

# JAC NEWSbreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

April 19, 2012

## On my mind this month...



Gail Yamner

Pack American Crossroads, Restore our Future, Priorities USA, Americans for Prosperity into one large bundle and what do you have? Billions

of dollars that Americans could use for creating jobs, improving lives and building a better future. Instead these SuperPACs, comprised of unnamed individuals who are not permitted by law to coordinate with candidates, spend their time and money distorting and discrediting opponents.

While federal, state and local governments struggle to pay salaries, build roads and educate children, super-PACs easily raise millions of dollars. These deep-pocketed donors surely expect a quid pro quo for their largesse. The impact of these cash cows shows up after elections in legislation.

The first sign of Citizens United's power was influence peddling in statehouses and Congress after 2010. Their primary target was women's health care followed closely by a public debate about religion. Religious rights were a weapon used to justify the right to deny women basic health care and contraceptive costs paid by work insurance. But we also saw the air we breathe threatened as these forces voted against clean air laws and our safety undermined by the NRA. What will the next round of cash cost?

Here's an idea. Limit the money that can be spent on campaigns. Every dollar over that amount goes into the public coffers to fund social programs and even reduce the deficit. Then we can restore our future by offering all Americans prosperity and the crossroad we choose will reset our priorities for a vibrant USA.

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## Israel

Ambassador Dennis Ross spoke to the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Chicago on April 18th. His wide ranging talk touched on the unprecedented relationship between the US and Israel on issues of security and cooperation, Iran, and the peace process. He spoke at length on the subject of Iran which he views as the top concern of both Israel and the United States.

Ross said the depth and frequency of conversations between Israel and the US has never occurred before.

The US National Security Advisor went to Israel to meet with Netanyahu and held talks over many hours and many days. US officials have met and strategized with their Israeli counterparts and all agree that there is no discrepancy between the two governments' assessments of the threat that Iran poses. Both countries agree that Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapon and everything must be done to thwart that effort.

President Obama has consistently stated that it is unacceptable for Iran to have nuclear weapons capability and has taken a long view on the problem. This administration has chosen the diplomatic route to blocking the Iranian nuclear weapons program. The whole world is watching as the US tries to persuade Iran to act responsibly. Ambassador Ross believes diplomacy is working: that the Iranians are now coming to the table because Iran is feeling the pressure of tough multilateral sanctions, international boycotts, the cutoff from global financial transactions and the denial of insurance coverage for their ships. Ross emphasized that "great pressure" has worked before and could work again if the cost is too great for Supreme Leader Khamenei to bear. The Iranian currency has lost 50% of its value and the pressure is beginning to mount inside and outside of Iran. Still there is no assurance the Iranians will make the right decision.

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## United States

### REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Last week the Senate Judiciary committee voted along party lines to refuse the re-authorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). VAWA was once a broadly bipartisan bill that had been easily reauthorized.

VAWA, a landmark bill, authored by then-Senator Joseph Biden and signed into law in 1994, revolutionized the way violent crimes against women are prosecuted and prevented, and the way communities respond to survivors. This act created the first federal legislation acknowledging domestic violence and sexual assault as crimes. The law has improved, protected, restored and saved lives. The Reauthorization Act S 1925, introduced by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Mike Crapo (R-ID), was the result of more than 2 years of work by a coalition of over 300 advocacy groups. This law provides for enhanced training for law enforcement, fortifies criminal justice responses to sexual assault, supports domestic violence agencies and provides funding for programs addressing rape kit availability. (The HILL, Congress blog 3/12) The bill this year was expanded to include same-sex couples, Native Americans and illegal immigrants as well as expanding the definition of violence against women. This latest Senate version of the bill had five Republican co-sponsors but it failed to get a single Republican vote in the Judiciary Committee. (NY Times 4/12)

Janice Shaw Crouse, a senior fellow at the conservative Concerned Women for America pressed senators hard to oppose reauthorization of VAWA as she called it a "boondoggle" that vastly expands government. Phyllis Schlafly called VAWA a slush fund that promotes "divorce, breakup of marriage and hatred of men." (NY Times 4/16/12)

According to the Religious Action Center about 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year and

(Reproductive Rights, continued on page two)

# Research & Races

## 2012 SENATE ELECTIONS

The results of this cycle's Senate elections will determine whether Democrats can hold their majority and maintain their firewall against the GOP's agenda. Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) controls whether or not legislation passed by the House even reaches the floor of the Senate. Currently, Democrats hold 51 seats with 2 Independents who almost always vote with the Democrats. Republicans hold 47 seats. The GOP needs a net gain of only 4 seats to take over majority control. Six Democratic Senators and 1 Independent – Akaka (HI), Nelson (NE) Bingaman (NM), Conrad (ND), Webb (VA), Kohl (WI) and Lieberman (CT) – are retiring, leaving those 7 seats Open. Only 3 Republican Senators – Kyl (AZ), Snowe (ME) and Hutchison (TX) are retiring. Republicans think they can pick up some or all the open seats except Connecticut (Lieberman retiring). Democrats believe the stature of their candidate in Arizona gives them the edge there. Independent candidate Angus King is leading in Maine. Texas strongly favors the GOP. The picture for Democrats is bleak: they have 16 seats to defend; Republicans have only 7. Five of the Democratic incumbents face difficult races.

In *Virginia*, JAC is supporting former Gov. Tim Kaine (D) in a race against

George Allen, the senator (also former governor) defeated in '06 by Jim Webb, who is vacating this seat.

JAC has also contributed to all five endangered incumbent Democrats. Without your help, these friends – and our agenda – could be sent packing.

**Florida** – Senator Bill Nelson will face the winner of a 5-person GOP primary on August 14. The leading candidates are appointed Sen. George LeMieux and Rep. Connie Mack. Both LeMieux and Mack have good voting records on Israel but 100% negative on Choice and Separation. Nelson has been a consistently positive vote on all JAC's issues through both his House and Senate tenures.

**Michigan** – Senator Debbie Stabenow is an old friend of JAC's from her days in the House. She now chairs the powerful Agriculture Committee. Stabenow has always supported Israel and Separation and has been especially outspoken on women's issues. There are eight declared Republican candidates led by former Rep. Peter Hoekstra and former American Family Association President Gary Glenn.

**Missouri** – First-term Senator Claire McCaskill is the most vulnerable of the Democratic incumbents seeking re-

election. Missouri has voted for both Bush and McCain in recent presidential elections. McCaskill defeated GOP Sen. Jim Talent in 2006 in a very close race. She is an excellent vote on JAC's issues and a tireless and effective campaigner. She will face the winner of an 8-person GOP primary on August 7 and a battle to the finish-line after that.

**Montana** – Freshman Senator Jon Tester won in 2006 with 49%. A rancher who returns to Montana when he is needed to help with planting or taking care of livestock, Tester doesn't fit the mold of most Washington lawmakers. He will face Rep. Dennis Rehberg, who votes negatively on Choice and Separation and is closely tied in with Montana's mining interests. Tester's values and votes align with JAC.

**Ohio** – Senator Sherrod Brown is a progressive advocate for recession-em-battled Ohioans and a rock-solid vote on JAC's issues. His challenger, Ohio State Treasurer Josh Mandel, is Jewish and a staunch conservative. Mandel is not pro-choice and he has pledged to repeal the Affordable Care Act. He is expected to draw votes in the Jewish community where Brown has always had strong support. Brown's excellent record on Israel, choice and separation has earned him JAC support since his days in the House.

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## **Reproductive Rights, continued from page one**

one in four women in the US has experienced domestic violence in her lifetime. VAWA would protect women against domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. JAC agrees with Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) who was quoted as saying that the right to live in peace, free from abuse, fear and violence is universal, yet threats to this basic right can be found across lines of race, class and even gender.

On the abortion front, Arizona just passed very restrictive laws. Arizona

is one of many states that are part of what the Guttmacher Institute refers to as a "hostile state" towards women's reproductive rights. More than half of the women in America of reproductive age live in hostile states. (*Guttmacher Policy Review*) Arizona's new law bans most abortions after 20 weeks. Gov. Jan Brewer (R) says that this new law strengthens Arizona's laws protecting the health and safety of women and recognizes the precious life of the preborn baby. The 20-week ban would put women who have at-risk pregnancies in perilous situations.

They would have to decide to continue with their pregnancies before they have all the relevant information about their pregnancy and viability of the fetus. (Center for Reproductive Rights) The 20-week mark will now legally begin from the end of a woman's last period before conception, the earliest delineation in American legislation. (*Daily Beast* 4/12) The new law also requires state officials to host a website with images of fetuses at various stages of development for women to view. (*LA Times* 4/16/12)

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## **Israel, continued from page one**

Ross observed that every Arab nation "knows" Israel has nuclear weapons, but they are not afraid that Israel would use them except as a last ditch solution. The same Arab nations greatly fear a nuclear armed Iran and believe the only defense would be to have nuclear weapons of their own.

On the subject of military intervention against Iran, Ross spoke of two different timetables based on geography and military power. Israel must act sooner because militarily it is not as strong as the US. Ehud Barak talks of the 'zone of immunity' which is the time that Israel could mount an attack singlehand-

edly. Israel has more exposure because of its location, but the US has military superiority.

Within Israel, there is great debate on when/if to attack Iran. However, there is no debate on the danger that Iran poses if they do possess the weapons.