

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

January 25, 2010

On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

The Supreme Court on January 21st rolled back some restrictions on corporate spending in federal election campaigns.

After decades of limitations, now it will be easier for big pharma, big oil, banks, and other corporate interests to mount expensive attack ads against federal candidates. In a 5-4 decision, the Court overruled important precedents and treated corporate speech the same as that of human beings.

“Because speech is an essential mechanism of democracy – it is the means to hold officials accountable to the people – political speech must prevail against laws that would suppress it by design or inadvertence,” wrote Justice Anthony Kennedy for the majority. In a stinging 90-page dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens wrote “The Court’s ruling threatens to undermine the integrity of elected institutions across the nation. The path it has taken to reach its outcome will, I fear, do damage to this institution.”

The Court decided that the Federal Elections Commission overstepped its constitutional authority when it barred a conservative group called Citizens United from running ads for a movie attacking Hillary Clinton during the 2008 election season.

JACPAC’s impact in the political process is diminished when wealthy corporations are given free rein on campaign expenditures. We have long been supporters of campaign finance reform and will continue to support members of the US Senate and House who share that point of view. We will advocate for a legislative remedy to keep corporate interests from wielding excessive influence.

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✪ Israel

Historically, Israel and Turkey have enjoyed warm relations and many are worried about the current chill between the countries. Turkey has long been one of Israel’s most important allies. While one is predominantly Muslim and the other Jewish, the two countries have prided themselves in maintaining their secular democracies. Turkey has allowed Israeli flights over their country, has been a negotiator in peace talks between Israel and other Arab countries, as well as having ambassadors between the countries. Turkey is now under the sway of the democratically elected AKP – a Muslim religious party governed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Recently there have been some worrisome developments. According to Soner Cagaptay, writing for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, since coming to power in 2002, the AKP has pursued rapprochement with Russia, Sudan, Iran and Hamas. Turkey was a staunch defender of Hamas during the Gaza war and blamed the Israelis for inciting the war and using excessive force. Israel’s military intelligence chief, Maj. General Amos Yadlin said that a rift in Israeli-Turkish relations is the result of Erdogan turning away from secularism and toward more radical Islam. Erdogan told the Lebanese Prime Minister in the beginning of January that Israel is menacing to global peace and that the UN should stop picking on Iran’s nuclear weapons while coddling Israel. (*JPost* 1/12/10).

Israeli Deputy Foreign Secretary Ayalon complained to the Turkish ambassador about a Turkish TV series entitled “Valley of the Wolves,” that depicts Israelis kidnapping and hiding Turkish babies and attacking old men. Ayalon said this show was offensive and dangerous and could endanger the Jewish community in Turkey. However, when Ayalon met with the ambassador he violated diplomatic protocol by forcing the envoy to sit

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🇺🇸 United States

CHOICE

Senator Al Franken (D-MN) and Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) introduced the Compassionate Care for Servicewomen Act to give servicewomen access to emergency contraception at all military bases, including those that are overseas. This bill, which will be added as an amendment to a defense authorization bill, will allow military women access to Plan B. Currently this contraception is difficult to obtain on military bases, where abortions are not allowed, regardless of circumstances. A federal judge ruled that the military ban on Plan B was politically motivated, which should help the measure pass. This act currently has eleven co-sponsors.

The bill would require that all military pharmacies stock emergency contraception and make it available to servicewomen without a prescription, the same way it is available to civilians (approved by the FDA for over-the-counter sale). Currently, servicewomen face the threat of court martial if their primary contraception fails, if they are sexually assaulted or if they simply fail to use contraception and then became pregnant. Military facilities are not allowed to provide abortion services under federal laws covering Medicaid and Medicare recipients, women in the military and federal employees.

With the trial in Wichita, Kansas of confessed killer Scott Roeder, abortion is in the spotlight. Roeder publicly admitted to fatally shooting Dr. George Tiller during worship services at the Wichita Lutheran Church where Tiller was a longtime member. Roeder has pleaded not guilty to the charges. Roeder’s lawyers have asked the judge to rule on the use of voluntary manslaughter as a plea based on their client’s belief that his action was justified to “save unborn children.” They seek to argue, using Kansas law, that he held “an unreasonable but honest belief that circumstances existed that justified deadly force.”

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Research & Races

Massachusetts Special Results

A little known state senator, Scott Brown, was the upset winner over Attorney General Martha Coakley, 52%-47%, in the January 19th special election for the Senate seat left vacant by the death of Senator Ted Kennedy. Brown serves until 2012, the remainder of Kennedy's term. Brown will become the 41st Republican senator, leaving the Democrats one vote short of the sixty votes needed to overcome a GOP filibuster. This puts the health care bill in jeopardy. Many Independents who voted for Obama in 2008, because they wanted change, voted for Brown a year later for the same reason.

2010 SENATE PRIMARIES

(continued from last month)

Missouri -- GOP Rep. Roy Blunt now holds a six-point lead over Democrat Robin Carnahan, JAC's pick in the race for the Senate seat currently held by retiring Republican Senator Christopher "Kit" Bond. The latest numbers mark a shift in Blunt's favor from last month when Carnahan had a narrow 46% to 44% edge over her Republican

rival. As it has for other Democrats throughout the nation, the health care issue appears to be creating challenges for Carnahan. Just 37% of Missouri voters favor the health care plan.

Nevada -- The Senate Race is heating up for JAC-supported Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. He trails behind Danny Tarkanian, businessman and former basketball player at UNLV, who has run for office and lost twice before, and State Senate party chair, Sue Lowden, who is a good fundraiser. Reid's poll numbers among Nevada voters are dropping and Republicans see this race as a good possibility for a pick up. In Reid's favor is that he is a formidable fundraiser, there are more Democrats than Republicans in the state, the state chose Obama over McCain, and that neither of the Republicans is gaining any ground. He has embarked on a \$1 million media campaign to "reintroduce himself" to Nevada voters.

New Hampshire -- Before Senator Judd Gregg (R) announced his retirement, JAC-supported Rep. Paul Hodes

(D) threw his hat into the ring for his seat. Former Attorney General Kelly Ayotte remains the GOP hopeful with the best chance against Hodes, a popular 2-term Congressman.

Pennsylvania -- In the Democratic Senate primary contest between Senator Arlen Specter (D) and Congressman Joe Sestak (D), both JAC-supported, Specter has pulled ahead. However, the race between former U.S. Representative Pat Toomey (R) and either of these Democrats has Toomey out in front. Toomey and Specter have crossed electoral paths before. Toomey mounted a far right challenge to Specter in 2004, with Specter just barely winning. Typically, the most extreme voters turn out in primaries and 2010 is expected to be no exception. Last year, Specter, a moderate, switched parties because Toomey was running again and polling indicated Toomey would win the primary rematch decisively. Specter said he was unwilling to see his political career ended by a handful of right wing GOP voters who had hijacked the party.

Separation of Religion and State

What happens in Texas rarely stays in Texas when it comes to textbooks. The Texas State Board of Education is proposing changes to the high school social studies and science curriculum through its once-a-decade rewriting of standards for textbooks. Since Texas and California are the largest textbook purchasers, their decisions influence what books are marketed and sold in other states. Texas's impact used to be balanced by the more liberal pull of California, but its economy is in such

shambles California has put off buying new books until at least 2014. (*Washington Monthly* Jan/Feb 2010.)

"Evolution is hooey," says Don McLeroy, chairman of the Texas Board of Education and an advocate of creationism. "The secular humanists may argue that we are a secular nation, but we are a Christian nation founded on Christian principles." Some changes sought by McLeroy and the influential ultraconservative bloc on the Board

are to rehabilitate Joseph McCarthy, bring global-warming denial into science class, downplay the contributions of the civil rights movement, and pack textbooks with early American documents that blend government and religion and portray religion as the foundation of our Constitution.

We must be vigilant and watch the content that may make it into textbooks that will be used throughout the country for the next ten years.

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(*NY Times* 1/12/10). If successful, this would mean a prison sentence of five years instead of life. Prosecutors and abortion rights groups have condemned the judge for refusing to bar this defense which they say will encourage more vigilantism and violence

against abortion providers. Dr. George Tiller performed abortions as part of his medical practice for over three decades, one of only a few doctors in the US to perform the procedure late in pregnancy. He was under constant threat of violence.

This trial will be closely observed by people on both sides of the abortion divide. In addition to the charge, other issues in the case involve jury selection, the right to a public trial, and the media's right to access. JAC will be closely following the developments.

Israel, continued from page one

on a low couch, removing the Turkish flag from the meeting room and making him wait in the hallway. Israel needed to issue an official apology over the treatment of the Turkish ambassador. Although Turkey has been

incrementally shifting its orientations from west to east, many observers hope that this Middle East democracy will return to its secular roots. Defense Minister Ehud Barak was going back to Turkey to try to keep the channels

open between these two countries. Turkish Defense Minister said that the near neighbors would remain allies as long as they had common interests. (*Haaretz.com* 1/20/10)