

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Nation Watch: February 9, 2017

Jessica Ceballos Campbell · Wednesday, February 8th, 2017

As social actions around the world demonstrate, the people listen, the streets listen. A vast, strong community seeks a world of greater compassion and justice. Politicians listen too, when there are enough people in real and virtual streets.

Cultural Weekly's **Nation Watch** highlights topics you may wish to take action on. We also wish to alert you to **DCReport**, a new website dedicated to investigative journalism of what the President and Congress *do*, not what they say, founded by Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter David Cay Johnston.

Who are your representatives?

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Find your Representative here: <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>

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Health Care

The House is shifting the conversation on Obamacare from repealing and replacing it, to repairing it. Markups could come in House committees within the next couple of weeks, and leaders hope to have the bill on the House floor within a couple of months. *Source: The Hill*

Immigration

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) has cut funding to Travis County, the home of the city of Austin, following through on a threat to block state grants over a new sheriff's refusal to cooperate with federal immigration authorities. *Source: Texas Tribune*

President Trump's speech at Police Chief Association Conference included a "call to action" to form a "new beginning" between the relationship between law enforcement and communities across the US. Only a day before, Senator Jeff Sessions, current nominee for Attorney General, met with Sheriffs from some of the largest counties of California to discuss ways to expand law enforcement authority in detaining and transferring immigrants to ICE. *Source: CSPAN*

In response to the president's executive order on a travel ban, and pressure from employees and protesting Uber-users across the nation, Uber CEO Travis Kalanick has dropped out of President Trump's business advisory council. *Source: Politico*

“U.S. District Senior Judge James Robart of Seattle on Friday issued a nationwide restraining order blocking the travel ban put in place by President Trump last week. The White House.” *Source: USA Today*

Federal appeals court will decide whether to reinstate President Donald Trump’s travel ban after a contentious hearing in which the judges hammered away at the administration’s motivations for the ban, but also directed pointed questions to an attorney for two states trying to overturn it. *Source: Chicago Tribune*

Labor

“The House voted 236-187 for a resolution under the Congressional Review Act that would block a rule that requires companies to report any labor law violation or alleged violation they’ve had in the last three years when bidding on federal contracts over \$500,000.” *Source: The Hill*

Military

“A raid in Yemen that killed a US Navy SEAL, 14 militants and 30 people, including 10 women and children, was ordered by President Trump and approved ‘without sufficient intelligence’,” say US officials. *Source: Business Insider*

The Trump administration has proposed changing the Department of Homeland Security’s “Countering Violent Extremism” program, which is intended to counter all types of violent ideologies, including white supremacy, to “Countering Islamic Extremism” or “Countering Radical Islamic Extremism,” to no longer target domestic “terrorism.” *Source: Reuters*

“President Donald Trump’s administration enacted new sanctions on Iran Friday, the first concrete action after the White House put Tehran “on notice” this week.” *Source: CNN*

Trump has pledged to increase military spending. “He ordered Defense Secretary James Mattis to conduct a “readiness review” to guide the military’s budget requests, and Mattis has started by ordering the Pentagon to prepare a supplemental request for this fiscal year by March 1 and a budget for fiscal 2018 by May 1.” Trump will need Congress to authorize and appropriate increased military spending. *Source: The Hill*

Religion

The Trump administration has drafted an executive order that would cripple anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people. The order, titled “Establishing a Government-Wide Initiative to Respect Religious Freedom,” states that the government will not force individuals or organizations to engage in activities that may “violate their conscience.” *Source: The Hill (update: The administration has since scrapped this order)*

President Trump has vowed to repeal the Johnson Amendment. The amendment is a 1954 provision that prohibits churches and other tax-exempt organizations from endorsing political candidates. Repealing the amendment would allow religious organizations to engage in partisan political activities without losing their tax exemption status. *Source: The Atlantic*

Public Information

The FCC chair blocked nine companies from providing low-cost internet access to low-income families. *Source: CNN*

“Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai on Thursday unveiled a plan to increase

transparency at the FCC by making regulatory proposals public as early as three weeks before votes.” *Source: The Hill*

Cabinet

Jeff Sessions confirmed as Attorney General. *Source: NY Times*

Environment

The Army Corps of Engineers has approved the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. *Source: NY Times*

Republicans on a Senate committee on Thursday suspended panel rules to force a vote on President Trump’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) nominee Scott Pruitt, over a Democratic protest. *Source: NPR*

Former Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson is confirmed as Secretary of State. *Source: Time*

“The House passed two Congressional Review Act challenges against former President Obama-era rules that Republicans have called a burden for fossil fuel companies. One of the regulations — the Stream Protection Rule that was finalized by the Interior Department in December — has been a longtime target of Republicans. The party tried multiple times to block the Office of Surface Mining from issuing the rule under Obama but never succeeded; with majorities in the House and Senate and President Trump in the White House, they’re now likely to strip the rule from the books.” *Source: The Hill*

The National Parks 9B rules are a set of regulations that govern the management of mineral rights, addressing a variety of things from abandoned mining claims to drilling for oil. Currently, if you wanted to drill for oil within a national park, you had to comply with 9B rules. If you’d like to apply for exploratory drilling for instance, your application must include a Plan of Operations and an agreement that the parks will enforce safety regulations. Rep. Gosar introduced HJ Res. 46 to roll back these 38-year-old regulations and pave the way for easier access to drilling. *Source: Washington Post*

Senate votes to cut the Stream Protection Act which was an Obama initiative that was created to protect to protect 6,000 miles of streams and 52,000 acres of American forest and waterways from mining waste. *Source: Forbes*

Rep. Jason Chaffetz (UT) introduced a bill that would initiate the sale of 3.3 million acres of land in 10 different states. *Source: EcoWatch (update: in response to tremendous nationwide opposition to the bill, Rep. Chaffetz has since withdrawn HR 621)*

Rep. Gary Palmer (R-Ala.) introduced the “Stopping EPA Overreach Act of 2017,” a bill that would amend the Clean Air Act so that:

“The term ‘air pollutant’ does not include carbon dioxide, water vapor, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, or sulfur hexafluoride.”

The bill currently has the support of over 114 Republican co-sponsors. *Source Huffington Post*

“The Environmental Protection Agency has approved a plan from two Republican Wisconsin state lawmakers that allows companies to pay to delay compliance with strict phosphorous pollution standards. Under the plan, polluters such as paper and cheese manufacturers and water utilities can apply to the Department of Natural Resources for a variance permit that allows them to postpone compliance for 10 years.” *Source: AGWEB/Farm Journal*

Education

Despite filibustering from Senate Democrats on grounds of overwhelming protest from their constituents, and through an unprecedented vote by the Vice President to break the tie, the Senate has confirmed Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. *Source: CNN*

International Affairs

“The Treasury Department said Thursday it will allow for some companies to do limited business with Russia’s Federal Security Service, known as the FSB. The move is a minor easing of a sanction put in place at the end of the Obama administration that limits business to \$5,000 for any calendar year.” *Source: CNN*

The White House warned Israel to stop settlement announcements that could undermine peace with the Palestinians. *Source: The Jerusalem Post*

“The Senate voted strictly along party lines Friday morning to repeal a regulation requiring disclosures for the payments that energy companies make to foreign governments. The measure passed 52-47 in a pre-dawn vote.” *Source: The Hill*

Animal Welfare

Thousands of records on animal welfare have been deleted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s website; now the information must be obtained by filing a request through the [Freedom of Information Act](#). *Source: Washington Post*

Gun Ownership

“The Republican-controlled House on Thursday took its first steps toward strengthening gun ownership under President Donald Trump, moving to scrap a requirement for background checks for disabled Social Security recipients mentally incapable of managing their own affairs.” This comes amidst a recent [senate rule](#) on wider checks. *Source: Fox News*

Last week’s Nation Watch.

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