

JAC NEWSbreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

December 17, 2012

On my mind this month...



Gail Yamner

Nearly six weeks ago, Hurricane Sandy slammed into the East Coast upending the lives of people in seven states. Millions of people were without

power, thousands lost homes, and, tragically, about 50 people lost their lives. And as so often happens when Americans are hit, they rally. Neighbors checked on neighbors, friends opened their homes and strangers offered help. All this one week before the very hostile 2012 Presidential election. Into this devastation two leaders came together for the good of the citizens.

The picture of Democratic President Obama walking alongside Republican Governor Christie created a tableau that evoked America as the greatest nation on earth. The two laid aside their considerable differences and led. They toured the devastated Jersey shore and reassured citizens that the federal and state governments were working for them. The President promised swift action with no red tape and Governor Christie accepted on behalf of his state.

The partisan bickering was cast aside and good was accomplished. Now, as the fiscal cliff is days away, the Congress must act as one to promote the welfare of the country. It is time to raise revenue and sensibly cut programs. It is time to begin a serious discussion of climate change and begin to chart a course forward. It is time to have a jobs program that rebuilds our infrastructure. It is time to nation-build at home. It is time to act for the country instead of legislating against women's reproductive rights. It is up to us to insist that our leaders work together or send them home.

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Year in Review

The 2012 election was all about numbers: 47, 69, 20, 78, 32 and 2 billion.

We all remember when Mitt Romney described 47% of the electorate as takers and moochers. Coincidentally, when all the votes were tallied he only received 47% of the vote. The press speculated, the Jewish community agonized and pundits argued over the Jewish vote. Would President Obama lose the Jews? Would Jews leave the Democratic party in droves and follow the Republicans? Would the Jewish community support Obama's Israel policy? Would they recognize how much he had done for Israel? Would they vote for choice, immigration reform, DADT, and other social issues? Would they only vote their pocketbooks? Sixty-nine percent of the Jewish community voted for President Obama. They supported him throughout the country and across all income brackets. The Jewish vote continues to be a very strong part of the Democratic party base - voting for social issues as well as maintaining support for a strong US-Israel relationship.

Twenty women will be serving in the 113th Senate and 78 women in the House of Representatives. Both of these numbers are new records. Not only are women better represented in both houses, but there are more women in leadership positions. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) will continue as the head of the DNC, Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY) will be the ranking member on the important Appropriations Committee, and Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was re-elected as the minority leader of the House. On the Senate side, newly elected Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) will sit on the Banking Committee, Patty Murray (D-WA) will chair the Budget Committee and the other women in the Senate will continue to have important committee positions where their voices and our concerns will be heard loud and clear.

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Reproductive Rights

2012 began with the fight over contraception coverage in the Affordable Care Act. GOP Rep. Darrell Issa (CA) held an all-male hearing in February that covered the religious freedom of employers whose religious views were opposed to contraceptive coverage for employees. This led to the introduction of Georgetown student, Sandra Fluke, who testified before another Congressional panel on the importance of insurance coverage for birth control. We cannot forget how Fluke became fodder for Rush Limbaugh who repeatedly berated her on his radio talk show.

March brought the Blunt amendment in response. This narrowly defeated law would have allowed any employer with moral objections to opt out of birth control coverage.

At the same time, the war on Planned Parenthood was heating up. The Republican majority in the House and several Republican Senators were trying to defund this important access to services for women without health insurance. Republican Presidential candidates promised to cut off funding, and states were setting up onerous regulations for the facilities.

April brought about an unexpected fight: the House refused to vote to reauthorize VAWA (Violence Against Women Act), which had easily passed the Senate. VAWA was expanded to include abused immigrant women, the LGBT community and women on Indian reservations. This important legislation has had bipartisan support since it was first passed in 1994. JAC will continue to work for its passage.

June brought the defeat of two more restrictive abortion bills: the Prenatal Non-Discrimination Act, intended to outlaw abortions based on sex selection, and an anti-abortion bill targeted at women living in Washington, DC. As the presidential GOP nominee, Mitt Romney was campaigning on overturning *Roe v. Wade*, state legislators were busy introducing bills that

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Looking Ahead to 2013

The Inauguration of 2013 will usher in a host of issues for our JAC members to pay attention to when the fiscal cliff situation is finally solved.

Israel continues to be on the top of the agenda and is foremost on our minds. With the Palestinian move at the UN, the recent rocket attacks against Israeli citizens and the discussion of settlement building, Israel's peace and security must be protected by our elected officials. We commend the President and his administration for his strong support of Israel at the United Nations. We continue to stress the need for Iran Sanctions, as all must be done to prevent that country from obtaining nuclear weapons.

We hope that 2013 will lead to the parties' sitting down at the table to bring about a peace agreement. Israeli elections in January will reveal the mind set of the Israeli electorate. Hamas has made incendiary comments about the refusal to ever recognize Israel along with the promise to inhabit all of the land that is now Israel.

Here at home, we will keep our eye

on the Supreme Court. Many cases are making their way to this court including same sex marriage, the Defense of Marriage Act, contraception coverage in the Affordable Care Act and gun control. Each of these issues will have a profound effect on our society and on the reputation of the Court. Also concerning the Court, it is almost certain that President Obama will have at least one, and maybe as many as three, appointments to make due to retirements. His picks will have a lasting effect on many important issues.

JAC is heavily invested in securing passage of VAWA. The Violence Against Women Act has been languishing in Congress as the Right continues to argue against protecting all women against domestic violence. This law provides important funding and protections for women who are in dire situations. This current version of VAWA includes LGBT, immigrants and Native Americans. The Senate passed the bill with a bi-partisan vote and we urge the House to do the same.

The Shaheen Amendment, which asserts the rights of US Servicewomen

who are raped, was incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act passed by the Senate the first week in December. Without these protections, women serving in the military have not been able to obtain an abortion in a military facility, even when paid for with their own funds. If serving in a foreign country, they have had to go to their commanding officer and return to the United States for the procedure. Gen. Colin Powell, in urging the passage, said about the servicewomen, "Congress should respect their service and sacrifice and provide them with the same level of health coverage it provides civilians." (12/9/ 2012) JAC is urging the House to pass the National Defense Authorization Act with the Shaheen Amendment intact.

We will also be watching and getting involved in discussions concerning climate change, immigration reform, voter suppression and gun control – issues of importance to JAC members. The re-election of President Obama has given us the opportunity to make progress on each of these. To make an impact, we must remain vigilant.

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would all but eliminate the right to an abortion.

August brought Reps. Todd Akin and Paul Ryan. Senate Candidate Akin gave an interview in which he said that women who are victims of what he called "legitimate rape" rarely get pregnant because their bodies "shut that whole thing down." Vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan had co-sponsored legislation with Akin redefining rape. Ryan, with a 100% anti-choice voting record, was chosen by Romney to appease the right wing of his party. The Republican platform has a provision that would force a rape

victim to carry her fetus to term.

As the election neared and Republican candidates made more outlandish anti-choice comments, the pro-choice community pushed back in full force. JAC worked with advocacy groups like NARAL to let the voters know all that was at stake in this election. The election of Mitt Romney would have changed the makeup of the Supreme Court, putting reproductive rights in severe danger. The re-election of President Obama, the passage of Obamacare, and a pro-choice Senate, gave our community a hard won victory for women's rights.

In the year ahead, our work will be cut out for us. We need to keep the pressure on to pass VAWA. We will work to ensure that our servicewomen abroad have full reproductive rights and coverage. Our representatives will need to hear from us. The courts are still hearing arguments about contraception coverage and religious exemptions. We must watch what is going on in the states, where some of the most anti-choice legislation gets passed without notice. JAC depends on our members to support pro-choice lawmakers as we fight these battles, month after month, in election and non-election years.

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Thirty-two Jewish members will take their places in the 113th House and Senate. This number is a decrease due to retirements and losses across the country. Important pro-Israel Jewish Democrats lost, including Reps. Howard Berman, Steve Rothman, and Shelley Berkley (who gave up her House seat to run for the Senate).

Their leadership will be missed. Four new Jewish members were elected: Brad Schneider (D-IL), Lois Frankel (D-FL), Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), and Alan Grayson (D-FL). Congress will have its lowest percentage of Jewish members since 1979.

Two billion was the number of dollars

spent on the 2012 presidential election. JAC was successful in 86% of the Congressional races in which we participated. In 2013, with the help of our members, we will increase our contributors and money raised, and we will elect more members of Congress who support our issues.