

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

December 18, 2008

On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

For many Americans, the time to be involved in politics is only when there is an election, especially a presidential

election. These days, when so many crucial decisions will be made by our elected officials, we can ill afford to be disengaged or uninterested. JAC works in the political sphere on behalf of the entire Jewish community. That work is possible because people like you who care about what we stand for keep us afloat during the “off-season.”

Actually, JAC does not have an off-season. There is work to be done day in and day out, all year, every year. Now is the time when we build relationships with the new members we helped elect, we develop a candidate support strategy for 2010 and we take a fresh look at the specific issues that will require our advocacy. At all times, we need to work with Congressional staffs to keep our issues in the consciousness of the Congress.

There are many ways to support JAC in these economically challenging times. One way to help is to make sure we have your email address. We save money when we can communicate with you electronically. And we promise you, no junk, and not too much information. You will still receive this Newsbreak by print and mail. Another way to help is to email us your carefully culled mailing lists, complete with email addresses, to help us increase our list of prospects. And you can make it a priority to come to the 2009 JAC Annual Meeting March 10-11. In the meantime, I wish you and your family a Happy Hanukkah and a happy, healthy New Year.

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Israel

On Thursday, December 18, Hamas declared the end of a six-month old ceasefire with Israel in the Gaza Strip. “The calm, which was reached with Egyptian sponsorship on June 19 and expires on December 19, is finished because the enemy did not abide by its obligations,” said Hamas member Ayman Taha, who represented the group in talks with other Palestinian factions. “The calm is over.” By Thursday afternoon, 11 Kassam rockets and five mortar shells had pounded southern Israel. Israeli warplanes and helicopters followed with strikes against terror infrastructure in Gaza for the first time in six months. Violence had picked up in the days before the truce was due to end. One Palestinian man was killed and three Israeli children were wounded. This week, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said her country “cannot tolerate Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip indefinitely as “an extreme Islamic state.” And, in the days leading up to the end of the cease fire, Israeli Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, said “As long as Gaza is calm, it will be met with calm, but if the calm is violated and the situation requires it, we will act.” (*Ynet news.com* 12/18/08; *Bloomberg.com* 12/18/08)

The UN Security Council adopted a resolution on December 16 backing the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian peace process begun at Annapolis last year. The resolution sponsored jointly by the United States and Russia, passed with 14 nations voting in favor and Libya abstaining. Both Israel and the Palestinians responded favorably to the resolution. Foreign Minister Livni said that “the Security Council’s clear support is a vote of confidence...there can be no turning back the clock...We have to continue on the chosen path.” The Palestinian UN observer, Ryad Mansour, expressed hope “that the sides will remove all obstacles and reach a peace treaty in 2009.”

The Israeli Supreme Court has ordered that the route of the security fence be redrawn in certain areas in

United States

CHOICE

The Obama transition team is looking at how to undo the Bush Administration’s plan to finalize a regulation that will allow “a right of conscience for medical staff to refuse to participate in any practice they object to on moral grounds, including abortion but possibly birth control and other health needs as well.” Also, under review by the new administration is its response to several other abortion and reproductive health issues: whether to cut the funding of sexual abstinence programs; whether to increase funding for comprehensive sex education programs, including discussion of birth control; whether to allow federal health plans to pay for abortions; and whether to overturn particular regulations, such as the one that make fetuses eligible for healthcare coverage under the Children’s Health Insurance Program. “We have a lot of work to do to fix the damage the Bush administration has done,” said Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America. It is expected that Mr. Obama will issue an executive order lifting President Bush’s restrictions on funding for embryonic stem cell research soon after he takes office. And, early action is also expected to abolish the “global gag rule,” which bars foreign organizations from using their own money for abortion services or advocacy if they accept U.S. aid for family planning. (*WSJ.com* 12/17/08).

NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts conducted a survey of 70 hospital emergency rooms statewide asking if they could provide emergency contraception to rape victims, as required by a 2005 Massachusetts law. The answer was “No, we don’t do that, you know we’re a Catholic hospital” from Caritas St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center in Brighton and Caritas Holy Family Hospital in Methuen. “Both hospitals are part of Caritas Christi Health Care and owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. The church’s opposi-

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Research & Races

SENATE 2008

GOP Incumbent Senator Saxby Chambliss defeated Democratic challenger Jim Martin by 57% on December 9. Georgia law requires that a candidate receive 50% of the vote to avoid a runoff. In November, Chambliss had received 49.8%, Martin 46.8%, and a third party candidate took approximately 3%. Democratic turnout for the runoff was very poor, especially in the African American community, which turned out in big numbers to vote for Obama. Minnesota's is the only 2008 Senate race that remains undecided.

HOUSE 2008

The following races are now decided: **California 04** - Republican Tom McClintock defeated Democrat Charlie Brown; **Louisiana 02** - Republican Joseph Cao defeated incumbent Demo-

crat William Jefferson; **Louisiana-04** - Republican John Fleming defeated Democrat Paul Carmouche; **Ohio-15** - Democrat Mary Jo Kilroy defeated GOP candidate Steve Stivers. LA-02 win was a takeover for the GOP; Ohio 15 was a pick-up for Democrats.

APPOINTMENTS

It is still questionable whether a senator will be appointed in Illinois or a special election will be held. In Colorado, Democratic Governor Bill Ritter will make the appointment to fill Democrat Senator Ken Salazar's seat. In New York, Democratic Governor David Paterson will choose the successor to Senator Hillary Clinton. The appointed senators serve until 2010, when elections take place for the full six-year term in Colorado and Illinois, and in New York for the remainder of

Senator Clinton's term, which is up in 2012.

SENATE 2010

Two GOP Senators have announced their retirements. Florida Sen. Mel Martinez and Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback will not run for reelection. Former Florida GOP Gov. Jeb Bush is expected to run for the open seat. If Bush makes a formal declaration, it is unlikely he will have primary opposition. Several Democratic names have been mentioned, but Bush will be a formidable opponent. He was a very popular governor. In Kansas, Democrats hope that Governor Kathleen Sibelius will choose to run. Several Republican names are circulating, including all three GOP members of the Kansas congressional delegation.

Separation of Religion and State

On December 11, US District Judge Cameron McGowan Currie ordered South Carolina state officials to halt production, sales, advertising and distribution of the new license plates, featuring a cross superimposed on a stained glass window with the inscription "I Believe" above the plate number and the name of the state. Currie said she issued the injunction because she believed that federal courts would find the law that created the plates "a gross violation of the Constitution's ban on government establishment of religion." South Carolina Attorney General Henry McMaster said he was "extremely disappointed in the court's ruling" and believes that the plate is "completely constitutional." McMaster said he would urge the state motor-vehicles and corrections departments - the defendants in the lawsuit challenging the plates - to appeal the injunction immediately. The case, Summers v. Adams,

is the second time that South Carolina has had to defend a license plate created by legislative fiat. In 2006, the 4th Circuit ruled a plate with an anti-abortion message unconstitutional because it violated the First Amendment's free speech provision. However, that plate is now available, sponsored privately like other South Carolina plates. And, if the "I Believe" plate is found to be unconstitutional, it is likely that it will be produced and distributed privately.

Oklahoma House Bill 1001, the "Religious Viewpoints Antidiscrimination Act," allows students "to express religious viewpoints in the classroom or in assignments." It prohibits students from being penalized or rewarded for the religious content of their work." The measure allows religious groups or clubs the same access to school facilities as secular groups. This is the first bill filed for the 2009 legislative

session. It's authors, Republican Reps. Sally Kern and Mike Reynolds, say that there is nothing new about this bill. It seeks to clarify what is allowed in public schools and to codify into law what the U.S. Supreme Court has decided regarding religion in schools. A nearly identical bill was vetoed last year by Governor Brad Henry. Henry said that students are already allowed to express their faith and that "the bill could subject school officials to an explosion of costly and protracted litigation." Dr. Richard Broughton, an associate professor of zoology at the University of Oklahoma and the president of Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education, opposed the bill last year and plans to do so again. "We think that only science should be taught in science classrooms...this is an attempt to inject religion into science classrooms." (*christianpost.com* 12/3/08)

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order to lessen the impact on Palestinians living near its path. "Security considerations will shape the new route but must take into account houses that have already been built

and not plans for future construction within Israeli settlements." Israeli Chief Justice Aharon Barak wrote that "Israel's democratic nature forced it to balance real security concerns with

a commitment to due process and human rights...a democracy must sometimes fight with one arm tied behind her back." (*AIPAC Update* 12/17/08)

Choice, continued from page one

tion to contraception, including the "morning-after pill" is well known. However, Caritas said "it trains staff to abide by the Massachusetts law" and questioned whether the NARAL researcher had spoken directly with

a member of the emergency department staff of the two hospitals that responded negatively. Andrea Miller, executive director of Massachusetts NARAL, said, "Our hope is that all hospitals will be in compliance with

the law...this research will encourage every hospital department to insure that their staff is aware of the law and trained to provide compassionate care to rape survivors." (*The Boston Globe* 12/18/08)