

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

April 25, 2009

On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

At the Holocaust Days of Remembrance ceremony in Washington last week, President Obama gave a stirring speech. Marked

by his characteristic optimism, it was not based on a rose-colored view of the world, but on the idea that if you take action to right wrongs, good can triumph over evil. The President told the story of the citizens of Chambon, France who saved 5000 Jews, one life saved for each resident of the small village. The author of a book on the rescue found that those he interviewed were baffled by his interest. "We were doing what had to be done," they said.

The President paid tribute to those who saved Jews at their own peril. "[N]o one is born a savior or a murderer -- these are choices we each have the power to make.... [N]o one can make us into bystanders without our consent..."

This message is relevant to what we have been doing at JAC for nearly thirty years. We are watchdogs over matters that affect us personally and, in the spirit of tikkun olam, we address grievances that affect others.

What it takes for injustice to spread, said the President, is for justification to replace conscience and "the willingness of those who are neither perpetrators nor victims to accept the assigned role of bystander, believing the lie that good people are ever powerless...that we do not have a choice."

Striving to live up to the President's inspiring words, we have chosen to "fight the silence that is evil's greatest co-conspirator" and "renew our resolve to do what must be done."

✪ Israel

Sec. of State Hillary Clinton told the House Foreign Affairs Committee on April 22 that the United States will not deal with or fund a Palestinian government that includes Hamas unless the Palestinians agree to three international conditions - renouncing violence, recognizing Israel and agreeing to follow the previous obligations of the Palestinian Authority. "We want to leave the door open" to including Hamas, Clinton said. "From everything we hear, there is no intention on the part of Hamas to meet these conditions, but these are not just American conditions. These are the conditions that were adopted by the quartet."

Secretary Clinton also told the committee that the United States is laying groundwork for new sanctions against Iran if outreach efforts to Tehran on its nuclear program fail to bring results. Clinton's remarks were in response to Committee Chairman Howard Berman's statement, "I cannot get away from the fact that Iran's efforts to acquire a nuclear-weapons capability keep going ahead, and that this engagement cannot be so open ended that we essentially pass the threshold that we are seeking to avoid by virtue of the engagement." Clinton responded that the administration is operating on two tracts, offering dialogue but also preparing for additional punitive action. "As the President said in his inaugural address, we will hold out our hand-they have to unclench their fist. But we are also laying the groundwork for the kind of tough, crippling sanctions that might be necessary in the event our offers are either rejected or the process is inconclusive or unsuccessful." (*VOA News*, 4/23/09) The new Israeli government has said that it will not move forward on the major issues of peace talks with the Palestinians "until it sees progress in U.S. efforts to stop Iran's suspected pursuit of a nuclear weapon and limit Tehran's rising influence in the region." Former ambassador to the United States and now Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel

🇺🇸 United States

CHOICE

The Indiana House has passed Senate Bill 89 requiring doctors who perform abortion procedures to have admitting privileges at a hospital. As explained in last month's Newsbreak, this could severely curtail the number of abortions performed in the state. Of the state's seven doctors who perform abortions, only one has admitting privileges, according to Planned Parenthood. The House legislation also requires doctors to inform a patient before the procedure that the fetus might feel pain. Rep. Gail Riecken (D-Evansville) said the bill is an "underhanded way of trying to stop abortions...I cannot accept a bill that under the surface is a pathway denying women control over their own bodies." Indiana Right to Life lobbyist Sue Swayze claims the bill is about patient safety. "Abortion is a legal procedure, and what we are talking about is what happens afterward in the instance that there are complications." The bill now moves back to the Senate.

Anti-abortion groups in 18 states have won approval for specialized license plates with the tagline, "Choose Life." According to the Associated Press, the plates raise "unresolved issues." A federal judge in Illinois rejected the plates finding them politically controversial and discriminatory. In Arizona, the 9th U.S. Circuit found the state's decision to reject the "Choose Life" message, discriminatory. The 4th U.S. Circuit Court in Richmond told South Carolina officials that they could not approve the plates without also allowing abortion-rights plates. And, New Jersey Asst. Attorney General Andrea Silkowitz argued that her state rejected the "Choose Life" plate because New Jersey law limits designs to group names and logos, and does not permit slogans. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the Arizona case last fall but Illinois is expected to appeal later this year.

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Research & Races

Minnesota Senate -- After numerous recounts and a three month trial, a judicial panel declared Democratic challenger **Al Franken** the winner by 312 votes. But, GOP Sen. Norm Coleman has appealed to the Minnesota Supreme Court, asking that a number of previously challenged absentee votes be counted. If Coleman loses on the state level, he could continue in the federal courts.

Special Election IL-05 -- The newest member of the House is Cook County Commissioner Mike Quigley who was elected to the seat formerly held by White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel. Quigley won a crowded primary in this heavily Democratic district and then defeated his Republican opponent with 73% on April 7.

2010 SENATE RACES

Connecticut -- Sen. **Chris Dodd** is considered one of the two most vulnerable Democratic senators running for

reelection. Dodd, as chairman of the Senate Banking committee, is being blamed for not anticipating the banking crisis. He is also accused of not doing his job and for moving to Iowa (before that state's primary) during his brief run for the Presidency. Former US Rep. Rob Simmons and st. Sen. Sam Caligiuri will vie for the GOP nomination. Dodd trails both Republican challengers in current polls.

Illinois -- Sen. Roland Burris is the other most vulnerable Democratic senator. The controversy over Burris' appointment by indicted former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, has made it difficult for Burris to raise money. Several names from both parties continue to be mentioned as possible challengers: Reps. **Jesse Jackson, Jr.**, and **Jan Schakowsky**, former Sec. of Commerce (and the Mayor's brother) Bill Daley, and st. Treas. Alexi Giannoulas. On the GOP side are Reps. **Mark Kirk** and Peter Roskam.

Kentucky -- GOP Sen. Jim Bunning could face both a primary challenge and top tier opposition in his race for a third term. Attorney General Jack Conway and Lt. Gov. Daniel Mongiardo will battle each other for the Democratic nomination. Mongiardo came close to unseating Bunning in 2004, losing 51% to 49%. Bunning's fundraising efforts have been terrible so far. St. Sen. President David Williams and Sec. of State Trey Grayson are both considering primary challenges.

Pennsylvania -- GOP Sen. **Arlen Specter** will face primary challenges on the right from former GOP Rep. Patrick Toomey and activist Peg Luksik. Democratic st. Rep. Bill Kortz and former National Constitution Center CEO Joseph Torsella have said they plan to run in the Democratic primary. St. Rep. Josh Shapiro and US Rep. **Allyson Schwartz** have not ruled out running.

Right Wing Watch

The Faith and Freedom Institute was formed to "combat satanic wickedness in order to return America to a foundation of Biblical principles." Dr. Gary Dull, pastor of the Faith Baptist Church of Altoona, Pennsylvania, has joined with other ministries to fill the "possible vacuum of power in evangelical leadership" following the retirement of James Dobson from Focus on the

Family. "America was founded with a spiritual basis, but there are those who want to make it a purely secular nation...Because of the rejection of God and His values, we can expect nothing but His judgment...All one needs to do is to read in history and find out how that when a nation forgot God, God forgot the nation." Dull blames economic failure and what he calls moral decline

on abortion and same-sex marriage. The Institute's mission is to educate Americans on the Christian values on which the country was founded. The Institute will begin a radio talk show, "Sound of the Trumpet" this summer and hopes to host a pastor's conference in the Fall. (People for the American Way, *Right Wing Watch*)

Separation of Religion and State

Two parents and their third graders filed suit in late March against the St. Johns County School District, St. Augustine, Florida. For the past few months, students at the Webster School had practiced "In God We Still Trust" to be performed at the end-of-the-year assembly. Students could choose between practicing or sitting out the entire performance. Defense attorneys said the song had been removed from

the program after the parents first complained, but "even if it hadn't been, past court rulings on religious songs in schools deemed it appropriate." However, U.S. District Judge Harvey E. Schlesinger ruled in the plaintiff's favor. "In God We Still Trust" is a "song overtly espousing a specific religious viewpoint and attacking of those who do not share in the same belief." The judge also wrote that "as

third graders, the younger plaintiffs are more easily influenced by their teachers and extremely sensitive to signs of disapproval and disappointment from the same teachers and classmates." The judge threw out affidavits signed by the principal and the two teachers in which they denied telling students they had to choose between performing the song and sitting out the recital. (*The St. Augustine Record* 4/16/09)

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Ayalon told the Washington Post, "It's a crucial condition if we want to move forward...If we want to have a real political process with the Palestinians, then you can't have the Iranians undermining and sabotaging." According to the Post article, U.S. officials are wary of linking the two issues and would

like to use progress in the Israeli-Palestinian talks as a way to curb Iranian influence. President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu are expected to meet in Washington next month. Martin Indyk, director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institute and a former peace

negotiator says, "Netanyahu expects Obama to say that in order to be effective with Iran, we need to manage the Palestinian track as well...Netanyahu is expecting that when he says, 'Iran, Iran, Iran,' Obama will say, 'Palestine, Palestine, Palestine'." (*Washington Post*, 4/22/09)