

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

March 25, 2008

On my mind this month...



Hon. Amy N. Dean

Clearly, things are heating up in this election cycle. It must be the trial lawyer in me - I love the action. My sense, however,

is that not everyone loves the give and take and just wants everyone to agree with their position (OK, I get like this at times, but that's the judge in me!).

I understand that a prolonged battle between the two Democratic front runners can be problematic since we do need to get on with the election debate with the Republicans. However, the level of discussion that has been generated by the Clinton/Obama races has been so interesting and so stimulating that I, for one, am glad for it. Last week for the first time, in a long time, I was at a dinner party where guests talked about the issue of race without rancor or retribution. It was wonderful, intelligent and informative.

The reaction of my dinner companions last week has not always been the case and I have heard words of racism and sexism from many via the internet and at various gatherings. This is disturbing. We must speak out whenever we hear this type of speech regardless of who we support. These views only diminish us as a people and as a nation.

JAC has a long and proud history of supporting candidates who fight for our civil rights. We, as members of this organization, can do no less. Thus we must speak out against falsehoods and bigotry directed towards any person who has willingly put themselves forward for public service

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Israel

President George W. Bush visited Israel in January for the first time since he was elected in 2000. Vice President Dick Cheney was in Israel this past weekend. Cheney is on a 10 day trip to the Mideast, where oil, the future of Iraq and Afghanistan and Iran's rising influence in the region have been the topics for discussion with foreign leaders. On Easter weekend Cheney visited Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories. Before going to the West Bank, Cheney met with Israeli officials in Jerusalem. He reaffirmed Washington's commitment to establishing a Palestinian state - "a feat," he said, "would require painful concessions on both sides... We want to see a resolution to the conflict, and an end to the terrorism that has caused so much grief to Israelis and a new beginning for the Palestinian people." He stressed that the United States would "never pressure Israel to take steps that would jeopardize its security." Cheney then flew by helicopter to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. He repeated the U.S. commitment to the creation of an independent Palestinian state, saying it was "long overdue." He then added, "terror and violence do not merely kill innocent civilians, they also kill the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people," Abbas thanked Cheney for U.S. support and asked the U.S. to stop Israeli settlement expansion and military operations that target militants. According to the Associated Press, Edward Abington, a former U.S. consul in Jerusalem and now an adviser to Abbas, said the mood in Ramallah was grim. "Neither the Israelis or Palestinians are convinced that Cheney is an integral player in the peace process." (*Yahoo News, AP 3/22/08*)

The House passed in September, 2007, H.R. 1400, and the Senate is considering legislation, S. 1430, aimed at increasing economic and political pressure on Iran. The legislation, introduced in the House by

United States

CHOICE

On March 13, Wisconsin Dem. Gov. Jim Doyle signed a bill that requires hospitals to provide emergency contraception to rape victims. Gov. Doyle credits the testimony of rape survivors, Linda Gage and Amanda Harrington, with being instrumental to the bill's passage. "I would like to recognize all of the survivors who have been willing to come forward with their stories...the survivors really made this happen." According to madison.com, this is the first time in a decade that Wisconsin has a new law on the books that significantly expands access to birth control. The recent trend in the state, reflected in Republican proposals, has been to prohibit the University of Wisconsin System from offering emergency contraception and to ban the state from funding family planning services for low-income women. Pro-Life Wisconsin, which opposes abortion and says that all forms of hormonal contraceptives cause abortions, will likely challenge the law in court. "We are not lying down," said lobbyist Matt Sande. "The law is unconstitutional. It ought to be challenged and we're working on it."

A July 2006 federal government report found that 87% of Crisis Pregnancy Centers misrepresent the medical facts on abortion, "often grossly exaggerating the risks." CPCs have provided misinformation concerning the "purported" relationship between abortion and breast cancer, the "purported" relationship between abortion and infertility, and the "purported" relationship between abortion and mental illness. Now, the Maryland state senate is considering a bill that would required CPCs "to issue a disclaimer stating that they are not required to provide accurate information. Similar legislation is being considered in several other states including New York. (*Feminist.org 3/12/08*)

Research & Races

There are five open Senate seats, all currently held by Republicans. Here is what those contests look like so far.

Colorado -- (currently held by Republican Sen. Wayne Allard). Rep. **Mark Udall** (D) faces former GOP Rep. Bob Schaffer (R). Green party candidate Bob Kinsey is also in the mix. This race is considered a toss-up at this time.

Idaho -- (currently held by Republican Sen. Larry Craig) Former Rep. LaRocco is in the race, as are multiple GOP candidates. This seat is considered safe for whichever Republican becomes the nominee.

Nebraska -- (currently held by GOP

Sen. Chuck Hagel) is a likely Republican seat. There are multiple candidates on all sides, including a Green Party candidate.

New Mexico -- (currently held by GOP Sen. Pete Domenici). Rep. **Tom Udall** (D) faces GOP Rep. Heather Wilson or GOP Rep. Steve Pearce. This is a toss-up at this time.

Virginia -- (currently held by Republican Sen. John Warner). Former Gov. **Mark Warner** (D) vs. GOP Gov. Jim Gilmore. This is a likely Democratic takeover.

Mississippi -- (GOP Sen. Trent Lott resigned Dec. 2007). This seat was filled by GOP Rep. Roger Wicker, who

was appointed by the Governor and sworn in January 2008. He will run again in November to complete Lott's term. Wicker will face former Gov. Ronnie Musgrove (D). The race favors Wicker who now has the advantage of incumbency. Likely GOP.

Minnesota -- Attorney and former Senate candidate Mike Ciresi (D) has withdrawn from the race. That leaves radio talk show host **Al Franken** with three, not prominent, Democratic challengers. This primary is very late, September 9, when Franken will be able to officially start his campaign against GOP Sen. Norm Coleman. The War in Iraq, the economy, health care and education issues are putting this race in the Toss-up column.

Separation of Religion and State

The Ector County School Board, Odessa, Texas, has agreed to stop teaching a course in its public schools that "unconstitutionally promotes a particular interpretation of the Bible that is not shared by Jews, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and most Protestants." The agreement settles a lawsuit filed last May by eight Odessa parents and taxpayers who were represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Texas, People for the American Way Foundation and the law firm of Jenner and Block LLP. The lawsuit argued that the course, created by a religious organization, the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NBCPS), violated their constitutional right to religious freedom by teaching specific religious doctrines to children in the community. "This agreement is a victory for those who wish religious education to be in the hands of par-

ents and not public school officials," said Dr. T. Jeremy Gunn, Director of the ACLU's Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. "It is unacceptable for government officials to decide which religious beliefs are true and which are not and then use the public school system as a means of proselytizing children." Douglas C. Hildebrand, an ordained elder and deacon at an Odessa Presbyterian Church was a plaintiff in the lawsuit. "It is inappropriate for one set of religious beliefs to be promoted over others...religion is an essential component of my life...but this course did nothing more than advocate certain religious views that are not shared by everyone." If the Ector County School Board should decide to offer a different Bible course in the future, the course must follow strict legal standards for objectivity. (People for the American Way Press Release, 3/5/08)

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A University of Florida study released in November 2007 found that sex education in Florida schools was not accessible to all students, often got little time, occurred too late (9th and 10th grade) and had no standards for training or quality. Florida's \$10.7 million abstinence-only-until-marriage program has not done much to reduce the state's sixth highest teen pregnancy rate in the country. House Bill 449 and Senate Bill 848 would require sexuality education that includes discussion of contraception. And House Bill 385 and Senate Bill 780 would improve access to contraceptives. Planned Parenthood's Teen Time programs, with 160 teens at three sites, resulted in a less than 1% pregnancy rate and a 100% high school graduation rate over the past eight years. The legislation aims to provide substantive programs that will help Florida lose its claim to the high rate of teen pregnancy.

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Reps. Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Ileana Ros-Lehiten (R-FL) and in the Senate by Sens. Durbin (D-IL) and Gordon Smith (R-OR) gives the U.S. tools to cut off funds to Iran's nuclear program and prohibits U.S. nuclear cooperation with those aiding Iran's atomic efforts. In addition, the House has passed the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act of 2007 which authorizes state and local governments to divest from companies investing in Iran's petroleum and natural gas sector and protects fund managers who divest from such companies from potential lawsuits. The legislation was

introduced in the House by Reps. Barney Frank (D-MA) and Christopher Shays (R-CT) and is sponsored in the Senate by Sens. Barack Obama (D-IL) and Sam Brownback (R-KS). **Ask your Senators to cosponsor these bills. Capitol switchboard 202-224-3121**

On March 25, King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud announced that he will organize an interfaith conference involving Christians, Muslims and Jews. The king said he hopes the interfaith dialogue will "prevent the rapid decline

in morals and traditional family values rampant in society, and restore loyalty and caring as guiding principles in our world." The Saudi Arabian News Agency reported that senior Muslim leaders authorized the idea and consultations would be made with Islamic religious authorities from other countries. The King went on to say that, "with God's help we will meet our brethren from other religions, including those who believe in the Torah and in the Gospel, in order to find ways to defend humanity." (*Jerusalem Post*, 3/25/08)