

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2019

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

As Members of Congress committed to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women globally, we write to urge the United States to constructively participate in the 2019 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This year, the CSW is considering the priority theme “social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.” We urge the United States to work with other Member States toward actionable policies that address the full spectrum of women’s and girls’ human rights and realities such as access to primary health care, including reproductive health services and support for LGBTQ rights. We also ask that the U.S. Delegation to the CSW reflect these priorities.

Each year, the CSW is the primary global forum to establish global norms, advance policies, and assess progress or challenges to achieving full women’s rights. This year, Member States will focus on building consensus around negotiations that will provide a blueprint for the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). To that end, we urge the U.S. to build on existing agreements and not roll back on international commitments that are rooted in human rights and embrace the full diversity of women.

Many of us wrote to you ahead of last year’s CSW, and we have been extremely concerned by the Administration’s efforts to use United Nations negotiations spaces over the past years to undermine existing commitments. We have particular concerns about your attempts to remove references to sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights. We know that ensuring access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, including contraception, is essential to reducing maternal and infant mortality and morbidity and advancing HIV prevention, care, and treatment efforts, which are stated priorities of the U.S. government’s development investments. Any effort to narrow the scope or roll back existing commitments and agreements would have detrimental effects on the health and rights of women and girls around the world and be unacceptable. The U.S. must not stand in the way of a CSW outcome that upholds or advances existing political commitments.

In addition, the delegation representing the U.S. at the CSW sends a critical signal about the United States' priorities, both here in the U.S. and around the world. For the past two years, the United States has sent representatives to the CSW who have actively opposed progress on women's health and rights, including, last year, Bethany Kozma, who's history of transphobic comments and behavior should exclude her from representing the US in international negotiations on gender. We also had serious concerns about her statements that the "US is a pro-life country," an assertion which is out of line with both the U.S. legal framework that recognizes an individuals' right to make their own reproductive health decisions, including legal abortion, and majority of public opinion which supports these rights.

This year, we strongly urge you to send a delegation to the CSW that includes widely respected experts and members of civil society. Specifically, we encourage you to include individuals with substantive professional expertise in this year's CSW theme, namely the challenges facing women and girls from accessing social protection systems. In addition to including experts who support the mission of the CSW and are working to uphold the human rights of all people we also urge you to include a representative of the majority of the House of Representatives who has demonstrated commitment to gender equality and women empowerment.

Finally, at last year's CSW, many registered CSW participants were unable to attend due to the insensitive travel bans and increased security at the UN. These efforts limited participation of women and members of the LGBTQ community across multiple countries. This year, we ask that the State Department alert posts of the upcoming CSW, emphasize the importance of ensuring diverse and representative civil society participation, and take all possible steps to facilitate the approval of registered participants throughout the visa process.

The CSW is strongest when Member States are able to negotiate a robust outcome that considers the complete experiences of women and girls around the world. We urge you to support comprehensive policies that account for the full range of challenges and opportunities that face women and girls globally. We welcome any opportunity to discuss U.S. engagement at the CSW with you further.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



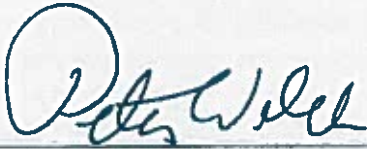
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Member of Congress



JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress



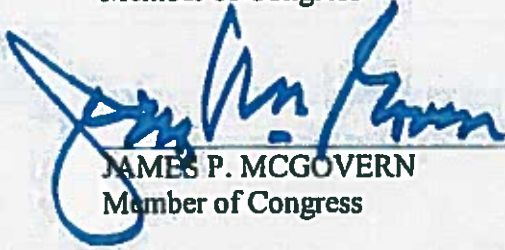
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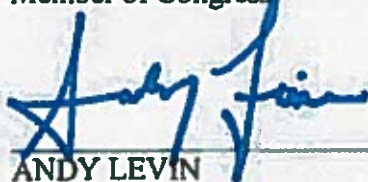
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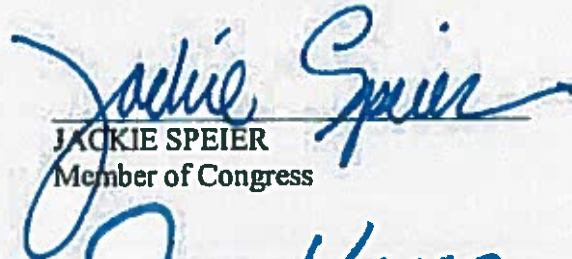
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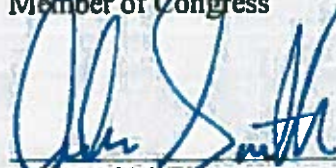
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