

# JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

February 25, 2009

## On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

During the 2008 presidential campaign the Jewish community was the target of emails that spread rumors

about then-candidate Obama. Those who sent the emails wanted to see him defeated. They chose character assassination to achieve their goals, and, although they did not succeed and Barack Obama is our President, the disinformation campaign has resumed. Recently many of us received an email saying that the President had issued an executive order that would fund the migration of Gaza militants to the United States. The claims made in that email were false. We cannot prevent the emailers from pushing their "send" buttons, but we can refuse to be their distribution network. As a community, we have always been committed to learning and respect for the truth. We must live up to that commitment before we hit the "forward" button.

Next week we are going to Washington for the JAC Annual Meeting. This is the 29th year that we will be meeting with national leaders to discuss our issues. We will also be doing a lot of listening, so that we can gather new information and learn the facts from those who really know them. This knowledge will serve us well when we receive incendiary, but sometimes believable, emails about subjects of concern to us. Together we can thwart the false messengers by debunking their claims and hitting the "reply all" button to send our own factual rebuttals. Email the JAC office to let us know about emails that are circulating or if you have questions about what you read or hear.

JAC NEWSbreak, for JAC Leadership Circle, is a monthly publication of JACPAC.

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## Israel

The 18th Knesset opened its first session on February 24 and President Shimon Peres "urged the new parliament to wrap up a peace accord with the Palestinians by the end of its term...it was time to put war aside." Three days earlier, Perez asked Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu to form Israel's next government. Netanyahu has said he "wishes to forge a broad coalition involving parties to the left of his right-wing." Tzipi Livni, who heads the centrist Kadima party, has already rejected an offer from him to join a unity government. JAC participated in a conference call on February 25 with Gidi Grinstein, the President and Founder of the Reut Institute, a premier strategy group in Israel. Gidi served as secretary and coordinator of the Israeli negotiating team under Prime Minister Ehud Barak from 1999-2001. He says it would have been better for Israel if the elections had produced a clear winner who would govern from the center. Netanyahu was forced to veer right to win a mandate to establish a government. But he is unlikely to be as far right as he was during his earlier term as Prime Minister. He is reaching out to Kadima with the hopes of forming a unity government. Netanyahu will have to endorse a two-state solution or there will be no coalition with Kadima. If he does this, it will be very difficult for Livni to refuse to join. Netanyahu has six weeks to form a government.

The United States has pledged more than \$900 million toward the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. The gift is to be announced next week by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the donors' conference in Cairo. The funding is to be channeled through United Nations agencies. Some of the funding was earmarked earlier for the Palestinians, while some of the funding is new. It has been estimated that at least \$2 billion will be needed for the Gaza restoration. The funding must be approved by Congress. This could be difficult because

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## Choice

The North Dakota House passed a bill which gives legal rights to "any organism with the genome of homo sapiens." This effectively makes abortion murder because a fertilized egg has the same rights as a human being. The measure was approved 51-41 and now goes to the North Dakota Senate. (AP 2/18/09)

The SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) legislation was passed by the Senate on January 29, by a vote of 66-32. Two anti-choice amendments were defeated earlier - an amendment sponsored by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) that would have codified a controversial 2002 Bush administration regulation "which allows states to make an embryo or a fetus - but not a pregnant woman - eligible for SCHIP," and the day before, an amendment that would have reinstated the global gag rule.

On February 18, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) met with Pope Benedict XVI. The Pope has said that supporters of abortion rights should not receive Communion. Pelosi had been previously rebuked by the Archbishop of Washington for saying in a television interview that the moment of conception has been a matter of controversy within the Catholic Church. Following the meeting, the Vatican reaffirmed "the Church's consistent teaching on the dignity of human life from conception to natural death which enjoin all Catholics, and especially legislators, jurists and those responsible for the common good of society, to work in cooperation with all men and women of good will in creating a just system of laws capable of protecting human life at all stages of its development." The Church's involvement in the American abortion debate can be viewed as breaching the separation of church and state. There are 162 Catholics in the 111th Congress. Even those who are 100% pro-choice, like Speaker Pelosi, may find themselves conflicted by the words of the Pope.

# Research & Races

## 2010 Senate

The Senate is currently made up of 58 Democrats and 41 Republicans. The Minnesota Senate race is still undecided, leaving one vacancy. There are 17 Democratic seats and 20 Republican seats up in 2010. Four of the Democratic seats are appointments - Michael Bennet (CO), Ted Kaufman (DE), Roland Burris (IL), and Kirsten Gillibrand (NY). Only Kaufman has said that he does not plan to run in 2010. Burris' appointment has been tainted by the scandal surrounding former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who made the appointment, and Burris' failure to honestly answer all the questions put to him before he was seated. He has been asked to resign but, so far, has declined to do so.

Four GOP Senators have announced their retirements, leaving those seats open and giving Democrats takeover opportunities: Mel Martinez (FL), Sam Brownback (KS), Kit Bond (MO), and George Voinovich (OH). Also, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (TX) has started an exploratory committee to run for Governor, which would also leave that seat open. It is likely that seat will remain in Republican hands.

## 2010 House

Democrats ended the 2008 cycle with a 257-178 advantage, meaning Republicans would need a mammoth 40 seat pickup to regain the majority they lost in 2006. Republicans have a 80-62 lead in House delegations from southern states, while Democrats hold a commanding 75-18 lead in House delegations from the northeast. However, there are still more House Democrats sitting in districts that have gone Republican at the Presidential level than House Republicans sitting in districts that went Democratic. Many of these "split district Democrats" are freshmen or sophomores in the 111th Congress, and they will be GOP targets in 2010 along with any freshmen elected with less than 52%.

Four JAC supported new members fall into this last group: **Walter Minnick** (ID-01) with 50.6%; **John Adler** (NJ-03) with 51.7%; **Mark Schauer** (MI-07) with 48.8%; **Dina Titus** (NV-03) with 47.4%. One JAC supported sophomore, **Michael Arcuri** (NY-24) won with 51.4%. John Adler's win was in an open seat previously held by a Republican. The other four defeated GOP incumbents.

There are three vacancies in the House, to be filled in March and April:

**IL-05** was held by **Rahm Emanuel** for six years. The special election primary is March 3 and 13 Democrats have filed. The general is set for April 7, but the demographics of this district dictate that the winner of the Democratic primary will be the winner of the general.

**NY-24** was held for one term by Kirsten Gillibrand, the new Senator from New York. Gillibrand defeated an ethically damaged Republican in 2006 and then won with 62% in 2008. The special election is scheduled for March 31. GOP st. Assembly Minority Leader James Tedisco will face Democratic businessman Scott Murphy. Republicans have the registration edge in this district and it could be a pickup.

**CA 32** has been held by the new Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis. A date for the special election has not been set.

As of today, eight Republican representatives have said they will not seek reelection, 7 are running for another office. Two Democrats are not seeking reelection, both are running for another office.

# Separation of Religion and State

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear *Salazar v. Buono*, a long running legal battle centering on the display of an 8 foot cross that stands as a war memorial in the Mojave National Preserve in California. The justices said "they will consider throwing out an appeals court ruling that ordered the cross be torn down." The cross was originally erected by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1934 and has since been replaced

several times by private citizens. In 2003 Congress approved a rider to the Defense Department bill that transferred the cross and the property beneath it to private hands. The San Francisco based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has twice said the cross must come down.

The Economic Recovery bill states that tax funds used for school construction and rehabilitation may not be diverted to religious institutions.

Sen. Jim DeMint (R-SC) attempted to remove the language, complaining that it was hostile to religion. Religious Right groups argued that the language will bar student religious groups from meeting at universities. The funding provision has nothing to do with such meetings. In fact, in 1981, the Supreme Court ruled that public universities must give the same access to facilities to religious groups that is granted to non-religious ones.

## *Israel, continued from page one*

Hamas continues to rule in Gaza and Congress is focused on the US declining economy. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has called on Hamas to recognize Israel so Hamas and Fatah can form a unity government and manage humanitarian aid for Gaza and the West Bank. "When governments come, they respect and honor the obligations of a previous government...that's what we ask." (*Ha'aretz.com* 2/24/09).

According to *Ha'aretz*, Iran has started tests on its Russian-built nuclear power plant. Israel's response to the news from Foreign Ministry spokesman Yidal Palmor was, "Iranians are showing again that they are making progress in their nuclear race...This should be understood as very bad news for the whole of the international community." Russia claims Iran's activity is "purely civilian and cannot be used for any weapons program." At the same time, according to Vice President

Gholam Reza Aghazadeh, Iran has increased the number of centrifuges enriching uranium to 6,000, "marking Teheran's latest defiance of UN demands to halt its nuclear program." The UN Security Council has passed three sets of sanctions against Iran. The stance of Russia and China has weakened Western-backed sanctions in the Security Council, arguing that "punishing Teheran too harshly for its nuclear activity would be counterproductive."