

Joint Action Update

February 2009

The Hard Work of Governing Begins

A President and Congress on our Side, An Economy on the Brink



*JAC Executive Director
Marcia Balonick with
then-Senator Barack
Obama during the presi-
dential campaign*

The campaigns seem like ancient history and the governing has begun. All indications are that we should fasten our seat belts because we are in for a bumpy ride. Yes, we have leadership and a strong majority that agree with us on issues foreign and domestic. But the country is in terrible shape and there isn't much precedent for fixing it.

So what lies ahead?

Israel needs U.S. support more than ever before. Real support, not just rhetorical, feel-good support, but day-in, day-out high-level involvement. By appointing a special Middle East envoy, former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, President Obama is signaling that the U.S. is fully engaged in the region and will begin work right away to facilitate a process that may someday lead to peace. In the near term that is a pretty tall order. The Administration is specifically committed to blocking Iran's nuclear ambitions and stopping the smuggling of weapons and terrorists into Gaza.

We do not presume to know how the problems of the Middle East will be solved or what an eventual solution will look like. Right now there is only a window of opportunity to make a concerted effort. JAC's task will be to maintain support for Israel on Capitol Hill. We are heartened by the fact that so many former elected officials with whom we had close relationships are now in the Administration: most notably, President Obama, Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, Vice President Joe Biden, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

We will make sure the newly elected members of Congress know who we are what we stand for.

Still, there is so much disheartening news.

As Israel is battling those who seek her destruction, critics in western democracies accuse her of human rights violations, and even war crimes. Recently, in a story that received very little press attention, Trine Lilleng, the first secretary in the Norwegian Embassy in Saudi Arabia, sent out an email on her foreign ministry account. In it, she declared: "The grandchildren of Holocaust survivors from World War II are doing to the Palestinians exactly what was done to them by Nazi Germany." Accompanying her text were photos seeking to equate the Israeli military operations in Gaza with the Holocaust. What else but malice aimed at Jews could explain the Norwegian diplomat's email? Where is the "proportionality" of comparing deaths in Gaza to deaths in Auschwitz? Where is her humanitarian concern for the children of Sderot or, for that matter, the women where she is stationed in Saudi Arabia?

The New York Times recently published a piece by Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan dictator who claims to have mended his terrorist ways. He wrote in support of a one-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which, as we know would mean the demise of Israel as a Jewish country. His words were measured and his tone reasonable. The Times gave him the space as if he were a revered elder statesman. Was he being sincere? Or was he trying to hoodwink both the Times and its gullible or unknowing readers.

continued on page 7



Joint Action Committee
for Political Affairs
P.O. Box 105
Highland Park, IL 60035
Tel 847. 433. 5999
Fax 847. 433. 6194
Email jacpac123@aol.com
Web www.jacpac.org

JAC at the Inaugural

Historic Inaugural Draws Record Crowd, Touches Deep Emotions

Sports promoter Don King and Deborah Gordon Klehr shmoozing at an inaugural reception



Deborah: "Mr. King, I understand we shared the same tour guide in Israel--Guy Liebowitz!"

Don: "That's right, he was my guide! Shalom, shalom!"

Reports and photos from JAC members and staff who attended the inaugural had a common thread: this was a most uncommon inaugural.

Deborah Gordon Klehr is a third-generation JAC member from Philadelphia. She arrived in Washington, DC with a group of friends, including 2nd generation JAC member Lauren Sheerr. Braced for the frigid cold, but undaunted, she joked that she was wearing 3 hats plus a hood, 4 shirts, 3 pairs of pants, and 2 pairs of socks. She had this to say about the inaugural festivities: "From the moment I boarded the train in Philadelphia (and sat in the same car as Senator Bill Bradley), the excitement of Inauguration Day was palpable. Everyone was friendly and patient as we navigated through the hustle and bustle (and security lines)

to get to our Purple Section. Thanks to a tree or two, we had an obstructed view of the main stage and the jumbo-screen, but we happily stood outside to witness the inauguration of our 44th President. If we turned behind us, we could see a sea of Americans, thrilled to celebrate a new era of hope and change. Rooftops of office buildings were filled with people, eager to catch a glimpse of history. Strangers sang patriotic songs together, hugged one another and treated each other with a special sense of ceremony, courtesy and awe for the moment. Standing there on January 20, 2009, listening to President Barack Obama speak was inspirational and energizing. It was a treat to be there and to share the day with my family and friends.

photo at right: Melanie Sheerr (l.) and Deborah Gordon (r.) with friends enjoying refreshments at inaugural reception



photo far right: Marcia Balonick, Josh Gray, a JAC member on the Obama transition team, and Caroline Gray





JAC Founder and Special Projects Director Linda Rae Sher noted, “We were fortunate to be sitting in coveted seats and as I looked around I noticed that many in our section were not the usual attendees. We were a community of all colors and ethnicities, all incomes, and all levels of political sophistication. I sat next to Columbus, Ohio Mayor John Coleman and his wife, Frankie. She said this was her first time back on the national mall since she was 16 years old when Martin Luther King gave his ‘I have a dream’ speech. Like so many of the African-Americans I spoke with, the inauguration of President Obama was the final piece in the long and arduous journey toward recognition and legitimacy that all Americans deserve, but many, because of the color of their skin, were denied. A couple of rows behind me I noticed a man holding up a tattered family photo, as if to proclaim, ‘We are all here.’ I never felt more proud and more hopeful. For those of us who gave 100% to participate in an election that would change the country, January 20th was an emotional and uplifting event. I am grateful to be associated with the many JAC members who gave their all. It was my privilege to witness the joy of those who had previously been denied a real place at the table. I suppose the only thing I can compare it to is the day Israel became a country. As my mother tells it, Jews around the world celebrated when the justice of their cause was finally vindicated and



they would never again be relegated to the margins of society.”

JAC Executive Director Marcia Balonick had this to say. “Throughout my tenure as Executive Director of JAC, I have had the privilege of watching historic events unfold. I have worked with elected officials and soon-to-be-elected officials, never knowing for sure where their careers would take them, but predicting which ones would be capable of leadership and vision. This inaugural was special and it was personal. I knew the person being sworn in, and those around him. I remember when Barack Obama was running for the U.S. Senate from Illinois and his was not exactly a household name. On a number of occasions I would go around with him at political events and introduce him to people, especially in the Jewish community. One such event was a luncheon where a high profile U.S. Senator was the special guest and he was an unknown in the audience. My daughter met him and had conversations on several occasions. When he was a state senator, he gave her his card and offered her advice on her career search. I talked to Michelle Obama about his speech in Boston before he gave it. How nervous she was, a real person, a real wife. I have seen Sasha and Malia on his shoulder or sitting bored at events, always adorable. As their father took the oath of office, I knew that I had never experienced anything like this before and probably never would again.” ■

left: Meredith Blum-Wolf and husband Bill Wolf at inaugural ball

far left: Lauren Beth Gash at left with Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson

Introducing the 111th Congress



Freshman Rep. John Adler (D-NJ) with Pennsylvanians Eve Klotben and Mark Aronchick

The 111th Congress was sworn in January 6th. The incoming freshman class in the House of Representatives has 54 members, as well as two delegates.

There are 32 new House Democrats: John Adler, NJ; John Boccieri, OH; Bobby Bright, AL; Gerald Connolly, VA; Kathleen

Dahlkemper, PA; Steve Driehaus, OH; Alan Grayson, FL; Parker Griffith, AL; Deborah Halvorson, IL; Martin Heinrich, NM; Jim Himes, CT; Mary Jo Kilroy, OH; Ann Kirkpatrick, AZ; Larry Kissell, NC; Suzanne Kosmas, FL; Frank Kratovil Jr., MD; Ben R. Lujan, NM; Michael McMahon, NY; Daniel Maffei, NY; Betsy Markey, CO; Eric Massa, NY; Walt Minnick, ID; Glenn Nye, VA; Thomas Perriello, VA; Gary Peters, MI; Chellie Pingree, ME; Jared Polis, CO; Mark Schauer, MI; Kurt Schrader, OR; Harry Teague, NM; Dina Titus, NV; Paul Tonko, NY.

The 22 Republicans are: Steve Austria, Ohio; Joseph Cao, LA; Bill Cassidy, LA; Jason Chaffetz, UT; Mike Coffman, CO; John Fleming, LA; Brett Guthrie, KY; Gregg Harper, MS; Duncan Hunter, CA; Lynn Jenkins, KS; Leonard Lance, NJ;

Christopher Lee, NY; Blaine Luetkemeyer, MO; Cynthia Lummis, WY; Tom McClintock, CA; Pete Olson, TX; Erik Paulsen, MN; Bill Posey, FL; Phil Roe, TN; Thomas Rooney, FL; Aaron Schock, IL; Glenn Thompson, PA.

The Senate has 13 new members, eleven Democrats (7 elected, 4 appointed) and 2 Republicans (2 elected). This does not count **Al Franken** who has been certified the winner over Norm Coleman in Minnesota, but has not been seated yet, or Bonnie Newman in New Hampshire. Newman, a Republican, is expected to be appointed by Governor John Lynch (D) to succeed Senator Judd Gregg (R) who is soon to be confirmed as the Commerce Secretary. Gregg accepted the Cabinet position on condition that the governor would appoint a Republican. Newman is a caretaker.

The 11 new Senate Democrats are:

Mark Begich, Alaska. Begich, 46, is a two-term mayor of Anchorage who defeated 85-year-old Ted Stevens, after Stevens was convicted on corruption charges. His father was Rep. Nick Begich, who was killed in 1972 when his plane disappeared over the Gulf of Alaska with then-House Majority Leader Hale Boggs of Louisiana.

Michael Bennet, Colorado. Appointed to replace now-Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. Bennet is leaving his job as Superintendent of Denver Public Schools. He served as the Chief of Staff to Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper; before that he had been Managing Director of the Anchultz Investment Company. Bennet has a law degree from Yale, where he was the Editor-in-Chief of the Law Journal.

Roland Burris, Illinois. Indicted Governor Rod Blagojevich (D) named Burris, 71, to fill Barack Obama's Senate seat. In 1978, Burris was the first African-American elected statewide in Illinois, becoming state Comptroller. He was elected Attorney General in 1990, before running unsuccessfully for governor in 1994, 1998 and 2002.



At the Jewish community inaugural reception, Bonnie Squires with soon-to-be-installed Senator Al Franken

Kirsten Gillibrand, New York, was appointed to the seat vacated by now-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Gillibrand represented New York's up-state 20th District for one term. She is a member of the Blue Dog Coalition and opposes gun control. Gillibrand earned her law degree at UCLA.

Kay Hagan, North Carolina. Hagan, 55, won a closely contested race against Senator Elizabeth Dole. She went into banking after earning a law degree. Hagan won a seat in the state Senate 10 years ago. Her late uncle, Lawton Chiles, was a senator and then governor of Florida.

Ted Kaufman, Delaware, was appointed to fill the senate seat vacated by Vice President Joe Biden. Kaufman served for nineteen years as Biden's chief of staff. Kaufman does not intend to run for re-election in 2010.

Jeff Merkley, Oregon. The 52-year-old Portland Democrat defeated incumbent Senator Gordon Smith. The first member of his family to go to college, Merkley received a master's degree in public policy from Princeton and a bachelor's degree in international relations from Stanford. In the mid-1980s, Merkley worked as a national security analyst for the Pentagon and the Congressional Budget Office. First elected to the Oregon House in 1998, he was elected speaker in 2007.

Jeanne Shaheen, New Hampshire. The first woman elected governor of her state became its first female senator in her second race against Republican Senator John Sununu. Shaheen, 61, had served six years in the state Senate.

Mark Udall, Colorado. Udall, 58, was in the Colorado House for two years and served in the U.S. House for a decade before his election to the Senate. His father, the late Morris Udall, represented Arizona for three decades in the House and his cousin Tom Udall is the freshman senator from New Mexico. (Another cousin, Gordon Smith, of Oregon, was defeated in 2008.)

Tom Udall, New Mexico. Udall, 60, succeeds New Mexico's longest-serving senator, Republican Pete Domenici. Udall has spent a decade representing his district in the House after serving as New Mexico's attorney general. His father is Stewart Udall, a former Arizona congressman and Interior secretary.

Mark Warner, Virginia. After getting a law degree from Harvard, Warner, now 54, moved to Washington, where he earned as little as \$350 a week as a Democratic fundraiser. He turned to business, making millions by obtaining licenses to radio frequencies that would one day link millions of wireless telephones. He was elected Virginia governor in 2001 and briefly considered a presidential bid in 2008.

The two new Senate Republicans are:

Mike Johanns, Nebraska. Johanns, 58, switched from Democrat to Republican in 1983. He was mayor of Lincoln from 1991 to 1998, governor from 1999 to 2005, and U.S. Agriculture secretary from 2005 to 2007. He succeeds Republican Chuck Hagel, who retired.

Jim Risch, Idaho. Risch, 65, succeeds Larry Craig as Idaho's Republican senator. He is a fiscal conservative who supports gun rights, opposes giving amnesty to illegal immigrants and supports greater development of U.S. energy resources. He won his first election, as a local chief prosecutor, at age 27. That was the first of 31 campaigns that would eventually make Risch a state senator, two-time lieutenant governor and governor before his election to the Senate.



At January Congressional swearing-in, Susan Hyatt, Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Nancy Wyden

continued at bottom of page six

Looking Ahead to 2010

Early Take on Midterm Elections

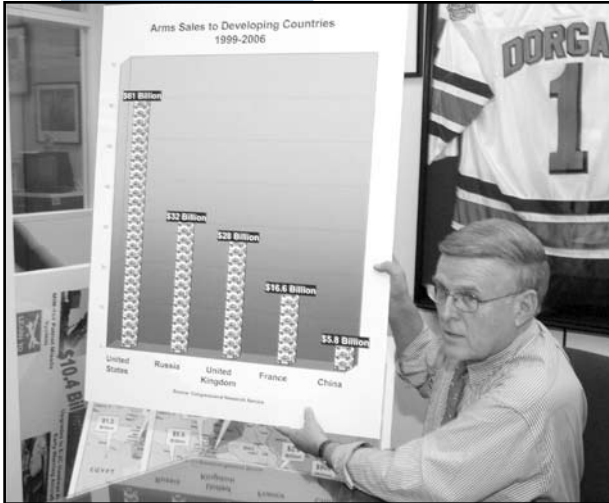


photo by Robert A. Cumins

Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), up for re-election in 2010, discussing international arms sales with JAC group last March

Although it may seem early to handicap 2010 Congressional races, campaigns began as soon as the November elections were over. 2010 is important to JAC. We must help elect a Congress that will keep the momentum going on the change promised by President Obama. JAC-supported incumbents up for re-election are:

Blanche Lincoln (AR), Barbara Boxer (CA), Chris Dodd (CT), Daniel Inouye (HI), Evan Bayh (IN), Barbara Mikulski (MD), Harry Reid (NV), Charles Schumer (NY), Byron Dorgan (ND), Ron Wyden (OR), Arlen Specter (PA), Patrick Leahy (VT), Patty Murray (WA), Russ Feingold (WI). Prospects look good for Democratic incumbents, but they will need early money to fend off opponents.

There are a number of early retirements of senators we never supported, which means open seats that may be opportunities for JAC: GOP Senators Mel Martinez (FL), Sam Brownback (KS), Kit Bond (MO) and George Voinovich (OH). We are watching to see which first-tier candidates who meet JAC's criteria will run, such as Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D) and Missouri Secretary of

State Robin Carnahan (D). In Florida, Reps. Ron Klein (D) and Kendrick Meek (D), both JAC-supported, are considering a Senate bid. January Federal Election Commission reports show Klein with \$1.6 million dollars in cash-on-hand and Meek \$429,000. In Ohio, there is no candidate yet that JAC could support.

At the next level of interest to JAC are the re-election bids of the appointed senators. The history of appointed senators is that they do not fare especially well when they run for re-election. In the past 25 years, fewer than 40% won re-election. That is significantly lower than the 88% of incumbents who win re-election. However, the outlook is better than 40% for appointees who have recent experience as legislators.

Roland Burris of Illinois can expect both primary and general election challenges. Chief among GOP hopefuls for this seat is 10th district Congressman Mark Kirk (R). Kirsten Gillibrand of New York is extremely vulnerable. Gillibrand's pro-gun stance has brought early opposition from Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D). Rep. Peter King (R) is also a possible contender. In New Hampshire, Bonnie Newman will be a caretaker and the seat will be open. Rep. Paul Hodes (D) is considering. In Delaware, caretaker Senator Ted Kaufman (D) may be holding the seat for Attorney General Beau Biden (D). At-large Rep. Mike Castle (R) may get in the race. ■

111th Congress, continued from previous page

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life recently offered a breakdown of House and Senate affiliations (not including the appointed Senators). The study indicated few variances between House and Senate members, with a little more than a majority identifying themselves as Protestant and a little less than one-third as Catholic. Jews make up 13 percent of the Senate (14% when Al Franken is

seated as the winner of the Minnesota Senate race) and 7 percent in the House, while Mormons are 5 percent in the Senate and 2 percent in the House. The House now includes two Muslims, Keith Ellison of Minnesota and Andre Carson of Indiana; and two Buddhists; Representatives Hank Johnson of Georgia and Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, who describes herself as non-practicing. ■

Governing, *continued from page one*



photo left: (l. to r.) Sheila, Brian, Danny and Joe Gutman brave the cold on inauguration morning



far left: June Rogul (l.) and the Boigon family at inaugural reception

We live in an upside-down world where Israel is the lone human rights violator, where a Norwegian diplomat engages in anti-Jewish bigotry with hardly a peep from the international press, and a newspaper of record, probably out of an absurd notion of “presenting all points of view,” gives a once-brutal dictator legitimacy.

Our work is far from over.

On reproductive health issues, the news is more upbeat. The President immediately reversed the global gag rule. The prohibition on federal funding of embryonic stem cell research is expected to be overturned soon. On separation of religion and state, he is firmly in the pro-science camp. He rejects both creationism and the global climate change deniers. For too long science has been held hostage by ideology and belief has triumphed over reason. Those days are over. President Obama announced the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. He believes faith-based and smaller secular neighborhood organizations can play a role in American renewal by working with the federal government to address big problems. And, unlike the Bush Administration office of faith-based initiatives, this one will not permit discrimination in provision of services or hiring.

Challenges abound, but so do opportunities. The

country is in the grip of the worst economic crisis most of us have ever known. But the opportunity to be a powerful presence on Capitol Hill – to speak out and be heard – will not wait for the economy to improve. Timing is everything and the time is now. Join us in Washington for the JAC Annual Meeting March 10th-11th, where you will meet with old and new members of Congress. Our ability to validate and shape public policy cannot be underestimated. Who knows, today’s member of Congress may be tomorrow’s Cabinet member or even President. ■



Laurie Oseran and Linda Rae Sher volunteer on behalf of military families the day before the inauguration

**JAC Annual Meeting
Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill
Washington, DC
March 10-11, 2009**

**Pre-conference Event
Group Leader Briefings March 9th
Details to follow**

It's our time!



Joint Action Committee
for Political Affairs
P.O. Box 105
Highland Park, IL 60035

JAC CONTRIBUTION FORM

Mail or fax this form with payment to: JAC, PO Box 105, Highland Park, IL 60035 Fax 847 433-6194

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Occupation _____

Employer _____

Fax _____ E-mail _____

I will __join JAC/ __renew my membership in JAC's Leadership Circle
__ \$5000 __ \$2500 __ \$1000 __ \$500 __ \$250

I will make an additional donation to JAC to be allocated to candidates.

__ \$150 basic member

Check (payable to JAC) Visa Mastercard

Card Number _____ Exp date _____

Federal law requires political committees to report the name, mailing address, occupation and employer for each individual whose contributions aggregate in excess of \$200 in a calendar year. According to law, JAC cannot accept corporate contributions. Membership, gifts, or other payments to JAC are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.