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Our Legislative Priorities for the 118th Congress

By Amelia Kegan

As the 118th session of the United States Congress begins, Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and its network of advocates will be lobbying legislators based on 13 legislative priorities in the next two years. The priorities reflect the discernment of more than 250 Quaker meetings, churches, individuals, and organizations from all over the country.

The FCNL General Committee approved the legislative priorities during its November 2022 annual meeting.

Every two years, preceding the start of a new session of Congress, FCNL asks Friends and their meetings, churches, and other groups all over the country to discern which public policy issues they feel are most pressing.

In developing the legislative priorities for the 118th Congress, FCNL “recognized that we are living through extraordinary times: dire threats to the foundations of our democracy, including attacks on our election infrastructure; an existential global climate crisis; renewed threats of global war; intensified awareness of racial injustice and police brutality; and painful economic turmoil exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The 13 FCNL legislative priorities listed below are not ordered according to their importance:

- » Promote peacebuilding and confront the paradigm of global militarism at home and abroad.
- » Work towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and, as opportunity occurs, conventional and newly emerging weapons.
- » Enhance diplomatic capacity to end current wars and prevent new ones. Reassert Congress’ role in the use of military engagements.
- » Advocate for democracy by working to remedy threats to our electoral processes that limit access to voting and undermine open, secure, and fair elections.

» Advocate for a reimagined justice system that is fair, equitable, and transparent for all. Eliminate mass incarceration and police brutality and uphold restorative justice.

» Work to end gun violence. Encourage the use of nonviolent conflict resolution methods and support programs that promote community safety.

» Center the voices of tribal nations, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians as we work together to uphold community rights and concerns. Ensure enforcement of the federal government’s treaty and trust responsibilities to protect tribal sovereignty and enhance tribal self-determination.

» Work for comprehensive immigration reform policies to establish inclusion and prosperity for immigrant communities, regardless of their status. Reject systems and processes that violate fundamental human rights.

» Center the voices of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color as we work together to ensure genuine equity by dismantling institutional racism and discriminatory laws. Promote measures to uncover the truth and repair slavery’s ongoing societal impact.

» Address structural economic inequality, through measures such as a more equitable tax system and a living wage for all, and by repairing and strengthening the social safety net programs.

» Support expansion of programs that meet basic needs, such as affordable, accessible housing and universal access to quality, affordable healthcare.

» Address the existential threat of climate change by reducing the use of fossil fuels and harmful land use practices; employ science-based mitigation and adaptation approaches.

» Strengthen environmental protections and advance environmental justice, mitigating both global and local impacts with a particular focus on vulnerable or exploited populations.

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Looking Back at the 117th Congress to Move Forward

By Kristen Archer

Rep. Rosa de Lauro (CT-03, far left) and Sen. Sherrod Brown (OH, far right) joined Bridgit Moix and other faith leaders at a press conference in Congress. Photo by Eric Bond/FCNL.

Amid our hopes for legislative progress in 2023, it is important to reflect on our work during the 117th Congress (2021-2023). Key policy wins during that session may help us stay the course in today's divided Congress.

Victories Despite a Dark Beginning

Two years ago, just days into the 117th Congress, we saw violent insurrectionists attempting to block the peaceful certification of the 2020 presidential election.

When we could have retreated in anger and despair, we pressed on and won several important legislative victories in 2021.

Two months after the attempted coup, the House passed the For the People Act (H.R. 1), legislation designed to improve election integrity by focusing on voting and election laws, campaign finance, and ethics.

President Joe Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (PL 117-58) into law after it passed both the House and Senate earlier that year.

Then, in a major victory for peacebuilding, President Biden also signed the Global Fragility Act (PL 116-94) into law—three years after it passed Congress. As progress on our policy priorities takes a long time, this win encouraged us to continue advocating for the world we seek.

Building on this momentum, 2022 ushered in several additional wins.

First, President Biden signed the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) (PL 117-139) into law. It extended this compensation program for individuals sickened by nuclear tests and uranium mining.

Next, our Native American policy work received a boost when the president signed the 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act (PL 117-103), which included the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). This long-overdue reauthorization includes critical tribal provisions to address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous people.

Later, with FCNL's Advocacy Corps leading our efforts, we made considerable progress toward establishing a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools (H.R. 5444/S. 2907). Advocacy Corps members will continue to advocate for this issue until July 2023.

After more than 20 years of inaction, President Biden signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (PL 117-159) into law in June 2022. This includes key FCNL gun violence prevention priorities. We will continue urging Congress to invest in community violence interrupters—our legislative ask for this year's Spring Lobby Weekend, March 25–28, 2023.

President Biden ended the summer by signing the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (PL 117-169) into law. This bill contains the most significant climate investments in U.S. history, setting the United States on a path to reduce its carbon emissions by 40% below 2005 levels by 2030.

Finally, two days before Christmas, lawmakers passed an omnibus spending bill to fund the government for FY2023. This includes substantial investments in critical peacebuilding accounts and vital protections for pregnant workers. Congress also passed the Electoral Count Reform Act (S.4573), closing a loophole in how our nation certifies elections that the January 6 insurrectionists attempted to exploit.

Work Still to Be Done

Unfortunately, the 117th Congress ended in 2023 leaving key policies unaddressed. It failed to expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC), despite overwhelming public support and the backing of over 100 lawmakers. We will campaign for this tax benefit in the 118th Congress (2023-2025).

Despite our advocacy, Congress also failed to pass the Environmental Justice for All Act (S. 872/H.R. 2021), which aimed to ensure that everyone has the right to clean air, clean water, and healthy soil as we build a clean energy economy.

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With each priority, FCNL will identify, expose, and work to eliminate policies and practices that are racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory.

“We are mindful that our nation has a special responsibility to redress the consequences of our history of slavery and genocide, together with ongoing race-based discrimination and oppression,” according to the priorities document (download at fcnl.org/priorities).

As it affirmed the priorities for the 118th Congress, the General Committee also sought the community’s discernment regarding FCNL’s policies on reproductive health care, including abortion. At its annual meeting in November 2023, the committee will consider whether or how to change FCNL’s Policy Statement guidance around these issues.

The Supreme Court’s June 2022 decision that overturned the constitutional right to abortion prompted Friends to reopen the conversation around what position FCNL might take on this issue.

FCNL’s Policy Statement, *The World We Seek*, states that “FCNL takes no position and does not act either for or against abortion legislation because Friends are not in unity.”

Amelia Kegan is FCNL’s associate general secretary for policy and advocacy. [f](#)

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In December, we came closer than ever to repealing the 2002 Iraq War authorization, with the introduction of bipartisan bills in both chambers and the support of the White House. We will continue urging Congress to remove this outdated, unnecessary, and dangerous legislation from the books in 2023.

FCNL Advocacy Teams dedicated 2022 to ending U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. They held more than 360 lobby visits and published over 100 media pieces, resulting in dozens of lawmakers now on record supporting the Yemen War Powers Resolution (H.J. Res. 87/S.J. Res. 56). We will continue this work in our quest for peace and nonviolent solutions to conflict.

Looking Ahead

Despite some legislative misses, our advocacy has laid the groundwork for important progress in the 118th Congress. The start of a new session of Congress is a great time to begin building relationships with legislators. Your voice is especially important as we continue to navigate uncertain political waters.

Visit fcnl.org/congress to get involved.

Kristen Archer is FCNL’s editorial and social media director. [f](#)




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Young Adult Programs

Upcoming Applications

Advocacy Corps

APPLY BY 4/14/2023
PROGRAM 8/2023–5/2024

Summer Internship

APPLY BY 3/24/23
PROGRAM 6/2023–7/2023

Spring Lobby Weekend

PROGRAM
March 25–28, 2023

FCNL Launches Development of New Strategic Plan

By Stephen Donahoe

As I look back on 14 years working at FCNL, it’s clear that planning processes have been one of the ways that Spirit has moved within the FCNL community to guide the organization.

I reflect on the wisdom of the 2006 Futures Working Group Report that clearly laid out the need for our expanded young adult program, which was brought about through “The World We Seek: Now Is the Time” Capital Campaign (2012-2017). I think about the Forward Plan (2018-2022) and the envisioned growth of our media work which has been so instrumental in our policy progress and outreach.

As I look toward our next strategic plan, I am excited about the possibilities for the next five years and beyond.

FCNL kicked off its planning for the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan last December after the process was approved by the Executive Committee in October. A core team of 16 governors and staff will be working jointly to develop the strategic plan for approval by the General Committee in November 2023.

The FCNL Strategic Planning Working Group will be assisted by Brighter Strategies, a woman-owned consulting firm that had earlier helped FCNL develop the strategic planning process.

The bulk of the research and consultation work will be done January-July 2023. A retreat will be held in September 2023 to analyze the first draft of the strategic plan circulated for further consultations by various stakeholders. It will also include a consultation on FCNL’s values and its theory of change.

By October 2023, the strategic plan will be presented to the Executive Committee and then for approval by the General Committee during the November 2023 Annual Meeting.

Throughout the planning process, the group will ensure that there is enough input from diverse constituencies across the Religious Society of Friends, the FCNL community, young adults, key individuals who have been long-standing members of the community, and voices from impacted communities.

In keeping with the Quaker practice of discernment and collaboration, the team will ensure that these guiding principles will inform the process. The team will help achieve the balance of building on FCNL’s longstanding strengths and being open to new revelations that may arise during the strategic planning process.

Initially, the process will involve 20 individual interviews. The results of the interviews will guide the creation of a survey questionnaire this coming spring, which will provide the largest number of people with the opportunity to provide input to the strategic plan.

After the results have been analyzed, the data will be used to formulate focus group interviews. The focus groups, representing various stakeholders, will delve deeper into issues that the survey will uncover.

After this research phase, Brighter Strategies and FCNL will draft the 2024-2028 FCNL Strategic Plan. This will be shared with various stakeholder groups and finalized through discernment over a two-day in-person retreat.

The resulting plan will be presented for approval by the General Committee when it meets, November 15-19, 2023.

The FCNL Strategic Planning Working Group is composed of the following governors: Mary Lou Hatcher, Michael Fuson, Tommy Wrenn, Emily Temple Abels, Ernie Buscemi, Trayce Peterson, Sergio Mata-Cisneros, and Pamela Minden. Members from the staff are Adlai Amor, Stephen Donahoe, Alicia McBride, Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, Thandie Masilela, Bridget Moix, Lauren Brownlee, and Amelia Kegan.

The Working Group can be reached at spwg@fcnl.org.

The charge of the Futures Working Group in 2006, one of our predecessor groups, rings true today: “[P]rayerfully envision FCNL’s future—to be inspired and also realistic. Just as our spiritual seeking calls us to live in a ‘now and not yet’ world. The FWG was asked to hold FCNL in the discerning Light of ‘now’ and discover what ‘not yet’ perfection our future might entail.”

Stephen Donahoe is FCNL’s associate general secretary for development. [f](#)

Q&A: Naming the Unacceptable

With Joe Volk

Joe Volk served as FCNL's executive secretary from 1990 to 2011. With the 118th Congress now sworn in, we caught up with Joe to learn more about lessons from the past that can be applied to today's political climate.

You were FCNL's executive secretary for nearly two decades. How did Congress change over that period? How did FCNL's priorities change?

I started on April 1, 1990. I picked that day because everyone said that it was a fool's errand to fix Congress and that nothing happens there.

At that time, we were focused on what would be possible now that the Berlin Wall had come down and the Cold War was ending. What would the new paradigm be for peace and security?

It was a chance to finally get away from these huge military budgets, huge military alliances like NATO, and create other structures.

That thinking lasted until August 1990 when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Then the military-industrial complex had just what they wanted.

Later, in 1995, Newt Gingrich became speaker of the House. From then on, you began to see a decline in what seemed to have been a more civil engagement on policy issues and a drift into name-calling, personality assassinations, and so on. That just gradually became uglier, until finally, a lot of FCNL's friends in Congress left by the 2000s.

It became harder, although not impossible, to have these bipartisan conversations that were so important to FCNL.

What is important to keep in mind as FCNL continues to expand and grow in the coming years?

The future of FCNL is not with grants from foundations, although those are important. The future is not with big, deep-pocket donors, although they are very important. It really is the support of the population of people across the country who feel invested in this experiment.

What aspects of congressional advocacy have remained the same over the years, even in the face of growing gridlock and division?

People have to be making demands in the streets, and then someone has to go on the Hill and translate those demands into actual policy. Without the movements doing their part, and without connecting those movements to public interest lobbyists on the Hill, it is unlikely to succeed. You need that cooperation to make this work. No matter how Congress changes, no matter how bad it might seem to get, that is an essential relationship that needs to be maintained.

How does the division of power in Congress affect FCNL's strategy?

We are now in a very, very dangerous moment. Previously, when Congress was divided, the conversation could still be about policies. You could disagree, but you could also



Joe Volk and Bridget Moix share a moment at FCNL's Annual Meeting 2022 in November. Photo by Wesley Pinkham/FCNL.

define the problem in a way where everyone would be able to work on it. In my impression now, especially with the new majority in the House, [the conversation] is not focused on policy. It is not defining real problems. It is trying only to win and exercise power and to do that by demeaning the opponent and by raising tons of money through misinformation and disinformation.

That poses some tough questions to FCNL, not the least of which is figuring out, "What does it mean to be non-partisan in this situation? I do not believe that non-partisan means you have to work with people who think the Constitution should be overturned, or that you should work with people who think it is okay to engage in violent disruption of the government. You have to name these things as unacceptable, and at the same time, you have to keep working on what you can get done.

Excerpts from an interview with Alex Frandsen. 