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Senior FBI Lawyer Did Not Read Carter Page FISA Before Signing Off on It

Congressional testimony by Trisha Anderson highlights unusual process used by FBI and DOJ in obtaining FISA warrant on former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page **12**

Trump Defends Sanctity of Human Life at National Prayer Breakfast



CHRIS KLEPONIS/POOL/GETTY IMAGES

President Donald Trump at the 2019 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington on Feb. 7, 2019.

BOWEN XIAO

President Donald Trump pledged to protect religious liberty and freedom of faith during the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington as he defended for the second time this week the sanctity of all human life—including the unborn.

always cherish believers who uplift and sustain the nation, and not only in the United States. He said his administration is also speaking out against “religious persecution around the world, including against religious minorities, Christians, and the Jewish community.”

“As president, I will always cherish, honor and protect the believers who uplift our communities and sustain our nation. To ensure that people of faith can always contribute to our society, my administration has taken historic action to protect religious liberty.”

President Donald Trump

Senate Intel Committee Chair Says There Is No Evidence of Trump–Russia Collusion

IVAN PENTCHOUKOV

After questioning more than 200 witnesses and reviewing more than 300,000 documents over the course of two years, investigators working for the Senate Intelligence Committee have found no evidence to support the allegation that the 2016 Trump presidential campaign colluded with Russia, according to the committee's chairman, Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.).

“If we write a report based upon the facts that we have, then we don't have anything that would suggest there was collusion by the Trump campaign and Russia.”

Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.)

on then-candidate Donald Trump. The FBI then used the dossier, without due verification, to surveil a former member of the Trump campaign. Burr's committee unsuccessfully attempted to interview former British spy Christopher Steele.

flit with that of the special counsel. He said he is not waiting for Mueller's report before releasing his own. “If I can finish tomorrow, I would finish tomorrow,” he said. “We know we're getting to the bottom of the barrel because there are not new questions that we're searching for answers to.”

Conservatives Weigh In on Late-Term Abortion and Infanticide

CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump used the State of the Union podium to unequivocally denounce infanticide and late-term abortion. “There could be no greater contrast to the beautiful image of a mother holding her infant child than the chilling displays our nation saw in recent days.”



Catrina Albo in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., on Aug. 2, 2018.

SAMIRA BOUAOU/THE EPOCH TIMES

ing equality and recognizing the rights of a free people, the devaluing of human life that started with Roe v. Wade has exponentially increased to the point we find ourselves today.

Floyd Conaway, veteran

“Do the politicians that lead the way for the legislation get any of the [Planned Parenthood] funds, directly or indirectly?”

Jo Ann Gould, fitness club manager, West Virginia
“My husband and I find it unbelievable that a baby could be born and kept comfortable until the mother decides if she wants it.”

Ed Halland, retired
“The [legislation] highlights the increasing confidence of the anti-Christian left. What was unthinkable 10 to 20 years ago is now openly advocated.”

Del Oakes before a Make America Great Again rally in Johnson City, Tenn., on Oct. 1, 2018.

Becky Cline, manufacturing, Rosehill, Va.
“It's very sad. Not only are late-term abortions and infanticide allowed to occur, but people are celebrating the fact that they can kill their children.”

Tiffany Short, manufacturing, Rosehill, Va.
“It means that we as human beings have lost all of our compassion. People have got so far from being caring moms and dads—to ones who are willing to kill their own baby as it is being born.”



CHARLOTTE CUTHBERTSON/THE EPOCH TIMES

“I believe all the recent legislation on late-term abortion signals entering into a dark, black hole for our country.”

Catrina Albo, homemaker, N.J.

On Feb. 4, the Senate failed to pass a bill that was introduced by Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) after Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) voted against it. The measure would have required infants who survived late-term abortions, where birth is induced, to receive the same care expected for any other newborns by on-scene health care practitioners.

Catrina Albo, homemaker, New Jersey

“I believe all the recent legislation on late-term abortion signals entering into a dark, black hole for our country. When a governing body within a society no longer values the life of the truly most innocent among us, we have accepted a lie that breaks down the very fabric of our morality and decency.”

Rita Eveland, retired, Nashville, Tenn.
“Life is precious, at any age. While our society has made great strides in achiev-

“The fact we place so little value on human life only proves our selfishness and that disposable consumerism has corrupted the soul of America.”

Del Oakes electrician, Johnson City, Tenn.

“I respect the right of a woman to be the determinant of her body. While it is a woman's right, I don't believe that this is something that should be federally funded at all.”

“Let me just say, a woman's right for an abortion to save her life is unquestionably justifiable in my opinion. But it seems to me that passing laws that say you can abort a baby till the day it is born seems contradictory to the fact that a criminal can be charged with homicide of a pregnant mother's baby.”

Senior FBI Lawyer Did Not Read Carter Page FISA Before Signing Off on It

Congressional testimony by Trisha Anderson highlights unusual process used by FBI and DOJ in obtaining FISA warrant on former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page

JEFF CARLSON

Trisha Anderson, the principal deputy general counsel for the FBI and head of the bureau's National Security and Cyber Law Branch, signed off on an application for a warrant to spy on former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page—before the application went to FBI Director James Comey—despite not having read it, she said.

Anderson, whose division was also assigned the Mid-Year Exam—the FBI's investigation into Clinton's use of a private email server—was responsible for legal oversight of the FBI's Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) applications process, and provided a final sign-off before FISA applications were sent to the FBI director level. Anderson, who supervised the FBI attorneys involved in FISA applications, characterized her role as being “involved at a supervisory level within the legal chain of command.”

Although she did not voluntarily reveal the information, she admitted during questioning that she was the individual responsible at the senior executive service (SES) level for signing off on the original Carter Page FISA application:

MR. BREITENBACH: “You had mentioned earlier that all FISAs have to be signed off, have an approver at an SES level. In OGC? Or is that anywhere inside the FBI?”

TRISHA ANDERSON: “In NSLB, in my particular branch.”

MR. BREITENBACH: “In NSLB?”

MS. ANDERSON: “Yeah. Uh-huh.”

MR. BREITENBACH: “Okay. Who was that SES approver for the Carter Page FISA?”

MS. ANDERSON: “My best recollection is that I was for the initiation.”

In her Aug. 31, 2018, testimony, a transcript of which was reviewed for this article, Anderson described her role in the FISA process as “a backstop” whereby she would serve as “a last check in the process to ensure that all necessary elements of the FISA package were present and that it met the basic requirements of probable cause.”



However, there appears to be significant latitude in the “backstop” review process. According to Anderson, the Department of Justice (DOJ) attached a “cover note” that identified potential issues, if any, for her to review with every FISA application. If no issues were identified by the DOJ, then according to Anderson, there would be no need for her to read the FISA application:

MS. ANDERSON: “[So] there typically would be a cover note that would summarize the FISA. That cover note is generated by DOJ. And because of the time pressures involved and the sort of very last-stop-in-the-process nature of the review, the SES review, that’s done, I wouldn’t read a FISA unless there were some sort of issue that was identified based on the cover note.”

MR. BREITENBACH: “You are, though, reviewing for the sufficiency of probable cause—?”

MS. ANDERSON: “After many people have reviewed that assessment. And so, as I mentioned, this was essentially a backstop to all of the other processes and the rigor that had been applied by DOJ attorneys and by FBI investigative and legal personnel.”

Despite the FISA application's politicized nature and obvious sensitivity, it appears that no issues were identified in relation to it, as Anderson testified that she had not read the

application, only the DOJ cover note:

MR. BREITENBACH: “Does that mean you read the FISA—?”

MS. ANDERSON: “No.”

MR. BREITENBACH: “Okay. So you did not read the FISA, but you would’ve been familiar then with at least part of the FISA with regard to the legal predicate for probable cause in the FISA in order to be able to sign it?”

MS. ANDERSON: “I would be familiar based on the cover note, yes.”

MR. BREITENBACH: “On the cover note. Okay. So—?”

MS. ANDERSON: “In the case of the Carter Page FISA, I was generally familiar with the facts of the application—?”

MR. BREITENBACH: “Okay.”

MS. ANDERSON: “— before I signed that cover note.”

Anderson claimed that in the case of the Page FISA, her approval was “more administrative in nature” because “all necessary approvals, including up through and including the leadership of the FBI and the leadership of the Department” had been obtained by the time the Page FISA came to her desk for sign-off.

The Page FISA application relied heavily on allegations made in the so-called Steele dossier paid for by Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign and the Democratic National Committee.

At the time of the FISA application, none of these allegations had been verified or validated by the FBI when they were presented to the FISA court in support of probable cause, and the Steele dossier remains unverified to this day.

The dossier extensively cited a Sept. 23, 2016, Yahoo News article by Michael Isikoff, which focused on Page's July 2016 trip to Moscow. This information, which was used by the FBI to “corroborate” the dossier, was provided to Isikoff by the author of the dossier, former MI6 agent Christopher Steele.

The House Intelligence Committee noted that “Deputy FBI Director McCabe testified before the Committee in December 2017 that no surveillance warrant would have been sought from the FISC without the Steele dossier information.” According to former FBI counterintelligence head Bill Priestap, “corroboration of the Steele dossier was in its ‘infancy’ at the time of the initial Page FISA application.”

Anderson admitted that the Page FISA process was handled outside of normal procedures, receiving early approvals from leadership officials at both the FBI and DOJ—including Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe and Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates—prior to the document reaching her desk:

MS. ANDERSON: “In this particular case, I’m drawing a distinction because my boss and my boss’ boss had already reviewed and approved this application. And, in fact, the Deputy Attorney General, who had the authority to sign the application, to be the substantive approver on the FISA application itself, had approved the application. And that typically would not have been the case before I did that. Before, I would usually sign the cover note on the FISA application.”

“So this one was handled a little bit differently in that sense, in that it received very high-level review and approvals—informal, oral approvals—before it ever came to me for signature. And so, in this particular case, I wouldn’t view it as my role to second-guess that substantive approval that had already been given by the Deputy Director and by the Deputy Attorney General in this particular instance.”

Normally, the applications would be presented to Anderson for sign-off and then sent to the FBI director, before being sent to the DOJ for final approval by either the attorney general, deputy attorney general, or assistant attorney general for the National Security Division.

When asked to describe the attention the FISA application received from FBI and DOJ leadership, Anderson testified that the “Deputy Director was involved in reviewing the FISA line by line. The Deputy Attorney General over on the DOJ side of the street was similarly involved, as I understood, reviewing the FISA application line by line.”

Anderson later appeared to soften her characterization of McCabe's level of review, noting that “[t]he Deputy Director read it, as I understood.”

Notably, during McCabe's testimony before the House Judiciary and Oversight committees, with Anderson acting as his FBI attorney, McCabe's review of the Page FISA was not ad-

ressed at any time.

In particular, Anderson singled out the involvement of her former boss, FBI General Counsel James Baker, in the Page FISA review process. Anderson described Baker as “one of the Nation's leading experts on FISA...one of the best people you could possibly consult about what was contained within the FISA application.”

Anderson, while defending her handling of the Page FISA signing, claimed that Baker had “personally reviewed and made edits to the FISA.”

However, according to Baker's Oct. 3, 2018, testimony, he had only read a small portion of the Page FISA and specifically did not review the underlying Woods Procedure file, which provided documentation for the accuracy of facts represented in the FISA application:

REP. MEADOWS: “And did you read the whole Carter Page FISA application?”

JAMES BAKER: “I—my recollection is that I read the factual part of the initiation of the Carter Page FISA. I am not going to say I read—”

Baker clarified that by “factual part” he meant that he had only read the probable cause section of the Page FISA. He also testified that he had asked Anderson to personally notify him when the Page FISA began “moving through the system.” Baker noted that he did not believe he reviewed the final document, stating “the final would not necessarily have to come to me for approval.”

Contrary to Anderson's claim, Baker said that he was primarily relying on briefings from his staff, which presumably would have included Anderson in her role as head of the National Security and Cyberlaw Branch—the specific legal division within the FBI that was responsible for the Page FISA:

“[W]hatever briefing I received from my folks about what was in the application, my assessment was that the information that we were providing was adequate and consistent, it was adequate to put the FISA court on notice of the important information that it needed to know, and we were doing so in way that was consis-

tent with our practice with the FISA court that I have been involved with for 20 years.”

During his testimony, Baker admitted that disclosures regarding the role of DOJ official Bruce Ohr and his wife, Nellie, had been unknown to him at the time of the Page FISA application. Ohr was passing on information from Steele, and Fusion GPS co-founder Glenn Simpson, to the FBI.

Baker also testified that this information, had he known of it at the time, would have been subject to further consideration for inclusion in the FISA application:

REP. RATCLIFFE: “But you agree with me, generally speaking, that if the number four person at the Department of Justice and his wife both play roles with respect to the creation of a piece of evidence, that the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court should have been apprised of that fact.”

JAMES BAKER: “If they played a role in the creation of it, and that’s how it came to the Bureau, then that seems like something that at least—again, I would like to know more details about it, but it seems like something that should have been evaluated about whether it should go into the FISA application or not. I would have—what you say concerns me and I would like to know more about it.”

Questions Over FISA Process

The issuance of a FISA warrant, which allows for the surveillance of American citizens, has been sold to the public as being subject to a thorough and rigorous process that entails a detailed vetting of the application at multiple levels within the FBI and DOJ. But Anderson provided some startling insights into the actual approval process.

Judging from Anderson's testimony, it appears that most of the work, including detailed reviews, are primarily done at lower levels within the FBI. By the time a FISA application makes its way to Anderson, her description of involvement at the SES level invokes something more closely resembling bureaucratic approval than intensive review:

“[T]he review by an SESer within FBI OGC, it happens on a very short timeframe. In other words, those SESers often will get a stack of FISAs that are—it could be 10, could be 15, could be 5—you know, perhaps, the morning they’re obligated to go to the Director or the night before.”

As Anderson herself noted, “There’s not a lot of opportunity for substantive review.”

The FISA process does not appear to be any more rigorous at the leadership levels of the FBI. Anderson claimed that the FBI “Director might on any particular day receive a stack of as many as 15, 17, 20 FISAs.” And the allotted time for the director's review of the applications seems surprisingly short:

“[T]hey’re] very thick. It’s not unusual for the Director to receive a stack this tall. I’m indicating about a foot and a half between my hands here, for the benefit of the reporter. And so that, obviously, is not commensurate with the 20 minutes the Director has in his schedule for review and approval of the FISAs.”



Then-acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe testifies before the Senate Intelligence Committee on May 11, 2017.

ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

“And so he does rely heavily on the process, on the rigor of the process, both on the FBI side and on the DOJ side, as well as on the cover note that is generated by a DOJ lawyer who has read and been involved in the drafting of that FISA application. And so, yes, the Director or Deputy Director, if he signs the FISA, you know, relies on others.”

The amount of time spent reviewing and signing off on FISA applications at the leadership level appeared to surprise the House majority investigative counsel involved in Anderson's interview:

MR. BAKER: “And you said just a minute ago—I thought you said that the Director has 20 minutes set aside to review all the FISAs?”

MS. ANDERSON: “Approximately, yes.”

MR. BAKER: “That’s a real number?”

MS. ANDERSON: “It’s not set in stone, and so we do have a process in place by which the Deputy Director or Director often will get a heads-up about the number—there’s an email that goes out every evening that indicates the number of FISAs that are ready for the Director’s signature by the next morning.”

Despite the fact that Anderson did not read the final FISA application she signed off on, Anderson repeatedly noted the particular importance of the Page FISA and claimed that it received an extraordinary level of scrutiny and preparation:

“We understood, because of who Carter Page was, that people would second-guess the appropriateness of submitting the FISA application, and so we were taking extra care with the application itself.”

Anderson claimed not to recall if she signed any of the three subsequent renewals of the Page FISA. But she did, toward the very end of her testimony—after denying multiple times that she had read it—suddenly recall that she had read the FISA at an undisclosed “earlier

In particular, Anderson singled out the involvement of her former boss, FBI General Counsel James Baker, in the Page FISA review process.



Former FBI General Counsel James Baker.

point in the process.”

Anderson had testified, however, that her only knowledge of the legal predicate for probable cause came from the DOJ cover letter that was attached to the final version that she signed, not from the actual FISA itself.

Political Bias?

Anderson was asked if she had observed any “improper considerations, including political bias” that might have affected or impacted the Page FISA process. To this question, she immediately responded that she had not.

Anderson was then asked if she had observed “any improprieties in that process that would have required subsequent disclosures to the FISA court about content that the FBI had omitted.”

At this point, Anderson halted her testimony and the FBI counsel interjected.

Upon resumption, Anderson testified that she had been “advised by the FBI lawyers that I can’t answer that question in an unclassified setting.” The topic of additional or supplemental information provided to the FISA court would be returned to once more during Anderson's testimony:

MR. BAKER: “Do you know if any additional information, either supplemental or for clarification, was provided to the court for any of the FISAs in the Russia case?”

MS. ANDERSON: “This question raises the same classification issue that was raised by the question a few moments ago by the minority staff. And so, based on my consultation with the FBI lawyers, I’m not able to answer that question in this unclassified setting.”

MR. BAKER: “Okay.”

Anderson did testify that in the Page FISA process, she was not aware of any attempts by the DOJ or FBI to intentionally mislead the FISA court.

SAMIRA BOUADOU/THE EPOCH TIMES



The Capitol Building in Washington on Feb. 26, 2018.

North Carolina Man Sentenced to 15 Years in Prison for Supporting ISIS

WILLIAM PATRICK

North Carolina man has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for attempting to provide material support to the ISIS terrorist group.

Erick Jamal Hendricks, 38, was convicted via jury trial in November, in Akron, Ohio. His prison sentence was announced Feb. 4 by Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers and U.S. Attorney Justin E. Herdman of the Northern District of Ohio.

"This defendant posed a very real threat to the safety of our community and nation," said Herdman.

In many ways, the case is symbolic of the ongoing terror threat as outlined by FBI Director Christopher Wray in October.

Speaking before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Wray warned that homegrown violent extremists, or HVEs, are "the greatest terrorism threat to the homeland."

"These individuals are global jihad-inspired individuals who are in the U.S., have been radicalized primarily in the U.S., and are not receiving individualized direction from foreign terrorist organizations. We, along with our law enforcement partners, face significant challenges in identifying and disrupting HVEs," Wray said.

A leading factor in homegrown radicalization is the worldwide proliferation of the internet and social media, which have changed the nature of the post-9/11 terror threat. "Due to online recruitment and indoctrination, foreign terrorist organizations are no longer dependent on finding ways to get terrorist operatives into the United States to recruit and carry out acts of terrorism," Wray said.

According to court documents, Hendricks is a U.S. citizen who became radicalized online and attempted to recruit and train others to commit jihad, all while living in the United States.

Hendricks admitted his goal was to create a sleeper cell that would be trained and housed at a secure location, and conduct attacks on vulnerable Americans. He claimed to have 10 recruits when arrested.

Hendricks planned to target members of the U.S. military whose information had been released online by ISIS, and an activist named Pamela Geller. Geller, who is culturally liberal, is an abrasive critic of Sharia law. She organized a "Draw the Prophet" cartoon contest in Garland, Texas, in 2015, creating the controversial free-speech event after a Danish newspaper cartoon sparked widespread protests and violent riots across Europe and the Middle East in 2005.

On April 23, 2015, Hendricks used social media to contact an associate named Elton Simpson. Ten days later, Simpson and a second individual, Nadir Hamid Soofi, launched an ISIS-inspired attack on Geller's cartoon event.

Simpson and Soofi, both U.S. citizens, arrived at the Curtis Culwell Center, the contest's venue, and opened fire. The attackers were killed in a shootout

with police, but not before wounding an unarmed security guard.

According to court documents, Hendricks also had been unwittingly communicating via social media with an undercover FBI employee who was supposed to film the attack as it happened so it could be posted on social media. "If you see that pig [Geller] make your 'voice' heard against her," he said.

Hendricks also asked the undercover agent a series of questions: "How big is the gathering?" "How many ppl?" "How many police/agents?" "Do you see feds there?" "Do you see snipers?" "How many media?"

ISIS went on to claim responsibility for the Garland plot, which was the first time the terror group took credit for an attack on U.S. soil.

Separately, Hendricks was connected to another man, Amir Al-Ghazi, who was arrested in Ohio in June 2015, after attempting to purchase an AK-47 assault rifle and ammunition a month after the Garland shooting.

Al-Ghazi had pledged allegiance to ISIS on social media and made statements "expressing interest" in conducting attacks inside the country, records show.

Hendricks had connected with Al-Ghazi over social media to recruit him in the spring of 2015, with Hendricks allegedly telling him that he "needed people" and that there were several "brothers" in Texas and Mexico.

Their plan was to train together, but first, Hendricks tested Al-Ghazi on his religious commitment to "jihad," his willingness to die as a "martyr," and his desire to enter "jannah," or paradise.

Al-Ghazi is now serving 16 years in prison after pleading guilty to attempting to provide material support for ISIS, and for being a felon in possession of firearms.

"Erick Jamal Hendricks represents the significant online ISIS threat that we face daily," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Eric Smith on Feb. 4.

According to the FBI, the internet and social media have allowed international and domestic terrorists to "gain unprecedented, virtual access" to people living in the United States.

ISIS, more so than any other foreign terror group, encourages sympathizers to carry out simple attacks against so-called soft targets, or unprotected people and places, and to travel to ISIS-held territory in Iraq and Syria.

The Epoch Times contacted the FBI for current information about the scope of the issue, but didn't immediately receive a response. However, Wray told NBC News in March 2018, that the agency had more than 3,000 open terrorism investigations.

The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force is a major aspect of the agency's counterterrorism and national security activities. It's comprised of members of the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and Investigations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and members of local law enforcement.

In January, the JTTF made 15 major announcements, with seven of them involving domestic terrorism linked to ISIS and Al Qaeda.

As recently as Jan. 30, an Ohio man named Damon M. Joseph, also known as Abdullah Ali Yusuf, was charged with attempting to provide material support to ISIS, in addition to attempting to commit a hate crime and possessing firearms in furtherance of a crime of violence.

Joseph had planned to conduct a mass-casualty attack on a synagogue in Toledo, Ohio.

"This man allegedly spent months planning a violent terrorist attack on behalf of ISIS here in the United States, and targeted a Jewish synagogue in the Toledo area specifically because of the faith of the people who worship there," Herdman said.

"We will work to identify and arrest anyone who take steps to use violence to spread their ideology and to interfere with the free exercise of our essential rights," he said.



Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Demers.

JIM WATSON/AP/GETTY IMAGES



Syrian Democratic Forces and U.S. troops during a patrol near the Turkish border in Hasakah, Syria, on Nov. 4, 2018.

REUTERS/RODI SAID

New York Governor Blames State Budget Shortfall on Republicans in Congress

WILLIAM PATRICK

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced a projected \$2.3 billion budget shortfall on Feb. 4, in what looks to be the beginning of a long-term revenue challenge for the high-tax state.

Cuomo, a Democrat, blamed New York's revenue woes on congressional Republicans and President Donald Trump. More specifically, a provision in the Republican-led Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, known as the state and local tax deduction, or SALT.

Previously, SALT allowed residents in high-tax cities and states to deduct those taxes from their federal income tax liabilities. But under the new tax law, which takes effect for the 2018 tax year, those state and local deductions will be capped at \$10,000.

Last year, New York state's average SALT deduction was \$22,000.

"SALT was an economic civil war," Cuomo said gravely on Feb. 4.

"It was a diabolical political maneuver," he added. "It literally restructured the economy to help red states at the cost of blue states. That's exactly what it did," said Cuomo.

Grover Norquist, president of the conservative Americans for Tax Reform, disagreed and said Cuomo's reasoning is exactly backward. "He said we started a war. No, we ended a war," Norquist said in a Feb. 5, FOX Business

interview.

"For the past 50 years, high-tax states like New York have been looting the rest of the country and getting subsidies in the form of tax loopholes," he said. "Now, all 50 states can play on the same flat playing field."

Economic studies tend to support the conclusion that wealthier individuals living in high-tax cities and states disproportionately benefit from SALT deductions, thus putting more of the federal tax burden onto lower-earning individuals living in low-tax states, or those with no state income tax at all.

According to the Washington-based Tax Foundation, the disparity among those who benefited from the previously uncapped SALT deduction is significant.

"The benefits of the SALT deduction overwhelmingly go to high-income taxpayers, particularly those in high-income and high-tax states," a Tax Foundation analysis states.

"In 2016, 77 percent of the benefit of the SALT deduction accrued to those with incomes above \$100,000; only 6.6 percent went to taxpayers with incomes below \$50,000."

In the study, New York had the highest benefit of any state, with its residents receiving an effective tax deduction of 9.4 percent of adjusted gross income. The average across all 50 states and the District of Columbia was just

4.6 percent.

California, another high-tax state, was responsible for 20.7 percent, or one-fifth, of all SALT deductions.

Norquist predicted that House Democrats—many of whom hail from high-tax cities and states—will try to repeal the \$10,000 SALT cap. But that puts them in the position of allowing the rich to go back to offloading a large portion of their tax liabilities, often onto working people—which is normally anathema to progressives.

Compounding the problem is the steady migration of residents from high-tax states to low-tax states, which has been occurring for years.

Cuomo acknowledged the issue during his Feb. 3 press conference, though he again blamed the recent tax reform law.

"SALT encourages high-income New Yorkers to move to other states. If even a small number of high-income taxpayers leave the state it would harm state revenues," he said.

According to the Foundation for Economic Excellence, a libertarian think tank, people are already leaving high-tax states as part of a nationwide trend. And that spells long-term trouble for states like New York.

"People move between states for many reasons, including climate, housing costs, and job opportunities. But when you look at the detailed patterns of movement, it is clear that

taxes also play a role," said FEE's Chris Edwards, also the director of tax policy studies at the Cato Institute.

"Of the 25 highest-tax states, 24 of them had net out-migration in 2016."

Most of the fleeing residents are relocating to economic growth-friendly states, such as Utah, Arizona, Texas, and Florida.

In 2014, Florida surpassed New York in total population, which has continued to increase. New York, however, ranked dead last among all 50 states in population growth in 2018.

New York also faced an even steeper budget shortfall last year, but was able to balance its budget by reigning in spending.

According to Cuomo's fiscal year 2019 executive budget, the state faces nearly twice its current shortfall.

"From the outset, this was going to be a difficult year for New York state's budget. We face a \$4.4 billion shortfall driven by declining revenues, compounded by a \$2 billion cut in federal funding for health care that could rise to \$5 billion in the out years," the governor's executive budget stated.

Norquist was unforgiving following Cuomo's newly bleak fiscal announcement. "All [Cuomo] has to do is reduce state taxes and high-income earners would stay," he said. "In New York City that means a reduction in income and property taxes."

US Special Representative Discusses Diplomatic Strategy on NORTH KOREAN DENUCLEARIZATION

RONEN ZILBERMAN/AP/GETTY IMAGES



Military pallbearers carry the remains believed to be of U.S. service members collected in North Korea during a repatriation ceremony at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Honolulu, Hawaii, on Aug. 1, 2018.

CYNTHIA CAI

PALO ALTO, Calif.—After 70 years of tension between North Korea and the United States, and two decades in which North Korea has possessed weapons of mass destruction, the two countries are making progress toward transforming their relationship in positive ways. Eventually, the United States seeks the complete denuclearization of North Korea.

This was the message delivered by Stephen Biegun, U.S. Special Representative for North Korea, in remarks at Stanford University's Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center on Jan. 31, 2018.

As the U.S. Special Representative for North Korea, Biegun is responsible for overseeing and leading the broad diplomatic initiative for the denuclearization of North Korea.

"The last 25 years were not wasted," said Biegun, although certainly the United States and North Korea missed opportunities.

Biegun began by explaining that more than two decades ago, North Korea was first found to have acquired the means of producing weapons of mass destruction. Since then, the United States has been working to resolve the issue, but has seen limited progress.

After the 2016 elections and during the presidential transition, then-President Barack Obama impressed upon President Donald Trump that the top national security priority the United States faced was the North Korean nuclear missile program.

Although "nothing in today's circumstances necessarily guarantees that we will be successful," said Biegun, Trump is taking steps to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to end the 70 years of hostility.

The Korean War ended in 1953 with an armistice, but no peace treaty formally ceasing hostilities. In April 2018, North Korea and South Korea issued the Panmunjon Declaration that promises the nations will work toward peace and unification.

Meetings

On Jan. 18, Ambassador Kim Yong Chol, vice chairman and adviser to Kim, visited the United States to meet with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. During this visit, the delegation covered several issues and set into motion plans for a second summit between Trump and Kim.

Biegun added that he also had the opportunity to meet with Ambassador Kim, engaging in a "results-oriented" discussion that laid out a plan for future negotiations between the two countries.

Through this "top-down approach," the United States and North Korea are working toward transforming the relations between the countries. "The New Year's speech by Chairman Kim at beginning of this year reaffirmed his commitment to denuclearization and economic modernization," stated Biegun.

Many senior level officials—including the vice president and national security adviser—have been pressing the goals of improving diplomacy and relations with North Korea at the United Nations, APEC summit, and the G-20 summit, among others. Biegun explained that the support of global partners and allies is important in building a strong backbone in diplomatic

ED JONES/AP/GETTY IMAGES



"Before the process of denuclearization is final, we must also have a complete understanding of the full extent of the North Korean weapons of mass destruction programs.

Stephen Biegun, U.S. special representative for North Korea

endeavors.

"Last fall, we had the opportunity to lay out our strategic vision to our NATO allies at the North Atlantic Council, and our partners in the European Union at the Political Security Committee," Biegun said. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs also hosted a meeting with the United States, Britain, and Germany. Earlier this year, Sweden hosted a conference with South and North Korean participation.

The Trump administration seeks to create progress and results in resolving relations with North Korea. "The purpose of diplomacy is not more meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to produce outcomes and progress," stated Biegun.

Through these meetings, the countries have been able to develop better communication with each other, Biegun said, though it's still challenging at times.

Progress

Evidence of progress under the current administration is that there are no more detained U.S. citizens in North Korea as of today. The most recent case of a U.S. citizen crossing into North Korea occurred in the fall of 2018. However, the citizen was quickly interrogated and flown back to the United States with the aid of Sweden, the U.S. consular protecting power.

Moreover, the official demilitarization of the "demilitarized zone" between the two Koreas, humanitarian programs, and the cooperation between North Korea and the United States on returning 55 sets of human remains believed to be from the Korean War are all examples of accomplishment and movement toward progress.

In terms of denuclearization, during the past North-South summit, Kim allowed access for international experts to verify the dismantlement of two nuclear test sites. Although these test sites aren't critical sites for the nuclear weapons programs, the act of allowing international experts into North Korea for inspection is a first in 10 years.

As Biegun expressed, these "mini actions" are all steps toward building a better relationship between the countries, but there are many steps that still need to occur.

"Before the process of denuclearization is final, we must also have a complete understanding of the full extent of the North Korean weapons of mass destruction programs. We will get that at some point with a comprehensive declaration," said Biegun.

The Trump administration's goal is "the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea," said Biegun.

Trump and Kim are expected to meet in a second summit at the end of February in Vietnam. Trump said he expects "significant and verifiable progress on denuclearization. Actions that are bold and are real in that next summit," added Biegun.

At the summit in Singapore, Trump described to Kim a vision of economic development driven by investment for North Korea, which could allow the country to flourish.

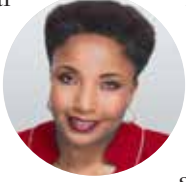
"I think it's fair to say that we have more work ahead of us than we do behind us," Biegun said. With 70 years of hostility on the Korean Peninsula, Trump has made the commitment to pursue the goal of re-envisioning North Korea.

OPINION

So-called CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS REJECT GOD'S VIEW

DR. CAROL M. SWAIN

Many U.S. Democratic politicians present themselves to the world as Christians. But their Christianity is completely devoid of a biblical worldview. The most shocking statements come out of their mouths disguised as genuine concern for the suffering of the less fortunate.



Consider the “gospel” of pro-abortion Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. It contains her favorite scripture, which isn’t found in any known translation of the Holy Book. According to armchair theologian Pelosi: “The Bible tells us that to minister to the needs of God’s creation is an act of worship. To ignore those needs is to dishonor the God who made us.”

This, from someone who hasn’t been shy about dishonoring the God who made us in His image.

Offering her expert opinion about abortion, Pelosi has described herself as “an ardent, practicing Catholic” who considers herself knowledgeable about the issue because she has studied it.

Based on her studies of conception and when life actually begins, which apparently equals her biblical knowledge, she argues, “Doctors of the church have not been able to make that definition. ... St. Augustine said at three months. We don’t know. The point is, is that it shouldn’t have an impact on the woman’s right to choose.”

There is no reason to question Pelosi. She strikes me as sincerely confused about her faith and its teachings. A fellow Catholic, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, recently signed one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world, a law that places us in the company of China and North Korea.

We have several prominent Protestants who find support and justification for abortion. One Episcopalian, in particular, takes the cake for most egregious remarks about the deaths

of the unborn: Rev. Katherine Hancock Ragsdale, an Episcopal priest and the former president of Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She famously said:

“Abortion is a blessing and our work is not done. Let me hear you say it: Abortion is a blessing and our work is not done.”

Other Christian abortion supporters who seem quite comfy cozied up under the Democratic Party’s all-inclusive umbrella include Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam and former President Barack Obama, the latter of whom, as a state senator, once fought against Illinois’ Infants Born Alive Act.

Northam, a Southern Baptist and pediatric neurologist, stunned many Americans by casually endorsing infanticide. When asked if he would support legislation that would permit abortion of a woman in labor, he said: “If a mother is in labor, I can tell you exactly what would happen. The infant would be delivered. The infant would be kept comfortable. The infant would be resuscitated if that’s what the mother and the family desired, and then, a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother.”

Speaking at a Johnstown, Pennsylvania, town hall in 2008, presidential candidate Obama said: “I’ve got two daughters, 9 years old and 6 years old. I am going to teach them first about values and morals. But if they make a mistake, I don’t want them punished with a baby.”

What Scripture Says About Life

The Bible says each unborn child possesses a unique identity and destiny. God told Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). King David writes in Psalm 139:13–16: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” In the cases of Jesus and John the

of Human Life

Our national disregard for human life places us on par with the nations God brought into judgment.

Baptist, an angel named each child before he was born, giving names later connected with the child’s world-changing mission (Luke 1:13; Matthew 1:21).

Exodus 20:3–17 lists the Ten Commandments that God gave to the Israelites. The Sixth Commandment states, “You shall not commit murder” (v. 13).

Throughout the Bible, starting with the death of Abel, God distinguishes between murder and other kinds of killing such as that in capital punishment, God-ordained war, and accidents. Murder—the deliberate taking of innocent life—is strongly condemned. The Bible speaks of innocent blood crying out from the ground, and of lands polluted by

the shedding of innocent blood. In Genesis 4:10, we read “And the Lord said [to Cain], ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.’” Proverbs 6:17 tells us that God hates “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.”

In Leviticus 18:21, the Israelites are told, “You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God.” Likewise, we read in Psalm 106:37–38: “They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.”

These scriptures admonished the Israelites not to follow the detestable practices of the Canaanites and neighboring peoples who sacrificed their children to Baal and Molech.

If God exists and is unchanging, as the Bible states, how would he feel about a nation whose government legalized the spilling of the innocent blood of more than 61 million babies? Our national disregard for human life places us on par with the nations God brought into judgment, including his beloved Israel.

Dr. Carol M. Swain is a former tenured professor at Vanderbilt and Princeton universities. Her Be The People News blog and podcast empower individuals to think independently, understand their responsibility, and make a difference in the world.

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.



Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton applauds as New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaks about late-term abortion at Barnard College in New York on Jan. 7, 2019.

Trump’s SOTU Reminds Us That by Uniting, We Can All ‘Choose Greatness’

BRAD PARSCALE

The president’s hopeful State of the Union address was a welcome respite from the ceaseless barrage of division, cynicism, and pessimism that Americans are subject to every day from the swamp in Washington.

The speech served as a reminder that, whatever disagreements our two parties may have, the democratic institutions that allow us to peacefully resolve them remain strong.

While confidently presenting his vision for the future, President Donald Trump pushed aside Washington’s bitter divisions as much as possible. He sought to remind us that Americans, no matter how they vote and which news networks they watch, have much more reason for optimism than fear, and more to gain from unity and patriotism than from partisan animosity.

In 2019, the state of the union is indeed strong, despite our tendency

to focus exclusively on the problems we face. America is experiencing the strongest economic growth since the Great Recession, the healthiest job market in almost 50 years, and the strongest wage growth for hard-working Americans in a decade.

We’re also making progress in tackling the problems that still plague our country. For example, the data indicate that we’ve turned a corner on the surge in violent crime we saw in 2015 and 2016, even in particularly hard-hit places such as Chicago.

More impressive still, we were able to achieve that while enacting historic, bipartisan prison reforms that protect our communities while ending decades-old injustices. President Trump was able to invite the first person released under the FIRST STEP Act, Matthew Charles, to the Capitol to hear his State of the Union address. Charles served 23 years of a 35-year sentence imposed for selling crack cocaine, during which time he found God, became a law clerk, and

America is experiencing the strongest economic growth since the Great Recession, the healthiest job market in almost 50 years, and the strongest wage growth for hard-working Americans in a decade.

mentored fellow inmates.

Following President Trump’s enthusiastic endorsement of the measure last year, both parties in Congress came together to pass the package of proven, common-sense reforms that will allow prisoners like Charles to earn their way back into society’s good graces while helping to reduce the rampant recidivism that drives crime rates up.

The president’s State of the Union address also held out the promise of many more such bipartisan victories, but those can only be achieved if we can set aside what divides us and cling to what unifies us.

Luckily, there is much that we can still agree on, even in the current political climate.

For instance, President Trump proposed a new initiative to fix our country’s outdated and neglected infrastructure, and asked both parties to help find a solution that will bring down the prices of health care and prescription drugs.

Even on the issues that divide us most, such as illegal immigration, border security, and trade, Americans across the political spectrum

share a common goal of justice, safety, and prosperity. The president asked Congress to build on those shared ideals, rather than continue to let partisan differences distract from the important work that needs to be done in this country.

“Together, we can break decades of political stalemate. We can bridge old divisions, heal old wounds, build new coalitions, forge new solutions, and unlock the extraordinary promise of America’s future. The decision is ours to make,” the president told Congress and the nation.

Whether our elected officials live up to that inclusive vision will be determined over the next two years. But, for this moment at least, the opportunity

to do as the president urged and “choose greatness” is there for the taking by all.

Brad Parscale is the campaign manager for Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.

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