This month we are focusing on the races of key Senate seats across the country, recognizing that each senator's vote is critical. We ask you to support these candidates in order to keep a strong US-Israel relationship, keep reproductive rights from being eroded, and to keep a clear distinction between religion and state. These issues will be advanced not just through our advocacy work, but through our commitment to a mission which includes electing the right candidates to office. Supporting these races whose outcome will determine the future course of our issues is a vital aspect of the work of this organization.

In order to advance our agenda, we are cognizant of educating our membership about the merits of participating in races all across the country, not just those of local candidates. A vote cast by a Senator or Congressman in Illinois is no different than a vote cast in California or New York; each counts equally, and any one of them can be decisive in regard to a bill's passage. If just five Senators - from any state - had voted yes, universal background checks on guns would have passed. If Alison Lundergan-Grimes receives crucial support and wins against Mitch McConnell, the anti-choice movement is struck a heavy blow.

Elections matter more than just a slogan. It is real. Our mission of support for Israel, choice and separation is inextricably tied to our mission of support for the candidates whose votes decide the fate of these issues. Let's join together in giving support to those who will further our cause, regardless of where they are from.

ELECTIONS MATTER
Student Council candidates from going to Israel on trips sponsored by pro-Israel organizations. The Anti-Defamation League called these efforts “just another strategy to delegitimize Israel and reflects how far the anti-Israel movement is willing to go in order to stifle voices that support the Jewish state.” *(Daily Bruin, Spring 2014)*

Last month, the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians came to an impasse when the PA announced a unity agreement with Hamas, a recognized terrorist group. PM Netanyahu has recently declared that if this deal is not implemented, Israel would be willing to return to the negotiations, but that it could not work with Hamas while they remain committed to our destruction. *(Jerusalem Post 5/13/14)* Martin Indyk, the special envoy for Secretary of State John Kerry said, “Some have said this ‘peace’ process is over, but this is not correct....In the Middle East, it’s never over.” *(Tablet 5/15/14)*

US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel recently arrived in Israel for three days of talks during which he will discuss efforts to bolster Jerusalem’s rocket and missile defenses. Hagel will meet with President Shimon Peres, PM Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon. *(Times of Israel 5/15/14)* Hagel affirmed the bond between the US and Israel, noted that US aid to Israel is at record levels, and said that he was not aware of any facts that would substantiate charges reported in Newsweek about alleged espionage by Israel against the US.

Recently on the topic of the nuclear negotiations with Iran, US National Security Advisor Susan Rice reassured a pro-Israel audience that Washington would take a tough line with Tehran. “We all have a responsibility to give diplomacy a chance to succeed. But America won’t be satisfied by mere words. We will only be satisfied by verifiable action from Iran,” on its nuclear program or else “there will be no final deal.” *(Reuters 5/13/14)*

Hillary Clinton, in a speech about the Middle East, spoke of her intention to keep the US Israel relationship rock solid. She said that it is not only a responsibility but her privilege to be a friend to Israel. She added that she was personally skeptical that the Iranians would follow through and deliver on the nuclear front but said that diplomacy was a promising development. She agreed with President Obama that the chances of reaching a deal were less than 50/50 and that, “no deal is better than a bad deal,” if the agreement endangers Israel’s national security. *(Politico 5/14/14)*

In other news, Israel offered help to the Nigerian government to search for hundreds of schoolgirls who have been kidnapped by extremists. “Israel expresses deep shock at the crime against the girls,” PM Netanyahu said in a phone call to the Nigerian president. Israel will send a team of Israeli counter terrorism experts to assist in the ongoing search and rescue operations. *(Global Post 5/11/14)* Unfortunately, Israel has a lot of experience with kidnapping operations.

National Jewish groups criticized the decision because of potential retribution from lawmakers if citizens do not participate in prayers at council meetings. In her dissent, Justice Elena Kagan cited a moment in American Jewish history when, in 1790, George Washington corresponded with Moses Seixas, a lay official of the Jewish community of Newport, RI. She noted that in a letter to Washington, Seixas expressed gratitude for an American government “which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution, no assistance— but generously affords to All liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.” Washington’s response is considered to be the cornerstone of religious freedom in this country. *(Jewish Exponent, 5/8/14)*

Hobby Lobby is in the news again. Currently, the nationwide craft store chain is awaiting a decision by the Supreme Court on its case claiming a religious exemption under the Affordable Care Act. The company seeks to deny contraception coverage in their employees’ benefits plans because certain forms of birth control go against the owners’ religious beliefs. The Court heard the case in March and is expected to deliver a verdict next month. Meanwhile, the president of Hobby Lobby, Steve Green, has developed a high school Bible curriculum that has been adopted as an elective by the school board in Mustang, OK. This course treats the Bible not as literature nor as a lens through which to view the humanities, but as a “reliable historical source.” Andrew Seidel, of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, said the curriculum, “casts doubt on the objective nature of the class,” and that the draft textbook demonstrates “a clear Christian bias.” Green anticipates his curriculum will soon be adopted in “hundreds, perhaps thousands, of American public schools.” *(Detroit Free Press 5/13/2014)*
On the other side of the aisle, Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) has introduced the Women’s Health Protection Act, a pro-choice bill that would prevent state legislatures from unfairly targeting abortion providers for no valid medical reason. Nancy Northup, the CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights said, ‘the choice before Congress is clear and they must advance federal legislation that would truly defend women’s well being, safety and rights, and not worsen the dangerous circumstances that millions of women now face. (RH Reality Check 5/13/14) JAC thanks Sen. Blumenthal for this legislation, as we have been dismayed by the numerous restrictions placed on every facet of abortion throughout the states over the last few years.

Senators McCaskill (D-MO) and Gillibrand (D-NY) have joined together to fight campus sexual assaults. The Senators have made new recommendations on addressing and preventing campus sexual violence, which has reached epidemic levels. Sen. Gillibrand was quoted, “The price of a college education should never include a one in five chance of being sexually assaulted.” (Time Magazine May, 2014) They are working with the White House and campus advocacy groups to create legislation that would hold perpetrators and schools responsible. The Department of Education is set to write a rule strengthening protections for victims of sexual violence on campus. The new rules would limit Title IX funding for universities that refuse to address the problem. Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) will be introducing similar legislation in the House. (Politico 5/13/14)

Obamacare has already helped millions of women. The ACA provides 47 million women with guaranteed preventative women’s health services. Some say that it is the most pro-woman/mother legislation in generations. Obamacare has helped lower income women receive prenatal care and well-women visits. It has provided gestational diabetes screening for women 24-28 weeks pregnant. It has also provided free contraception to women that has saved millions of dollars for women and their families and has allowed women to make their own family planning decisions. (Eclectablog 5/11/2014)

BEYOND THE CORE continued
Nigeria. “This act makes ending violence against women and girls a top diplomatic priority…. [T]argeting women for violence and early marriage is still unacceptably common. The International Violence Against Women Act ensures that the U.S. will take a leadership role in combating these problems,” Susan Collins said. Barbara Boxer, who has been a leader on these issues said that “ending discrimination and violence against women and girls is a top priority for the United States and central to our national security interests.” Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) has introduced a companion bill in the House. (The Hill 5/15/14) JAC members should urge their Congressional members to co-sponsor this important legislation.

Common sense gun legislation also protects women. A study by Mayors Against Illegal Guns shows that a woman is 5 times more likely to be killed by her abuser if the abuser owns a firearm. The study also shows that 57 percent of mass shootings between January 2009-2013 involved the killing of a family member or current/former intimate partner. Although federal law prohibits convicted domestic abusers from possessing guns, these laws have significant limitations due to restrictions pushed through by gun lobby groups over the years. (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 5/11/2014) Several states are now working to increase gun possession restrictions for accused or convicted domestic abusers. JAC will continue to follow these developments.

The American Academy of Pediatricians (AAP) and the NRA are in a public battle over the right for doctors to advise parents on gun control. The AAP has been on the forefront in the gun control battle for the past three decades speaking about the risk of guns in the home. Over 20,000 people under the age of 25 are injured by a gun every year. More die in this age bracket from guns than cancer. Nevertheless, the NRA is saying that the doctors have no business talking about gun laws and this type of discussion between a physician and patient should be banned. The NRA has already sponsored laws in 6 states forbidding pediatricians from asking their patients about guns in the home. The group will most likely push for even more bans in the coming months. Most pediatricians, however, say they will continue to warn kids and parents about the dangers of guns in the home and to promote the safe lock up of guns and ammunition. (The Daily Beast 5/15/2014)
Over sixty JAC members and elected officials joined us for JAC’s annual Detroit Membership Meeting with keynote speaker Rep. Gary Peters (D-MI).

JAC met with Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) in Chicago. (l to r: JAC Executive Director Marcia Balonick, Hollis Wein, Senator Begich, Dana Gordon, Marcey Barichello)


With Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) in Chicago. (l to r: Lynn Cutler, Sen. Warren, Joy Malkus)

With Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) in Chicago. (l to r: Rachel Sher, Hollis Wein, Susan Berk, Marcia Balonick, Sen. Shaheen, Tiffany Keane)

Elections Matter
We support a strong U.S./Israel relationship, reproductive choice, and separation of religion and state.

Upcoming Events
4th Annual Power of Women Luncheon, June 3rd
Lincolnwood, IL
Speaker: Capricia Marshall
Special Guest: Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Honoree: Former JAC PAC President Lois Zoller

For more information, go to www.JACPAC.org.