

# JAC NEWSbreak

ELECTIONS MATTER

Vital News and Research Information for JAC Membership

January-February 2014

## Presidential Outlook



Janna Berk

President Obama's message during the State of the Union address was clear: women matter. His particular focus on working women was a distinguishing feature of this year's speech; issues of income inequality, paid sick leave and universal pre-K/child care were not just covered, but addressed in terms of concrete legislation. But even remarks geared toward female constituents could not offset the realities taking place in Congress. Hours before his speech, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would make permanent the ban on federal funding of abortions. According to the National Women's Law Center, HR-7 could restrict access for women facing serious health conditions, eliminate abortion coverage nationwide in the private health care market and prohibit residents of Washington, D.C. from using local funds to pay for abortions.

And so we are reminded, unfortunately, that the hard work of fighting for women's reproductive rights and equality continues. As the country looks ahead to the challenges and possibilities that lay before us in 2014, JAC also looks forward. We are on the front lines of the "war on women," and need all of you to engage with us and take action. As JAC members, you receive action alerts that urge you to make calls to Congress. Please make those calls. You receive the weekly EZ Read online newsletter, highlighting important articles, events, candidates, and issues. Read and share, stay informed, and join with us in educating yourselves through our resources.

As we consider the State of the Union speech, we realize that the progress made thus far dulls in comparison to the work yet to be done. JAC is proud of the efforts to support candidates who stand strong on the issues of Israel, Choice and Separation. Let us draw inspiration and hope from the attention President Obama gave to women's issues, but never forget that these advances happen because our voices are loud and our message is clear.

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## Israel & the Middle East

President Barack Obama explicitly recognized Israel as a Jewish State during his fifth State of the Union address on January 28, 2014. Discussing the peace talks he said, "American diplomacy is supporting Israelis and Palestinians as they engage in...talks to end the conflict there, to achieve dignity and an independent state for Palestinians, and lasting peace and security for the State of Israel—a Jewish state that knows America will always be at their side." This strong statement affirming Israel's Jewish character led to a standing ovation from both sides of the aisle. (*JTA 1/28/14*)

The Middle East peace talks, led by Secretary of State John Kerry, began in July and are scheduled to last through April. Both sides have continued negotiating and releasing statements about their intentions. Netanyahu speaks of a Jewish

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## Reproductive Rights

Elections Matter. This truth is most evident when discussing reproductive rights. At the most recent Republican National Committee meeting, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, once a presidential contender, spoke about birth control. He said, "women are helpless without 'Uncle Sugar' providing for them a prescription each month for birth control, because they can't control their libido or their reproductive system without the help of the government." (*New York Times 1/24/2014*) At the same meeting, the RNC encouraged its members to speak out for anti-choice legislation whenever possible. JAC member and JAC-supported Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) contends, "For women, contraception isn't a matter of ideology, it's a matter of health." (*Women's Health Policy Report 1/28/2014*)

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## Separation of Religion & State

Nineteen senators, 18 Democrats and 1 Independent, have filed an amicus brief in support of the Obama administration's contraception mandate under the Affordable Care Act. This mandate is being challenged in the Supreme Court by the private retailer Hobby Lobby, who argues that the mandate violates the company's religious freedom under the First Amendment. (*Yahoo News 1/14/2014*) The senators and the administration contend that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 does not apply to for-profit companies and characterized Hobby Lobby's lawsuit as a "gross misapplication" of the law, according to the brief. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) said, "Allowing a woman's boss to call the shots about her access to birth control should be inconceivable to all Americans

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## Beyond the Core

Since January 1, 2014, there have been at least 11 school shootings, compared to 28 for all of 2013. Eliminating weekends and holidays, this represents almost one shooting a day for our nation's schools. These attacks have happened at middle schools, high schools and universities. They have happened in red states and blue states: Connecticut, Tennessee, Hawaii, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Illinois. States have enacted 106 of 540 gun bills proposed in 2013, but national legislation with basic amendments to federal gun control laws have failed. (*The Wire 1/28/2014*)

BEYOND THE CORE continued on page 3

Go to [www.JACPAC.org](http://www.JACPAC.org) for more information on JAC's issues.

## **ISRAEL continued**

state and ironclad security. He has demanded that the Palestinians recognize Israel as the national state of the Jewish people. President Mahmoud Abbas talks about territorial claims and rights of return. Recently, Abbas expressed hope that there would be progress before the April deadline, saying, “A solution will bring Israel recognition from 57 Muslim countries, a clear, straightforward and diplomatic recognition between these countries and Israel.” (*The Times of Israel* 1/28/2014)

The P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom, and France, plus Germany) continues to engage with Iran about its quest for nuclear weapons and worldwide sanctions. According to an annual U.S. Intelligence assessment presented to Congress, Iran's ability to make missiles loaded with nuclear warheads now rests primarily on the "political will" of its leaders, rather than on any technical constraints. (*Politico* 1/29/2014) A group of senators led by Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Mark Kirk (R-IL) introduced a sanctions bill to punish Iran if it cheats while negotiations are ongoing. Although 59 Senators (43 Republicans and 16 Democrats) have co-sponsored the proposed legislation, more and more co-sponsors, including Sens. Chris Coons (D-DE) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) say that now is not the time for a vote on the Iran Sanctions bill, and the debate is becoming increasingly partisan. (*Huffington Post* 1/29/2014) AIPAC released a statement last week against voting on the sanctions bill at this time.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) has signaled an unwillingness to bring the sanctions bill to a vote while the parties are still at the negotiating table. In his SOTU, President Obama said, "Let me be clear: if this Congress sends me a new sanctions bill that threatens to derail these talks, I will veto it. For the sake of our national security, we must give diplomacy a chance to succeed and prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon." Senators Kirk and Menendez are continuing to urge the Senate to pass their sanctions bill. (*JTA* 1/28/2014)

JAC supports HR 938, introduced by Reps. Ted Deutch (D-FL) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL). The United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act enhances the broad scope of cooperation between the U.S. and Israel, including military, strategy, security, energy and trade. Rep Deutch said, "This act sends an important message to the international community that the United States and Israel stand together. On January 29th it was unanimously approved by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and now awaits action in the full House.

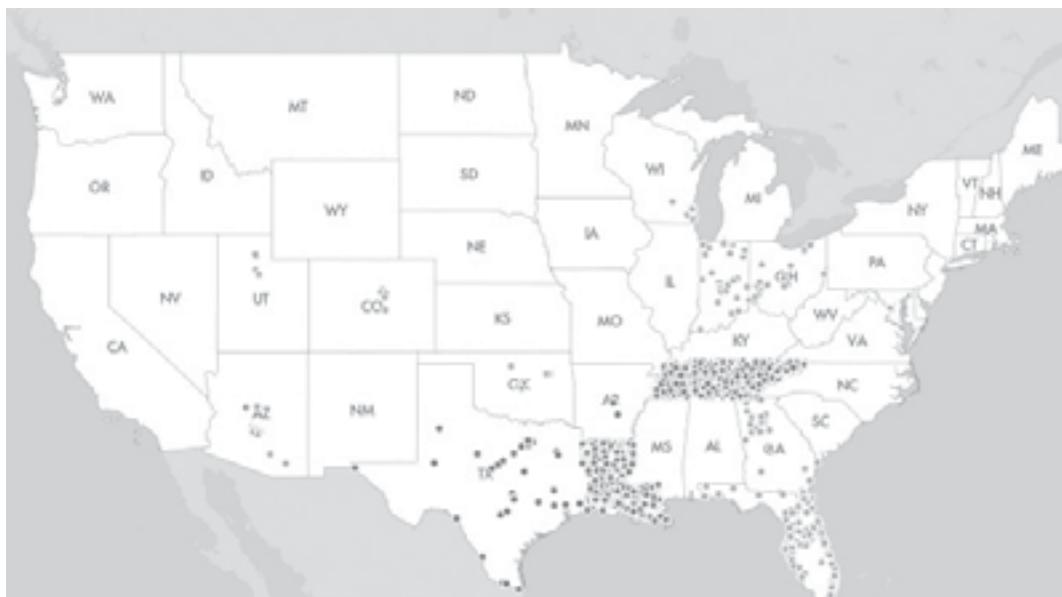
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**SEPARATION continued**

in this day and age, and takes us back to a place in history when women had not voice or choice.” (*Huffington Post* 1/28/2014)

The Supreme Court's rulings on school prayer have been consistent: students cannot be coerced into religious observance. However, lawmakers in South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee are debating bills that, according to supporters, are designed to "put prayer back in schools." (*Americans United* 1/22/2014) In justifying the introduction of his bill that blatantly violates the separation of religion and state, Tennessee's state Rep. Jimmy Matlock (R) cited America's 'Christian majority.'

Texas continues its fight to deny science in their classrooms. Although teaching creationism violates the U.S. Constitution, all four Republican candidates for Lieutenant Governor in Texas have said that creationism must be taught in Texas public schools. Their belief is that parents and students should decide if their religion trumps the teaching of science and evolution. Unfortunately, this fight is also being waged in a dozen other states across the country. (*Slate* 1/29/2014)



Source: [Slate.com](#) Publically-funded schools teaching creationism.

President Obama recently reaffirmed his support for *Roe v Wade*, as the anti-choice majority in the House continues to vote on more anti-choice legislation. Commemorating the 41st anniversary of *Roe v Wade*, President Obama said, "We reaffirm our steadfast commitment to protecting a woman's access to safe, affordable health care and her constitutional right to privacy, including the right to reproductive freedom. (*The Hill* 1/22/2014) House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) has said that passing the anti-choice bill HR-7 and a ban on all abortions after 20 weeks were "top priorities" in 2014. (*Wall Street Journal* 1/22/2014)

JAC has joined with many pro-choice groups in opposing HR-7, The No Tax-Payer Funding for Abortion Act, a bill designed to forever eliminate coverage of abortion in all health insurance markets. HR-7 would prevent women seeking abortion services from using their own private insurance to pay for abortion services. HR-7 would take away the health insurance women currently have, tax any policies that include abortion services and ban multi-state programs under the Affordable Care Act from offering abortion services. The bill would eliminate coverage of abortion even when a woman needs services to prevent severe and permanent damage to her health. This bill has passed in the House but will be stopped by the pro-choice majority in the Senate. JAC-supported House members voted against this bill.

In his weekly address, President Obama announced a new task force that will combat sexual assault, particularly on college campuses. In his pledge to strengthen the criminal justice system, he said, "I want every young man in America to know that real men don't hurt women. Men and women must be brave enough to stand up and help put an end to these crimes." He also recently ordered the Pentagon to show progress in curbing sexual assault within its ranks. (*The Hill* 1/25/2014) Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Claire McCaskill (D-MO) are awaiting a vote in the Senate on their competing Military Sexual Abuse bills. JAC will be watching for any developments on these issues.

In Texas, a young mother, pronounced brain dead in last November, was finally taken off life support following a court order. Texas law mandates, since she was pregnant, medical officials were prohibited from cutting off life support machines. Tests show that the fetus has significant deformities and was not viable. Her husband and family fought for months to disconnect the ventilator and allow Marlise Munoz to be put to rest. (*New York Times* 1/27/2014)

**BEYOND THE CORE continued**

Recently released research from the University of California, San Francisco shows that firearms cause more than 31,000 deaths each year. They found strong evidence for increased odds of suicide among people who keep guns at home. Adolescents with firearm access were no more likely to have suicidal thoughts, but were seven times more likely to have a plan involving a firearm. Women were also found to be at greater risk for being murdered in the home. (*CNN* 1/20/2014)

Gun violence prevention advocates are not sitting quietly on the sidelines. Former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords brought the issue up with her new ad that played before and after the recent State of the Union address. In urging legislators and voters to act, she said, "Tell Washington it's too dangerous to wait." Representatives Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Elizabeth Esty (D-CT) introduced a House resolution calling for renewed congressional action to reduce gun violence by expanding background checks, improving the mental health system, and making gun trafficking and straw purchases a federal crime. (*Huffington Post* 1/29/2014)

## JAC Happenings Around the U.S.



JAC's 4th Annual Power of Women Luncheon is in full swing. Our planning committee met this month to begin work on another stellar event!



Our co-chairs for the 4th Annual Power of Women Luncheon - Lori Lustbader and Kim Shwachman



Our January Talking Points brought together a very special panel to discuss Gun Violence Prevention. Above, our panel, l-r: IL Rep. Scott Drury, Dana Gordon, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (IL-9), Stephanie Gordon & Nicole Chen of Moms Demand Action IL, and gun victim advocate Bill Jenkins.



Nicole Chen (l) and Stephanie Gordon of Moms Demand Action IL joined us for Talking Points to discuss Gun Violence Prevention.

### Research and Races

Holding onto the Senate in 2014 is crucial to our issues. Keeping JAC-supported Senators in their seats will ensure that the right wing cannot push the Koch agenda: working to end vital protections for women, denying science, and further eroding the safety net for our most vulnerable. In this issue, we are highlighting three races where our candidates are running against right wing Congressmen with extreme voting records. They voted YES on HR-7--anti-choice legislation banning abortion coverage in health care plans, voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act 40 times and voted to shut down the government. The House is at its lowest approval rating in history, and we will highlight these opponents as they attempt to move from the House to the Senate.

Newly appointed Senator (and former Lt. Governor) **John Walsh** (D-MT) will face Rep. Steve Daines (R-MT) for the seat being vacated by Senator **Max Baucus** (D-MT), who was recently confirmed as ambassador to



#### Elections Matter

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

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Joint Action Committee for Political Affairs



[www.JACPAC.org](http://www.JACPAC.org)

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China. Daines voted ‘yes’ on the anti-choice legislation HR-7, that would all but eliminate abortion coverage in the insurance marketplace. Daines also voted to shutdown the government over Obamacare. Walsh is pro-Israel and pro-Choice and is strongly supported by Senators Baucus and Tester. JAC strongly supports John Walsh.

Senator **Mary Landrieu** (D-LA) faces a tough reelection for her fourth term in a red state against Rep. Bill Cassidy. Cassidy was a ‘yes’ vote for both the anti-choice HR-7 and the government shutdown. Landrieu has been a great friend to JAC’s issues, ranging from Israel, to reproductive rights to gun violence prevention. JAC strongly supports Landrieu’s reelection.

Senator **Mark Pryor** (D-AR) will confront Tea Party Conservative Rep. Tom Cotton (R-AR) in his reelection bid. This red state race is a pickup opportunity for the Republicans. Tom Cotton is in the mold of Ted Cruz and will be a formidable opponent. The South is tough for Democrats and Pryor will need to run a very good race. Tom Cotton would be a ‘no’ vote on all of JAC’s issues.



JAC met with Senator Jeanne Shaheen from New Hampshire, who is also running a key race this year. Pictured from left to right: Marcia Balonick, Kim Shwachman, Wendy Abrams, Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Dana Gordon, and Joy Markus



With Lt. Governor John Walsh (D-MT), Senate candidate for Montana.

l to r: Marcia Balonick, Linda Rae Sher, Lt. Gov. Walsh, Dana Gordon, Janna Berk



Senator Mary Landrieu with two JAC presidents: Lois Zoller and Janna Berk

### Upcoming Events

#### Talking Points February, IL.

Please look for your invitation to the February Talking Points. More details are to come.

**Annual MI Membership Meeting, May 5.** This annual meeting will be held in Detroit.

#### Palm Beach Meeting March 9th

Watch your inbox for this special event with Rep. Patrick Murphy.

#### 4th Annual Power of Women Luncheon, Chicago, IL

This event is still in the planning stages. More information to follow.

Want your JAC event listed here? Please e-mail the information to [info@JACPAC.org](mailto:info@JACPAC.org).

For more information, go to [www.JACPAC.org](http://www.JACPAC.org).