Election 2018:
How You Talk to Candidates Matters

In some ways, 2018 is similar to other mid-term election years. All 435 seats in the U.S. House are contested. One-third of all Senate seats and 39 governorships will be decided, as well as numerous state and local offices. Candidates are already out in force, telling voters where they stand and listening at town halls and in other public forums.

Yet this first national election since President Trump’s inauguration feels different. Frustration and anger with the administration and Congress are spurring more people to run for office. More women overall, and women of color and immigrants in particular, are seeking public office. People feel a sense of urgency to get off the sidelines and are active as candidates, campaign volunteers, and advocates.

Many people are invested in the election’s outcome and are closely following it. Will the results vindicate the Trump administration’s agenda or repudiate it? Will Republicans keep majorities in the House and Senate, or will Democrats gain more ability to advance and block legislation? How will changes in state legislatures affect national politics?

For FCNL, this election season is important for these reasons as well as another: it lays the groundwork for the next two years of advocacy for peace and justice.

FCNL is a nonpartisan organization that does not endorse particular candidates or parties. We encourage everyone to vote according to their conscience. Just as importantly, we encourage you to use this election year to talk to candidates, ask them questions, and influence their agendas.

What candidates hear on the campaign trail influences the actions they are willing to take once elected. We want to make sure they hear from you.

This newsletter is your how-to guide for engaging with candidates this year. We provide sample questions you can ask at a town hall meeting, adapt into a letter to the editor, or email to candidates using FCNL’s website: fcnl.org/2018elections. We offer ideas for engaging your meeting, church, or community group to raise issues that matter to you.

Asking questions starts or continues building a relationship with the people who want to represent you. The tone in which you ask your question and the respect with which you listen to the response make a difference in whether the candidate sees you as an adversary or a someone also seeking solutions to our country’s problems. Even when you disagree with the candidate’s perspective, engaging in a civil exchange, one person to another, can leave the door open for future conversation and transformation.

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<th>Question</th>
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<td><strong>Cancel the Blank Check for War</strong></td>
<td>As a matter of faith, FCNL believes that war is not the answer to the threats our nation faces. As a matter of public policy, the decision to commit our country to military action should not be undertaken lightly. To avoid concentrating excessive power in the executive branch, Congress has the constitutional power to decide when our country goes to war. Yet Congress has largely abdicated this responsibility. Three presidents have used the 2001 Authorization to justify unrestrained military action in the Middle East, Africa, and Indonesia—at least 41 military engagements in 18 countries. Congress needs to cancel this blank check for war by repealing the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force.</td>
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<td><strong>Sustain Diplomacy with North Korea</strong></td>
<td>Even as the prospects for peace have improved on the Korean peninsula, the threat of war remains. Members of Congress have been silent or, even worse, criticized efforts to pursue diplomacy with North Korea. This needs to change. War with North Korea would impose disastrous costs on the United States and its allies. Congress must not allow the president to choose a war that could cost millions of Korean and U.S. lives. Congress should also back the search for diplomatic solutions. The United States has engaged in dialogue and diplomacy with North Korea in the past to avoid war while securing vital national interests—as it did with the Soviet Union before that. It must do so again.</td>
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<td><strong>Stop the Bombs in Yemen</strong></td>
<td>Since March 2015, the U.S. has supported the Saudi-led military coalition to wage a devastating war in Yemen, plunging that country into humanitarian crisis. The coalition is bombing civilians and blocking humanitarian aid from getting into the country. The U.S. has backed the coalition at every stage in this war, from furnishing planes and bombs to sending U.S. pilots to refuel Saudi bomber jets in Yemen’s skies. Congress should end U.S. support for this war and stop all arms sales to the Saudi-led coalition.</td>
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Rein in Pentagon Spending

**Question:** Taxpayers are handing the Pentagon more than $1 million every minute—more, after inflation, than at the height of the Cold War. We don’t know what happens to that money, since the Pentagon’s finances have never passed an audit. Will you oppose any new Pentagon spending unless the Defense Department’s spending is thoroughly audited?

**FCNL Perspective:** FCNL does not support spending taxpayer money on war and violence. Yet even those who support some military spending can agree that Pentagon spending is out of control. Congress increased the agency’s budget to a whopping $716 billion—more than the next six largest military budgets combined—despite the fact that the Pentagon, unlike every other federal agency, has never passed a basic financial audit. The Pentagon’s own internal study identified $125 billion in potential savings over five years. After years of promises, the Pentagon this year finally started an audit, but it is unlikely to be completed soon. At the very least, Congress should put a moratorium on any new spending until the Pentagon can demonstrate where the money goes.

Ensure the U.S. Has Peacebuilding Tools

**Question:** Preventing genocide and mass atrocities protects national security, advances economic interests, avoids U.S. military interventions, and saves lives. Do you support the Elie Wiesel Genocide and AtROCITIES Prevention Act, which makes sure the U.S. has the tools it needs to address the root causes of violent conflict?

**FCNL Perspective:** Before, during, and after a conflict, the U.S. can work to build peace—if our government invests in the institutions and personnel necessary for peacebuilding to succeed. Congress has a critical role to play in appropriating funds and establishing peacebuilding structures. The bipartisan Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act protects institutions that ensure effective coordination across the U.S. government, supports training for Foreign Service Officers in early warning signs, and prioritizes flexible funding to address unforeseen crises through mechanisms such as the Complex Crisis Fund. The bill would help the U.S. respond before mass violence starts.

Revive the Iran Nuclear Deal

**Question:** President Trump’s decision to violate the Iran nuclear deal makes war with Iran more likely. Will you do everything you can to prevent such a war and to press the administration to reverse this decision?

**FCNL Perspective:** The Iran nuclear deal successfully closed off Iran’s pathways to a nuclear weapon and made the world safer. U.S. and Israeli security officials have attested that the deal is working and that Tehran has upheld its commitments. The collapse of the deal would remove extensive monitoring of Iran’s nuclear program, making U.S. and Israeli military action more likely. Members of Congress should press the Trump administration to reverse course, demand emergency hearings to question administration officials, and reach out to the other diplomats involved in the deal to discuss how to avoid military conflict.

Welcome Refugees

**Question:** Will you support full funding for the U.S. refugee resettlement program and call for increased admissions of refugees?

**FCNL Perspective:** FCNL supports openness to refugees, as well as victims of violence and human trafficking and those seeking asylum. We are disturbed by the Trump administration’s decision to scale back refugee resettlement, abandoning the U.S. leadership role in the international community and its moral duty to help those fleeing violence and persecution. The administration has increased vetting requirements, diverted funds from refugee resettlement, enacted bans on refugees from some Muslim-majority countries, and reduced the refugee admissions goals to historic lows. Congress should fully fund the refugee resettlement program and call on the administration to increase resettlement.
## DOMESTIC POLICY
Questions for Candidates

### End Mass Incarceration

**Question:** Will you support legislation, such as the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act, to reduce mandatory minimum sentences, give judges more discretion, and decrease the federal prison population?

**FCNL Perspective:** The U.S. incarceration system is unfair, unjust, and expensive. Our country is the world’s leader in incarceration. The number of people in prison or jail in this country has increased 5-fold in the past 40 years, even as the crime rate has gone down. As applied, U.S. laws unequally burden people of color. Today, African-American men who failed to finish high school are more likely to be behind bars than employed. Congress can begin to change this system by passing the bipartisan Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act to reduce mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug crimes, both prospectively and retroactively.

### Provide an Economic Safety Net

**Question:** Will you oppose efforts to deny access to food, medical, and housing assistance to people who aren’t working?

**FCNL Perspective:** Each person has the right to live a life of dignity with access to basic necessities. Programs like SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid, and housing assistance are critical to meeting this need. Taking away access to these programs will make it harder for people to find work. Making public assistance contingent on work does little to address the barriers to employment that many people receiving these benefits face. These barriers include access to affordable child care and transportation, predictable work schedules, and education and training opportunities. Work requirements may shrink public assistance rolls, but they will not reduce poverty or help people achieve self-sufficiency.

### Stop the Gun Violence Epidemic

**Question:** Nearly 100 people die every day in this country from gun violence. If you are elected, what will you do to stop this gun violence epidemic?

**FCNL Perspective:** The prevalence of guns in the United States is a public health crisis, a policy failure, and a reflection of our country’s culture of violence. From mass killings carried out by legally purchased assault weapons to “everyday” deaths from suicide, domestic violence, or at the hands of police, gun violence is preventable—if Congress is willing to act. As initial steps, we call on Congress to reinstate a ban on assault weapons, institute universal background checks, pass legislation to advance evidence-based gun violence prevention, implement community-based violence intervention and prevention programs, and invest in domestic violence and suicide prevention efforts.
Reform the Immigration System

**Question:** Will you work for comprehensive immigration reforms that enable families to stay together and protect the rights and safety of all immigrants regardless of citizenship status, vocation, race, or religion?

**FCNL Perspective:** Based on our belief that there is that of God in everyone, we are called to encounter one another with love and compassion, regardless of place of birth, religion, or race. Yet, instead of working to fix a flawed immigration system, Congress has focused on tougher enforcement measures that hurt immigrants and their communities. This enforcement-only approach wastes money, enriches private prison corporations, terrorizes border communities, racially profiles immigrants and U.S. citizens, tears families apart, and abrogates constitutional protections. Congress should insist on rigorous oversight over immigration detention and enforcement and enact legislation that makes the legal immigration system more accessible and affordable, with an emphasis on keeping families together and strengthening protections for asylum-seekers and refugees.

Address Climate Change

**Question:** How should the U.S. be involved in international efforts to address climate change? Do you support the president’s decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement?

**FCNL Perspective:** Climate change is a global problem that needs global solutions. Its effects are already evident in the devastating hurricanes and wildfires the U.S. has recently experienced and in ever-rising global temperatures. Bold action, both individually and collectively, is required to address these alarming trends. Congress should pass legislation to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, and the U.S. should participate in international agreements to address and mitigate the effects of climate change. President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement points the U.S. in the wrong direction, endangering both its negotiating power with other nations and the wellbeing of communities around the world.

Honor the Promises to Native Americans

**Question:** How will you engage with Native American tribes to ensure they are involved in the decision-making process on policies that affect them?

**FCNL Perspective:** Native American tribes have the inherent right to govern themselves and their lands. This right is affirmed by the U.S. Constitution, by treaties between tribes and the federal government, and by court rulings. The trust relationship between tribes and the federal government—establishing that the U.S. must treat tribes as sovereign nations and support tribal self-governance and economic prosperity—is also well-established legal precedent. Yet Congress often ignores tribal leaders’ priorities.

De-Militarize Local Police Departments

**Question:** Will you support legislation, such as the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act, to curtail the Pentagon program allowing police departments to receive free surplus military equipment?

**FCNL Perspective:** Already, in many towns and cities, police officers feel—and sometimes see themselves—more like an occupying force than community servants. Arming local law enforcement agents with grenade launchers, tanks, and guns designed for a battlefield only reinforces the threat that communities, especially communities of color, see in law enforcement. Congress should end the program and take steps to de-militarize U.S. police forces by insisting on accountability measures, training in de-escalation tactics, and implicit bias training.
Engaging (from p. 8)

Write a Letter to the Editor

Any of the questions in this newsletter can become the basis for a letter to the editor. Respond to a news article if possible, and keep your letter short (150 words or less). Be sure to include the names of your candidates so campaigns will see the letter. Get more tips at fcnl.org/lte, and please email a copy to support@fcnl.org if your letter is published!

Contact Campaigns Directly

You can send campaigns a postal letter or an email. See FCNL’s website at fcnl.org/2018elections for sample letters to candidates based on the questions in this newsletter.

Engage with Candidates on Social Media

Follow candidates on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms and comment to raise issues you want to see them address. Campaigns monitor these sites closely! Candidates are also likely to share information about public events on these platforms.

As you can see, you can use these questions in many different ways. However you interact with candidates, you will learn about them and they will learn about you and what you expect them to pay attention to if elected.

Resource: Download our handy pocket guide to help you engage candidates this year: fcnl.org/2018elections

Engaging a Texas Candidate

A May campaign event for Beto O’Rourke, a candidate for the U.S. Senate, gave Advocacy Corps member Jordan Navarro the chance to ask about climate change. Jordan, who attended the event with several friends, asked O’Rourke, who currently represents Texas’s 16th congressional district, if he would support bipartisan legislation and international efforts to address climate change.

In response to Jordan’s question, O’Rourke promised support in both these areas. He went on to praise the efforts of the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus to find practical climate change solutions. O’Rourke said he would continue to support action on climate in the Senate.

Jordan now has the opportunity to follow up with O’Rourke, now as well as after the election. Candidates are accountable to their voters, and asking questions at events gives you the opportunity to make sure candidates know your priorities.

Jordan is an organizer in FCNL’s Advocacy Corps, a 9-month paid program for young adults between the ages of 19-30. Organizers connect local activists and leaders with their member of Congress. They work for long-term policy change and gain hands-on advocacy and leadership experience. Find out more at fcnl.org/advocacycorps.

If you go to a campaign event, do what Jordan did and send FCNL a photo! Let us know how it went and what kind of response you received: support@fcnl.org.
Election 2018 (from p. 1)

Many of you are already involved in this election, as volunteers and in efforts to increase voter registration and turnout. These are also ways of shaping our government for the coming years.

This election is important—and it’s also just one point in the process of political change. Changing U.S. policies to advance the world we seek takes persistence and focus, before, during, and after an election. It takes an ability to adapt to changing circumstances, paired with a clarity of purpose and principle—a sense of what can and can’t be compromised.

Engaging with candidates now helps put issues on their radar and also gives you an opening to follow up after Election Day, once successful candidates have turned to the business of governing.

The challenges facing our country won’t be solved by one election—but the way you take part in our democracy during the election makes a difference in how solvable those problems will be.

“FCNL educates and empowers Friends and those who share our concerns to participate in the political process as voters, advocates, and elected officials.”

~ The World We Seek: FCNL Statement of Legislative Policy

Three reasons why we appreciate FCNL monthly Sustainers:

1. These monthly contributions ensure we’re able to advocate for peace, justice, and sustainability daily.
2. Giving monthly is the most efficient and environmentally friendly way to support FCNL.
3. Their ongoing support allows us to better plan for the future, making our education and advocacy programs more effective over the long-term.

If you’d like to join the 1,468 people who are already giving monthly as part of FCNL’s Sustainer program, please visit fcnl.org/sustainers or call 202-903-2508.

Thank you to all our Sustainers. Every month, you are a key part of our work for peace and justice.
Engaging with Candidates

As the November 6 election approaches, political candidates are hosting town halls, talking to voters, and listening more closely to constituents. This is an opportunity to lift up our concerns for peace and justice with candidates for Congress and state offices, and with the public.

Here are suggestions for how to engage with candidates in 2018.

Ask a Question at a Campaign Event

You can check candidate websites or contact campaign offices to find out about public appearances. We recommend deciding in advance what question you want to ask and practicing speaking it out loud. You will likely only have a minute or two to ask your question. Listen carefully to the candidate’s answer and thank them for their response.

Consider going to an event with other people who are ready to ask the same question. This strategy increases the chances that one of you will be called on to speak.

If you attend an event, take a photo and send it to us at support@fcnl.org! We will share it on social media to inspire others.

Organize a Campaign Event

When you work with your meeting, church, or community group to put on your own event, you can focus on the issues most important to your community and help candidates get to know your group. Several years ago, Durham Friends Meeting invited congressional candidates to such a forum and asked them questions based on FCNL’s suggestions. You can do the same!

Organize a Joint Letter to Candidates

Letters can come from a few people or from your meeting or church as a whole, asking candidates’ perspectives on your priority issues. Joint letters can help show candidates that there’s an organized group of people who are paying attention to an issue.

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