

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

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On my mind this month...



Gail Yamner

As 2010 draws to an end and I reflect on the changed political landscape, I see a year that contained hope for peace in Israel and promise for women's health. Now those dreams may be on hold.

A year ago we had hopes for a renewed peace process spurred on by a President committed to a strong US role as facilitator. Today, talks are stalled. All who are committed to a Jewish and democratic Israel are wondering what it will take to move to a two-state solution before the Palestinians decide that one state (with an eventual Arab majority) is all they need. Perhaps the aid offered to Israel during the fires is a harbinger of better relations.

It is hard to believe that it was just a year ago JAC went to DC as part of a broad coalition to protest anti-choice language in the Health Care bill. Since then, Congress passed a health care law that has much to offer women. So much has occurred since that pivotal time. Recently a Virginia Court decided that government cannot require individuals to purchase health insurance. As a result, those calling for repeal of the law may be emboldened and benefits may be jeopardized.

The re-emergence of the hard right is a political challenge that reaffirms our historic mission. Reproductive rights are already in jeopardy and the new Congress is the most anti-choice in many years. Many in the freshman class have no prior political or legislative experience -- elected simply because they were not the Democratic incumbent. Politically they are much farther to the right than their predecessors. Whether they will be supportive of the US-Israel relationship remains to be seen.

In these uncertain times, I am touched by those who responded to the need for greater advocacy and increased their membership. I wish you all a happy, healthy New Year and I thank you for your commitment to JAC.

Israel

On December 5, Brazil announced public recognition of a Palestinian state "within borders defined in 1967." Argentina and Uruguay followed close behind. "The Argentine government recognizes Palestine as a free and independent state within the 1967 borders," said Foreign Minister Hector Timerman, reading from the letter that Argentine President Christina Kirchner wrote to PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Uruguay made a similar statement and said the "step is part of efforts to reignite peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians." The U.S. and Israel both denounced the declarations. In response, the House passed a resolution Dec. 15th calling on the PA leadership to return to direct talks with Israel and to stop circumventing the peace process by lobbying for support for a unilaterally declared Palestinian state. No Member spoke in opposition. The resolution was brought to the floor by Reps. Berman (D-CA), Poe (R-TX), Berkley (D-NV), Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Ackerman (D-NY) and Burton (R-IN).

During a visit to Chile, U.S. Undersecretary of State William Burns said, "We believe such recognition [of a Palestinian state] is premature... it's only through negotiation between the parties themselves that we'll be able to realize the two-state solution." (*Haaretz.com*, 12/11/2010)

Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat asked the European Union to follow the example of Brazil, but the ministers, meeting in Brussels, issued a statement that "only negotiations will establish a Palestinian state....The EU commends the work of the Palestinian Authority in building the institutions of the future state and reiterates its full support for their endeavors in this regard. The EU Council of Ministers reiterates its readiness, when appropriate to recognize a Palestinian state." It added that "urgent progress is needed towards a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

United States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

According to Nara Pro-Choice America, the 112th Congress will have only 155 fully pro-choice House members. Abortion opponents gained about 45 seats in November and the new Speaker of the House, Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), is a staunch ally of the anti-choice movement (*NYTimes*, 12/11/10). The Republican caucus also chose Rep. Joe Pitts (R-PA), a vocal opponent of abortion, to chair the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health. This committee affects issues such as abortion, family planning, health insurance, the Food and Drug Administration, Medicaid and the National Institutes of Health. Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL, said, "Putting Joe Pitts in charge of a committee that oversees women's health programs is like putting Lindsay Lohan in charge of 'Celebrity Rehab.'"

Repealing the health care law, (which includes prenatal care and family planning), increasing abstinence-only programs and banning tax deductions for policies that do have abortion coverage are all on the right wing agenda. Rep. Boehner is meeting with leaders of the Right-to-Life movement to help set this agenda. This group, headed by activist Randall Terry, wants the House to "end legalized child killing in America" (*Think Progress*, 11/10) and was a major player in the mid-term elections. Many say the top two goals are tough restrictions on abortion funding and the defunding of Planned Parenthood. "Even though federal funding of Planned Parenthood goes only towards family planning, contraception, sex education...and never to fund abortions, the right wants to cut the \$300 million that goes to this group." (*Mother Jones*, 12/10).

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Research & Races

Introduction to the 112th Congress

House

193 Democrats - 242 Republicans

(currently 257 Democrats, 178 Republicans)

94 new representatives:

85 Republicans, 9 Democrats, 13 women

Fifty-six new members are under the age of 50; the youngest is Justin Amash (R-MI) who was 30 in April; the oldest is Frederica Wilson (D-FL) who was 68 in November.

There are 7 African Americans, 2 of whom are Republicans. Three are Hispanic and 1 is Asian. One new member is Jewish – David Cicilline (D-RI).

Thirty-eight are lawyers; 6 doctors, 1 dentist.

Four are former members who were defeated in 2006 or 2008.

Senate

51 Democrats - 47 Republicans -

2 Independents (who caucus with the Dems)

(currently 58 Dems-40 Repubs-2 Ind.)

16 new senators:

13 Republicans, 3 Democrats, 1 woman

Five of the new Senators are under 50; the youngest, at 39, is Marco Rubio (R-FL); the oldest, Dan Coats (R-IN),

is 67. Nine are lawyers; one is a doctor. One is Jewish, Richard Blumenthal (D-CT).

Dan Coats served in the House of Representatives from 1981-89 and in the Senate from 1989-99.

Chris Coons (DE), Mark Kirk (IL) and Joe Manchin (WV) have been sworn in; they replaced appointed senators.

First Look at 2012

House: Sixty-three seats changed parties in 2010, giving the Republicans a 24-seat majority. Democrats will need to net 25 seats in 2012 to get back to the barest majority (218). This could prove even more difficult than it has been in the past. The mid-term elections gave Republicans control of many state legislatures, allowing them to dominate the redistricting process next year. Many districts will be altered substantially, especially in states losing districts – Illinois, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania. The first priority will be to shore up the 85 GOP freshmen, those who defeated incumbent Democrats and those who won open seats in swings districts or districts that marginally favor Republicans.

Senate: For the GOP to win the majority, they need a net gain of 4 seats. Democrats have to defend 23 seats; Republicans only 10. JAC has supported 16 of the Dems and 1 of the GOP running for reelection. The Democrats are: Dianne Feinstein (CA), Tom Carper (DE), Daniel Akaka (HI), Ben Cardin (MD), Amy Klobuchar (MN), Bob Menendez (NJ), Jeff Bingaman (NM), Sheldon Whitehouse (RI), Debbie Stabenow (MI), Jon Tester (MT), Kent Conrad (ND), Maria Cantwell (WA), Joe Lieberman (CT), Bill Nelson (FL), Claire McCaskill (M) and Sherrod Brown (OH). It is possible that one or more of the 16 will retire and that Joe Lieberman may retire or run as an Independent. The other Democrats running that JAC has not but could support in 2012, based on voting records are: Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), Bernie Sanders (VT), and Jim Webb (VA). Herb Kohl (WI) does not accept PAC money. Bob Casey (PA), Ben Nelson (NE) and Joe Manchin (WV) are not pro-choice. JAC has supported Olympia Snowe, (R-ME), but the remaining 9 GOP members up in 2012 are not pro-choice.

Separation of Religion and State

It seems that in tough economic times, separation of church and state can be as much a fiscal as a religious issue.

Case #1 - Douglas County, an affluent Denver suburban school district that was the first in the state to open a charter school and is now considering a voucher program. The state has debated the voucher issue on and off for close to twenty years. In 1992, voters rejected a statewide voucher ballot issue by a 2-to-1 margin. In 2003, lawmakers passed a bill that would have given vouchers to poor children in underperforming schools to attend private schools. The Colorado Supreme Court struck down the law one year later.

The Douglas County proposal creates an option that would issue payments

to private schools in parents' names. It would give up to \$4,900 for tuition at a private school - or approximately 75% of state funding for each Douglas County student. The district would hold onto 25% of that or \$1,635. Supporters say that would be a windfall for the district because there is no state funding now when a child attends a private school. The slow economy forced Douglas County to cut \$36 million from its 2010-2011 budget and similar reductions are expected for the next school year. That is obviously the fiscal issue. On the other hand, Dick Delo, executive director of the Colorado Assn. of Christian Schools, says he has been told that no Christian school would be required to change its philosophy to join the voucher program. That is definitely the religious issue.

Case #2 - Ark Encounters, a proposed religious theme park in Grant County, Kentucky, to be "privately funded at an estimated cost of \$150 million and subject to the approval of certain state and local incentives and other assistance for the project." Encounter backers hope to raise \$25 million in development costs from the public and now stand to receive up to \$37.5 million over a decade from public coffers. Under the structure of the tax incentives, the state returns sales tax receipts to the developers up to 25% of the cost of development, with a ten year limit on the assistance. Democratic Governor Steve Beshear says the state does not have a church-state issue - "the people of Kentucky didn't elect me governor to debate religion. They elected me governor to create jobs."

Israel, continued from page one

Tucked into the massive continuing resolution approved by the House of Representatives on December 8 is an extra \$205 million for an Israeli missile defense system known as the Iron Dome missile shield. The administration requested the funds several months ago. The money is in addition to a \$200 million provision, also in the

continuing resolution, to support the Arrow theater missile defense program and other longer established U.S.-Israel missile defense ventures. Rep. Steve Rothman (D-NJ), a member of the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, said, "This was a priority of Congress and President Obama, and it is the first funding of its kind for

this important short-range rocket and artillery shell defense system." At the special Hanukkah briefing at the White House, Ambassador Dennis Ross stressed the Obama administration's total commitment to Israel's security. At a time when all spending is being questioned, this measure is concrete evidence of that commitment.