

CEG Meeting Minutes—March 9, 2018

Mary Jane Francis, facilitator for this session, opened the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

PAST EVENTS

World Affairs Council—Jeremi Suri Interview (2/15/2018)

Steve Ellis reported that he, Diane Stevens, and Joan Conlon attended the World Affairs Council event at Folio where Jeremi Suri, the author of *The Impossible Presidency and Foreign Policy: From Washington to Trump*, was interviewed.

Suri, history professor at the University of Texas, Austin, looked at American presidential records to determine that as presidents acquire more powers, their effectiveness decreases, implying that “The system is structurally set up for the President to ‘fail’.”

During the discussion that followed Steve’s remarks, Frank Conlon reminded us of another book, *The Imperial Presidency*, by Arthur Schlesinger, that had a similar theme.

For a copy of Steve’s comments on the interview with Jeremi Suri, please see Attachment #1.

District Legislative Session (2/17/2018)

Jim Sanders reported on the 43rd District Town Hall meeting held at the Seattle First Baptist Church with State Senator Jamie Pedersen, Speaker of the House Frank Chopp, and State Representative Nicole Macri. Approximately 18 Skyline residents were in attendance.

A more detailed report of the meeting was distributed to the CEG distribution list in February. If you did not receive it, or would like another copy, please contact Jim at jimsanders1947@gmail.com.

Dick Dion, who was not in attendance at the Town Hall meeting, expressed disappointment in our representatives for having voted for SB 6617 concerning records disclosure obligations of the legislative branch.

Putin’s Redux—Jill Doherty’s talk at Skyline (2/19/2018)

Judy Mayotte, a friend of Doherty, explained that in her Skyline talk, Doherty had given a timeline of Putin’s consolidation of power and his U.S. relations resulting from his conflict with Hillary Clinton. Judy added the information that Jill Doherty was on her way to Moscow to cover the March 18th Russian elections.

Several residents expressed a desire to have Doherty return to Skyline after the March 18th elections. Judy explained that Doherty is an extremely busy consultant and contributor to CNN who provides expert commentary on Russia. Nevertheless, Judy will pass on our enthusiasm to have her return to Skyline.

SB 6617 Defeated

Kathe Dobbs led a discussion on SB 6617 regarding public disclosure of legislative documents, reporting that the bill was presented and passed by both houses within 48 hours without debate. The governor received more than 12,000 emails and 6,000 phone calls asking him to veto the bill, which he did.

Most of the discussion revolved around the question of why our legislatures overwhelmingly voted for the bill. Some explanations offered among CEG attendees included the importance of timing of a pending lawsuit and the possible work overload these requests would place on legislators.

COMING EVENTS

Secretary of State Kim Wyman—Tuesday, March 13, 1:00 p.m., Mt. Baker Room

Jim Tanner announced that Kim Wyman will join us on March 13th to address questions of voter fraud and voter suppression. Wyman is currently serving her second term as Washington State's Secretary of State. She is the highest-ranking member of the Republican Party to serve Washington as an elected official. The Secretary of State is the state's chief elections officer, chief corporations officer, and supervisor of the State Archives.

March for Our Lives: A student-led march protesting the lack of legislative action to reduce gun violence—March 24, Cal Anderson Park, 10:00 a.m.

Wendy Schoen talked about the protest march taking place around the United States on Saturday, March 24th. This student-led march is a result of the latest mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL. The Seattle event is being held in conjunction with a march in Washington D.C. and many other cities around the country.

How to Join the Protest:

- Walk to Cal Anderson Park (about 3/4 of a mile): 9th Ave. to Madison, Madison to Broadway, Broadway to Pine, and Pine to Nagle Place.
- Take the #60 bus, which stops in front of St James Cathedral, and exit at Broadway and Pine. Then walk one block to the park. Bus departs about every half hour, depending on traffic (e.g., 9:45, 10:15, 10:45, and 11:15).

- Join the march in progress: The event begins at Cal Anderson Park and ends at the International Fountain at Seattle Center. The route has not yet been identified. Check the local paper or television news channels as we get closer to the event for the actual route.
- Join at the end of the march: Take the #3 or #4 bus downtown to the Seattle Center.

Note: Planning for this event is still in progress. Additional information may be available at <https://www.facebook.com/events/148775925933794/>

Suzanne Hittman noted that a 17-minute National School Walkout will take place at 10:00 a.m. on March 14th, in memory of the 17 victims of the Florida massacre. The purpose of this walkout is to call on Congress to pass tighter gun control laws.

Congressman Adam Smith’s Town Hall Meeting—Wednesday, March 28, 6:00 p.m., Federal Way City Hall

Tom Gibbs announced the town hall meeting of Congressman Adam Smith in Federal Way’s City Hall at 33325 8th Ave. South in Federal Way. The meeting is scheduled from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. Attendees are asked to register at Eventbrite.com or by calling (425) 793-5180 or toll free at (888) SMITH09.

If anyone is planning to go by car and can take passengers, please let Jim Sanders know via email or telephone. A Skyline bus to the event will not be available without the commitment of 15 passengers paying \$15 each.

State Representative Nicole Macri, Skyline Talk—Friday, April 27, 3:00 p.m., Mt. Baker Room.

Katherine Graubard announced that Nicole Macri will be at Skyline on Friday, April 27. This will be Macri’s third visit to Skyline, first as a candidate and then as our representative. She currently serves as vice chair of both the Healthcare and Wellness Committee, and the Community Development, Housing, and Tribal Affairs Committee. She is also a member of the Capital Budget Committee.

Macri has 20 years of active involvement in housing and other progressive policies. Outside of the legislature she serves as Deputy Director of the Downtown Emergency Services Center at 3rd and James Street, across from the County Courthouse.

We have asked her to focus on the accomplishments and limitations of the recent legislative session, and what she sees for the next year.

Lisa Manheim: “The Limits of Presidential Power”—Tuesday, May 1, 3:00 p.m.

Jim Sanders announced the Skyline talk by Lisa Manheim on the “Limits of Presidential Power,” Skyline’s first “Law Day” event. Professor Manheim and Kathryn Watts, both UW Law School faculty members, have published the book, *The Limits of Presidential Power: A Citizen’s Guide to the Law*. Manheim was the moderator of a similarly titled UW Law School town hall event, which was CEG’s first “streamed event.” She also spoke with us about electoral politics last year. Manheim will talk about the constitutional limits on executive power.

If you are interested in acquiring the book on *The Limits of Presidential Power*, please contact Jim Sanders in the next two weeks at jimsanders1947@gmail.com.

Ryan Calkins, Port of Seattle Commissioner—Friday, June 1, 10:30 a.m.

Al MacRae reported that Ryan Calkins, Port of Seattle Commissioner, has been invited to speak at Skyline by the Science and Technology group. Calkins has been asked to address the Port’s challenges and long-term plans, including the cleanup of the Duwamish River, the possible leasing of Terminal 5, and issues of ground transportation between SeaTac and Paine Field.

Al also reminded CEG that Graham Sayre, Life Style Manager for the Terraces, will give a talk on computer hacking at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, March 13th, and two weeks after that, he will talk about the influence of Russian hacking on our elections.

He also announced the upcoming Science and Technology Group’s April 10th presentation by Steve Ellis. Steve will speak on the role of the Higgs Boson (particle) as it was predicted 50 years ago and how it was finally discovered at the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Geneva and announced on the 4th of July 2012.

STATUS REPORTS ON COMING EVENTS

Centrists, Republicans and Democrats

Jim Sanders reported little progress in inviting more Republicans and Centrists to speak at Skyline and requested help from those who know or have contact with Brian Baird, Chris Vance, Tina Podlodowski, or Caleb Heimlich. If you can help, please contact Jim Sanders.

Lands Commissioner Hillary Franz

Donna McKinney gave an update on the status of an invitation to Hillary Franz, Commissioner of Public Lands and the Director of the Department of Natural Resources, to speak at Skyline. Franz has been asked to speak about her role as commissioner and on topics such as forest management and fire prevention. A

letter of invitation was sent to her last Wednesday, May 7th, and we are hoping for a positive response.

Alliance for Gun Responsibility

David O'Hara reported that the Peace and Justice Committee has issued an invitation to a speaker from the Alliance for Gun Responsibility. They have expressed interest, but are too busy at this time and cannot commit to a date. David is hopeful that they will send a speaker in the near future.

Review of Five Books—*Times Literary Supplement* of December 15, 2017

Joan Conlon gave a summary of and comments on five books about authoritarianism and current authoritarian leaders that were recently reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*. The authoritarian leaders include Putin of Russia, Erdogan of Turkey, Orban of Hungary, Duterte of the Philippines, el-Sisi of Egypt, and Modi of India.

For a copy of the full report, see Joan Conlon's comments in Attachment #2.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:57 p.m.

Next Meeting: Friday, April 13, 2018, 4:00 p.m., Mt. Baker Room

Thanks to Mary Jane Francis for serving as our facilitator; Suzanne Hittman, Donna McKinney, and Lorraine Sakata for taking notes; Wendy Schoen for editing and formatting this document; and to all of you who participated.

ATTACHMENT 1: Comments on Jeremy Suri's Interview at the Folio

Comments on the interview with Jeremi Suri (History Professor, University of Texas at Austin) on his new book, *The Impossible Presidency and Foreign Policy: From Washington to Trump*, with Jacqueline Miller of the World Affairs Council at the FOLIO on 2/15/18.

The following are the combined contributions of Diane Stevens, Joan Conlon, and Steve Ellis (blame mistakes on Steve).

Suri set the tone for his thoughtful, but often light-hearted, discussion with his opening comment. He describes a historian (like himself) as someone who is interested in reading your mail, after you have passed-away. He continued with the comment that this situation is to be contrasted with that of Vladimir Putin, who gets to read your mail now!

The author has taken a historic look at American presidential records, and determined that as Presidents have acquired more powers and larger staffs, their effectiveness has been decreased. Ironically, the more power given to the President, the more constrained the President finds himself in achieving his goals. 99 percent of the President's time in the current system is spent on issues the President doesn't care about. As the powers of the office have expanded, the expectations of the electorate have grown in parallel, and it is impossible for the President alone to fulfill those expectations. The system is structurally set up for the President to "fail".

Suri used the example of Obama being constrained by diversions. Obama had stressed that he wanted to close Guantanamo, but he was constrained by the inability to focus on a few major issues. Instead, he was diverted by a plethora of other issues. He was unable to concentrate on singular, important issues because he was always distracted by diversions.

Suri argues that this was not what the founding fathers had in mind (in a much simpler world). From the time of George Washington up to FDR, the office of the Presidency was small (our first President, Washington, had a small office with a staff of five). Starting with FDR, the role of the Presidency greatly expanded and became very powerful. FDR provided hope and a sense of unity for the U.S. through stressful economic times and then a world war. Post-war, we came to expect that the U.S. President would provide leadership for the world (a New Deal for the world). As a leader, he reached out, healed, and offered hope. He was able to get people to work together, building connections, such as the CCC (Civilian Conservation Core). At the same time, with the development of a strong military during WWII, we now tend to view international solutions in the context of

military action. Unfortunately, the Legislative branch, as we have recently seen, has only limited ability to check the President on foreign policy. Furthermore, as the task of President has become more complex, we have not required any corresponding evolution of the preparation (if any) required of a Presidential candidate.

Today, we elect people on expectations, but once they are elected, they are severely constrained in solving major concerns. “The President is the most powerful leader in the world. Yet he is set up to fail.” Society tends to dictate the activities of the President. The vast growth of presidential tools and capabilities means that the tools tend to control the presidency rather than vice versa.

As an added change, at the time of FDR, there were fewer significant players in the world: Churchill, Stalin, France, and the USA. By the time of Reagan, we needed to consider in addition China and Germany. Currently, something like 140 other countries need to be considered as part of the foreign policy of the U.S.

The question arises as to how to use power. Thomas Jefferson had said, “The key to Leadership is knowing how, when, and where to use amassed power.” Power redefines us and moves us away from liberty.

Examples the author gave were that Eisenhower, JFK, and LBJ did not want to go to war. Obama and Biden did n’t want to go into Afghanistan. Afghanistan has ended up being our current Viet Nam.

Clinton and Obama both were over-achievers. They never saw their own limits. Because neither of them served in the military, both were cowed and pressured by the military.

The founding fathers did not want the military to be as powerful as it is today. They wanted checks and balances. However, today, checks and balances do not work well because of the War Powers Act, which violates checks and balances.

Example: There exists no procedure for the President to launch nuclear war on our part. SAC and NORAD would act; then tell Congress about it afterward.

Suri noted that no other functioning democracy operates with a unitary (single leader) Executive. The more typical approach is to have BOTH a Prime Minister AND a Head of State, serving to largely separate the responsibility of domestic policy from that of foreign affairs. He suggested that the U.S. consider moving towards this paradigm to both simplify the task (no longer impossible?) and decouple the two kinds of issues. He provided examples of where a President’s choice (and ability) to focus on limited issues led to successful outcomes; e.g., Nixon in China, Carter in the Middle East, and Reagan’s focus on “big picture” domestic issues.

Critical has also been that Obama, Clinton, and Trump had no previous foreign public policy experience.

Yet we are Executive driven: .01% of us gave 20% of funds to the campaigns.

Partisan politics thrives under our current system. The current Speaker of the House can be the most extreme. A Prime Minister would be less extreme. It is impossible to build consensus in a country when everybody has a different agenda.

Reagan realized that the office was too big, and he did not micromanage. Instead, he liberated himself from the minutiae. But, Reagan ignored important elements of his presidency; he realized that Schultz and North were giving him different news, and he ended up lying under oath.

Another example was that LBJ focused on Civil Rights, at the expense of significant interaction with such issues as poverty and NATO.

On a more positive concluding note, Suri suggested that the millennials he interacts with in the classes he teaches seem to be aware of the challenges (e.g., no guarantees that they will live as well as their parents) and are prepared to get involved, solve problems, and (re)build institutions. Their focus is less on earning lots of money than on solving problems of concern to all of us. A meaningful life's work is more important to them than getting rich. They are the hope of the future, although the "old guard" will apparently not cede power willingly.

"Generation Change is the engine of Reform."

Suri also lauded the U.S. press for its recent essential role in trying to ensure accountability.

A final "positive" note was sounded during the question period when Suri suggested that, if we survive the current administration, we will likely have learned some important lessons about the limits of the presidency and the unfortunate role of inappropriately high expectations.

ATTACHMENT 2: Joan Conlon's Comments on Fives Books Reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*

The following five books were reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* of December 15, 2017:

- *A Question of Order: India, Turkey, and the Return of the Strongmen*, by Basharat Peer
- *Mastering the Past: Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe and the Rise of Illiberalism*, by Ellen Hinsey
- *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age*, by James Kirchick
- *Who Lost Russia: How the World Entered a New Cold War*, by Peter Conradi
- *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, by Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg

The focus of these books is on authoritarian leaders: Putin of Russia, Erdogan of Turkey, Orban of Hungary, Duterte of the Philippines, el-Sisi of Egypt, and Modi of India.

“The lesson is that authoritarianism does not always need an authoritarian majority. It can emerge as the accidental afterlife of a decayed democracy.”

“Leaders around the world often seem cut from the same pattern, regardless of the nature of the political system that produces them. They value loyalty above truth. They speak directly to their constituents and claim a mystical ability to discern the people’s wishes.”

“The strongman’s greatest asset is not administrative competence or personal charisma. It is rather an ability to paralyze opponents with dark buffoonery: the demeaning of established practice, the tough-guy posturing, the lying chutzpah, the eager flattery of acolytes.” (Given as an example of the latter was Reince Priebus, then President Trump’s Chief of Staff, who was quoted as saying at a televised cabinet meeting in June of 2017, “We thank you for the opportunity and the blessing that you’ve given us to serve your agenda and the American People.”)

Modi of India is described as having “calculated outrageousness and mystical nationalism” that has attracted youth among his following. In Hungary, changes in electoral laws and media laws threaten to close down universities and groups that champion human rights and press freedom.

In the case of Italy, for example, the far right fascists were never stamped out during the Cold War because they were seen as a bulwark against communism. Now, they are greatly popular in Italy, as witnessed in the election last Sunday.

In India, Hungary, and in the United States, it is possible to say in public discourse things that were beyond the pale just a few years ago.

“The brilliance of the far right is its ability to portray demographic majorities as victimized embattled minorities.”

“Ethnicity, race, and religion may be displacing class as the core way of speaking about social divisions.”

“Improved media exchange across international boundaries may be witnessing a withering of the bond between living a good life—with opportunities for consumer choice, freedom of movement, and personal expressions—and living under a thing called democracy.” In other words, if you personally can get those things, it may not be important to you that many others also have access to them.

“Even in certain advanced democracies, the most globally connected generations seem to be the least committed to democratic governance.”

In a World Values Survey, fewer than half the Europeans and Americans born in the 1970s and '80s believe that it is “essential to live in a country that is governed democratically.” Nearly 80% of Australians born in the 1930s feel that living in a democracy is essential, yet the figure for those born in the '90s is half that number. In Germany, Spain, Japan, and the United States, between 20 and 40 per cent of people now say that having “a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections is a good thing—an increase over figures from more than a decade ago.” The proportion of Americans who believe that “army rule” would be a good thing has gone from one in sixteen in 1995 to one in six today.”

The improved communication among teenagers across the globe has them dressing, dancing, and singing more alike than at any other time in history. As always, they are far more adept than their parents and grandparents at sniffing out what is new, dynamic, and vital. “The worrying thing is that among these future voters, there is no guarantee that democracy and cosmopolitanism will always be cool.”