



## The Persistence of Faithful Advocacy



By Jim Cason

A new year, a new Congress, and a new president offer hope for decisive action and real change from the destructive policies of the last four years. Yet as the new year unfolded, resistance from the departing president, his political allies, and the mobs of extremist white nationalist he nourished and incited underlined the difficulty of this work.

Democracy in the United States has always been a work in progress. But the events of the first few weeks of January remind us of how much work is still needed to address the underlying inequities, the white supremacy, racism, and anti-Semitism that are eroding the foundations of our country.

The Biden administration has outlined an ambitious agenda on some of the issues that are on top of the list of FCNL priorities. Our agenda is, of course, a much bigger agenda than what President Biden is currently advocating. The Biden administration has taken some important actions by executive order, but congressional action will be needed on many of the issues that are priorities for FCNL.

Even with a divided Congress and the insurrection in early January, I'm optimistic that more change will come. Changes regarding how we address the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout are already happening. But we cannot stop there. We also are called by our own priorities to start addressing the underlying racism and structural inequalities in our current system that have been thrown into such stark relief by recent events.

### We Know How to Advocate

What we know from our history is that for change to happen, Congress needs to hear early in the year from constituents in their home districts and states. The first

eight months of 2021 will be critical to the success of any legislation that can pass in the 117th Congress. By the end of this year, members of Congress will already be running for reelection. Substantive legislative change becomes much more difficult as partisan political posturing takes hold.

We know how to do this work. In the last year, your persistent advocacy provided critical support to pass laws expanding Pell Grants to incarcerated individuals, increasing food assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, banning the transfers of bayonets and other war equipment to local police, and addressing the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

In a time of conflicting priorities, members of Congress listen hard to what they hear from their constituents who have built relationships with their offices. For example, staff for a Republican senator told our members last

*(continued on page 7)*



*Weeks after the inauguration, the U.S. Capitol continues to be protected by the National Guard and barbed wire. Photo by Brian Feinzimer/FCNL.*

# A Snapshot of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress

By Alex Frandsen



Members of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress have been sworn in, and they've got their work cut out for them. From the COVID-19 vaccine rollout to climate change to institutional racism, our lawmakers are facing a formidable set of challenges.

While these challenges need to be dealt with almost simultaneously, we're ready to work with our legislators to address these issues. We've written this snapshot to bring you up to speed on the new session. Read on to learn what's new on Capitol Hill, what's the same, and how you can engage your members of Congress.

## The Big Picture

The most notable change from the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress is that control over the Senate changed hands. Sens. Raphael Warnock (GA) and John Ossoff (GA) both won their run-off elections, which means that Democrats now narrowly control the chamber. The majority leader is now Sen. Chuck Schumer (NY), and Sen. Mitch McConnell (KY) is the minority leader.

In the House, Democrats lost seats but still retain control over the chamber, with 221 members compared to 211 Republicans. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA-12) was reelected as Speaker of the House, and Rep. Kevin McCarthy (CA-23) is the minority leader.

While both chambers continue to be predominantly male and white, the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress is the most diverse in history. A record 141 women are serving in this Congress, and a record 25 Black women—all Democrats—won House seats this year. This is up from the previous high of 22 women last cycle. There

are 45 Latinx members across both chambers and 19 Asian-American members. There are also 11 LGBTQ members of Congress, a record.

## Faith on Capitol Hill

Congress remains overwhelmingly Christian. According to the Pew Research Center, 88% of members identify as Christian, and 55% identify as Protestant Christian. Members who identify as Jewish are the next largest group, making up 6% of the new Congress.

There are three members who identify as Muslim: Reps. Rashida Tlaib (MI-13), Ilhan Omar (MN-5), and Andre Carson (IN-7). Two identify as Buddhist: Rep. Hank Johnson (GA-4) and Sen. Mazie Hirono (HI). Two others identify as Hindu: Reps. Ro Khanna (CA-17) and Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL-8).

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (AZ) is the only member to identify as religiously unaffiliated.

## How You Can Engage with the New Congress

Just as before, [fncf.org/congress](https://fncf.org/congress) is your main hub for engaging with members of Congress. You can find action alerts, identify your legislators, and use a staff look-up tool to figure out who works on the issues you're interested in.

If you're new to our digital action center, we've put together a short video on the home page to help you get oriented.

*(continued on page 6)*

*A new banner is up outside FCNL headquarters on Capitol Hill to greet the 117th Congress and remind them of the world we are trying to create. Photo by Diane Randall.*



## Two Viewpoints: Why I Advocate

### Ormond Derrick writes from Sarasota, Florida:

Turning on the news these days doesn't exactly scream "Good Morning" to America anymore—millions of Americans are unemployed, virus cases are on the rise, and there's political turmoil in our nation's capital.

While headlines tend to dehumanize the people behind them, our neighbors, our family, and human beings generally are all representative of the collective suffering. Just as one person's pain contributes to this bleak picture, so can one person's resolve to brighten it.

While many would feel it useless to lobby a Tea Party member to support federal assistance for the COVID-19 pandemic, I feel quite the opposite. Politics is so divided right now; we are a country in the fray. While we think of Congress as a place of abstract ideas, members of Congress are human beings just like you and me.

As a citizen, a constituent, and a former FCNL Advocacy Corps member, I know speaking from your own experiences proves powerful. Lobbying over the spring and summer, I watched as members' entire body language changed and their resolve softened. Their human sides began to show when I described watching food cabinets go bare while people await assistance.

Experiences like these show me that politics go beyond our current divide. We are humans, mortal to the conditions we create, and members of Congress are no different. Even though I am not always successful, if my lobbying changes the mind of one person, it pushes policy that would help change the mind of one more—that's a change to the collective picture I wouldn't have made by staying quiet. This is why I keep lobbying.

*Ormond Derrick is a 2019-2020 Advocacy Corps organizer.*

### Beth Henricks writes from Indianapolis, Indiana:

I used to feel that living in a conservative state rendered my voice useless. I have had some good conversations with officials in my state of Indiana. Though we often disagree, I also know there are issues about which they will listen to my view. This is the importance of the work that each of us does to develop connections within the offices of our representatives.



*FCNL advocates meet with Rep. Jack Bergman (MI-1). FCNL Photo.*

Indiana Sens. Mike Braun and Todd Young and their staff have been very open to talk about our priorities—most recently about the last COVID-19 relief bill. I felt that my spiritual approach and role as a pastor at a Quaker Meeting connected me to Sen. Young's legislative director.

She is also a person of faith, and we talked about our spiritual experiences. When food and rent assistance were included in the bill that passed, I believe it was in part due to my conversations as well as those of others.

I am thankful that FCNL provides a way to put my faith and testimonies into action. I continue to listen to the calls that I feel God speaks into my heart about issues that I must act upon. There are so many injustices, and one can feel overwhelmed and immobilized by the magnitude of challenges that we need to address to make society more loving and just.

Many people of faith become discouraged and might believe that they can't make a difference. I have felt this before, but I know that I need to work on the issues that God calls me to be my work. Over the last 25 years, FCNL has provided a great way for me to answer this call.

*Beth Henricks is a member of the FCNL General Committee, appointed by the Western Yearly Meeting.*

## Advocacy Teams at Five Years: Now in 42 States

FCNL's power to make change in Washington is a result of the combination of careful lobbying on Capitol Hill and focused advocacy around the country. Five years ago, FCNL staff began working with advocates around the country to launch local Advocacy Teams that build deep relationships with their members of Congress.

The first teams were launched in 2015. Today, we have more than 120 teams stretching across 42 states, engaging Congress to end endless wars. Here are some of their stories.

### Colorado: Diplomacy with Iran Is a Marathon, Not a Sprint.

In 2015, few members of Congress wanted to be seen as friendly with Iran, a country that had taken U.S. Embassy personnel as hostages in 1980. Nonetheless, President Barack Obama helped to negotiate an international agreement blocking Iran's ability to build nuclear weapons and imposing the most stringent monitoring program ever created.

In September, the Senate was voting on whether to block the United States from joining the Iran Nuclear Agreement (JCPOA by its formal initials). The Colorado Advocacy Team, which had existed for only a few months, contacted their senators to press for support for the JCPOA. One of their senators ended up voting to support diplomacy with Iran. Years later, the senator's staff told the Colorado team that their lobbying was instrumental in the senator's decision to support diplomacy with Iran in 2015.

Subsequently, former President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the diplomatic agreement with Iran and imposed new sanctions. As a result, Iran re-started enriching uranium that could lead to building new nuclear weapons. Publicly, President Joe Biden said that he wants to reenter the JCPOA to halt Iran's uranium enrichment program.

In January 2021, the Colorado Advocacy Team formed a coalition with the local chapters of J Street—a pro-peace, pro-Israel organization—and several other organizations to host a Zoom briefing on diplomacy with Iran. It attracted hundreds of viewers, all of whom were urged to lobby their senators.



*With the COVID-19 pandemic, Advocacy Teams pivoted to Zoom, not only to lobby members of Congress but also to get the latest updates on FCNL issues.*

### Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Engaging Local Media

Throughout 2019, the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Advocacy Team published six letters to the editor in LNP, their local newspaper. The letters called on their senators and representatives to support legislation that would repeal the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMFs). These have been used by three different presidents to justify wars all over the world.

"We received no responses, no rebuttals, and no inquiries for feedback from the LNP staff," said Advocacy Team member Tom Latus. "We asked for a meeting with the paper's editorial board but got no response. It felt like all our words were falling into a void."

Then, in January 2020, they found out their impact: With no advance notice, LNP published an editorial from the publisher citing many of these letters from Advocacy Team members. The editorial declared, "Congress needs to do its job and take back its power to authorize war."

Latus said that the editorial was a big deal for Lancastrians. "As the county's only daily newspaper, it is read and argued over by everyone—right, left, center," he said. "This editorial presents AUMF repeal as logical, pure common sense—and patriotic—as in supporting the Constitution .... The moral of this story ... is to stay faithful, persistent in our mission, and expect that what needs to be said will be heard."

**"FCNL Advocacy Teams have helped me become a better advocate as well as provided me with coping and wellness tools."**  
– Nancy Bermon, New York Advocacy Team

### Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Building Strong Relationships

Friends in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, hosted FCNL's very first Advocacy Team workshop and have continued to stay engaged with their members of Congress. The team has prayed for their representative's sick wife, worked with local coalitions to expand support for sentencing reform, and consistently engaged with their community on every issue that has been an Advocacy Team priority.

In 2020, they joined World Beyond War and other organizations to support a billboard that read, "Three Percent of U.S. Military Spending Could End Starvation on Earth." Rep. Gwen Moore (WI-04) and Milwaukee County Supervisor Steve Shea joined the peace activists to highlight this message. Two local television stations covered the event.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread in Iran, the team asked Rep. Moore to join other members of Congress in appealing to the U.S. Treasury to lift sanctions on Iran so that medicines and medical equipment can enter the country. Within days, her staff agreed and sent a letter to the Treasury. "How wonderful [it is] when our representatives follow through right away," said team member Roger Hansen.

**"I'm going to tell you that I wouldn't have been able to [pass the repeal of the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs] had it not been for the Friends Committee and how you all have really gotten to your members of Congress and made sure they understood in no uncertain terms that they had to be accountable."**

**– Rep. Barbara Lee (CA-13), addressing FCNL's Advocacy teams, September 2020**

### Huntsville, Alabama: Opening New Pathways with Conservatives

Advocacy Team members in Huntsville, Alabama were not sure how their conservative congressional delegation would react to constituents, calls for Congress to reassert its authority over war.

In a 2020 meeting with their representative, they were careful to respectfully frame their request in terms of the U.S. Constitution.

"No one has ever talked to me about the Authorizations for Use of Military Force," said their representative. "I can't say how I will vote on Barbara Lee's amendments until I read them, but I will study them." *(continued on page 6)*



FCNL Milwaukee Advocacy Team is joined by Veterans for Peace, World Beyond War, and Peace Action in front of the billboard they built focusing on the cost of military spending. Congresswoman Gwen Moore (WI-4) spoke at the event as well. Photo by Susan Ruggles.

## Advocacy Teams at Five Years (from page 5)

Judy Guerry, a member of the team, said that the response was better than they hoped for. "All three of our Congressmen have been encouraging overall. Thanks to you all at FCNL for your training, encouragement, and monthly and twice-monthly investments in helping us get to this point."

## Lexington, Colorado: Lobbying That Strengthens Faith

One Advocacy Team member reflected on his growth over several years, both as an advocate and a

person of faith. He shared the deep anger he felt after the 2016 election. He added that he struggled with knowing how to express his frustration and disappointment to his members of Congress.

The advocate wanted to go into congressional offices and shout at their staff so they would know how upset he was.

But he changed his approach after receiving regular support from FCNL on how to lobby effectively and strategically. Not only did he get the tools and training to be a better advocate, but it also "made me a better Quaker." 

## Snapshot (from page 2)

The beginning of a new session of Congress is a great time to begin building relationships with your legislators. We encourage you to reach out to your members, congratulate them on their election, and tell them that you'll be in touch.

You can do this by either using our blank letter template ([fcnl.org/writeyourownletter](https://fcnl.org/writeyourownletter)) or by looking up their phone numbers by clicking on the *My Officials* tab at [fcnl.org/congress](https://fcnl.org/congress).

Alex Frandsen is FCNL digital communications associate. 

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 Friends Committee  
on National Legislation

March 20–22, 2021

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[fcnl.org/slw](https://fcnl.org/slw)

THE FIGHT CAN'T  
END HERE!  
KEEP THIS SAME  
ENERGY FOR YEARS  
TO COME! BLM



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# Accountability, Justice, and Fierce Love



By Diane Randall

The January 6 insurrection in the U.S. Capitol jolted our political landscape. It was a traumatic inflection of the Trump presidency that caused deaths, destruction, and soul-searching questions of how we can possibly become a unified country. We felt disbelief that an angry mob, fueled by lies and hate, would invade the Capitol and wreak violence to prevent the peaceful transition of power and further assault our democracy.

In the weeks after the insurrection, we see, yet again, the depth and breadth of the cancerous white nationalism that plagues our country. It manifests the white supremacy that has denied equality and continues to do harm.

Those who perpetuated the Jan. 6 insurrection must be held accountable and prosecuted for their crimes. We are governed by the rule of law, and we recognize that adhering to the rule of law promotes justice. We cannot have peace or unity without justice. The world we seek requires us to pursue truth. It requires us to recognize

that of God in every person and to work for a world where every person's potential may be fulfilled.

This is how we practice fierce love—to reject violence, to pursue truth, to listen, and to be in dialogue. Listening deeply to others in our communities and with our congressional offices—even when they do not share our views—is a positive step to resolve these ongoing crises. Every day, we have opportunities to create a better world.

We live at a time where the call to love our neighbors, no exceptions, requires us to be both practical in our advocacy and spiritually grounded in our interactions.

This is how FCNL works—with a readiness to speak truth, listen deeply, and lobby for the world we seek. We are grateful for your participation; it is so vitally needed as we seize the opportunities before us.

*Diane Randall is FCNL general secretary.* 

## **Persistence** (from page 1)

year that when their senator took a stand against President Trump's support for the Saudi war in Yemen, the office received a dozen angry calls from constituents asking why the senator was disagreeing with the president.

That explains why the same senate staffer was so appreciative of the support he received in a visit from FCNL constituents. Ultimately, that senator voted to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

Our advocacy isn't just about the next vote, or the next resolution. The relationships you are building now, across the political spectrum, are the key to making change in Washington. "I don't always agree with you advocates, but I always appreciate the way you approach these issues," explained one congressional staffer. During FCNL's lobbying last November at Annual Meeting, a Republican senator reiterated how much she appreciated her "long-term relationship" with FCNL constituents.

The biggest challenge for the Biden administration and the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress is how to prioritize policy proposals. President Biden and congressional leaders will drive the agenda. But they also listen closely to what individual members of Congress say they are hearing from constituents. Your respectful meetings with lawmakers early in the year can influence the agenda in both big and small ways.

The independent research organization Congressional Management Foundation affirms our experience that members of Congress place a high value on individuals who build long-term relationships with lawmakers.

Our FCNL community brought thousands of people into virtual meetings with members of Congress and their staff last year. This year, we look forward to working with you to continue and expand this work and take advantage of the change that is possible.

*Jim Cason is associate general secretary for strategic advocacy. Before Jim Cason joined FCNL in 2005, he worked as a journalist for African and Mexican newspapers.* 

## Q&A: Partnerships Expand the Power of Advocacy

With Amelia Kegan

### Why are partnerships important in our work?

Partnerships expand our power. It's not just FCNL going into an office—we're joined by other organizations who represent additional constituents. Just in that sense, the representative power of our advocacy is made a lot stronger.

It also expands our capacity. It's a lot easier to schedule 30 Hill visits when you're divvying it up between different groups. We can share relationships that different organizations may have with certain offices, so that allows us to get into even more offices than we could do alone.

When you get groups together who seem like they might not agree on everything, it can perk up ears within congressional offices. It allows us to make stronger arguments and cut through the noise.

### What's the impact of people from different faiths uniting for a common goal?

Within different faith traditions, there are some fundamental disagreements, yet there's so much commonality in the core tenets of our faiths, particularly in the moral callings of our scriptures and faith teachings.

When lobbying from a faith perspective, your message may resonate better with certain offices. There have been meetings where we pray with staffers or members of Congress in the meeting. Those moments allow you to connect on a deeper level.

### Can you cite some successes because of our coalitions?

Every victory we've had is because of our coalition work. Some of the examples that stick out are on the defensive end—bad stuff that didn't happen because of the work that we did. Blocking repeal of the Affordable Care Act was huge, and the faith community played a big role.

Another example was in 2011, when you had the Tea Party coming into Congress, and there were all these calls for deficit reduction. The faith community worked really hard to ensure that in all the fiscal commissions, bipartisan caucuses, and supercommittee proposals, there was a core principle that deficit reduction would not come at the expense of individuals most in need.

### What goes into building partnerships?

Often, a coalition will emerge in response to some sort of threat or opportunity. One coalition, the Circle of Protection, emerged out of the 2011 deficit hysteria to cut all federal spending. A wide group of faith leaders convened to protect programs that address hunger and poverty.

Those faith leaders were on opposite ends on a lot of issues, but they came together around that fact that a budget is a moral document, and we shouldn't be balancing the budget on the backs of those who can least afford it.

### How has coalition work changed during the pandemic?

A lot of the coalition work is the same. We probably have more meetings now because we can fit more in the day without travel time. I miss not meeting in person, but Zoom has been incredibly valuable.

One thing that's changed, though, is public witness. The faith community does a lot of public witness, and amid a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, we would usually have a vigil to draw attention to it. We still do that, but they're now online. This allows us to engage more people around the country, yet the visibility isn't the same in front of the Capitol.



*Aside from Amelia Kegan's work as FCNL's director of domestic policy, she also handles the economic justice portfolio. Interview conducted by Alex Frandsen. [f](#)*

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