

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

March 25, 2009

On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

During a recent meeting with a small group of JAC Annual Meeting participants, Senator Barbara Boxer asked JAC to

take the lead in gathering support for US ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). As a key subcommittee chair on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Boxer is well positioned to address human rights violations. Until the US ratifies the treaty, she lacks the official validation to go after the violators.

The US is the only industrialized democracy that has not ratified this treaty. Ratification has been blocked by pressure from groups that claim -- erroneously -- this treaty will promote abortion, "radical feminist agendas," and give too much power to the international community to supersede U.S. federal and state law. In fact, if ratified in the US, CEDAW would help efforts to enhance U.S. laws with respect to violence against women, access to legal protections, and other human rights.

Those present at the Boxer meeting, brought her message to the entire Conference. A discussion ensued and the democratic process worked its will. By a vote of the members present, it was agreed JAC will take the lead as advocates for ratification of this treaty and the protections it will afford.

We are seeking donations that will go toward building a coalition and doing the necessary advocacy, including an online campaign for this initiative. Personal checks to JAC in any amount are welcome and needed. Enclosed is an envelope for your convenience. (Donations will go to JAC, the 501c4 advocacy group).

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Israel

On March 24, the Labor Party voted 58%-42% to join the Likud-led coalition government, virtually assuring that Benjamin Netanyahu will be Israel's next prime minister. With center-left Labor in his corner, Netanyahu would have a ruling majority of 66 seats in the 120 member Knesset. He could still widen the margin before the April 3 deadline to form a government. According to HaAretz, Benjamin Netanyahu's "package of temptation for Labor was so bountiful that it is not clear whether the party will have enough people to man all the positions." The deal gives the party five cabinet posts, including two of the most senior - Defense Minister and Trade and Industry Minister. Ehud Barak will retain his post as Defense Minister.

The new administration in Israel is committed to working toward the formation of a comprehensive regional arrangement for peace and for economic cooperation in the Middle East and would honor all national and international agreements that were signed by former Israeli governments. The plan states "that the government would work toward achieving peace agreements with all of its neighbors and that the defense minister would be a full partner in the peace process and a member of any limited forum for decision-making in the diplomatic, security and economic fields." The coalition deal also includes a "sort of economic rescue plan," with funding for retraining for different professions, day care for working women's children, investment in factories and a commitment not to cut salaries in the public sector.

The United States, Israel and other Western countries continue to be worried about a nuclear armed Iran. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton returned from her recent trip to the Middle East convinced that this worry is shared by many Arab leaders. "There is a great deal of concern about Iran from this whole region. It

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United States

CHOICE

From 2005-2006, the birthrate among 15-19-year-olds rose 3.4%. That increase continued into the following year with the rate increasing another 1.4%, from 2006-2007. Prior to 2005, there had been a 14 year decline. The increase has fueled an intense debate over federal funding for sex-education programs that focus on encouraging abstinence until marriage. Opponents say the findings provide new evidence that "abstinence only" education is ineffective and "that the money should be shifted to programs that include educating young people about contraceptives." Abstinence programs had been receiving about \$176 million in federal funding each year. The FY 2009 budget cut about \$14 million. White House spokesman Reid H. Cherlin called the birthrate statistics "highly troubling." "President Obama is committed to reducing the number of unintended pregnancies in this country...the president has supported abstinence programs if they are a part of a comprehensive, age-appropriate and evidence-based effort to reduce teen pregnancy." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi wants to eliminate funding for abstinence-only programs entirely, calling them "bad policy and dangerous to the health of young women." (Washington Post, 3/19/09; CQ Weekly 3/2/09)

Indiana state Sen. Patricia Miller (R-Indianapolis) has introduced Senate Bill 89 which would require doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at a hospital. "A woman who has an abortion deserves to be able to follow up with that physician at a local hospital if complications arise." Seven physicians perform abortions in Indiana and only one Marion County doctor has admitting privileges at a hospital. Planned Parenthood is concerned that Bill 89 would further restrict the number of doctors performing abortions. Statewide, about 10,000 abortions each year are performed at nine clinics in five counties. Three of the facilities, in Gary, South Bend and Fort Wayne are served by an Illinois physician.

Research & Races

2010 HOUSE RACES

It's 19+ months until the 2010 mid-term elections, but not too early to look at what could be some of the top races.

House members who win with less than 55% are considered vulnerable and targets by the opposition party in the next cycle. The GOP will be taking aim at the following JAC-supported freshman Democrats in 2010.

Idaho 1 -- Former Rep. Bill Sali (R) has already signed up for a rematch with Rep. **Walt Minnick** (D). National Republicans would like to see another candidate in a district where demographics definitely favor the GOP. Minnick's win was helped by Sali's abrasive personality and the national mood for change, even in a state that gave its electoral votes to McCain. Minnick is very aware of the constituency he represents, voting against the stimulus and not supporting the proposed budget.

Michigan 7 -- Democrat **Mark Schauer** barely edged out former GOP Rep. Tim Walberg. Walberg had won this seat in 2006, defeating GOP Rep. Joe Schwarz in a bitter primary battle. Walberg was too conservative for this district that had been represented by moderate Republicans for 14 years. Obama's win in Michigan

helped Schauer, but keeping this seat in a non-presidential cycle will be very difficult.

Michigan 9 -- Freshman Democrat **Gary Peters** defeated 8 term GOP incumbent Joe Knollenberg in this suburban Detroit district with a large Jewish population. Knollenberg's record on Israel related issues was good, but he was not in sync with the community on domestic issues. As is true in Schauer's district, the mid-term election will be difficult and Michigan Republicans are looking for a strong challenger to Peters.

Nevada 3 -- Democrat **Dina Titus** defeated incumbent GOP Rep. Jon Porter with 47.4%. Republicans want this seat back and will be willing to put money and physical effort into Nevada where they also hope to defeat Democratic Senate Majority Leader **Harry Reid**. Nevada's population continues to surge so it is too early to know how the demographics will play out.

New Jersey 3 -- Freshman **John Adler** (D) won this open suburban Philadelphia seat with 51.7%. It had been held by GOP Rep. Jim Saxton for 24 years. Adler was a state Senator representing a large portion of the district and had declared his intention to run even before Saxton announced his retirement. New Jersey Republicans are

looking for a high profile candidate to challenge Adler.

JAC will carefully watch the following sophomores who won with less than the 55% benchmark:

Arizona 5 -- Democrat **Harry Mitchell** defeated Maricopa County Treasurer David Schweikert (R) with 53.2%. Schweikert says he is looking "to exact revenge." Schweikert had a tough September primary which helped Mitchell come out ahead.

Arizona 8 -- **Gabrielle Giffords** (D) defeated GOP state Senate President Tim Bee with 54.7%. Bee should have been an even tougher opponent but his campaign never really took off. There is no clear demographic leader in this district.

New York 24 -- Democrat **Michael Arcuri** squeaked by Republican businessman Richard Hanna with 51.4%. This was an open seat in '06 when Arcuri won with 54%. Arcuri was the first Democrat to represent the district in nearly 60 years.

Wisconsin 8 -- **Steve Kagen** (D) won this northern Wisconsin district with 54% against state House Speaker John Gard (R). Kagen defeated Gard in '06 with 51% when this was an open seat. This will never be an easy race.

Separation of Religion and State

JAC members were privileged to have a White House briefing during the recent annual conference. As part of the briefing, Joshua DuBois, a Pentecostal minister who is the new executive director for the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, spoke to the group. President Obama has left untouched five executive orders and numerous agency regulations and rulings that

allow publicly funded religious groups to discriminate in hiring on religious grounds and permit public funds to pay for construction and renovation of buildings used for worship. DuBois insists that the president "is still very much committed to clear constitutionality and legality in the program...he's committed to non discrimination." But, when asked why these orders have not been repealed, DuBois said

that they are carefully reviewing all of the rulings but would not set any time line or plan for removing the discriminatory measures. Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) thinks the president is wavering. "Based on what he said, we thought the issue had been resolved. You'll have to ask them why they think it's all right to discriminate." (*Church and State*, March 2009)

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is clear Iran intends to interfere with the internal affairs of all these people and try to continue its efforts to fund terrorism, whether it is Hizballah or Hamas or other proxies." (Near East Report) George Mitchell, U.S. special envoy to the region, said every Arab official he has spoken with has

brought up the threat of Iran. Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, has called on the Arab world to "come up with a strategy for dealing with the Iranian challenge." And Egypt's foreign minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, has accused Iran "of manipulating Arab states to increase its influence in the

region." While countries met in Cairo to raise money for the Palestinian Authority, Iran held its own conference in Tehran to raise money for Hamas. PA President Mahmoud Abbas responded publicly, "Iran needs to take care of its own issues and stay away from intervening in Palestinian affairs."