

Issue Watch

Gun Violence Prevention

JAC joins in coalition with other organizations to flood the Capitol with calls and emails demanding action now.

Universal Background Checks

Assault Weapons Ban

High Capacity Ammunition Ban

Straw Purchase/Trafficking Enforcement

#nowisthetime

CALL TODAY

Capitol Switchboard 202.224.3121

Guttmacher Institute Report

In the first 3 months of 2013, states introduced 694 bills and provisions aimed at reproductive rights and abortion.

Link to the full report on the JACBlog!

www.jacpac.org/index-php/jac-blog

Action Alerts are sent via email and posted on our website
www.jacpac.org

Events

May

Talking Points Highland Park
date to be announce

June 6

Power of Women Luncheon
honoring Wendy Mills Abrams, long-time JAC member, environmental activist and founder of Cool Globes. Featuring keynote speaker Kerry Kennedy of the RFK Center for Human Rights

Want to HOST an EVENT?

Contact the JAC office: info@jacpac.org

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United States

Gun Violence Prevention

Over 31,000 Americans die from gun violence every year and 3,000 of those deaths are children. Since the Newtown, CT shooting, over 3,000 Americans have been killed by gun violence. Recent Gallop and Pew polls have shown that an overwhelming majority of all Americans, including NRA members, support sensible gun measures, including background checks, anti trafficking laws and bans on assault weapons and clips.

JAC supports common sense gun violence prevention legislation and urges Congress to pass 1) universal background checks, 2) enhancement of criminal penalties for straw purchasers and gun traffickers and 3) a ban on high capacity weapons and ammo clips. The NRA and other pro gun lobbies are working to water down the bills or abolish them all together by strong arming legislators. President Obama made comments about the NRA in Colorado, "they have ginned up fears among responsible gun owners that have nothing to do with what's being proposed, nothing to do with facts, but feeds into this suspicion about government." (*The Hill* 4/5/13)

The bill to prevent straw purchases and illegal gun trafficking has bipartisan support and has the best chance of passing the Senate. As for background checks, most Americans, police organizations, and crime experts believe that they are vital to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, those with mental health issues and domestic abusers. "Everyone supports background checks except for NRA leadership," said Josh Horwitz, executive director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. (*The Hill* 4/5/13) The Senate voted 68-31 to proceed to debate on legislation to curb gun violence. This Congressional action will be the most consequential debate on firearm regulation since the 1990's. (*Washington Post* 4/11/13)

Across the country, many states are passing gun legislation as a result of Sandy Hook and the impending legislation. States like California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland and others are moving ahead with gun legislation that further restricts the size and sale of certain weapons, require registration of other weapons and parts, and generally make it more difficult to own and use semi automatic weapons. Other states, such as Arkansas, Kentucky and Mississippi are relaxing gun regulations and are making it easier to carry weapons into public places. Legislators have introduced more than 1,300 bills to change state gun laws, according to the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, a San Francisco based group tracking gun legislation. (*Washington Post* 4/4/13) ♦

JAC NEWSbreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

April 2013

On my mind this month...



Janna Berk

It is with great excitement that I write to you as the newly-installed President of JAC. I am proud to have been a member of this organization for 20 years, and come to this position prepared to both offer my ideas and seek your input. As the gavel was passed on March 19th at the annual DC Fly-In, I was keenly aware of my role, and the roles of all of us, in continuing to advance JAC's mission as a collaborative body. Our mission today is no less vital than it was the day JAC came into existence; Israel's safety and security remains paramount, women's reproductive rights hang by a thread and have been legislated out of existence in many states, and issues relating to separation of religion and state are being hijacked by the religious right. We have a lot to do, and we must do it together.

Our mission has also evolved. We now include compelling issues of the day in our advocacy work. We recognize that when our country is consumed by the national tragedy of gun violence, it is our obligation to enter the discussion and to join our voices in coalition with others who are demanding change. While our core mission remains unchanged, we have taken seriously our membership's call to action in regard to certain issues of profound importance. We are committed to this ongoing dialogue.

Our organization as a whole must continue to evolve as well. We must grow new chapters, build new infrastructure, include new voices and see new perspectives. Our foundation is solid, and our respect in the political community is great. I look forward to the next two years as we work together to bring our goals to fruition. ♦

Israel

Columnist Jeffrey Goldberg in *Bloomberg.com* (3/26/2013) called President Barack Obama's Israel trip, "Operation Desert Schmooze, a two day charm offensive in Jerusalem." Goldberg considered Obama's achievements "partly symbolic...he went a long way toward neutralizing a Republican propaganda campaign that was meant to convince Israelis (and American Jews) that he was the bastard offspring of Jimmy Carter and Haman." However, the achievements were also "substantive...Obama somehow convinced the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, a man who does not spend his days looking for people to apologize to, that he should call the obstreperous Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to say how sorry he was for the loss of Turkish lives during the notorious flotilla conflict off the Mediterranean coast in 2010." The apology opens a path for cooperation between the two countries on other matters, especially Syria.

Just two weeks after helping to end the Turkey-Israel deadlock, The White House announced President Obama will welcome four Middle Eastern heads of states to the White House this spring – Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Qatari Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and Jordanian King Abdullah II. The planned meetings with the four heads of states are follow ups to Secretary of State John Kerry's visits this week and signal revived US engagement in the Middle East. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney was asked whether the meetings would focus on the situation in Syria. Carney replied, "not just Syria, but including Syria. There are obvious issues for these leaders to discuss, including Syria, his recent visit [to Israel, the West Bank and Jordan], and broader developments in the Arab Spring." There was no mention of Iran.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on April 5 called on Netanyahu to "lay out the proposed borders of a future Palestinian state as a precondition for renewed negotiations between the two parties.... Any return to negotiations requires Netanyahu to agree on 1967 borders." A senior member of Hamas, in an interview in *Al Monitor* said that:

"... the Islamist party ruling the Gaza Strip is prepared to accept a state within the 1967 borders," but not recognize Israel or a two-state solution... We do not say 'two states.' We agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, within the 1967 borders, and that this would include a solution to the refugee problem. What I can tell you is that all factions in the movement agree to this and are prepared to accept it." (*The Times of Israel*, 4/5/2013)

On his third trip to the region in three weeks, Secretary Kerry, on April 6, offered Abbas a package of Israeli concessions, "including the transfer of land from Israeli to Palestinian control, in return for agreeing to return to the negotiating table. Abbas refused. Abbas "reportedly told Kerry he would only budge with a settlement freeze and the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons." (*The Times of Israel*, 4/5/2013) (continued inside)

2013 Special Elections

Illinois 02 – Democrat **Robin Kelly**, former Illinois State Rep. and currently the Cook County Chief Administrative Officer, will be the new member of Congress from the 2nd district. She fills the seat left vacant by the resignation of Jessie Jackson, Jr. last November. JAC supported Kelly in this race.

South Carolina 01 – Former GOP Rep and Governor Mark Sanford won the GOP primary to fill this open seat. He will face Dem. Elizabeth Colbert Busch on May 7. GOP Rep. Tim Scott resigned his seat in January when he was appointed to South Carolina’s open Senate seat.

2014 Senate

There are 21 Democratic held seats and 14 Republican held seats up for election in 2014. As of this date, 5 of the Democratic seats and 2 of the Republican seats are open due to retirements.

In addition, the **Massachusetts** seat, which will be filled in a special election on June 25, will be up again in November 2014. The seat, which was Secretary of State John Kerry’s, is currently held by Dem. Sen. Mo Cowan, appointed when Kerry resigned. Whoever wins the special in June will hold the seat until November, when someone will be elected to fill the remainder of Kerry’s term.

A similar situation exists in **Hawaii**. Dem. Sen. Brian Schatz was appointed when Dem. Sen. Daniel Inouye died this past December. Schatz will have to run in November 2014 to fill the remainder of Inouye’s term.

3 Open Democratic seats are rated in the “toss-up” column:

Iowa – Sen. **Tom Harkin** was likely to have a relatively easy race. But, Harkin’s retirement gives the GOP a better opportunity. Dem. **Rep. Bruce Braley** has already announced that he will run for Harkin’s seat and he has been endorsed by Harkin. The GOP could have a hotly contested primary. Several names are mentioned including Rep. Steve King. Braley vs. King would be a race between opposites.

South Dakota – Sen. **Tim Johnson** just announced his retirement. Johnson has not completely recovered from a severe illness in 2007. He returned to Congress after undergoing surgery, then physical, occupational and speech therapy. Asked if his health was a factor in his decision, Johnson replied, “I feel great. But I must be honest.” Johnson said his speech is not “what it used to be,” and that he believed it was time to exit. There are no definite candidates from either party at this time. But, Mitt Romney was the clear winner in South Dakota in 2012.

West Virginia – Sen. **Jay Rockefeller** was the first to announce that he would not seek reelection. The GOP candidate is likely

to be Shelley Moore Capito, a 7-term Congresswoman from Charleston. It is too early to even speculate on who Democrats might nominate. West Virginia also went for Romney in 2012.

The two other Open Democrat seats are Michigan, where Sen. **Carl Levin** is retiring after 6 terms, and New Jersey, where Sen. **Frank Lautenberg** is retiring after 5 terms. Both states were in Obama’s column in 2012.

Both Open Republican seats, Georgia (Sen. Chambliss) and Nebraska (Sen. Johanns) are likely to stay in the GOP column. There are no Republican held seats currently in the “Toss-Up” category.

2014 House

The current House lineup:

Democrats	201
Republicans	232
Vacancies	2

There are 435 House members which means that 218 is required for the majority. Democrats need a net win of 17 seats to regain control of the House.

The two vacancies will be filled by the middle of June, but both are likely to stay in Republican hands. Next month we will feature JAC’s endangered friends in the House. ♦

 Israel

(continued from pg 1)

Two days of negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program failed to reach any accord and ended with no plans for resuming in the near future. According to Catherine Ashton, European Union Foreign Policy Advsor, following 2 days of negotiations in Almaty, Kazakhstan, “We’ve talked in greater detail than ever before, with a “real back and forward between us,” though the two sides “remain far apart in substance.” Ashton said the six powers – the US, Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia – will return to their capitals and consult on what happens now, but no date and place was set for the next round of talks. Iranian chief negotiator Saeed Jalili said the talks were “substantive, intensive and comprehensive,” but the other countries “weren’t ready” to accept Iran’s proposal. Western officials said “it is for Iran to make the first concessions.” Jalili said “the other side must prove its sincerity and show what Iran stands to gain at the end of the process.” (Bloomberg.com 4/8/2-13) ♦

Reproductive Rights

US District Court Judge Edward Korman ordered the US Food and Drug Administration to make emergency contraception available over-the-counter to women of all ages. The Court has ordered the FDA “to make emergency contraception available without a prescription and without point-of-sale or age restrictions within 30 days.” Currently, EC is available to women ages 17 and older without a prescription; under 17 requires a prescription from a physician. Medication is available only at health clinics or pharmacies, upon request with adequate identification. The Court ruling will allow drug companies to make EC available to women of all ages and at stores other than just pharmacies. (realitycheck.org 4/5/2013)

Kansas legislators have passed a sweeping anti-abortion measure that declares “life begins at fertilization.” The bill also blocks tax breaks for abortion providers, “bans abortions performed solely because of the baby’s gender, prohibits abortion providers from being involved in public school sex education classes and enumerates what information doctors must provide to patients seeking abortions.” GOP Gov. Sam Brownback is a strong abortion opponent and supporters of this legislation expect him to sign it into law. The new restrictions take effect July 1.

On March 22, the North Dakota House passed a resolution defining life as starting at conception. The measure has to be approved by voters and will likely be on the ballot in November 2014. It is one of a series of anti-abortion resolutions passed by the Republican controlled Legislature this year, including one that bans abortion as early as six weeks. The Senate approved the measure in February. The “so-called personhood measure bestows human rights on fertilized human eggs.” Similar measures in other states have failed. Abortion rights activists have said that “if Gov. Dalrymple signs these resolutions, they will fight them in court.” (www.dispatch.com 3/23/2013)

The Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate have approved an amendment drafted by GOP Gov. Bob McDonnell that will bar insurers that participate in the upcoming federal health exchange in Virginia from offering coverage for abortion. According to the amendment, “No qualified health insurance plan that is sold or offered for sale through an exchange established or operating in the commonwealth (Virginia) shall provide coverage for abortions, regardless of whether such coverage is provided through the plan or is offered as a separate optional rider thereto.” Gov. McDonnell likened the amendment to the federal Hyde Amendment, which provides Medicaid funding for abortion only in cases of rape, incest or threats to the mother’s life. “I think what this bill boils down to is taxpayers funding abortion,” said Sen. Jeffrey McWaters (R-Virginia Beach), who made the connection based on the fact that federal money is partly

funding the exchange. Anna Scholl of Progress Virginia responded that “the amendment is yet another outrageous interference by right-wing politicians into private medical decisions... No woman should be denied the ability to spend her own private dollars on an insurance policy that will cover her in case something goes horribly wrong with a pregnancy.” (Huffington Post DC 4/4/2013)

The Alabama Legislature has adopted new regulations requiring doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at local hospitals. Several of Alabama’s clinics rely on doctors who fly in from out of state. It is unlikely local hospitals would grant them privileges. Similar measures were passed recently in Mississippi, Tennessee and North Dakota. The requirement in Mississippi, if enforced, would shut down that state’s only abortion clinic. A federal court injunction is the only thing allowing the clinic to stay open. The Alabama bill also requires clinics to meet the building, equipment and staffing standards of ambulatory surgery centers. This would mean an investment of several millions of dollars. GOP Gov. Robert Bentley backs the legislation (NYTimes 4/3/2013). ♦

Separation of Religion & State

Late last month, Rowan County, North Carolina, decided to have a Christian prayer at the beginning of its county commission meetings. The ACLU filed a lawsuit against the county commission in an attempt to block the prayer. In response, the North Carolina House of Representatives drafted legislation “that aimed to establish an official state religion.”

“Section 1. The North Carolina General Assembly asserts that the Constitution of the United States of America does not prohibit states or their subsidiaries from making laws respecting an establishment of religion;

Section 2. The North Carolina General Assembly does not recognize federal court rulings which prohibit and otherwise regulate the State of North Carolina, its public schools, or any political subdivisions of the State from making laws respecting an establishment of religion.”

In a series of cases going back almost a century, the Supreme Court has ruled that the First Amendment does cover state governments.

“Judicial precedent has held that any such proposals on the establishment of religion must have secular, legislative purpose; cannot inhibit or advance religion; and cannot be ‘an excessive government entanglement with religion.’” (huffingtonpost.com 4/4/2013)

On April 4, the speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, Thom Tillis (R-Charlotte), killed the legislation. Tillis is considering challenging Dem. Sen. Kay Hagan in 2014. ♦