

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

December 16, 2009

On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

While many of us are taking a break with Hanukkah celebrations and winter vacations, Iran just test-fired a missile

which is capable of hitting Israel and parts of Europe. Like the Jews of Syria 2200 years ago, Jews today are at risk from a sworn enemy bent on their destruction. In the U.S., there is no break from the health care reform debate which might produce positive changes, but at what cost? Opponents of full reproductive health choices for women are bargaining away our rights. In England, the British equivalent of the FDA is not taking a break. The country is poised to politicize food labeling, changing some labels from "produce of Israel," and "produce of the West Bank" to "produce of Israeli Settlements" and "produce of Palestinians." Following on the heels of the UN Human Rights Council's Goldstone report, Israel gets no break from being unjustly singled out for censure. A recent story about a drug-sniffing Israeli-trained dog donated to a sheriff in Montana has been a welcome exception.

Soon we will be celebrating the new year and many of us will be returning to our normal routines. Our issues have not taken a break and we will need to step up our advocacy to ensure our rights are not bargaining chips. I urge all of you to continue your involvement with JAC and to make timely annual renewals. Only with strong member support can JAC help elect a Congress that shares our values -- pro-Israel, pro-choice and pro-separation of religion and state -- and fights for them. Together we can solidify the gains made in the 2008 election and help our candidates win in 2010. Our future depends on it.

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Writer: Joy Malkus
President: Barbara Bluhm-Kaul
Executive Director: Marcia Balonick
Tel (847) 433-5999 Fax (847) 433-6194
Email jacpac123@aol.com
Web www.jacpac.org © JAC 2009

Israel

The House of Representatives passed the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act of 2009 on December 15 by a vote of 412-12. Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) spoke on the House floor in strong support of the bill. "All members of Congress, regardless of party, agree: a nuclear Iran is simply unacceptable. It is a threat to the region, to the United States, and to the world.... Today, with this legislation, we give the President a new option, a new tool - the power to impose sanctions against companies that supply Iran with, or support its domestic production of, gasoline and other refined petroleum products....By targeting Iran's ongoing dependence on largely imported refined petroleum, we reduce the chance that Iran will acquire the capacity to produce nuclear weapons." (News From Speaker Nancy Pelosi, www.speaker.gov)

Iran state television, early in the morning of September 16, said that the Islamic Republic had successfully test-fired the Sajjil-2 missile, a missile "said to be capable of striking Israel and U.S. bases in the Gulf." The Sajjil-2 missile is Iran's most advanced two-stage surface-to-surface missile powered entirely by solid fuel. Solid-fuel missiles are more accurate than the liquid fuel missiles of similar range. They are also a concern because they can be fueled in advance and moved or hidden in silos. Following the report, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said "this is a matter of serious concern to the international community and it does make the case for us moving further on sanctions. We will treat this with the seriousness it deserves." (*Haaretz.com* 12/16/09; *Huffington Post* 12/16/09)

The Palestine Liberation Organization's Central Council met in Ramallah this week to extend the soon-to-expire term of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Delegates said "that with little hope of elections soon, they will authorize Abbas to stay in office indefinitely." Hamas' control of the Gaza Strip has forced the cancellation

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United States

CHOICE

The Senate rejected the Nelson-Hatch restrictive abortion amendment to the health care bill by a vote of 54-45 on December 8. JAC had joined with other pro-choice organizations in Washington to lobby against this amendment during the week prior to the vote. JAC members were able to meet with several senators whom the PAC has supported, including Sens. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Susan Collins (R-ME) and Tim Johnson (D-SD). This was a difficult vote for these four senators, all of whom voted to reject the amendment. The current language (and current law) in the Senate health care bill restricts the use of public funds for abortion services. But private insurance plans that are offered in the insurance exchange can cover abortion if funds for the procedure are used only from premiums paid by beneficiaries. The bill does not require any current plans to cover abortion or prohibit them from doing so. The Nelson-Hatch amendment, almost identical to the Stupak amendment passed in the House, would have prohibited any private insurance plans, receiving federal subsidies and participating in the exchange, from offering abortion coverage even when paid for with private funds. When the Senate passes its health care bill, the difference in the abortion language will have to be negotiated in conference.

The battle over abortion, which for decades took place outside the Kansas clinic of Dr. George Tiller, has shifted to suburban Omaha. Since Dr. Tiller was murdered in May, his colleague, Dr. LeRoy Carhart, has hired two people who worked in Dr. Tiller's clinic and has trained his own staff members to assist in performing late-term abortions. Dr. Carhart told the *New York Times* that he has begun performing some abortions "past 24 weeks" and "is prepared to perform them still later if they meet legal requirements and if he consid-

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Research & Races

Massachusetts Special

On December 8, voters selected the candidates that will face off in the special election on January 19, 2010, to fill the unexpired term of Sen. Ted Kennedy (D). Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley garnered 47% of the Democratic vote in a field of four candidates. State Senator Scott Brown defeated perennial candidate Jack E. Robinson to win the GOP nomination. Only 11% of Massachusetts' registered voters are Republican and there are no Republicans in the congressional delegation. JAC supported Coakley in the primary; she is expected to win. She will need to run for reelection in 2012.

2010 Senate

Both parties face primary battles in the 2010 cycle and both parties will be defending 19 seats. The Illinois primary is February 2, the first in the country. The general election race will begin in Illinois on February 3. The Hawaii primary is September 18, the last in the country. Hawaii's eight-term Sen. Daniel Inouye (D) will not have a primary opponent and may only have a nominal GOP opponent. He won with 76% in 2004. There are several other states with September 14 primaries, and the winners of those

contests will have barely seven weeks until the general election in November. Louisiana's primary date is August 28, but Louisiana election law requires a candidate to win 50% of the vote or go to a runoff on October 2, only a month from November 2.

States with primary contests:

Arkansas - Primary May 18; Runoff June 8 - Incumbent Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D) is unlikely to have a primary opponent. There could be as many as 7 Republicans vying for the nomination with state Senators Gilbert Baker and Kim Hendren leading the pack.

California - Primary June 8 - Senator Barbara Boxer (D) will not have a primary opponent. She will be challenged either by state Assemblyman Chuck DeVore or former Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina.

Colorado - Primary August 10 - Senator Michael Bennet will face state House Speaker Andrew Romanoff. Bennet was appointed to this seat and has never run for political office. This will be a tough primary, costly, risky and time consuming. The winner will face one of five Republicans, headed by former Lt. Gov. Jane Norton.

Connecticut - Primary August 10 - Senator Chris Dodd (D) is being challenged by businessman Merrick Alpert. The GOP field has narrowed to former U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, World Wrestling Entertainment CEO Linda McMahon and financial services executive Peter Schiff. Dodd will win the primary; he is considered the most vulnerable incumbent Democrat.

Florida - Open - Primary August 24 - Both parties have primaries - Both races are in doubt. U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek leads the Democratic field and the GOP race appears to be between Gov. Charlie Crist and former state House Speaker Marco Rubio. August primaries leave the winners with less than three months to raise additional money and define their opponents.

Illinois - Open - Primary February 2 - Both parties have primary battles: of 8 Republicans who filed, only U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk has held elected office; of 7 Democrats who filed, the race appears to be between state Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias, former Chicago Inspector General David Hoffman and Chicago Urban League CEO Cheryle Jackson, with Giannoulias leading. More next month...

Separation of Religion and State

City Councilman Cecil Bothwell of Asheville, North Carolina, was sworn into office on December 7 using an "alternate" oath that did not require using a Bible or referring to "Almighty God." Mr Bothwell considers himself an atheist, although he belongs to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Asheville. Now, several conservatives,

citing North Carolina's Constitution that disqualifies officeholders "who shall deny the being of Almighty God" are threatening to sue the city and challenge Mr. Bothwell's swearing in. David Morgan, the head of a conservative weekly, the Asheville Tribune, said city officials had "shirked their duty to uphold the state's laws by

swearing in Mr. Bothwell." Mr. Bothwell cannot be forced out of office. In 1961, the U.S. Supreme Court said that federal law prohibits states from requiring any kind of religious test for officeholders when it ruled in favor of a Maryland atheist seeking to be a notary public. Six other states have similar laws. (*NYTimes* 12/8/09)

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ers them medically necessary." Troy Newman, the president of Operation Rescue with headquarters in Wichita, Ka., said he has traveled to Nebraska six times in recent months and that Dr. Carhart's clinic is "a new battlefield in

the abortion fight." State law in Nebraska bans abortions in cases when a fetus appears to have reached viability, except to preserve the life of the mother. "We're trying to get criminal charges against him, to get his license

revoked, and to get legislators there to look at the law," Mr. Newman said of Dr. Carhart. (*NYTimes*, 12/4/09) The Nebraska law was upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Attorney General of Nebraska vs. Carhart* in 2000.

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of an election set for January, when Abbas' term should end. Delegates also said they plan to endorse Abbas' policy of refusing to start new peace negotiations with Israel "without a comprehensive freeze on the expansion of its

settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem." Abbas told members of the Council, "If settlement activity were to stop completely for a specific period and borders of a Palestinian state were declared within the 1967 borders, we

would go to negotiations." He does not consider Prime Minister Netanyahu's decision to temporarily halt construction for ten months "a stop of the settlement activities." (*Jerusalem Post* online 12/15/09)