

# JAC NEWSbreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

November 21, 2011

## On my mind this month...



Gail Yamner

The news in November went from troubling to downright scary.

The UN vote for Palestinians to become members of UNESCO opened a Pandora's box. The US is mandated to stop funding UNESCO, even though many of its programs are humanitarian. Disputed heritage sites in Israel are now threatened. This vote emboldens the Palestinians to press for membership in other UN-run groups and is a potential impediment to peace efforts.

During the SC Republican debate, Gov. Perry outlined a deficit-cutting plan that would zero out foreign aid. The other candidates agreed, either unaware or willing to ignore the ten-year funding agreement between the U.S. and Israel. Ignorant or ill-considered foreign policy proposals alert us to the dangers these candidates pose.

Mississippi rejected a referendum to confer personhood on a fertilized egg. If passed, it would have outlawed birth control pills, IUDs, embryonic stem cell research and in vitro fertilization. Aiming for a legal challenge to *Roe v. Wade*, Personhood USA, a religious-based far right group, is promoting referenda in Florida, Montana, Ohio, California, Oregon, S. Dakota, Michigan, Nevada, Georgia and Wisconsin.

The latest report from the Intl. Atomic Energy Assn. (IAEA) provides evidence of Iran's advanced nuclear program. The UN Security council is taking the threat seriously and drafting a resolution calling on Iran to show there is no military intention.

Alarming. But at our Thanksgiving tables, let us give thanks to the land where we have the freedom to pursue our dreams and the right to be political advocates.

## Israel

A bipartisan group of seven senators sent a letter to President Obama November 16 urging the U.S. to seek a strong resolution concerning Iran at the Nov. 17-18 board meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "We appreciate that there will, as always, be opposition in some quarters to a strong resolution at the IAEA Board of Governors," wrote Senators Bob Casey (D-PA), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), John McCain (R-AZ), Joseph I. Lieberman (I-CT), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Marco Rubio (R-FL). They called such a resolution "an important test of U.S. leadership and resolve at this vital juncture." The letter comes less than a week after the Director-General of the IAEA issued an unprecedented and alarming report detailing the considerable evidence that the Iranian government is moving toward the capability to develop and deliver nuclear weapons. On November 15, the House passed an amendment by Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX) that prevents the U.S. government from doing business with marine classification societies, which perform legal inspections on merchant ships, if they also do business with state sponsors of terrorism such as Iran. (*AIPAC Update*, 11/18/11)

Hamas and Fatah are scheduled to meet in Cairo next week to continue discussions about the formation of a Palestinian unity government. A spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority said that PA President Mahmoud Abbas would "issue the call during a speech marking the anniversary of Palestinian 'independence day.'" They have agreed on a May date for elections and PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has said he is willing to step aside. Fayyad was the finance minister prior to becoming the prime minister. The United States and other Western governments consider him honest and fiscally responsible. Hamas has been adamant that Fayyad must go, calling him "a pawn of the Western governments and

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## United States

### REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND STATE

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is determined to make the case that the government is infringing on the Church's rights. The group says that its fight against abortion, contraception and same sex marriage is being waged as a struggle for religious liberty. (*NYT* 11/11) Archbishop Timothy Dolan, president of the bishops' conference, says that the Justice Department and other government agencies are trying to neuter religion. The bishops are actively lobbying against a provision in the Affordable Care Act that would provide birth control in insurance plans – without co-pays – to women. The USCCB wants a stronger religious exemption for Catholic organizations, like hospitals and universities, that would allow them to deny insurance coverage for birth control to all of their employees and students.

The current provision exempts certain religious, non-profit organizations, for which religion is their primary purpose and the majority of their employees share their religion. (*National Journal* 11/11) Many in Congress question whether hospitals (whose purpose is healing) and schools (whose purpose is teaching) fit these exemptions. They also question whether non-Catholics have to abide by Catholic teachings in their private lives because of where they work.

The Bishops believe that their right to practice their religion is threatened by the rights of others in regard to reproductive choices, same sex marriage and other social issues. Although they feel that our nation is increasingly intolerant of Christianity, many others, including John Gehring of Faith in Public Life, argue that government officials can choose policies that differ from church teaching without prejudice being a factor. (*AOL* 11/11)

The other top agenda item, besides abortion and birth control, is same

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# Research & Races

## 2012 HOUSE RACES TO WATCH, continued from last month

Along with the chaos of redistricting, considered more ruthless than usual by political pundits, is the worry over retirements. So far, seven Democrats have announced they will retire, while eight are running for another office. Seven Republicans are leaving their seats, all seeking another elected position. It will be difficult for four of the open Democratic seats, Mike Ross (AR), Jerry Costello (IL), Dan Boren (OK) and Joe Donnelly (IN), to remain in the Democratic column. Republicans hope to force several other members to leave by redrawing the electoral map to make their districts less hospitable to Democrats.

**Iowa** - Democratic Rep. Leonard Boswell's 3rd district has been merged with GOP Rep. Tom Latham's 4th district. JAC has supported Boswell throughout his sixteen-year tenure. During that time he has always been a positive vote on JAC's issues. Latham is always a negative vote on choice and separation legislation.

**Kentucky** - Rep. Ben Chandler (D) is at the top of the GOP "hit" list. Chandler barely survived in 2010, winning with just 50%. He could be helped by the reelection of Gov. Steve Beshear, one of two Democratic governors to be elected this cycle.

**Michigan** - Redistricting in this state

put two JAC-supported members in the same district – Democratic Reps. Sander Levin and Gary Peters, both representing Detroit suburbs and adjacent towns. The two found themselves with the possibility of facing off. Peters has decided, instead, to run in the 14th district, also Detroit and suburbs, and will face freshman Democratic Rep. Hansen Clarke. JAC did not support Clarke in 2010 and will stay with Peters.

**Missouri** - The Republican controlled legislature in this state, faced with eliminating a district, chose to shore up their incumbents and leave Democratic Rep. Russ Carnahan without a district. It looks as if Carnahan will move to run for the open seat in the 2nd district. The seat is being vacated by Representative Todd Akin, who is running for the Senate against Claire McCaskill. This will be an uphill race for Carnahan.

**Nevada** - Former Rep. Dina Titus (D), who lost her 3rd district seat in 2010, is running for the open 1st district seat, currently held by Rep. Shelley Berkley, JAC member and Senate candidate. There is currently no declared GOP opponent. Nevada's filing date is March 16, 2012.

**New York** - There will be several races to watch here, but the filing deadline is not until next summer. GOP Rep. Bob Turner (NY-09), who was elected to the seat vacated by Democrat An-

thony Weiner, will have a hard time winning re-election. The district has a strong Democratic registration advantage. Democrat Kathy Hochul (NY-26) won a special election with only 47% in a district that demographically leans Republican. New York is losing two districts, which could change the landscape for many members of the state's delegation.

**North Carolina** - JAC may see two of its incumbent friends running against each other. Democrat Brad Miller may be running against fellow Democrat David Price for what is now Price's 4th district seat. Miller's seat, the 13th district, was completely redrawn as a new district, with a sizable Republican voter advantage.

**Ohio** - JAC-supported Democratic Rep. Betty Sutton found herself without a district when Ohio's new map was drawn. Rep. Sutton has told her supporters that she is not retiring and intends to run for reelection. She has been a positive vote on all JAC's issues so this is race to watch.

**Oregon** - A special election to fill the vacant first district seat will be held on January 31. State Sen. Suzanne Bonamici won the Democratic nomination on November 8 and will face GOP businessman Rob Cornilles. Bonamici is pro-choice but JAC does not have an Israel position paper so is not yet involved in this race.

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## Reproductive Rights, continued from page one

sex marriage. In Illinois, government officials stopped working with Catholic Charities on foster care and adoption because the church refused to recognize a new civil union law. Critics of the bishops view the closer focus on religious liberty as a sign that

church leaders are turning away from the church's teachings on social justice and that there is not enough discussion on poverty, despite the state of the economy. (*Huffington Post* 11/11) Jews and other religious groups worry that the church is actively lobbying for

laws to be based on church doctrine, not on science, health needs or social justice. Women's groups worry that the administration will extend these exemptions to the Affordable Care Act and affect the vast majority of women who choose to use birth control.

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too close to Israel." According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Israeli officials warn that Abbas can't have both peace with Israel and reconciliation with Hamas. "If Abbas consummates this marriage in a meeting next week with Hamas head Khaled Mashaal, this is a big problem for us... We have said before that Abbas can choose peace with us or Hamas, but they don't go together." Washington has sent messages that

the PA could once again face a cutoff of U.S. funds if it makes a deal with Hamas "without Hamas first recognizing Israel, forswearing terrorism, and accepting previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements." There is no indication that Hamas is willing to commit to any of the three conditions, let alone all three. Statements continue to come out of Hamas leaders that they will never recognize a Jewish state.

Meanwhile, Fatah and Hamas have agreed that the next Palestinian government will be located in Gaza. They also agree on their aim of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with its capital in Jerusalem, said Ahmed Yousef, advisor to Hamas PM Ismail Haniyeh. Yousef added that Hamas would support PA President Abbas' efforts to win full membership for Palestine at UN institutions. (*Haaretz.com*, 11/21/11)