

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

June 25, 2007

On my mind this month...



Jackie Abelman-Cohen

JAC's raison d'être, a pro-Israel PAC with a domestic agenda, was in evidence last week on the House floor. Under debate was the foreign aid appropriations bill. It contains \$2.4b in defense assistance for Israel as well as \$40m in refugee assistance. To borrow a phrase from the current Administration lingo, it was a "slam dunk"; support for Israel in the U.S. Congress is unwavering. So why did the bill pass by a vote of 241-178 with only 16 Republicans in favor? Because it contained an amendment to provide contraceptives to overseas organizations that provide or counsel abortions. Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), a JAC member, has worked tirelessly throughout her entire congressional career supporting reproductive rights at home and abroad. As chair of the subcommittee on foreign operations, she authored the amendment. It does not authorize aid for abortions; it promotes prevention. In an attempt to kowtow to the religious right and appease the Jewish community, the Republican leadership sent a memo to its members advising them to vote against the bill, but at the same time urging them to sign a letter to AIPAC "affirming Republican support for Israel, not withstanding final passage of this bill." President Bush has issued a veto threat if the final bill contains the amendment. In the end Israel will get the funding, but too many poor, uneducated women will end up without reproductive care and too many innocent children will suffer from disease and starvation. Our mission to elect legislators who support a strong U.S.-Israel relationship AND reproductive rights continues.



Israel

A four-way summit featuring Israeli PM Ehud Olmert, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Jordan's King Abdullah II, and PA President Mahmoud Abbas took place at Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt on June 25. The purpose of the meeting was to show high-profile support for the Palestinian Authority. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert played down expectations in advance of the summit, but expressed hope the meeting would provide a basis for renewed peace talks. "An opportunity has emerged to genuinely advance the regional diplomatic process. I do not intend to let this opportunity pass us by." (Haaretz.com, 7/25/07)

The House passed the FY08 Department of State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill on June 22nd. Usually these measures pass by an overwhelming majority. This time the vote was 241-178, with a majority of Democrats favoring and a majority of Republicans opposing. The overall \$34.2 billion spending bill included \$2.4 billion in military aid to Israel and declared America's commitment to help Israel maintain its qualitative military edge in the Middle East. Republicans were urged by their leadership to oppose the overall bill which restores family planning aid to overseas organizations that provide abortions, even though the aid cannot be used for abortions. In a memo to all Republicans instructing them to vote "no," minority leader Rep. John Boehner (R-OH) advised that a letter had been drafted to AIPAC affirming Republican support for Israel funding. (JTA, 6/22/07)

The United States is pressing outgoing Prime Minister Tony Blair of England to become a special envoy to the Middle East, representing the diplomatic quartet - the U.S., U.N., E.U., Russia. Blair would be working to help the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, build the institutions and apparatus necessary for a viable state. The last envoy to represent the quarter was James Wolfensohn, the former World Bank president, who left the post last year after expressing frustration with the lack of progress.



United States

CHOICE

The debate over sex education continues across the country. While eighth-graders in North Clackamas, OR are learning the correct way to put on condoms, students in New Hanover, N.C., are using books that say, "There is not a lot of proof that condoms really work. Would you trust your life to one?" An 11 year old federal program gives grants to states that match 75% of the federal money and use the funds solely to teach abstinence-only sex education. But a congressionally authorized study, released in April, showed that kids who took abstinence-only classes were just as likely to have premarital sex as those who weren't in the classes. A rising number of states still require that abstinence be stressed in sex education but also require that contraception be taught along with abstinence. This year, three states - Colorado, Iowa and Washington - have enacted laws requiring schools that teach sex education to ensure the information is "medically accurate" or science-based." In Minnesota, an education bill with a similar requirement is waiting for the governor's signature and a bill pending in New York would fund similar programs. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), opposes abstinence-only programs. Last fall, California and Maine rejected federal funds because of the restrictions, and since then governors in another seven states - Connecticut, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Wisconsin - have decided not to re-apply for the money, saying that the regulations had gotten too strict. The "sex education landscape" has changed significantly since last November's elections. Washington state Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen who successfully sponsored a comprehensive sex education bill said, "I think that enough people have realized that we're living in a very different world with young people who are exposed to so much, and you really cannot keep your kids in a closet...Ignorance is not bliss. Being ignorant is not acceptable." (Detroit Free Press, 6/5/07)

Choice, continued on reverse side

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Research & Races

Senate 2008

Several longtime friends of JAC who now hold leadership positions or chair important committees face re-election in 2008. Although it is early in the cycle and challengers to the incumbents have not been determined, support for these Senators is crucial to their victory. Successful fundraising in the early months often discourages opponents and hurts the opposing party's recruiting efforts. The list is alphabetical by state - more next month.

Delaware - Joseph Biden (D) is in his 6th term, having been elected to the Senate just short of his 30th birthday (the age requirement for the Senate). He chairs the important Foreign Relations committee and also sits on the Judiciary committee. Biden is running for President, but has indicated that if he does not get the nomination, he has every intention of running for re-election to the Senate.

Illinois - Richard Durbin (D) is the Majority Whip, the 2nd leadership role in the Senate. He has been a friend of JAC's since first elected to the House in 1982 (one of JAC's first races), shares JAC's concerns and values and is a consistent positive vote on JAC'S issues. Because JAC's headquarters are in Illinois, JAC staff and many

Illinois members have developed a personal relationship with Sen. Durbin and his staff.

Iowa - Tom Harkin (D) chairs the Agriculture committee and also sits on the Appropriations committee. Charter members of JAC recall riding a bus to Iowa to work on Sen. Harkin's House campaigns and his first Senate campaign. He is in his 4th term and continues to be a staunch supporter of JAC issues, including reproductive rights for women, and a broader agenda to repair the tattered social safety net.

Louisiana - Mary Landrieu (D) was first elected in 1996. She sits on the Appropriations and Homeland Security committees and chairs the Ad Hoc subcommittee on Disaster Recov-

ery. Sen. Landrieu continues to fight for the people of New Orleans and Louisiana who still face clean up and rebuilding from Hurricane Katrina. Just this week, the media reported that it is likely that New Orleans could still expect heavy flooding from another serious hurricane. Sen. Landrieu is considered very vulnerable.

Maine - Susan Collins (R) is solidly with JAC on our core issues: Israel, Choice, and Separation of Religion and State. She is running for her 3rd term and is the ranking minority member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee. Sen. Collins has briefed JAC members during our Washington conferences and is always receptive to our requests and visits. This is a targeted race for 2008.

Right Wing Watch

In "The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical America are Winning the Culture War," author Dan Gilgoff, senior editor at U.S. News & World Report, sees Dobson as the Christian Right's "new standard bearer." Rev. Jerry Falwell died last month, Coral Ridge Ministries' head D. James Kennedy is seriously ill, Pat Robertson's

stature has declined and Ralph Reed is tainted by the Abramoff scandal. Dobson's "empire" is based at an 88 acre campus in Colorado Springs, with approximately 1,300 employees and a 75,000 square foot warehouse filled with DVDs, CDs, pamphlets and books. Focus on the Family Action, a political lobbying group, is Dobson's most recent addition to his organiza-

tion. He is also the founder and essentially controls the Family Research Council and a number of state level groups called Family Policy Councils. The combined Focus organization has revenue of \$148.8 million in the last fiscal year. Most of the sum - \$136.6 million - was contributions. Focus also receives revenue from the sale of books, films and other materials.

Separation of Religion and State

The Freedom from Religion Foundation has sued the state of North Dakota to "bar public financing of an association that provides therapeutic and rehabilitative services for troubled youth by steeping them in Christian teachings, Bible readings, religious services and rituals. Children with serious behavioral and emotion problems are committed to the Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, which, according to the ranch's Web site, helps "children

and families succeed in the name of Christ." The ranch is affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The ranch has been providing social services since 1952 and currently serves 124 children in its residential programs and 90 in its day programs. The complaint says that "children are disciplined for refusing to participate in the spiritual aspects of their therapy and that objectionable behavior is

deemed a corruption in the eyes of Jesus Christ." Lisa Bjergaard, director of the Division of Juvenile Services, says she has not seen the complaint but that "the ranch does not coerce children into practicing Christianity...kids can attend church service if they want, but they aren't forced to." The Freedom from Religion Foundation is acting on behalf of three North Dakota taxpayers. (NYTimes, 6/21/07)

Choice, continued

President George W. Bush spoke in a taped message to hundreds of anti-abortion activists at the Right to Life Convention in Kansas City on June 14. In a taped message, he praised the

members as "fearless shepherds of the innocent and the unborn," and listed numerous achievements of his administration including passing a law that bans a particular procedure known as

"partial-birth" abortion. Abortion is a major issue in the presidential race for the National Right to Life Committee, the sponsor of the three day convention.