

**Postcard Party #162 -- Friday Feb. 28, 2020**

 **Environment
\*\***The federal Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has issued **plans to gut the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act** and direct **federal agencies to ignore climate change effects and limit public input (see** <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CEQ-2019-0003-0012-2.pdf> **) when approving highways, pipelines, and other infrastructure proposals. The changes severely limit public input on such projects. Thousands of related CEQ documents have been withheld from Freedom of Information Act requests filed in 2018, with claims they can’t be made public until November.** CEQ accepts citizen comments through March 10: *CEQ, 730 Jackson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20503 Attn: Docket No. CEQ-2019-0003*

**\*\*Duke Energy Progress Rate Hike Hearings** Duke is attempting, yet again, to raise electricity bills to help pay for its fracked gas infrastructure and coal ash negligence. Now is your chance to speak directly to the NC Utilities Commission.  Closest (in-person) Utilities Commission hearing is 7 p.m. March 12 Buncombe Co. Courthouse Rm. 1-A 60 Court Plaza Asheville. *Or write: Commission Chair Charlotte A. Mitchell, Dobbs Bldg. 5th Floor 430 N. Salisbury St. Raleigh NC 27699, or other (appointed) commission members: ToNola D. Brown-Bland/ Lyons Gray/ Daniel Clodfelter/ Kimberly W. Duffley/ Jeffrey A. Hughes/ or Floyd B. McKissick Jr.*

**\*\***Henderson County Community Foundation recently made significant ($5,000) donation to support the Hands On! “Bring the Hive Alive” project, which will fund a **bee/pollinator awareness mural** facing the Azalea parking lot on 3rd Ave. E. The mural, painted by Matthew Willey of www.thegoodofthehive.com, should be completed by late fall 2020. *Contact: Community Foundation Chair Cindy Causby* [Main St., Suite 300, Hendersonville, NC 28792](https://www.google.com/maps/place/Community%2BFoundation%2Bof%2BHenderson%2BCounty/%4035.3168754%2C-82.4628567%2C17z/data%3D%213m1%214b1%214m5%213m4%211s0x8859c2110bc196ed%3A0xa8f157231ff29749%218m2%213d35.316871%214d-82.460668?hl=en) *– also Burlett Painting, $5K+ donor 609 Yarborough St. Hendersonville 28739*
 **GUN VIOLENCE**
**\*\*Bring S. 42 to a vote** On 2/25/19 - a YEAR AGO! - the U.S. House passed the background checks bill. Nearly 40,000 Americans have died by gun violence since then. Yet, the U.S. Senate has not even brought the bill to a vote*. Contact: MOC and also (especially) Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell*

 **HEALTHCARE**
\*\*Hospital Corporation of America’s management since its 2019 purchase of Mission Hospital has resulted in growing dissatisfaction among employees and patients. A recent letter signed by several WNC elected officials contends that “…HCA has chosen to make its money by reducing charity care, eliminating medical and unit administrative staff to the detriment of patient care and safety, and sacrificing entire physician practice groups with long-standing contractual relationships by demanding significant reductions in pay.” *Contact: Ronald Winters and/or Thomas Urban c/o Gibbins Advisors 1900 Church Street, Suite 300, Nashville, Tennessee 37203 (“independent healthcare restructuring monitors” appointed to oversee HCA acquisition)
also: Greg Lowe, President NC Division HCA/Mission Hospital 509 Biltmore Avenue Asheville, NC 28801,
NC legislators including Atty. Gen. Josh Stein. Mail specific complaints to:* Complaint Intake Unit,
2711 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-2711

**\*\***On January 30, the current administration announced a [new initiative to allow states to set limits on federal funding](https://www.medicaid.gov/sites/default/files/Federal-Policy-Guidance/Downloads/smd20001.pdf) **for Medicaid coverage for non-disabled adults**. The federal government [currently covers a set percentage of states’ Medicaid costs](https://khn.org/news/block-grants-medicaid-faq/) regardless of total spending. Under the proposed policy, states could apply for a waiver to receive a limited amount of federal Medicaid funding based on how many nondisabled adults they cover. States that adopt the funding cap [will be able to modify their Medicaid benefits](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/30/health/medicaid-block-grant-trump.html) to cover fewer prescription drugs and eliminate traditional Medicaid benefits, including long-term care and non-emergency medical transportation. The policy would also let states charge [higher Medicaid copays](https://khn.org/news/5-things-to-know-about-trumps-medicaid-block-grant-plan/). [The proposed capped funding structure](https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/01/30/800841612/trump-administration-offers-states-a-way-to-block-grant-medicaid) has the potential to [increase states’ administrative load and cause Medicaid funding shortfalls](https://www.aafp.org/news/government-medicine/20200203medicaidblockgrant.html) during economic downturns. Healthcare advocates are concerned the plan could [reduce Medicaid patients’ access](https://medcitynews.com/2020/02/patient-groups-push-back-against-medicaid-block-grants/) to both clinical services and prescriptions]. **Other critics have questioned whether the** [administration has legal authority to impose federal spending caps](https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/480860-medicaid-block-grants-would-gut-law-and-cut-care) **without congressional approva**l. (info from 5calls.org) *Contact: MOC, White House, also Seema Verma, Administrator - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services 7500 Security Boulevard, Mail Stop S2-26-12 Baltimore, Maryland 21244-1850***\*\*COVID-19** response: On Feb. 24, the administration sent a budget request to Congress, for $1.25 billion
in new funding and asking for transfer of $535 million more from an Ebola preparedness account.
The WH anticipates shifting money from other HHS accounts and other agencies to complete the total $2.5 billion response plan. In 2018, then National Security Advisor Bolton dismantled the WH Global Health Security Team. In its 2020 budget the administration proposed a [further 10% cut](http://thenationshealth.aphapublications.org/content/49/3/1.2) in CDC funding, equivalent to $750m. It zeroed out funding for epidemiology and laboratory capacity at state and local levels. U.S. House leaders are asking for a more competent, comprehensive approach to global pandemic preparedness.
(info from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/31/us-coronavirus-budget-cuts-trump-underprepared>*) Contact: MOC, WH, National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien - Eisenhower Exec. Ofc. Bldg. DC 20504* More info: www.cdc.gov/covid19

 **IMMIGRATION/BORDER PATROL**

**\*\***S. 1123, the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act, and H.R. 2214, the No Ban Act would **overturn the Muslim Ban**, put into action in January 2017 and expanded in January 2020. The expanded ban primarily targets people from African nations. This ban has had a real and devastating impact on people and families, preventing them from coming to the U.S. simply because of their faith, the color of their skin, or their national origin. *Contact: MOC, White House; Senators Tillis & Lindsey Graham, chairman, Judiciary Committee, re S.1123; Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) chair, Border Security Subcomm., re H.R. 2214.***\*\***As of mid-February 2020, 100 officers from the elite tactical unit known as **BORTAC (Border Patrol Tactical Unit) will deploy to New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and seven other major cities**, bringing "additional gear such as stun grenades and enhanced Special Forces-type training, including sniper certification”. The BORTAC agents will be asked to support Federal interior officers (mostly ICE) in run-of-the-mill immigration arrests. (info from <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/02/14/trump-sends-border-patrol-units-arrest-immigrants-houston-other-cities/>) *Contact: MOC, WH, Homeland Security Acting Director Chad F. Wolf- Mail Stop 0525 DHS 2702 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. DC 20528-0525*

 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
\*\*Another young female has stepped up to participate as a leader in WNC government**! Kristin Dunn,
Exec. Dir. of local nonprofit Camplify, applied for and was unanimously appointed to fill a vacancy on the Laurel Park Town Council. *Contact Kristin c/o L. P. Town Council 441 White Pine Dr Laurel Park NC 28739*