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FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

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Our Progress Towards the World We Seek

By Diane Randall

FCNL made important progress during the 115th Congress, despite the prevailing hyper-partisanship. The mission for peace, justice, and sustainability is essential for all humanity, regardless of political views.

Thanks to your faithful advocacy, four bills that FCNL staff and grassroots advocates relentlessly advocated for were signed into law during the last Congress:

- » The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 establishes the prevention of genocide and other atrocities as core national security interest and moral responsibility of the United States.
- » The farm bill, or the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, reauthorizes funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). It helps more than 40 million Americans put food on the table.
- » The FIRST STEP Act of 2018 reforms the federal prison system and seeks to reduce recidivism. The full name of the law is The Formerly Incarcerated Reenterer Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person.
- » The PREPARE Act of 2017 created an interagency council to establish government-wide goals to deal with extreme weather. It stands for Preparedness and Risk Management for Extreme Weather Patterns Assuring Resilience and Effectiveness.

These laws were not passed just within one session of Congress. The reality is our work goes beyond a session of Congress—it includes persistent advocacy that stretches across decades. We keep one eye on what's right in front of us and one eye on the horizon. We work for change that takes years of sustained, persistent effort to achieve.

We start our work with the 116th Congress full of hope and confident of the Light that guides us.

While we worked hard to pass these laws, just as important were our efforts to stop bad laws from being enacted. In 2017, we managed to help narrowly defeat legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Had it passed, 22 million people would have been deprived of health care. FCNL was a central part of the debate, with advocates making more than 295 lobby visits and thousands calling and writing their members of Congress.

We worked to affirm the powers of Congress to declare war—to prevent and curtail endless wars. During the last Congress, the senate passed a historic resolution to end U.S. military participation in the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Senators used the Vietnam War-era War Powers Resolution to end wars never authorized by Congress.

We worked on several other bills which only passed one chamber of Congress. We were informed that some of these will be re-introduced in the 116th Congress.

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Viewpoint

The Marathon for the World We Seek

By Amelia Kegan

I love running long distances. My most recent marathon was a 243-mile race deep in the Moab Desert of Utah. I ran for more than 90 hours with barely any sleep.

At 3 a.m. on my final day, the only thing I could think of was where the next aid station was. I was certain that it was going to be around the next bend. Each time, I was met with darkness and silence. I kept thinking, that I should've been there already.

Fear took over when two hours passed, and I had still not reached the aid station. Terrified, I cried to God for help: "Don't leave me lost out here, Lord."

Just then, I heard footsteps. I saw the headlamp of another runner shining a path in the darkness. I hadn't taken a wrong turn; I wasn't lost. It was just a really long race, and a really long section.

Amid my exhaustion and fear, God answered my prayers. God answered, not by removing my suffering, but by providing another ordinary runner. My companion, too, was cold and tired. We leaned on each other, supported each other, and encouraged each other. Two rather slow runners made it to the finish line, accomplishing something extraordinary.

Memories of that ultramarathon centered me as the 116th Congress was seated early this year. The next two years will be long, and we will think at times that we should have been there by now.

But I firmly believe that our advocacy marathon is one where we will be sustained by God and will be run by ordinary people. The Bible repeatedly shows that when a leader is needed, or courageous action is required, God calls on ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary.

God picked Moses—a poor shepherd with a stutter—to tell the pharaoh to let his people go. He led them out of Egypt, as they sought refuge from an oppressive regime. Yes, God picked Moses to lead a migrant caravan of asylees across the desert, seeking refuge in a new homeland.

Joseph got caught up in a criminal justice system that valued wealthy people over poor people. This formerly incarcerated individual rose to power by heeding, not denying, a report of impending climate disruption. Joseph, once incarcerated, successfully led Egypt through famine and drought.

Esther, an orphaned Jew became queen, yet risked her life to stop an administrative decree to remove all her people from the kingdom. The king issued an executive order to remove people from a different nation. God called on Esther to stand up and speak out to save her brothers and sisters.

Ruth, a Moabite, followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, to her homeland of Bethlehem. Ruth was not denied entry because of so-called "chain migration." Her gleanings of food assistance did not bar a green card because of a "public charge" designation. Instead, Ruth worked hard and married Boaz.

From Ruth came Obed. From Obed came Jesse, then David. David's lineage eventually leads to Joseph, the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus in a manger.

Jesus was an undocumented child when his parents fled to Egypt to escape an oppressive king. Jesus was wrongfully prosecuted and convicted. He socialized with outcasts. The Messiah was a Dreamer, a refugee, a prisoner—and an underpaid teacher.

In our advocacy marathon, your background doesn't matter. Each of us has a role to play as we journey together during the two years of the 116th Congress—and beyond.

We're going to run or walk one foot in front of the other. Leaning on each other. Encouraging each other. Strengthening each other. Praying for each other along the path of justice as we journey towards that horizon of the world we seek and the kingdom of God.

Excerpt from a speech delivered during the 2018 Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute. 

Our Legislative Priorities for the 116th Congress

During FCNL's Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute, Nov. 28-Dec. 2, 2018, the General Committee affirmed our legislative priorities in the new 116th Congress.

Since the early days of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), God's spirit has led Friends to be a prophetic witness and to take action in the world. The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) brings Friends' spiritual values and testimonies to bear on U.S. public policy decisions.

FCNL solicited the views and concerns of Quaker meetings, churches, and organizations around the country to help discern the following priorities for our lobbying and public education work during the 116th Congress (2019-2020):

- » Peacebuilding, diplomacy, and the peaceful prevention and resolution of violent conflict with an emphasis on the Middle East.
- » Reduction of military spending and armed interventions.
- » Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.
- » A criminal justice system that is just and equitable, eliminates mass incarceration, and promotes law-enforcement that is community-oriented and demilitarized.
- » An immigration system that promotes and respects the rights, safety and dignity of all immigrants, refugees, and migrants.
- » Equitable access for all to participation in an open and transparent political process.
- » Ending gun violence including through the support of policies informed by public health best practices.
- » Witnessing and advocating on Native American concerns. Honoring the treaties.
- » Economic justice and equity; strengthen programs that meet basic needs, including universal access to quality, affordable healthcare.
- » Sustainable solutions to climate change, including reducing fossil fuel use, increasing renewable energy, strengthening environmental protections, promoting international cooperation, and protecting vulnerable populations.

Friends are called to promote genuine equality of opportunity and communities in which everyone can safely live, learn, work, worship, and love. In each priority we will identify, expose, and work to eliminate institutional racism, institutional sexism, and other forms of systemic discrimination. We are mindful that our nation has a special responsibility to redress the consequences of its long history of slavery, race-based discrimination, and oppression.

FCNL seeks to collaborate across the political spectrum to advance these priorities. FCNL's work will be based on legislative opportunities, specific expertise, leadings, and available resources. In addition, The World We Seek (FCNL's policy statement) gives FCNL the flexibility to respond to crises and to important legislative opportunities, as Way opens. [f](#)



Friends gathered at Annual Meeting 2019, which approved FCNL's legislative priorities for the 116th Congress. From Left to Right: Carol Winkleblack, Rebecca Burgess, Andy Juhl, Jim Glasson | Photo Credit: Jennifer Domenick

Our Growing Advocacy Network

By Jim Cason

Thousands of FCNL volunteer lobbyists from Florida to Alaska visited Congressional offices last year to lobby respectfully and in a non-partisan manner for the world we seek. You advocated to support sentencing reform, to support legislation to prevent atrocities, to oppose U.S. support for the Saudi war in Yemen, and to prevent cuts to the food stamps program.

Several of the resulting bills passed Congress and were signed into law, and others are moving policy without becoming law. For example, the Senate passed a historic resolution on Yemen, essentially re-establishing Congress's constitutional authority to declare war and putting pressure that is driving peace talks that could end that war.

Your work—whether as Quaker advocates, members of FCNL Advocacy Teams, or as an FCNL Advocacy Corps organizer—made a major difference during the 115th Congress.

“You changed my mind,” one member of Congress told FCNL advocates recently. He praised them for their persistence, their letters to the editor, and their respectful engagement with his office. Not all our advocates heard such dramatic words, but many received thanks for their efforts.

“You all do advocacy just right,” staff for a Republican senator told another team. Throughout the year, FCNL's volunteer network of advocates kept hearing thanks for their engagement with Congress.

FCNL's 97 Advocacy Teams alone logged 286 lobby visits and published nearly 200 letters to the editor around the country in 2018. But most importantly, they secured Congressional co-sponsorship of legislation that pushed back against dangerous threats of U.S. military action against North Korea.

(continued on p. 6)



In 2018, FCNL's 97 Advocacy Teams logged 286 lobby visits and published nearly 200 letters to the editor around the country. Left to Right: Elinor Steffy, Delcy Steffy, Cindy Fowler | Photo Credit: Jennifer Domenick

Six Ways to Advocate Prophetically

Your advocacy early this year will be critical to setting the agenda for the new Congress. Here are six ways you can be prophetic, persistent, and powerful advocates with FCNL:

1

Write Congress

Telling your story, and explaining why an issue matters to you, is key to effective advocacy. Please invite your friends and family to join you in this important work by signing up for our regular focused email action alerts: fcnl.org/alerts

2

Organize an in-district visit

Visiting the district and state offices of your members of Congress is a great way to start building a relationship. Learn the basics of lobbying and go to fcnl.org/congress to look up your member of Congress.

3

Form an Advocacy Team

Our FCNL Advocacy Teams are engaged in high-impact advocacy throughout the country. Learn how you can launch a team that will meet monthly and lobby members of Congress on a single issue for an entire year. fcnl.org/advocacyteams

4

Bring FCNL to your Meeting

Organize your Quaker meeting, church, or faith community to advocate. fcnl.org/quakers

5

Grow the Power of Young Adults

Join young leaders (ages 19-30) at our 2019 Spring Lobby Weekend, where we'll advocate for comprehensive immigration reform. Not a young adult? Help us spread the word about this and other great programs we have for young adults. fcnl.org/youngadults

6

Support FCNL's Work

FCNL can sustain 21 lobbyists on Capitol Hill and a growing, diverse network of volunteer lobbyists around the country because of financial support of thousands of people. Make a donation today: fcnl.org/donate



It's a family thing. Chris Kearns-McCoy lobbies Congress with his mother, Laurel Kearns | Photo Credit: Matthew Martyr


“Quaker lobbying is a form of ministry to the nation. It is also a service to individual members of Congress and their staff. By treating elected officials with integrity, FCNL seeks to open their hearts to other perspectives and encourage them to reach beyond self-interest. At the same time, FCNL approaches these conversations with a sense that it, too, may be changed and led to new understanding of complex issues.”

-A Theological Perspective on Quaker Lobbying, by Margery Post Abbott

Progress (from p. 1)

One bill, Savanna's Act, was designed to ensure better coordination among tribal police and other jurisdictions. Native American women murder rates are 10 times the national average. The bill is named in honor of Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind (Spirit Lake) a pregnant woman murdered by her neighbor in North Dakota.

Clearly, our experience in the 115th Congress affirms the enduring power of the Friends Committee on National Legislation to influence public policy in the U.S. and around the world. We start our work with the 116th Congress full of hope and confident of the Light that guides us.


As with the 115th Congress, we recognize that using our power in the new Congress is not about the politics of partisanship or political parties. It is not about the power of money, of domination, or of empire. It is about the power of the Spirit, manifested in human beings leading us along the path to the world we seek. 

Growing Advocacy (from p. 4)

Those numbers don't include the nearly 600 people that FCNL's Advocacy Corps brought into Congressional offices last year. These local organizers, mostly students, advocated on climate change and then against the militarization of local police.

Late last year, Advocacy Corps organizer Micajah Daniels persuaded the entire student body at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, to pass a resolution opposing the Pentagon program that gives equipment designed for war to local police departments. Other organizers in Arizona and Florida worked with local Quakers to organize lobby visits against police militarization.

Several Advocacy Corps organizers also used the mid-term election to raise issues with candidates running for office, many of whom are now members of the new 116th Congress. Through FCNL's Quaker advocacy program, we organized three separate meet-the-candidate events to put our issues on the agenda for candidates running for office.

Rep. Barbara Lee (CA-13), addressing a recent conference call of FCNL Advocacy Teams, reflected on the importance of FCNL's work. "Thank all of you for all the work that you do to advance peace and justice. I just don't know what we would do without FCNL and your advocacy. Your work is remarkable; we are making progress thanks to you." 

SAVE THE DATE**Spring Lobby Weekend:****March 23-26, 2019
Washington, DC**Learn more: fcnl.org/SLW

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Quaker Welcome Center

The Power of Our Witness

By Christine Ashley

At the Quaker Welcome Center, we regularly see how the stories and connections of Friends are helping to make change on Capitol Hill.

A few weeks ago, your stories and advocacy helped reform our criminal justice system. Congress passed, and the president signed it into law, a bill known as The FIRST STEP Act (PL 115-391). It is a positive step towards addressing mass incarceration and bringing more fairness to our criminal justice system by reducing mandatory minimum sentences.

FCNL's Quaker Welcome Center was a part of this successful process—from the businessman who attended a Witness Wednesday lobby training to the early morning breakfast video conference with Senator Chuck Grassley (IA), the lead sponsor of the bill, and eight Quakers in Iowa.

Scott Breeze, a Friend and businessman, recently participated Witness Wednesday lobby training. While he has lobbied local legislatures, he had not done it with Congress. Breeze began seriously thinking about how he can engage Congress.

Breeze is the owner of a business that solely employs returned citizens. As someone who was formerly incarcerated himself, he has experiences that are important to the discussion about criminal justice reform. The two-hour Witness Wednesday lobby training that Breeze attended gave him the tools he needed to share his story with his elected officials and their staff.

Breeze was the last of the Quakers briefed at the Quaker Welcome Center in 2018 who lobbied Congress to pass criminal justice reform legislation. He was encouraged by the passage of The FIRST STEP Act; he has committed to lobby Congress again.

FCNL has advocated for sentencing reform as a part of its criminal justice program for many years. In 2016, this was the legislative ask of the Advocacy Teams and the Quaker Public Policy Institute. However, each time the bill got close to passage, it was delayed by objections from members of Congress, or the Justice Department.

The faithful advocacy of Friends and others came at critical moments for the legislation. When support for Sen. Grassley's bill wavered, our witness as Quakers and people of faith shored it up.

Carole Winkleblack, one of the Iowans on videoconference with Senator Grassley attests to the long-term effectiveness of our witness.

"Years ago, Senator Grassley was opposed to, or at least dubious about, getting rid of mandatory minimum sentences. But he read the research. And he talked with his constituents. We changed his mind," she said.

Winkleblack said that the power of speaking to our legislative representatives is just amazing. "I remember hearing Senator Grassley and realizing that he is a human being and that he can change, and adapt his thinking, and can learn...he is just like me," she added. [!\[\]\(4f6bf54ae7e4144a72d78316053e412d_img.jpg\)](#)



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To get started, contact: Mary Comfort Ferrell
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Question & Answer with George Conyne

Quakers, Laws, and Courts

What has been the Quaker view of the law?

Quakers have always put law as written by man below their conception of the law of God.

The occasions of Quaker civil disobedience are well-known, including their refusal to remove hats in deference to the nobility. But the civil disobedience is matched by deference to the law.

The Quakers' relationship with the law is that they both accept and, in instances, reject the superiority of the law.

How have Quakers viewed the legal profession and the courts?

Quakers had long seen involvement with the law as inherently confrontational or encouraging conflict and so, contrary to Quaker beliefs.

For instance, repeated clashes between Friends' principles and the pragmatic necessities of government, according to non-Friends, led Pennsylvania Quakers to withdraw from political activity during the French and Indian War.

You are a Quaker and a lawyer – when did Friends begin to choose law careers?

In the 1900s, legal scholars increasingly saw law not as a reflection of the rigid application of logic handed down from generation to generation, but as a reflection of the collective experience of society.

At the same time, courts of law and equity unified. Equity courts had tried to resolve disputes fairly in situations where the law did not traditionally apply. Law courts took on these new equity powers and lawyers saw new possibilities.

Therefore, society could shape law to suit its needs, much as the Declaration of Independence argues: "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected with another..."

Reformers—including Quakers—began to see that law (including equity) could be used to aid society's progress. Quakers began going to law school, so that, by mid-century, many Friends were working in the legal field.

How would you describe our courts today?

The United States does not have a single court system. We have the federal system and one for each state, territory, and the District of Columbia.

Federal judges are appointed by the president and confirmed by the senate. Thirty-nine of the 50 states elect some or all their judges.

In recent years big money—tens of millions of dollars—is being spent on state judicial races. Quakers may want to get involved in judicial issues—including limiting expenditures and moving to non-partisan elections of judges.

What can we do to help change the minds of judges?

Recent polls suggest that judges are generally not affected not by presidential or other election results—much less opinions polls. What affects judges most are the attitudes of those in the circles in which they travel or frequent.

Helping to shape their intellectual world with letters to the editor, creative campaigning, working with groups to show that your opinions are commonly held, is a way to help.



George R. Conyne, is a recent FCNL Friend in Washington. A lawyer and a historian, he is also assistant clerk and elder of the Canterbury Friends Meeting. Dr. Conyne taught history at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.

He is author of the books, "Woodrow Wilson: British Perspective 1912-21" and "A History of the United States Supreme Court." 