy. Our country has made some progress, most recently with the introduction of the bipartisan Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act (S. 2551). This bill would ensure effective investments in conflict prevention that has proven effective in the Central African Republic, Kenya, and elsewhere.

Yet funding for peacebuilding remains precarious year-to-year. Our elected leaders need to commit to sustained, well-funded investments in efforts to break cycles of violence and build peace.

The number of people in U.S. prisons has skyrocketed in recent decades, primarily due to the long mandatory minimum sentences handed down to nonviolent drug offenders. These sentences are expensive for taxpayers and hurt communities. Do you support legislation to reform sentencing laws and reduce mandatory minimum sentences?

Photo Credit: Thomas Hawk

## End Mass Incarceration

The U.S. has 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the world prisoners. Our prison population has grown 500 percent in the last 30 years, mostly because of changes in state and federal sentencing laws, rather than increases in crimes. The burden of these sentences falls most heavily on people of color. One in three black men in the U.S. will be incarcerated at some point in his life.

This system of mass incarceration is unfair and unjust. It needs to change. It is also expensive: the prison system consumes nearly a fourth of the Department of Justice's entire budget. Taxpayers are footing the bill, and communities suffer from the loss of too many of their members.

Bipartisan support for change is growing. By supporting efforts such as the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 2123), our leaders can take steps to reduce mandatory minimum sentences and reduce the number of people in federal prison.

Climate change looms as one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. It is a threat that undermines peace and stability in our country and throughout the world. Will you work meaningfully to advance bipartisan solutions to climate change?

## Address Climate Change

Climate change isn't coming — it's already here. Rising sea levels, droughts, and extreme weather are just a few of the effects people are feeling. Our leaders need to acknowledge humans' impact on the planet and commit to solutions.

Support for addressing this issue cuts across party lines. From the 12 Republicans who have joined Rep. Chris Gibson (NY) on a climate change resolution, to the newly formed bipartisan House Climate Solutions Caucus, the moral, economic, and security aspects of the issue are being recognized. Through our Call to Conscience on Climate Disruption, FCNL has helped encourage bipartisan dialogue and action.

The necessary policy solutions — such as reducing carbon and promoting conservation and renewable energy — will require cooperation across ideological lines. Bipartisan dialogue and solutions are essential for the prosperity of our shared future.

Our immigration system is broken. Rather than making repairs, our government is focused on punishment: setting quotas to keep immigrants in detention, building higher walls, and raiding homes. Do you support comprehensive reform to fix our immigration system that would treat immigrants and U.S. citizens touched by this system with respect and dignity?

## Reform Immigration

There's wide agreement that the system is broken, but the agreement ends there. Our nation was built by immigrants, and immigrants are still needed and should be welcomed. All those affected by migration should be treated with respect and compassion — including immigrants themselves, their families, and the communities in which they reside.

A comprehensive approach to reform would keep families together; end mandatory detentions, especially of children and families; ensure legal representation for asylum-seekers; demilitarize the U.S. border; provide a path for legalization; and create equitable and practical solution for the millions of immigrants in the U.S. without documentation. (See our full statement of principles at [fcnl.org/immigration](http://fcnl.org/immigration))

Money speaks loudly in our political system. Its influence has weakened our democracy, leading ordinary people to doubt their power and giving wealthy individuals and corporations outsized access to decision makers. What will you do to restore trust in our political system?

## Curb Money in Politics

The U.S. campaign finance system makes it possible for a relatively few number of wealthy individuals and corporations to have undue influence on decisions that should be decided democratically.

Several court rulings in the last decade have struck down congressional efforts to regulate campaign spending. Any attempt to address campaign finance raises legitimate free speech concerns, but it is necessary to balance those concerns with the access and influence that money can buy, and the detrimental effects campaign spending can have on ordinary people's faith in our democratic system.

Our leaders should demand transparency and accountability for political spending, create public financing options, and strengthen and expand existing laws. If needed, a constitutional amendment could clarify that Congress and state legislatures have the power to establish fair, content-neutral controls on election-related spending in the interest of preserving the critical democratic value of equal participation in elections.

Since 2001, Congress has given the president nearly unchecked power to engage in military action all over the world. U.S. use of lethal drones, expanded military action, and indefinite detentions at Guantanamo are recruiting tools for violent extremists. Will you support repealing the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, the basis for the president's authority?

## End Endless War

For nearly 15 years, Congress has provided neither checks nor balances to the president's war powers. Presidents Bush and Obama have invoked the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force to justify military interventions, indefinite detention, and lethal drone attacks that spread terror in communities around the world.

Today the U.S. special forces are actively engaged in more than 100 countries. Yet, in the majority of these cases, Congress has not voted on or approved these uses of lethal force.

The 2001 Authorization has been called "the most dangerous sentence in U.S. history." Congress should repeal this law and take back its authority over where and how the U.S. goes to war.



That was **FUN!**  
Spring Lobby Weekend 2016

## THANK YOU!

- \* To the more than 400 young adults who joined us in Washington to lobby for sentencing reform.
- \* To the thousands of people who lobbied from home.
- \* To everyone who supported this event.  
**Visit us online to see photos: [fcl.org/slw](http://fcl.org/slw)**



**Your candidates are on social media!**

Ask them questions, find out about their events, and more. See tips on social media advocacy at [fcl.org/election2016](http://fcl.org/election2016)



#UNLOCK JUSTICE 

President Obama wants to spend nearly \$1 trillion dollars over the next 30 years to “modernize” and maintain our nuclear arsenal, and to develop and buy 1,000 nuclear-capable cruise missiles. Do you support former Defense Secretary William Perry’s call to cancel the plans for the new nuclear cruise missile as a step toward a world without nuclear weapons?

## Advance a World without Nuclear Weapons

Over the past decade, the U.S. has significantly reduced its nuclear arsenal to fewer than 5,000 warheads. Yet even that number is too many. The world will not be safe from nuclear weapons until there are no nuclear weapons left.

Instead of eliminating weapons, current political discussions revolve around “improving” on them, at enormous cost. Now, President Obama is proposing to add nuclear cruise missiles, which can quickly escalate a conflict into a nuclear war.

Plans to develop new cruise missiles reflect outdated, Cold-War thinking that looks to deter threats from other global powers through the promise of quick and deadly retaliation. We agree with former Defense Secretary William Perry and former Assistant Secretary of Defense Andy Weber, who in a *Washington Post* op-ed this fall urged the program’s cancellation as a way to “lead the world to a stabler and safer future.”

The U.S. is a wealthy nation. Yet 1.5 million households — including 3 million children — live on less than \$2 a day per person. Do you support investing in federal programs, such as the the Earned Income Tax Credit, food stamps, and housing assistance, which successfully help families support their children and move into the middle class?

## Address Poverty & Income Inequality

Between 1979 and 2007, the average income of the bottom 99 percent of U.S. taxpayers grew by 18.9 percent — while the average income of the top 1 percent grew more than 200 percent. Meanwhile, the number of families living in deep poverty has doubled since 1996. Access to programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), SNAP (food stamps), child nutrition programs, and housing assistance are essential to preventing hunger and homelessness.

These programs also help children succeed in the long-term. Children whose families receive the EITC, food stamps, and housing do better in school, are more likely to go to college, and enjoy higher earnings as adults.

Our leaders need to ensure our federal assistance programs are adequately funded and that broader tax and budget decisions promote economic mobility and opportunity, rather than exacerbating current trends of stagnating wages and growing pockets of deep poverty.

This year, because of U.S.-led diplomacy, Iran no longer has enough fuel to build a nuclear bomb. Yet the kind of sustained diplomacy that led to this agreement does not always have political support in this country. Will you support continued U.S. diplomatic engagement with Iran, as well as with Syria, to peacefully resolve long-standing conflicts in the Middle East?

After 30 years of threats and confrontation that had the U.S. on the brink of war with Iran several times, diplomacy with Iran has made the world safer. As of January 2016, for the first time in nearly a decade, Iran doesn't have enough fuel to build a nuclear bomb. Under the agreement, Iran is subject to the most intrusive nuclear inspection regime ever negotiated.

This agreement was possible because the U.S. and Iran were willing to talk through their disagreements using tools of peace rather than threats and violence. These talks have repercussions beyond the agreement itself — Iran's participation in the Syrian peace talks in February is one important result.

The U.S. needs to build on this diplomatic success in the Middle East. Nonviolent engagement with all the stakeholders in the conflicts in the Middle East — such as in Syria and Israel-Palestine — can help de-escalate and even prevent violence.



## Support Middle East Diplomacy



During this election season, help FCNL keep peace and justice as priority issues by making a contribution today.

Donate online at [fcnl.org/contribute](http://fcnl.org/contribute) or call 1-800-630-1330

*Thank you for your advocacy and for your support.*

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**Inside:**

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On November 8, our country will make choices about leadership at all levels of government.

Voters will be electing...

**1** president

**14** governors

**34** U.S. senators

**435** U.S. representatives

**Many, many** state and local government officials

Find all the congressional and presidential candidates who will be on your ballot at [fcnl.org/election2016](http://fcnl.org/election2016).

No matter where you live, candidates are in your community seeking your vote. Make the most of this opportunity to promote policies that advance peace and justice by engaging with candidates.



Photo Credit: Mark Pratt-Russum

*FCNL is on the road! We're visiting cities across the country to share what our capital campaign means for our work for peace and justice. Here, Executive Secretary Diane Randall speaks to a group in Portland, Oregon. Find out more about the campaign and when we'll be in your area: [fcnl.org/nowisthetime](http://fcnl.org/nowisthetime).*