

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

Nov 18, 2010

On my mind this month...



Gail Yamner

In 2008 it was the change that we were waiting for; in 2010 it was take back America. The slogans, the rhetoric describe a country that longs for greatness and believes deeply in its power of renewal and growth. The hard-fought, often ugly, elections are over and it is time for healing.

The voters asked that our leaders work together to solve our most urgent issues. They seemed to want kumbaya moments of collaboration and compromise that might yield better answers. It will be up to the newly constituted House and Senate to provide real leadership and put partisanship aside for the moment.

But in this moment I would like to thank our JAC members for their active participation in many races. We supported our candidates with time, money and get out the vote efforts. We lost a number of good friends, members like Russ Feingold who was an independent spirit who defied the odds in many of his races and served honorably for three terms; Melissa Bean who brought business acumen and compassion to Congress; long-serving Chet Edwards who, even as Pres. Bush's Congressman, was a staunch defender of separation of religion and state. We were gratified that Barbara Boxer and Patty Murray triumphed over self-financed opponents and outside interests eager to topple them. They will continue to be champions for our issues.

Take a minute to regroup, to pat yourselves on the back for all your efforts, then get ready to meet the challenges that we are sure to face as the 112th Congress goes into session.

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Israel

After an 8-hour meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel had a major proposal to bring back to his cabinet concerning the Middle East peace process. In exchange for a 90-day construction freeze on settlements in the West Bank, the Obama administration has offered Israel a package of security incentives and military hardware. The Israeli cabinet is waiting for these details to be put into writing before taking a vote. The Secretary of State is hoping that this proposal will bring the two parties back to the negotiating table which the Palestinians left in September when the current 10-month moratorium expired.

Clinton praised Netanyahu's efforts and said, "We are going to continue to do everything we possibly can to get the parties to begin the kind of serious, end-game negotiations that are necessary to end the conflict." According to *HaAretz* (11/15/10), the plan calls for a 90-day extension of the moratorium on building West Bank settlements for a series of incentives including the sale of 20 new fighter jets to Israel, the promise to veto any moves in the United Nations Security Council to try to shape a final peace agreement, and the refusal to allow the Palestinians to unilaterally declare statehood in the UN (*NYTimes*, 11/13/10). The United States, Israel and the P.A. are at an impasse over whether this freeze would include Jerusalem or any building that has already begun. Netanyahu must get the approval of his government for this plan to pass. President Obama commended the Prime Minister for "taking a very constructive step."

Because of a flood of illegal immigration on the Egyptian border, Israel is going to begin building a border fence. The Israeli government has said that the purpose of this fence is to keep the growing number of illegal migrants from infiltrating Israel. Israel's population and immigration

United States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The pro-choice community was hit hard by the results of the November 2nd election. With the Republicans winning 64 seats in the House and eight (8) seats in the Senate, the pro-choice community lost fifty votes in the House and six in the Senate. This results in the most anti-choice Congress that has existed in years. Fortunately, pro-choice Senators will maintain their slim majority. However, Terry O'Neil of the National Organization for Women (NOW) predicts that the new Republican leadership in the House will make many moves that will compromise women's rights.

The Democratic pro-choice leadership, headed by speaker Nancy Pelosi (CA), will be replaced by a roaring group of anti-choicers including John Boehner (R-OH), Eric Cantor (R-VA), Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), Mike Pence (R-IN), and Pete Sessions (R-TX). This is in addition to the seats that will soon be occupied by Tea Party-endorsed candidates who oppose abortion even in cases of rape and incest, including Rand Paul (R-KY) and Ron Johnson (R-WI).

Despite the incredibly close Senate race in Colorado, Amendment 62, the "personhood" amendment, was defeated. Amendment 62 would have established legal protections for fertilized eggs, with the goal of outlawing abortion, many common forms of birth control, and stem-cell research. Immediately, pro-choice advocates are working to stand up to John McCain and other anti-choice Senators, to end the abortion ban that prevents women in the military from being able to obtain an abortion, even when paid for with their own funds. And, as soon as the new Congress is sworn in, there will be attempts to make changes in the health care legislation passed earlier this year and renewed efforts to weaken *Roe v. Wade*.

ACTION ALERT: Call your Senators (202-224-3121) and ask them to end the abortion ban for women in the military.

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Research & Races

2010

The results of the November 2 election are still not final. There are 6 outstanding races in the House. As of this date, there are 239 Republican members of the House and 190 Democrats. This gives the GOP a 21-member majority even if they do not pick up any additional seats. The Senate will have 51 Democrats, 2 Independents who caucus with the Democrats, and 47 Republicans. Eighty-three JAC-supported House candidates and 12 Senate candidates were winners. [Election results are on the enclosed scorecard.]

On November 16, Democratic and Republican caucuses met to choose their leaders for the 112th Congress. The new GOP Speaker of the House will be ten-term Ohio congressman John Boehner, currently the minority leader. The new GOP Majority Leader will be five-term Virginia Rep. Eric Cantor,

currently minority whip. The post of majority whip goes to California Rep. Kevin McCarthy and the GOP Conference chair will be Jeb Hensarling from Texas. All four have positive records on Israel. All four are anti-choice and negative on separation. On the Democratic side, current Speaker Nancy Pelosi becomes the minority leader, Steny Hoyer minority whip, and James Clyburn assistant leader. Important committee chairs are yet to be appointed and seniority may not guarantee that ranking members become chairs. It is a given that Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL) will head Foreign Affairs and very likely that Rep. Paul Ryan (WI) will chair the Budget Committee. The Foreign Operations subcommittee of Appropriations, responsible for allocating aid to Israel, has been chaired by Rep. Nita Lowey (NY). Rep. Kay Granger (TX) is the ranking GOP

member. Granger's votes on Israel-related issues are good.

2012

All 435 House seats are up in 2012. Redistricting will occur prior to election day (Nov. 6th) and states may lose or gain seats, based on the 2010 census. Thirty-three of the 100 Senate seats will be decided, 23 now held by Democrats (including 2 independents) and 10 held by Republicans. The following JAC-supported Senators are up for re-election: Dianne Feinstein (CA), Tom Carper (DE), Bill Nelson (FL), Daniel Akaka (HI), Ben Cardin (MD), Olympia Snowe (ME) Debbie Stabenow (MI), Amy Klobuchar (MN), Claire McCaskill (MO), Jon Tester (MT), Bob Menendez (NJ), Jeff Bingaman (NM), Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), Kent Conrad (ND), Sherrod Brown (OH), Sheldon Whitehouse (RI), Maria Cantwell (WA).

Separation of Religion and State

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit has upheld the constitutionality of public school children reciting "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. The Freedom from Religion Foundation filed a lawsuit in 2007 on behalf of two New Hampshire parents and their children, challenging the state's School Patriot Act, which requires that public schools authorize a time for students to voluntarily participate in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. The lawsuit alleged that the statute violates the Constitution's First Amendment guarantee of free exercise of religion. The Court's three-judge panel ruled unanimously that "the phrase 'under God' has some religious content" but does not determine the "constitutionality" of the New Hampshire Act. This is in part because the Constitution does not "require complete separation of

church and state." "It takes more than the presence of words with religious content to have the effect of advancing religion...the New Hampshire School Patriot Act's primary effect is not the advancement of religion, but the advancement of patriotism through a pledge to the flag as a symbol of the nation." The Wisconsin based FFRF hired well known atheist activist Michael Newdow to argue the case. Supporting the Pledge in the court battle were several conservative legal organizations including the Alliance Defense Fund and the American Center for Law & Justice.

Rep. John Kline (R-MN), who will become the chair of the House Education and Labor Committee in January when Republicans take over the House, has said he intends to push to bring

back the D.C. school voucher plan which was cancelled by the Obama administration. The D.C. voucher plan was authorized for five years during President George W. Bush's tenure and expired in 2009, although students enrolled under the plan have been allowed to continue. Opponents argue that the plan did not boost student academic achievement and served mainly to "prop up financially shaky religious schools at taxpayer expense." D.C. has many troubled public schools and the voucher plan was intended to help children in need. Kline is focused on restoring the program, but he will not have an ally in the newly elected mayor of D.C., Vincent Gray. The former mayor, Adrian Fenty, was pro-voucher. Mayor Gray spoke against vouchers during his campaign.

Israel, continued from page one

authority reported that 700 illegal migrants, mostly from Africa, cross the border on a weekly basis. *HaAretz*, 11/14/10

A bipartisan letter, signed by 198 lawmakers, has been sent to the Administration regarding arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Rep Howard Berman (Chairman) and Rep Ileana Ros Lehtinen (Ranking Republican) on Foreign Affairs, are concerned with the \$60 billion proposed arms sale. They want

reassurances from Secretary of State Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates that this sale will not undermine the security and qualitative military edge of Israel. This letter asks Administration officials "what US policy goals and interests are advanced by this sale and if conditions have been placed on it, as well as about potential repercussions for US troops and friends in the region should there be political change in Saudi Arabia." (*JTA*, 11/15/10) The long list of concerns

about the sale as well as where it fits into the US national security strategy, is defended by the Obama administration, but lawmakers are leery. Israel is not objecting to the sale, but Congress wants to ensure the deal doesn't compromise this country or Israel. Many question whether this deal is an insurance policy to ensure that Saudi Arabia helps with the Iranian nuclear weapon issue. Congress is expected to authorize the sale despite the questions.