

Week ending 02/04/18 - PA-08 MoCTrack Report

Tracking Congress in the Age of Trump

The lower the number, the more the legislator votes against the Trump agenda.

Senator Bob Casey — **30.6%** (+1.1% from last report)

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick — **83.1%** (+0.3% from last report)

Senator Pat Toomey — **91.7%** (+0.2% from last report)

Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight website assesses the voting records of our MoCs to provide this index. Two votes were scored this week:

- Senate vote on the 20-week abortion ban
- House vote on Defense Appropriations

Each of these votes is recapped under "Votes of Interest."

Votes of Interest

H.R. 695: Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2018

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr695>

Originally this bill was to establish a national criminal history background check system and criminal history review program for people who have access to children, the elderly or individuals with disabilities in the course of their work. But in the past weeks the bill was amended to become the vehicle for passing the defense appropriations for the fiscal year ending 09/30/18. It came to the floor of the House for a vote on 01/30/18 and passed 250-166. **Fitzpatrick voted YES.** It now goes back to the Senate because of the changes made to its content.

S. 534: Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/115-2018/h45>

In the past few weeks, a flood of news about a sexual abuse scandal has rocked the US gymnastics establishment. More than 150 young girls were abused by the team doctor, Larry Nassar. For years, his abuse had been reported to various adults in the gymnastics establishment, but a decade passed after the first reports were made before they were finally taken seriously and the offender brought to justice. This bill, introduced in the Senate last year by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, would extend mandatory reporting responsibilities to "adults who are authorized to interact with minor or amateur athletes at a facility under the jurisdiction of a national governing body." In other words, it would not be left to the adult who hears such a report to dismiss the allegations (which happened a number of times in the Nassar case). Instead, the adult would be required to bring the issue to law enforcement for a thorough and professional investigation. This bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent last autumn. It came before the House on 01/29/18 and it passed 406-3. **Fitzpatrick votes YES.** Because of some small changes, the bill will return to the Senate for a second vote before it goes to the President.

S. 2311: Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2311>

In last week's MoCTrack I wrote the following:

There are 10 Senate Democrats running for re-election in 2018 in states that Donald Trump won in the 2016 presidential election. They are all vulnerable going into this election. The Republican Party leadership, fearful of the Democratic enthusiasm that was evidenced in a number of 2017 elections, has come up with a diabolical plan to dampen that progressive support for these hard-pressed Democrats. They are bringing a bill, S. 2311 The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, to the floor in the coming week, possibly as soon as Monday, 01/29/18. This is a 20 week abortion ban, and it passed the House last year. The Supreme Court has already ruled that bans on abortions made prior to the third trimester are unconstitutional, so this bill is purely political theater. However, because Senator Casey is admittedly anti-choice (though he is an ardent advocate of Planned Parenthood, as he recognizes the value in the services they provide, including the dispersal of contraception and otherwise reducing the need for abortions), a YES vote

on this bill will serve to agitate the progressive base who would otherwise be his most active supporters in the coming election.

Senate Majority Leader McConnell did indeed bring this bill to the floor on 01/29/18. To pass it would have had to achieve the 60 vote threshold in a [cloture vote](#). The cloture vote failed, 51-46. **Casey voted YES and Toomey voted YES.** Senator Casey issued the following statement after the vote:

“I am a pro-life Democrat, which means I support women and children before and after birth. I have fought against multiple Republican attempts to defund Planned Parenthood and have advocated for funding for contraception (Title X). I have also taken the lead in opposing Republican schemes to decimate Medicaid and Republican budgets that substantially cut programs like the Women Infants and Children (WIC) program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This evening, I voted for the Graham bill as I have in the past. I will continue to do all I can to stop dangerous efforts by Washington Republicans to defund Planned Parenthood and decimate Medicaid. Seventy-seven percent of Planned Parenthood patients receive services to prevent unintended pregnancy and Planned Parenthood serves one in three of all patients seeking contraceptive care at a publicly-funded health care provider. Medicaid pays for nearly half of all births in the nation.”

On the Nomination PN1423: David Ryan Stras, of Minnesota, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/115-2018/s27>

The Trump administration continues its push to reshape the judiciary by filling US District Court seats left vacant during the Obama Administration by a Republican Senate that slow-walked or refused to confirm judges. This week the Senate voted on David Ryan Stras to fill a seat that oversees a large swath of the midwest, including Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas and Minnesota. Lambda Legal, the organization dedicated to defending the legal rights of LGBT people, opposed Mr. Stras’s nomination. In [the letter](#) they submitted to the Senate, they noted:

“Justice Stras’s record raises serious concerns about his willingness to adhere to the Supreme Court’s landmark LGBT rights decisions. In a 2008 law review article, then-Professor Stras suggested that the U.S. Supreme Court had inappropriately ‘venture[d]’ into addressing constitutional issues regarding ‘homosexual rights,’ and he denigrated critical constitutional protections for LGBT people as mere ‘social policy.’ He further expressed skepticism about the core holding of *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Supreme Court’s 2003 ruling that struck down Texas’s sodomy law as an unconstitutional deprivation of liberty. He called into question his respect for the well-established fundamental rights of liberty, privacy and self-determination at the core of the ruling when he skeptically noted that sodomy bans violated privacy rights, at least “according to the Court.” Although these fundamental constitutional protections are important to everyone, they have been the lynchpin of our community’s legal progress. Therefore, questioning the legitimacy of this line of cases—from *Lawrence* to *Windsor* to *Obergefell*—must be understood as a threat to established civil rights protections for LGBT people...

...Justice Stras has apparently cleared President Trump’s litmus test for potential Supreme Court nominees, which includes a commitment to overturning *Roe v. Wade*. As noted previously, *Roe* is the foundation for the cases that have brought LGBT people out of the shadows, including *Lawrence v. Texas*, which decriminalized our relationships, and *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which ensured that our families could access the same legal protections as married heterosexual couples. Consequently, Justice Stras’s elevation to the federal bench would be rightly understood as a threat not only to *Roe* but also to the LGBT equality jurisprudence that was built upon *Roe*’s foundation. We urge you to reject his nomination.

Despite these alarming concerns, Mr. Stras was confirmed to his new judicial post on 01/30/18 in a 56-42 vote. **Casey voted NO and Toomey voted YES.**

MoC Twitter Action

Senator Bob Casey hot topics: The Senator returned to his usual prolific Twitter output after his previous slow week. He issued a multi-tweet response to the State of the Union and a similarly detailed rebuttal to the release of the Nunes Memo. In relation to that memo, he shared Senator John McCain's denouncement and copied a multi-tweet thread from the FBI Agents Association directly to @realDonaldTrump. He closed the week with some choice words for Vice President Pence, who made an early 2018 campaign stop in Pittsburgh in support of the Republican challengers to Senator Casey.

Casey tweet of the week, 02/02/18: "Here's what they deserve to know: you keep trying to decimate their Medicaid, jack up their premiums and sabotaged their health care system. Anytime you mess with middle class families in PA, I'll be there to fight you every step of the way, Mr. Vice President." *(In response to a tweet from Pence, which read "People of the Keystone State deserve to know @SenBobCasey voted against cutting taxes. Bob Casey voted against letting working families & job creators keep more of their hard-earned money. I believe the people of Pennsylvania deserve better! #TaxCutsForAmerica")*

Representative Fitzpatrick hot topics: Most of the Representative's Twitter output this week focused on bipartisanship, as he made that the centerpiece of his response to the State of the Union and the Nunes Memo. He also pushed his Right to Try Act, which he supported by bringing a local ALS patient as his guest to the State of the Union ceremonies. He also shared a press release from his office about the Bipartisan Heroin Task force and the empty public health emergency fund.

Fitzpatrick tweet of the week, 01/30/18: "@RepTomSuozzi & I have a lot in common, including both being members of the #ProblemSolversCaucus. At tonight's #SOTU, we'll be sitting together to show Washington there's more that unites us than divides us" *(Shared with a [press release](#) from his office about the seating plan)*

Senator Pat Toomey hot topics: The Senator continues his McConnell-directed charm offensive in support of the GOP Tax Bill. He also shared out his statement in response to the State of the Union (which you can read in full in the next section). The remainder of his output was reserved for holidays and commemorations.

Toomey tweet of the week, 01/30/18: "As both a Catholic school graduate and parent, I know firsthand the good work they do every day to prepare the next generation. I am happy to have helped designate this week as #CatholicSchoolsWeek. #CSW18" *(Shared with an image of the Senate resolution titled "Supporting the contributions of Catholic Schools")*

Honorable mention, lawmaker

From @tedlieu, Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA), 02/01/18: "It has been pointed out folks under 40 may not understand my below analogy of the #NunesHoax. So try this: Remember when GOP Senators gravely warned about a secret society at @FBI? Then the actual evidence was released. It's like that, but those Senators have more integrity." *(Shared with an earlier tweet of his own, where he referenced Geraldo Rivera and the infamous mystery of Al Capone's vault)*

Honorable mention, journalist

From @NateSilver538, Nate Silver, founder of FiveThirtyEight, 02/02/18: "The stock market seems like a dumb economic indicator for a politician (e.g. Trump) to brag about. People focus on the trend, not the level. And the trend is largely unpredictable over politically-relevant time horizons."

Honorable mention, constituent

From @ToomeyMemes, 02/02/18: "We'd be much better off with a groundhog as Senator than YOU." *(In response to a tweet from Senator Toomey that repeated "Happy Groundhog Day" ten times, followed by an image from the movie)*

President Trump's refusal to implement Russian sanctions

This is a follow-up to a piece of "Legislation of Interest" from last year. The bill [H.R. 3364](#): Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act was enacted in August. This legislation passed through both houses with bipartisan support: in the House the vote was 419-3, and in the Senate the vote was 98-2. The bill is long, but the big takeaway sections related to this week's news are:

Section 211(6) - "On January 6, 2017, an assessment of the United States intelligence community entitled, Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections stated, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the United States presidential election. The assessment warns that Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the U.S. Presidential election to future influence efforts worldwide, including against U.S. allies and their election processes."

Short version: *Russia meddled in our election.*

Section 231(a) - "On and after the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the President shall impose five or more of the sanctions described in section 235 with respect to a person the President determines knowingly, on or after such date of enactment, engages in a significant transaction with a person that is part of, or operates for or on behalf of, the defense or intelligence sectors of the Government of the Russian Federation, including the Main Intelligence Agency of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation or the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation."

Short version: *The President has 180 days to impose sanctions on rich Russians who are close to the Kremlin.*

The 180-day period after the enactment of the bill elapsed this week. The US Treasury Department, which handles sanction-related tasks for the Administration, did not impose sanctions. Instead, it released a list of 96 Russian businesses who could face sanctions. The number 96 is key here; the [Washington Post](#) reports, "instead of compiling the list through a serious, independent review, however, the department appeared to have simply copied Forbes's list of 96 Russians with estimated net worths of at least \$1 billion." The article adds, "the Treasury Department submitted the list to Congress to comply with the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act of 2017, but the copy-paste nature of the list suggests that the Trump administration did not take its charge seriously." Added to this, The State Department said they would not be imposing sanctions, despite the mandate from the above-cited law.

Neither of our Senators responded to this situation publicly. Representative Fitzpatrick and Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), Co-Chair of the Congressional Ukraine Caucus and senior member of the Defense Appropriations Committee, released a joint statement that reads:

"We are deeply disappointed with the Administration's decision to forgo sanctions on more Russian oligarchs and Putin courtiers, particularly those who threaten liberty's most cherished freedoms, democratic institutions and security, both public and private. The Administration claims that the mere threat of sanctions acts as a deterrent. We disagree.

It is clear that Russian aggression continues across Europe, and senior members of the U.S. intelligence and defense community have stated repeatedly there has been no significant diminishing of Russian attempts to sow division around the world, and use cyber weapons to damage our nation's institutions.

Words alone are not enough. We urge our colleagues in Congress to recommit in holding Russia accountable and call on the Administration to sanction the Russian oligarchs."

If the notion that a President who is under investigation for possibly colluding with the Russians is thwarting the will of a nearly-unanimous Legislative Branch by choosing the NOT impose mandated sanctions on the same Russians disturbs you, it is incumbent upon you to speak out. Call your Senators and demand a public statement on this issue. Ask them what steps they plan to take to stand up to an Executive branch that is supposed to be co-equal to the Legislative, and should uphold the law. And ask Representative Fitzpatrick what next steps he and Rep. Kaptur plan to take, or if this statement was just words.

President Trump's State of the Union Address, our MoCs respond

Senator Bob Casey, 01/30/18, via his website:

"Donald Trump's presidency has been a series of broken promises to the middle class and workers, a fact which tonight's address did not change.

"This Administration talks about helping workers and middle class families, but when it comes to actions, it's all extreme right economics and decimating health care. After passing into law massive tax giveaways to the wealthiest and biggest corporations, Republicans in Congress now want to tackle 'entitlement reform,' which is nothing more than the clever phrasing of a scheme to cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid." My State of the Union guest, Anna Corbin from Hanover, Pennsylvania, was here on behalf of her two children, both of whom have a disability and would be devastated by the cuts to Medicaid that Republicans in Washington are pursuing. It's time to enact an agenda to rebuild the middle class.

"Congress should immediately pass a bipartisan infrastructure plan that actually invests in our communities, instead of just giving more tax cuts to wealthy developers and big corporations. Congress should also pass commonsense, bipartisan legislation to reduce the cost of health care instead of sabotaging the current system and plotting to decimate Medicaid. The people of Pennsylvania have heard enough talk from Republicans in Congress and this Administration, it's time for action on an agenda that raises their wages, creates jobs and reduces the cost of living for the middle class.

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, 01/30/18, via his website:

"What is needed now more than ever is for our nation to come together, both Democrat and Republican, to tackle serious challenges facing our nation. What's more, is that we do so in a civil, dignified manner that is becoming of American values, viewing those with different viewpoints as a strength to be harnessed, not a quality to be criticized. It is my hope that the President will embrace the bipartisan Problem Solver's Caucus in 2018 as the vehicle for solutions that will unite our great nation. Each one of us look forward to working with the Administration on a wide range of issues, from tackling the opioid epidemic, to growing our economy, to fixing an inherently broken system in Washington, D.C. Let's get to work."

Senator Pat Toomey, 01/30/18, via his website:

"Tonight, President Trump used his State of the Union address to spotlight the important progress that has been made during the first year of his presidency while laying out his top agenda items for the next year. Already, about three million Americans have received bonuses and raises due to tax reform-and this is all before the benefits of new investments are realized. I share the President's view that tax reform will help to grow wages, create new jobs, and spur stronger economic growth.

"I was also pleased that President Trump laid out a clearer vision on three very important issues: infrastructure, immigration, and national security. I was heartened to hear him say we must streamline the approval process for new road and bridge projects, and I look forward to reviewing in detail proposed infrastructure legislation. President Trump also outlined a legal solution for DACA recipients, which goes beyond what President Obama had proposed, with an offer of a path to citizenship. We need stronger border security that enhances physical barriers, increases law enforcement patrols, and utilizes surveillance-based technological advancements. It was also encouraging to hear that the administration understands the clear and present danger represented by North Korea. Congress must act swiftly on the BRINK Act, my bipartisan bill with Senator Chris Van Hollen, to strengthen sanctions against this dangerous regime and any entity doing business with Kim Jong-un.

"Finally, I hope the White House will reconsider its course on trade. Tariffs are taxes on consumers and are designed to snuff out competition. I will be actively engaged with the administration on all trade matters moving forward."

The Release of the Nunes Memo, our MoCs respond

On 02/02/18 the Trump Administration released the Nunes Memo, a partisan recap of cherry-picked intelligence designed to cast doubts on the collection of data that led to the establishment of the Mueller investigation. Every media outlet has its own take on the data contained in the Nunes memo. I recommend this [New York Times piece](#) for its brevity and incisiveness. While we wait for the release of the Democrat's rebuttal memo, which was blocked by the GOP-led Intelligence Committee, why not review the response from each of our MoCs?

Senator Bob Casey, 02/02/18, via Twitter:

"This release indicates that many House Republicans have proven once again that, in the Mueller probe, they are recklessly deferential to President Trump, weak on national security and hostile to law enforcement. For months, House Republicans have conducted a coordinated smear campaign against law enforcement, especially the men and women of the FBI who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe from criminals and terrorists. President Trump's own Justice Department has called the release of this propaganda memo "extraordinarily reckless" and said that DOJ is "currently unaware of any wrongdoing related to the FISA process..." The FBI, which is led by Trump-nominated Director Christopher Wray, has said "we have grave concerns about material omissions of fact that fundamentally impact the memo's accuracy."

"Russia attacked our nation during the 2016 election, yet many Republican members of Congress are so weak on national security that they would rather obstruct this investigation than protect our nation. When it comes to Russia's attacks on our democracy, the American people need vigilant watchdogs who are prudent and honest. Republican members of Congress have failed to serve as an independent check and balance on President Trump. Will House Republicans be watchdogs or lap dogs? Their weakness endangers our nation."

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, 02/02/18, via his website:

"The American people deserve honesty and transparency from their government at all times. Today's release of the HPSCI's majority memo is a step in that direction. I also believe the minority memo, which was made available to Members of Congress, should be similarly vetted and released. As I've said: this majority memo raises more questions than answers. As the only former FBI Special Agent serving in Congress, I am an eyewitness the fact that the women and men of the FBI are some of the finest law enforcement professionals in the world. We must not judge an entire institution due to the actions of a few bad actors. The correct solution is to expose those bad actors, identify them by name, make public their bad conduct, and deal with them appropriately. I urge all of my colleagues on both sides to recognize that a critical element to a successful investigation is public confidence in the integrity of that investigation. Let the facts be revealed in a manner that is consistent with our national security interests, and let all viewpoints of those facts be heard. End the politics; stick to the facts and to the truth. Then, let the American people be the judge."

Rep. Fitzpatrick then added the following via Twitter on 02/02/18: "The FBI was, & REMAINS, the finest law enforcement org. on the planet. The bad actions of a few does not change that. Bad actors will be properly dealt with; they do not represent the 99.99% of the women & men who courageously protect us & keep us safe"

Senator Pat Toomey, 02/02/18, via comments made to the ABC affiliate [WNEP](#):

"I honestly was not persuaded by the senior FBI folks who suggested that while there might be important omissions, ok, if there's an omission then tell us about it. We can have that discussion. But, the American people need to understand, were people wiretapped on the basis of a campaign opposition research report? Because that's not a good reason."

Casey in the News

“The impact of this issue cannot be overstated. I will continue to push community health centers because they don’t have the long term funding in place that they need. Republicans have total control of the house and the senate and the presidency. They have to get their act together and fund community health centers because right now we have a circumstance where they have run out of time.”

— From a 01/29/18 [Philadelphia Tribune](#) article titled *Pressing Congress to fund community health centers*

The article goes on to explain the urgency of the situation addressed by Senator Casey, saying, “The Community Health Center Funds authorization lapsed on Sept. 30 and the Congress failed to renew its \$3.6 billion in funding. If Congress does not act, community health centers will lose nearly 70 percent of the federal dollars they rely on to operate.”

“Pittsburghers have seen this song and dance before from the president and now the vice president — lots of talk, no action. When it comes to fighting for middle-class families in Western Pennsylvania, I would put my record of securing health care for 2,000 retired coal miners and securing funding to repair the region's waterways, which support 200,000 jobs, up against the vice president's tax giveaways to the super-rich and big corporations any day.”

— From a 02/02/18 [Tribune Live](#) article titled *VP Mike Pence and Sen. Bob Casey use Pittsburgh as stage to trade political barbs*. More of their back-and-forth can be found above, in the MoC Twitter Action section.

Fitzpatrick in the News

“Even with the amazing work done in American medical research and development, for too many, access to these potentially lifesaving treatments will come too late, or not at all. The Right to Try Act opens the opportunity to trial-stage care and establishes the freedom for patients and their doctors to try therapies where the benefits far outweigh the risks. Americans — our constituents — should have every opportunity to fight for their life, or the life of their loved one.”

— From a 01/29/18 [Doylestown Intelligencer](#) article titled *Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick invites Bucks ALS patient to State of the Union*

For more context about this bill, which gained momentum after a mention from the President in the State of the Union address, please read one of these [two pieces](#) from [The Hill](#). Right to Try is a great public relations initiative, but medical ethicists and patients rights advocates have major concerns with how this bill is constructed.

Toomey in the News

“I expect that probably early on we will hear quite a bit on tax reform. I am looking forward to that because I think the benefits of the tax reform have begun even earlier than most of us expected. I think we are going to continue to see more jobs, higher wages, a better standard of living, and I think this tax reform is really going to be terrific.”

— From a 01/30/18 [News Radio WKOK 1070](#) interview.

In the interview, Senator Toomey discusses what he expected to hear in the State of the Union address, and continues his charm offensive on behalf of the GOP Tax Plan, as directed by Senate Majority Leader McConnell.

“The financial and economic crisis is over. It’s been over for years; at least six or seven years, and yet we still maintain crisis-level interest rates.”

— From a 02/01/18 NPR interview on [All Things Considered](#) titled *With Focus On Unemployment, Yellen Led Fed Through Tough Balancing Act*

This 2015 quote from Senator Toomey was directed at former Federal Reserve Chairperson Janet Yellen and her decision to keep interest rates low. The article continues with observation, “He said the Fed was risking an outbreak of inflation and financial instability by keeping rates low. But inflation didn’t accelerate — in fact, it remains below the Fed’s target.”

Learning about Legislation - Career Civil Servants vs. Political Appointees

This week the President said a lot of disturbing things in the State of the Union address. However, one line was more sinister than any other, and yet it was met with cheerful applause from the audience:

“Tonight, I call on the congress to empower every Cabinet secretary with the authority to reward good workers—and to remove federal employees who undermine the public trust or fail the American people.”

What the President called for was the ability of his hand-picked appointees to be able to fire at will career civil servants. Not only would this change completely undermine the role of the union within the public sector, but it would break nearly a century of precedent in keeping the influence of politically appointed personnel separated from the career civil servants.

Civil servants are bureaucrats who fill positions that are not political or judicial. They are administrators and support staff, regulators and scientists. They staff the Post Office, the Center for Disease Control and the Internal Revenue Service. Their mandate is to fulfill the rules and regulations, as defined in law and the US Code of Federal Regulations, that pertain to their specific office. Partisanship has no role in how they perform the duties of their position. To move up in the ranks of the civil service requires tenure, but also experience and expertise in one’s particular field.

Political appointees are cabinet-level positions and some levels below. Many are liaisons between the White House and the specific bureaucratic offices. Although political appointees may have some level of experience in the field where they are assigned, that is not always a prerequisite (e.g., Ben Carson, Betsy DeVos and Rick Perry). Interaction between the political staff and the civil service is almost always mediated by the employee unions.

Yasha Mounk, political theorist and host of the excellent podcast *The Good Fight*, had [an essay in Slate](#) this week in which he commented on the danger in the President’s call for his cronies to be able to fire civil servants at will. He wrote:

“Under Trump’s proposal, any Cabinet secretary could decide that, say, a law enforcement official investigating the president had ‘undermined the public trust’ or ‘failed the American people’—and fire him on the spot. In other words, Trump is calling for an end to any semblance of independence for the IRS, the FBI, the Department of Justice, or any other federal agency.... in his first State of the Union, the 45th president of the United States asked Congress for the authority to end the rule of law. And that—not Trump’s supposedly unifying policy proposals, much less his supposedly presidential ability to read a speech off a teleprompter—should be the headline of every newspaper tomorrow.”

Remember, this is not normal. We cannot let this become normal. And at the first sign that Congress is actually taking this dangerous, authoritarian suggestion seriously and putting together a bill to change the rules regarding the interactions between civil servants and political appointees, you will read it here.

Legislation of Interest

S. 2362: A bill to amend the Fair Credit Reporting Act to require that a consumer authorize the release of certain information

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2362/text>

This bill was introduced on 01/30/18 by Sen Jack Reed (D-RI). It does not yet have any co-sponsors, and it is pending in the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, where Sen. Toomey is a sub-chairperson for Financial Institutions and Consumer Protection. This bill is another in a line of initiatives to grant consumers more privacy than the currently have. Last year a bill passed that allowed Internet Service Providers to sell consumer data to third parties without the consumer's permission. This bill would stop credit agencies from being able to do the same thing. If consumer privacy is an issue that motivates you, please call Senator Toomey (who is supposed to be the point person for issues relating to consumer protection for the entire country) and let him know your feelings about this bill.

H.R. 4907: To amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to require the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to establish a grant program to assist eligible entities in carrying out programs to replace lead service lines for schools and solder that is not lead free used in the plumbing for schools

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr4907/text>

This bill was introduced on 01/30/18 by Rep. Bobby Reed (D-IL). It has two Democratic co-sponsors, and it is pending in the House Energy and Commerce Committee. This is an attempt by the Congress to provide funds for municipalities who need to upgrade their infrastructure in the wake of environmental tragedies like the one that is ongoing in Flint, Michigan. These issues are nationwide, and are often more prevalent in areas populated with people of color and other minorities. Since we know that lead is particularly pernicious to the development of children's brains, it is critical that any lead contamination be removed from our schools.

H.R. 4889: Healthy Climate and Family Security Act of 2018

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr4889/text>

This bill was introduced on 01/29/18 by Rep. Donald Beyer (D-VT). It has 26 Democratic co-sponsors and it is pending in both the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Ways and Means Committee. The subtitle of this bill is "to cap the emissions of greenhouse gases through a requirement to purchase carbon permits, to distribute the proceeds of such purchases to eligible individuals." There have been previous attempts at building a carbon exchange in Congress. While it is unlikely to pass under the GOP-run Congress, it does provide an interesting opportunity to try to get Representative Fitzpatrick, who likes to portray himself as an environmentalist, on the record about carbon exchanges and using market forces to modify corporate behavior.

H.R. 4901: Flamethrowers? Really? Act

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr4901/text>

This bill was introduced on 01/30/18 by Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY). It has one Democratic co-sponsor and it is pending in the House Judiciary Committee. I will admit that this bill caught my eye because of its name, but upon reading it I became convinced that it was one that merited all of our attention. Through a peculiarity of the law, flamethrowers are almost entirely unregulated in the United States. The Department of Defense outlawed their use in combat after the Vietnam War, but only two states have any regulations on the books because the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has ruled they are not technically "firearms." Anyone can purchase a flamethrower almost anywhere in the United States without a background check. This bill seeks to address this lapse in regulation and law. As for the name of the bill, GovTrack's summary notes:

The bill's name was inspired by the Seth Meyers and Amy Poehler recurring sketch "Really?" on Saturday Night Live, in which the comedians would discuss a ridiculous news story while saying "Really?" in increasingly incredulous voices as more details were revealed. Meyers addressed the bill on his current show Late Night, sarcastically opposing the bill.

"I believe it's every American's right to own and operate flamethrowers. People will say, 'But flamethrowers throw flames.' No, people throw flames," Meyers joked. "You never know when a Japanese World War II soldier is going to kick in your door."

THE GOP might be known for their anti-regulatory stance, but it would be interesting to put that to the test in this situation, in light of the potential mayhem that a flamethrower could cause if put in the wrong hands.

If you are interested in following all of the voting action in Congress, a number of phone apps come in handy. One of the Lower Bucks Indivisible leaders recommends the Countable app. It is available for both Apple and Android phones. You can sign up at Countable.us to get instant notification when our legislators vote, as well as details on each measure, pros and cons, status, and links to take action.

For those of you who are more computer- than phone-oriented, I recommend Govtrack.us. The website enables you to add individual bills that interest you to a docket, so you can easily see the status of all your items in one place. They can also provide daily or weekly digest emails to track the action of any Member of Congress, committee, bill or vote. If not for Govtrack, I would not be able to compile this report.

This report brought to you by the PA-08 MoCTrack team...

Gary Garb

Kierstyn Piotrowski Zolfo

We are seeking additional assistance. Our Congresspeople are always busy and there is always more for us to cover — tasks big and small to fit any level of time commitment or experience. Can you help us out? Please email KierstynPZ@gmail.com and put "MoCTrack Help" in the subject. Thanks!