

Week ending 03/11/18 - PA-08 MoCTrack Report

Tracking Congress in the Age of Trump

The lower the number, the more the legislator is in opposition to the Trump agenda.

Senator Bob Casey — **30.3%** (no change from last report)

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick — **83.6%** (no change from last report)

Senator Pat Toomey — **90.6%** (no change from last report)

Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight website assesses the voting records of our MoCs to provide this index. No votes were scored this week. Please be advised that FiveThirtyEight only scores votes when President Trump has expressed a definite position. Thus, no scoring does not mean there was no voting, but simply that any votes were on bills on which the President has not indicated a stance.

Words from our Founders

"Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: and a people who mean to be their own Governours, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." — [James Madison](#), 1822

Votes of Interest

Senate judicial confirmations

The Senate confirmed three judicial nominees this week:

- Tilman Eugene Self III, of Georgia, to be District Judge for the Middle District of Georgia
- Karen Gren Scholer, of Texas, to be District Judge for the Northern District of Texas
- Terry A. Doughty, of Louisiana, to be District Judge for the Western District of Louisiana.

In a surprising result for this political climate, each of these nominees was confirmed with little wrangling. Both Scholer and Doughty were confirmed unanimously, and Self received only 11 dissenting votes.

H.R. 1119: SENSE Act

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/115-2018/h101>

This bill was introduced by Rep. Ken Rothfus (R-Pa.) early last year. It lowers clean air standards for plants that use coal refuse to produce energy, and lets them emit higher levels of mercury than was previously permitted. This bill is one chapter in a much a longer story about the EPA's efforts to regulate toxic power plant emissions, the energy industry's desire to evade those regulations, the court system's rulings on this topic, and an industry-friendly Congress legislating away environmental protections. If you would like more detail, this [Sierra Club](#) article titled "Ideology, Common Sense, and Poisoned Children" recaps the saga concisely. On Mar. 8, 2018, the Congress passed this dangerous reduction in air quality with a 215-189 vote. **Fitzpatrick voted NO.**

H.R. 4607: Comprehensive Regulatory Review Act

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/115-2018/h95>

This bill was introduced by Rep. Kenneth Loudermilk (R-Ga.) in December. The bill creates a framework where the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) must review its regulations every seven years with an eye towards eliminating overly burdensome ones. In a [letter](#) in support of this bill, the Consumer Bankers Association applauded the Congress for making the CFPB "identify redundant or unduly burdensome regulatory requirements imposed on depository institutions, increasing the reviews of these rules from a 10-year to a 7-year cycle will help regulators modify, streamline, and repeal outdated regulations." While reviewing legislation is not inherently nefarious, with this particular Congress and its ardent anti-regulatory stance, coupled with the banking industry's support, one does need to be concerned that this chips away at the CFPB's ability to protect consumers and could drain away protective resources and redirect them towards regulatory review. This bill passed 264-143 on 03/06/18, and **Fitzpatrick voted YES.**

MoC Twitter Action

Senator Bob Casey hot topics: Senator Casey promoted the bill he introduced with Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) to address the huge stock buybacks that corporations have initiated since the passage of the GOP tax bill. He pushed for actions on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) as President Trump's deadline passed. He supported the president's move to address concerns with metal trade issues, but wants to work with the administration to "improve and refine" the order.

Casey tweet of the week, 03/06/18: "The deadline @realDonaldTrump unilaterally set to end the DACA program has passed. Since then, he has thwarted repeated attempts by Congress to act. It is time to stop sabotaging commonsense solutions so we can #ProtectDreamers."

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick hot topics: The representative only shared one tweet this week, a retweet of a "thank you" from the Opportunity Council.

Fitzpatrick tweet of the week, 03/05/18: Retweet of @BCOpportunity "Thank you @RepBrianFitz for your support of BCOC & CSBG #addresspoverty #BeCommunityAction"

Senator Pat Toomey hot topics: Sen. Toomey started the week by promoting his background check improvement bill. He divided his remaining Twitter time between his continued charm offensive on behalf of the GOP tax plan, and delicately taking the president to task for the planned metal tariffs. He had kind words for departing Trump advisor Gary Cohen and the retiring Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) who is leaving the Senate in April.

Toomey tweet of the week, 03/08/18: "Pennsylvanians, like millions of other Americans, are experiencing how beneficial #TaxReform is for them and their families through increased wages, bonuses, and job creation. Check out how Pennsylvania companies are rewarding their employees thanks to #TaxReform."

(Shared with a link to a Grover Norquist-led advocacy site's [article](#) titled "Pennsylvania Examples of Tax Reform Good News")

Honorable mention, lawmaker

From @RepDebDingell, Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.), 03/09/18: "We've made strides in combating #CampusSexualAssault, but a recent report by @NatCounDis found that the needs of students w disabilities are not addressed under existing policies. Proud to intro a bill w @SenBobCasey & @senatorhassan to address this gap"

(Shared with her own [press release](#) titled "Dingell, Casey, Hassan Continue Fight Against Campus Sexual Assault")

Honorable mention, journalist

From @jdickerson, John Dickerson of CBS *This Morning* and Slate's *Political Gabfest*, 03/09/18: "It used to be that a lie could get halfway around the world before the truth gets its boots on. Now the lie makes it around the globe and is on the front porch enjoying an ice tea."

(Shared with a link to an [article](#) in The Atlantic titled "The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News")

Honorable mention, Constituent/Protester response

From @PhillyResistNow, 03/08/18: "Nope. Again you show how willing you are to lie. Your #TaxScam has triggered corporations to spend their tax windfall on stock buybacks (enriching, you guess it, the already wealthy) rather than increasing wages or benefits for the rest of us."

(Tweeted in response to Sen. Toomey's tweet of the week)

President Trump's Tariff Announcement: Our senators respond

Senator Bob Casey, 03/08/18, via his website:

"When foreign countries cheat on trade, Pennsylvania workers lose their jobs. I commend the Administration for taking action. I also urge the Administration to use the next 15 days, until these trade

remedies take effect, to improve and refine this order. Specifically, the Administration should consider additional action on downstream products, like transformer cores, without which foreign producers could undermine domestic production of electrical steel and put Pennsylvania jobs at risk.

"We must go after China and other trade cheaters, with our allies, the only way they'll understand —head on. Workers across Pennsylvania know what unfair trade has brought —job losses and stagnant wages.

"When the playing field is level, Pennsylvania workers can out compete any workers in the world. It's vital to hold countries that cheat on trade accountable in order to protect Pennsylvanians' jobs and a good standard of living."

Senator Pat Toomey, 03/08/18, via his website:

"While it is good that Americans won't have to pay new taxes on steel and aluminum from Canada and Mexico, reportedly this new proclamation will, instead, force big tax increases onto American consumers of steel and aluminum from our other trading partners.

"The administration invoking national security to impose tariffs on imported steel and aluminum is a big mistake that will increase costs on American consumers, weaken our economy, and invite retaliation from other countries on other products.

"I will continue to work with the administration to mitigate the effects of these tariffs on Pennsylvania industries and workers."

Tracking Congressional Misconduct — a New Tool!

Govtrack just introduced a new feature on its site: the [Congressional Misconduct Database](#). This tool keeps an updated status report on all pending (and closed) investigations that the organization is aware of. Should Congress actually pass any of the pending bills that demand open information about such cases, no doubt this tracker will be working overtime. As the site notes, an allegation of misconduct does not imply guilt. Similarly, it notes that "investigations that end without a guilty determination **do not imply innocence**" (*their emphasis*), merely an absence of enough evidence to conclude guilt. Here is an example of the data included in the tool:

[Congress](#) / [Members of Congress](#) / Patrick Meehan

■ Rep. Patrick Meehan

Representative for Pennsylvania's 7th District

pronounced PAT-ehrik // MEE-uhn ⓘ

Meehan is the representative for [Pennsylvania's 7th congressional district](#) ([view map](#)) and is a Republican. He has served since Jan 5, 2011. Meehan is next up for reelection in 2018.

Misconduct/alleged misconduct

While serving on the House Committee on Ethics, Meehan used taxpayer funds to settle a 2017 sexual harassment complaint privately, heading off an investigation. He was subsequently removed from the House Committee on Ethics.

Jan. 20, 2018 House of Representatives [removed Meehan from his position on the House Committee on Ethics](#)

Jan. 22, 2018 House Committee on Ethics [opened an investigation](#)



Russian Sanctions Update: Hypocrisy Alert!

The bill H.R. 3364: Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act was enacted in August 2017. This legislation passed through both houses with bipartisan support: in the House the vote was 419-3; in the Senate the vote was 98-2. The shortest possible recap of this bill is "Russia meddled in our election and the President has 180 days to impose sanctions on rich Russians who are close to the

Kremlin.” That 180-day period expired in early February, at which time the Trump Administration released a list of Russians who they were thinking about sanctioning, a list that was later revealed to have been copied directly from a Forbes Magazine list of the richest Russian oligarchs (see page 4 of the [02/04/18 MoCTrack report](#) for a full recap of this situation). No sanctions have been enacted since then.

This week, Rep. Danny Heck (D-Wash.) introduced a [new bill](#) titled “H.R. 5216: To direct the President to impose sanctions on certain senior foreign political figures and oligarchs in the Russian Federation and certain Russian parastatal entities.” As its title indicates, it would press the president to obey the legislation that he signed into law seven months ago, and has since ignored. Seventy-four legislators have signed on to support this bill (73D, 1R). The bill is pending in the House Foreign Affairs (where Rep. Fitzpatrick is a member) and House Judiciary committees.

Last month, in response to the president’s inaction on this topic, Rep. Fitzpatrick joined forces with Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio) to make a joint statement that closed with the sentence, “we urge our colleagues in Congress to recommit in holding Russia accountable and call on the Administration to sanction the Russian oligarchs.” Rep. Kaptur is one of the 73 Democrats who has co-sponsored the legislation introduced this week to do exactly that. Rep. Fitzpatrick is NOT the lone Republican who has signed onto this bill — that legislator is Rep. Leonard Lance from central New Jersey. I would strongly encourage readers to call Rep. Fitzpatrick’s office to find out why he hasn’t joined this effort to pressure the administration to impose sanctions. Why would he make a statement, but then neglect to take the very action he called for in the statement? He MUST answer for this apparent cowardice.

Casey in the News

“I urge the administration to follow through and to take aggressive measures to ensure our workers can compete on a level playing field.”

— Senator Casey’s comments on the Trump Administration’s decision to enact metal tariffs, from a [PBS News Hour](#) article titled “In a switch, Democrats and unions cheer Trump while GOP frets”

“It remains to be seen how broad they go and what the exemptions are, but I want to make sure steelmakers in our state and other states have some relief they haven’t had in a long time.”

— The senator clarifies his desire to see details about the metal tariffs, but generally supports the idea in a [Politico](#) article titled “Trump finds some friends on tariffs: Red-state Democrats”

“Forcing students to drop out of college for committing a youthful mistake does nothing to reduce drug abuse or crimes on campus. Repealing the Aid Elimination Penalty will reduce recidivism, over-criminalization, and tax-payer burdens by stopping the suspension of college aid for young people who made a mistake but want to get their lives back on track.”

— The senator’s observations about a pending bill from the education blog [Inside Higher Ed](#) article titled “New Push to Drop Drug Offenses as Barrier to Student Aid”

“It is our sacred responsibility to help keep seniors safe from scams and we must take aggressive action to ensure that not one more senior loses another penny to a con artist. I will continue to ensure that law enforcement has the resources necessary to punish perpetrators.”

— The senator, speaking as ranking member of the Senate Committee on Aging about tax scams focusing on senior citizen, from a [Sunbury Daily Item](#) article titled “Detective: Be on alert for tax scam”

“I am extremely concerned with the job cuts happening at federal prisons in Northeastern Pennsylvania. For an administration that promised job growth, this seems like another broken promise for the people of Pennsylvania — not to mention a serious safety hazard for the men and women who put themselves at risk every day to keep us safe. It’s now five years after Eric Williams was tragically killed on the job at USP Canaan, and we can’t start taking a step back on safety. I passed a bill in Eric’s honor to promote safety for staff in prisons, and cutting staff doesn’t make anyone more safe.”

— The senator expressed his concerns after signing on to a letter submitted jointly by a bipartisan group

of Pennsylvania legislators, as reported in the [Milton Standard-Journal](#) article “Senators, congressmen call on BOP, Sessions to act: Staff cuts at federal prisons questioned”

Fitzpatrick in the News

Editor’s note - Rep. Fitzpatrick was only quoted once in all of non-editorial news sources this week, as provided by the Google Alert content search system.

“Perfluorinated compounds have been found in communities surrounding over 600 military installations nationwide — including several in our own district. My constituents have a right to safe, clean drinking water and they deserve to know if PFOS and PFOA have compromised their long-term health.”

— From a Fitzpatrick press release cited in the [Bucks County Courier Times](#) article titled “Fitzpatrick honored with water ‘Champion’ award” about a national trade industry honor

Toomey in the News

“Invoking national security as a means of imposing new, huge tariffs on all kinds of imported steel is a big mistake that will increase costs on American consumers, cost our country jobs, and invite retaliation from other countries.”

— The senator’s criticism of President Trump’s plan to impose blanket tariffs on imported metals, from a [Forbes](#) article titled “Politicians are Messing Up the Markets”

“Over the years Congress has ceded way too much authority to the executive branch in a variety of [areas], but few more so than in the trade space, where presidents have an awful lot of unilateral authority granted to them by Congress.”

— The senator’s analysis of what he led the country into the current tariff situation, as reported in the [Wall Street Journal](#) article “McConnell Says GOP Senators Are Worried About Trump Tariff Plan”

“So what we’re doing is we’re slapping a tariff on Canadian steel, which makes no sense at all; they don’t impose that kind of tariff on our steel. But we’re doing that. China is completely unaffected because we already don’t buy steel from China.”

— More tariff criticisms from the senator in an article from [The Hill](#) titled “GOP Pa. senator: Tariffs ‘very, very counterproductive’”

“I’m sorry to see him go. [Gary Cohn is] a very important voice in encouraging free trade.”

— The senator’s comments on the departure of Trump’s chief economic advisor and Toomey ally in the steel tariff situation, Gary Cohn, from [WPSD Channel 6](#) article titled “Trump economic aide Cohn departs after trade disagreement”

“That’s the focus: Common ground, respecting the Second Amendment but making it more difficult for people who shouldn’t have firearms to obtain them.”

— The senator’s comments at a Philadelphia press conference about a recently-introduced bill, as reported by the [Carlisle Sentinel](#) in a piece titled “Toomey, senators want alerts when gun buyers fail background checks”

“[We] are working together to demonstrate that you actually can make progress, can find common ground, and do something to enhance the safety and security of the people we represent.”

— The senator’s comments on bipartisanship and gun bills, from the [NBC 10](#) article titled “Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey, Delaware Sen. Chris Coons Target Loopholes in Gun Laws”

Legislation of Interest: Post-Parkland legislation regarding firearms and school safety

Last week we started a running tally of bills introduced since the Parkland school shooting that aim to address the continuing issue of gun violence in general and school massacres in particular. Each party

has responded on a different timeline and with varying areas of focus. Here you will find a list of bills introduced this week, to be added to the 14 from last week. For an at-a-glance recap, please see the chart below. Please note that while 24 bills have been introduced on related topics so far, the total number in the table below will add up to more than 24, because some bills cover multiple subjects.

Topic of legislation	Introduced by	
	Democrat	Republican
Addresses mental health	2	2
Bans assault weapons	2	
DECREASES purchasing age limits		1
Improves background checks	3	2
Increase purchasing age limits	2	1
Increases research	1	
Increases reporting	3	
Increases school security		7
Increases taxation on firearms	1	
Limits straw purchasing		2
Prohibits weapon modification		1

H.R. 5161: To require the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service to submit to Congress an annual report on the effects of gun violence on public health

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr5161>

03/05/18

Introduced by Rep. Robin Kelly (**D-III.**)

The Dickey Amendment forbids the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) from putting government funds toward researching anything related to firearms. H.R. 5161 would bypass that legislation by reassigning the research tasks to the Surgeon General, to whom the Dickey Amendment is not applied.

H.R. 5162: To amend the Consumer Product Safety Act to remove the exclusion of pistols, revolvers, and other firearms from the definition of consumer product in order to permit the issuance of safety standards for such articles by the Consumer Product Safety Commission

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr5162>

03/05/18

Introduced by Rep. Robin Kelly (**D-III.**)

Currently, firearms are excluded from consumer rules that mandate safety standards and recalls. This bill would remove that exclusion, so that firearms would be overseen in the same manner as all other consumer products.

H.R. 5163: To amend chapter 44 of title 18, United States Code, to prohibit the sale or other disposition of a firearm to, and the possession, shipment, transportation, or receipt of a firearm by, certain classes of high-risk individuals

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr5163>

03/05/18

Introduced by Rep. Robin Kelly (**D-III.**)

This addresses an expansion of people who would be forbidden to own firearms and who would be flagged in the national background check system. Under this bill, domestic abusers, stalkers, and people with a pattern of violent crimes would be stripped of their rights to purchase firearms.

S. 2492: NICS Denial Notification Act of 2018

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2492>

03/05/18

Introduced by Sen. Pat Toomey (**R-Penn.**)

This bill would require state authorities and local law enforcement to report cases of prohibited individuals attempting to purchase firearms, so that they can be prosecuted.

S. 2495: A bill to reauthorize the grant program for school security in the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2495>

03/05/18

Introduced by Sen. Orrin Hatch (**R-Utah**)

This is another bill that would provide money to schools for increasing security.

H.R. 5185: To make supplemental appropriations for the Cops in Schools program for fiscal year 2018

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr5185>

03/06/18

Introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows (**R-N.C.**)

This is another bill that provides money to schools for increasing security by having armed police officers present.

S. 2502: A bill to address gun violence, improve the availability of records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, address mental illness in the criminal justice system, and end straw purchases and trafficking of illegal firearms

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2502>

03/06/18

Introduced by Sen. Chuck Grassley (**R-Iowa**)

This is the Senate GOP's take on an omnibus firearm reform bill. It was introduced by Sen. Grassley, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, so it has some heft behind it. So far, the only co-sponsor is Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas).

S. 2513: A bill to improve school safety and mental health services

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2513>

03/07/18

Introduced by Sen. Lamar Alexander (**R-Tenn.**)

This bill increases the funding available to schools to hire more counselors and to provide additional training for existing staff. It also allows schools to use federal education funding for school safety infrastructure, including installing new alarm systems, improving entrances and exits of school, and installing security cameras.

S. 2521: A bill to authorize the issuance of extreme risk protection orders

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2521>

03/08/18

Introduced by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (**D-Conn.**)

This bill is a national version of the "red flag" legislation that is moving through many state legislatures, which would allow family and mental health professionals to have guns removed from at risk individuals.

H.R. 5225: To reinstate the final rule issued by the Social Security Administration entitled "Implementation of the NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007"

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr5225>

03/08/18

Introduced by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (**D-N.Y.**)

This bill would reverse the awful decision made last year to get rid of an Obama-era law related to guns and mental health. Some people receive Social Security Disability benefits because of mental issues so disabling that they need another person to manage their finances. That old bill banned them from purchasing firearms. The current Congress got rid of that law last year, utilizing the Congressional Review Act to nullify the legislation from the previous administration.. H.R. 5225 bill would put the ban back into effect.

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...

Gail Friendman

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!