

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

January 22, 2007

On my mind this month...

This month marks the 34th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. As a baby boomer that lived through the pre-Roe days, it's hard to believe that nearly two generations of women have grown up with the right to choose recognized by the 1973 Supreme Court decision. It has not been a smooth path as we continue to fight attempts at the federal and state level to pick away at the law. But with your help we have gained 22 pro-choice seats in the House and, most importantly, a leadership team that shares our support for women's reproductive rights.

In more ways than just the abnormal January temperatures that caused the cherry blossoms to bloom, there is a sense in Washington that spring is in the air. For the first time in 12 years we have a Congress that is committed to enacting domestic legislation—prescription drugs, health care reform, stem cell research, education and environment—all issues of importance to the Jewish community. Earlier this month JAC was well represented at the swearing-in ceremonies of JAC-supported candidates. You will have the opportunity to meet many of the new members of Congress at the JAC Annual Conference, April 30-May 2 in Washington. Call the JAC office (847)433-5999 and sign up now.



Jackie Abelman-Cohen



JAC members celebrate with newly-elected Rep. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rep. Robert Casey (D-PA).

JAC NEWSbreak, for JAC Leadership Circle, is a monthly publication of JACPAC.
Writer: Joy Malkus
Editor: Margie Kapnick
President: Jackie Abelman Cohen
Executive Director: Marcia Balonick
Tel (847) 433-5999 Fax (847) 433-6194
Email jacpac123@aol.com
Web www.jacpac.org
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★ Israel

The chief of the IDF General Staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, has sent a letter of resignation to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz. Halutz resigned following investigations concerning the war with Hizbollah. Several members of the Knesset then called on Olmert and Peretz to step down as well. "Halutz's step was unavoidable, but he was not the only one responsible for the failures of the war," said MK Zahava Gal-On, Meretz faction chairman in the Knesset. Gal-On's words were echoed by her opposite number in the Likud, MK Gideon Sa'ar, "It doesn't make sense for the chief of staff to carry all the blame, while his supervisors at the political level - those responsible for the failures of the war - escape the responsibility and continue in their positions." MK Effi Eitam of the National Union-National Religious Party told Army Radio that Halutz had "no choice but to resign...but Israel's political leaders most not absolve themselves of responsibility." A new IDF chief of staff will be appointed quickly, but Olmert's and Peretz's positions are considered "shaky." ("Shaky" due to the war with Hizbollah, but also because there is a criminal investigation concerning Olmert's role in the 2005 privatization of Bank Leumi while he was serving as Finance Minister) (Haaretz, 1/17/07) On January 15, Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice announced that she would call together Israeli and Palestinians leaders within the next month "for what she described as a high level yet informal meeting in hopes of pushing along moribund peace efforts." Rice had met with Prime Minister Olmert early that morning, a day after a session with Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas. The announcement came during a news conference in Luxor, after consulting with Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak.

Israel, continued on reverse side

🇺🇸 United States

CHOICE

On January 4, outgoing GOP Governor Bob Taft of Ohio signed a bill restricting public funding of abortions, putting into law a policy that was likely to be thrown out of incoming Democratic Gov. Ted Strickland. The bill makes permanent state rules dating back to 1977 that limited use of taxpayer money, including Medicaid, for abortion except in instances of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother. Recent budget policy in Ohio also bans the use of public money for abortion counseling and referrals. Keith Dailey, spokesman for Gov.-elect Strickland, said the Democrat "would not have supported this bill. He believes in a woman's right to choose, and does not believe that a poor woman should be deprived of access to a legal medical procedure because she's poor." (Cincinnati.com The Enquirer)

The 1973 Roe v. Wade decision gave women the right to terminate a pregnancy. Now there are two bills awaiting action in the Texas legislature that would make abortions illegal in Texas. St. Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston) filed Senate Bill 168 on January 10 to have a law on the books ready to outlaw abortions if and when Roe is overturned. Patrick's bill "would make it the policy of the state that life begins at conception and would allow exceptions to the ban on abortions only to prevent the death of a pregnant woman." The identical bill - House Bill 175 - was filed late in 2006 by st. Rep. Warren Chisum, (R-Pampa). Both bills ban abortion by surgical means or from the administration of any drug or medication. There are no exceptions for the health of the woman, or for rape or incest. Patrick said he was "unsure whether he could garner the support of two-thirds of the Senate to bring his bill to the floor for consideration." His attempt to do away with the two-thirds rule failed. (Austin Star Telegram 1/11/07)

Research and Races

One cycle ends and another begins almost immediately. And, the 2008 Senate and House elections will be directly influenced by the Presidential contest, especially in a year where there is no incumbent in the White House.

On the Senate side, Republicans have 21 Senators up for re-election, Democrats have 12. As of this date, only one Senator from either party has declared retirement - GOP Senator, Wayne Allard of Colorado, has said he will not run for a third term. Dem. Rep. Mark Udall (CO-01) is expected to enter the race and had expressed his interest whether or not Allard ran for re-election.

Now that Allard has announced his intentions, several Republican names are also being mentioned. This will be one of the top races of the cycle. Democrats currently hold a 51-49 majority in the Senate, with Independent Sen. Joe Lieberman caucusing with the Democrats. Republicans hope to recover their advantage while Democrats want to increase their majority.

All 435 House seats will be up again in November, 2008. The current line-up is 233 Democrats, 202 Republicans. Democrats picked up 30 seats on November 7, all but 2 of which were won with less than 55%. In addition, eight seats that

stayed in the Democratic column were also won with less than 55%. Such small margins make these seats vulnerable and put them at or near the top of the GOP target list. On the other side of the aisle, seven of the new Republican members won with less than 55% and 34 Republican incumbents retained their seats with margins under 55%. That puts those 41 seats at near the top of the Democratic target list. 2008 could be a most interesting election with everything depending on the situation in Iraq and domestic accomplishments of the Democratic-controlled Congress over the next two years.

Separation of Religion and State

The cover story of the January 6, 2007 edition of the National Journal is entitled "Leaps of Faith." This is an eight page story about thousands of small faith-based organizations nationwide that are using taxpayer dollars to provide social services. Congress has declined to pass legislation that would "enshrine President Bush's initiative in law, so he has done what he can within the executive branch... more than \$2 billion in federal funding is pouring into church-affiliated organizations around the country annually." In some cases, the government is actually creating faith-based organizations to provide services such as "healthy marriages" counseling and abstinence education. Conferences supported by tax dollars are held to teach church-affiliated groups how to write grant applications, help train volunteers, buy vehicles, set up offices and navigate the tax code.

Large, religiously affiliated non profits, including Jewish Federations, Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services, have long had partnerships with the federal government and received federal funds for providing non-sectarian services with

full accountability, Outreach to small faith-based charities began initially with the 1996 welfare reform law, but the Bush administration made the outreach a priority when it established the White House office of faith-based and community initiatives in January 2001. Satellite offices were also created within various Cabinet departments, including Health and Human Services, Education, Housing and Urban Development, and last year, at the Homeland Security Department. The White House told the Journal that faith-based organizations can now compete for about \$20 billion a year in federally managed programs, and another \$55 billion or so in programs managed by state and local governments. Some of the grants are very small: Biblical Concepts in Counseling, an organization in Cheyenne, Wyoming, got \$5,000 from the Health and Human Services Department's "Compassion Capital Fund." Biblical concepts is run by Charlie Reed, ordained by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Reed says that his counseling "begins with Jesus...we certainly have faith here, a belief in Jesus Christ, and he's the healer."

Some charities also receive support from more state faith-based offices as well as from the federal government. "A New Entry," an Austin based group that provides housing to ex-offenders and administers drug and alcohol counseling, anger-management classes, and employment assistance received a grant from the Labor Department and has a full time AmeriCorps volunteer and a staff member paid for by HHS. The group isn't affiliated with any particular church, but a crawler across the top of its web site says, "You too can become more than an overcomer by accepting Christ." The rule for religious organizations using tax dollars is "No proselytizing." Civil liberties organizations continue to file suits challenging various programs currently being funded, and the Supreme Court is considering a case brought by the Freedom from Religion Foundation of Madison, Wisconsin. Dan Barker, co-president of the foundation says the larger groups separate religion from secular services, but "more and more money is going to services that don't make the separation...Bush's initiative has crossed that line."

Israel, continued

No date or location was set, but the meeting "would signal deepening involvement by the Bush administration in stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks at a time when Rice is seeking greater support from Arab leaders in helping to stabilize Iraq." Rice would like the dialogue to "loosen the logjam," and end in what she called the "political horizon."

This is a phrase the Palestinians have used to emphasize the need for some sort of timetable for achieving Palestinian statehood. "I am very clear that the one thing that you do not want to do is try to rush to formal negotiations before things are fully prepared, before people are fully prepared. But that doesn't mean that there can't be progress as we're moving along."

(New York Times, 1/16/07)

This week, Israel will release \$100 million in frozen tax money collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. The money will be transferred to P.A. Pres. Mahmoud Abbas rather than to the Hamas-led government. Sec. Rice is believed to have pushed Olmert to make the transfer to shore up Abbas' image.