

# JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

May 27, 2009

## On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

President Obama met recently with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and, despite the dire warnings of the media, the two had a warm and productive discussion. Some predicted that the meeting would reveal tensions between the two leaders. Speculation was that Obama would be pushing the creation of a Palestinian state on a rejectionist Netanyahu and the Israeli Prime Minister would be pushing US support for a war with Iran. Instead, despite some differences, both men emphasized their common interest in thwarting Iran's nuclear ambitions and working toward implementation of the principles outlined in the Roadmap. Too bad the Press likes to manufacture controversy. It's like crying wolf.

Now that President Obama has nominated Judge Sonia Sotomayor for the Supreme Court, hard right organizations are raising money and talk radio hosts are itching for a fight. Given her compelling personal story and lengthy judicial resume, it is expected that her nomination will be confirmed by the Senate, but not until she has been thoroughly scrutinized. People for the American Way and NOW have endorsed her nomination. NARAL applauds "her distinguished record" and is calling upon the Senate to give Sotomayor "a fair hearing" that will "include questions about Roe v. Wade." Church-state watchdog Americans United asks the Judiciary Committee to "thoroughly question [Sotomayor] to determine her views on church-state separation." As information becomes available, it will be posted on the JAC website. It will be important for us to let the Senate Judiciary Committee and our Senators know how we feel about the choice. Our strong relationships on Capitol Hill mean our voices will be heard.

## Israel

On May 20, Iran test fired a medium range solid-fuel missile capable of striking Israel and U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf region. U.S. officials confirmed the launch and said that Iran fired a similar missile last year. The ability to build a solid-fuel rocket suggests an increasing sophistication in Iran's missile program. Experts say that solid-fuel rockets can be launched faster and are more mobile than liquid-fuel rockets. "We send them a message: Today the Islamic Republic of Iran is running the show," said Iranian President Ahmadinejad. Israel said after the launch that Europe and the United States should share Israel's goal of stopping Iran's missile program. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon told Israel Radio, "If anybody had a doubt, it is clear the Iranians are playing with fire."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Barack Obama on May 18. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitments to seeking a comprehensive Middle East peace. Obama declared that "Israel's security is paramount," and Netanyahu said he wanted to move forward in negotiations with the Palestinians. Obama has called on Arab states "to be more supportive and bolder in seeking potential normalization with Israel," and said he would personally deliver that message to both Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Abbas is coming to the White House May 28. This meeting is as much about bolstering Abbas as it is about strategy. Abbas' term as PA President expired four months ago. He is heading a fractured government and a fractured political party. Talks about a Hamas-Fatah unity government have gone nowhere. Abbas was a longtime aide to Yasser Arafat and his credibility is often questioned, as is his ability to negotiate with Israel. Abbas' supporters and critics both say that if progress is not made soon, his hold on power could collapse. The issue of a nuclear Iran was Netanyahu's

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## United States

### CHOICE

A Gallup Poll released on May 15 reported that a majority of adults, 51%, consider themselves "pro-life," whereas 42% consider themselves "pro-choice." Gallup noted that, as recently as last year, 50% of respondents called themselves "pro-choice" and 44% identified themselves as "pro-life." Mark Mellman, a political analyst and pollster for Democrats, says the poll is flawed. In a large national survey conducted by Mellman, fewer than half of respondents defined the term "pro-choice" in a way connected to the abortion debate. Only 28% made reference to abortion. Another 20% offered a vague definition and the other half responded, "having the choice to change your mind if you want to - about anything." Nearly a third of those questioned who called themselves "pro-life" reject the view that the government should be involved in a woman's decision and legislate additional legal restrictions on the availability of abortion. Mellman says that Roe v. Wade is at the heart of the public policy debate. A week after Gallup's poll, CNN and Opinion Research defined the decision this way: "The 1973 Roe v. Wade decision established a woman's constitutional right to an abortion at least in the first three months of pregnancy." Sixty-eight percent wanted to keep Roe in place. Just 30% supported overturning Roe.

President Obama gave the commencement address May 17th at the University of Notre Dame, a Catholic University that supports the Church's position against abortion. Anti-abortion demonstrators protested outside while there were a few hecklers inside. The President directly confronted the issue by calling for "open hearts, open minds, fair minded words." The President has tried not to make abortion a priority issue. The Notre Dame invitation and the pending retirement of Justice David Souter, who voted to uphold abortion rights on the Supreme Court, have pushed the issue to the forefront. (NY Times, 5/18/09)

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## Research & Races

### SPECIAL ELECTIONS

**NY-20** -- Democratic businessman Scott Murphy defeated Republican Jim Tedisco with 50.1%. Murphy succeeds Democrat Kirsten Gillibrand, who was appointed to fill the seat formerly held by now Secretary of State **Hillary Rodham Clinton**. Democrats and Republicans are nearly even in voter registration, with the GOP having a slight edge.

**CA-32** -- On May 19, Judy Chu (D) the vice chairwoman of the California State Board of Equalization, took 32% of the vote in an all-party primary to replace former Rep. (and now Secretary of Labor) **Hilda Solis** (D). The demographics of this district favor Democrats so Chu is now the overwhelming favorite to win the July 14 special election.

### SENATE 2010

**California** -- At a breakfast in Chicago last week, Sen. **Barbara Boxer**, running for her fourth term, told at-

tendees that JAC was the first group to support her in her 1982 House race. Although Sen. Boxer looks to be relatively "safe" at this date, the toughness of her race will depend on her opponent. Former Hewlett-Packard CEO and McCain campaign official, Carly Fiorina, is considering a run. If she declares, the race could tighten and will be very costly. Television time in California is extremely expensive.

**Florida-Open seat** -- GOP Gov. Charlie Crist announced that he will run for the open seat being vacated by GOP Sen. Mel Martinez. Former st. House Speaker Marco Rubio had declared his intention to run before Crist and has said he will not pull out. The same is true of former New Hampshire Sen. Bob Smith. There are three declared Democrats at this time: North Miami Mayor Kevin Burns, st. Rep. Dan Gelber, and U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek. Polls show Christ defeating any of the Democrats.

**Missouri-Open seat** -- This race remains a "toss-up," but the GOP could hurt itself with a contested primary. Secretary of State Robin Carnahan is the only declared Democratic candidate. House Minority Whip Roy Blunt is the only announced Republican candidate, but st. Treasurer and '08 Gubernatorial candidate Sarah Steelman is seriously considering the race, as is former Ambassador and Washington University law professor Thomas Schweich. This seat is currently held by 4 term GOP Sen. Kit Bond.

**New Hampshire-Open seat** -- Dem. Rep. **Paul Hodes** is the only declared Democratic candidate, now that Dem. Rep. Carol Shea-Porter announced that she would run for re-election to the House. On the GOP side, several names are being mentioned, including former Sen. John Sununu, former GOP Rep. Charlie Bass, and former GOP Gov. Steve Merrill. JAC supported Hodes who has an excellent voting record on JAC's issues.

## Separation of Religion and State

The Internal Revenue Service has ruled that churches do not risk their tax exempt status for engaging in "traditional values advocacy." The IRS ruled that the Niemoller Foundation of Houston, Texas, did not violate its 501 (c)(3) status when it assembled pastors and politicians "to champion moral issues" during Republican Gov. Rick Perry's 2006 re-election campaign. As long as there is no candidate endorsement or substantial portions of nonprofit budgets spent on lobbying, clergy can engage in political acts such as get out the vote on behalf of issues or values. The IRS decision, conveyed only to the Niemoller Foundation, also applied to Niemoller-sponsored gatherings in Texas and Florida in support of state constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage. Evangelicals considered the decision a major victory. Liberal groups say the ruling will embolden wealthy special inter-

ests who want to funnel money into nonprofits as a backdoor way to drag churches into partisan campaigns." (*Washington Times*, 5/13/09)

For the past eight years, the White House recognized the National Day of Prayer with a service in the East Room. On May 6, President Obama followed previous presidents by signing a proclamation to declare a National Day of Prayer but did not host any events at the White House. The National Day of Prayer Task Force, a conservative Christian group led by Shirley Dobson, the wife of Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, responded by expressing its disappointment at the lack of participation of the Obama administration. "At this time in our country's history, we would hope our president would recognize more fully the importance of prayer."

Congress voted in March to end funding after the 2009-10 academic year for the District of Columbia school voucher program, formally known as the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. President Obama is proposing a compromise which would fund all 1,716 students in the program until they graduate from high school, but would not allow any new students to join the program. The proposal sparked criticism on both sides. The Department of Education recently issued a three year analysis of student achievement under the program and found limited gains in reading and no significant progress in math. Teacher unions and other education groups regard vouchers as a drain on public education. Several hundred voucher and school choice supporters demonstrated, calling on Congress to restore the program.

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top priority in his discussions with Obama. Netanyahu described an Iran with nuclear military capabilities as "the worst danger we face, a threat to Israel's existence, U.S. interests worldwide, and moderate Arab regimes of the Middle East." Obama reiterated his

commitment to engaging Iran in an effort to change its policy and said he expected to know by the end of the year whether Iran was making a "good faith effort to resolve differences.... We're not going to have talks forever.... We're not going to create a situation in which

talks become an excuse for inaction while Iran proceeds with developing a nuclear weapon." If Iran fails to begin serious talks, the administration will shift direction and seek to impose tough sanctions. (*Washington Times*, *AIPAC Update*)