Israel

Israel and the United States formally signed a new defense aid agreement on August 16. Under the Memorandum of Understanding, the U.S. will transfer $30 billion to Israel over 10 years. This is a 25% rise in U.S. military aid. Israel is scheduled to receive the first pay out of $2.55 billion in October 2008. That sum will grow each year by $150 million, until it reaches $3.1 billion in 2011. In addition, the agreement permits Israel to convert into shekels 26.3% of the aid money, enabling it to procure defense equipment from Israeli companies. The remainder of the aid must be used to purchase equipment from American military industries. As Ron Dermer, Israel’s economic attaché to Washington and a key force behind the agreement, said, “The most important part of the agreement is the message it sends to Israel’s enemies that America remains fully committed to Israel’s security.”

The US is also working on a $20 billion package deal to Saudi Arabia and five Gulf States, and will continue a $13 billion, 10 year military aid package to Egypt as well. At the press conference following the signing, US Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said, “We have not linked our support for the future security of Israel to any other issue… it stands on its own. There is an intrinsic American interest in seeing Israel remain secure and strong in the Middle East.” (Jerusalem Post 8/16/07) House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) who very recently returned from leading an 18 person Democratic delegation to Israel, promised to raise questions about the proposed Saudi arms deal. And, Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA), the deputy minority whip, who also just returned from a 19 member Republican tour of Israel and the Palestinian areas, said “The United States relies on its only democratic ally in the Middle East, and that’s Israel, the only ally that’s in sync with U.S. interests…we ought to make sure our ally in the region maintains a qualitative military edge.” (YNetnews.com)

United States

CHOICE

On August 2, pro-choice Senators defeated an anti-choice amendment to the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) by a vote of 50-49. The amendment would have codified a Bush administration regulation, put in place in 2002, which allows states to make an embryo or a fetus - but not a pregnant woman - eligible for SCHIP. It is important to note that the margin of victory was only one vote and should be a wake-up call and a reminder of how important it is to elect more pro-choice legislators. College students returning to campus this fall will find that the cost of birth control obtained at campus health clinics has more than doubled. Legislation that reduced federal spending by $39 billion made it more expensive for drug makers to participate in Medicaid, the public health program that allowed the companies to offer discounted birth control to colleges for years. Now, health center officials are concerned that many students will stop buying birth control, raising the risk of unintended pregnancies and gravitating health problems treated by contraceptives. “I don’t think people are just going to abstain,” said Candace Wells, assistant director of nursing at Florida State University’s women’s clinic. “That’s not a reality.” (HaroldTri-bune.com 7/31/07)

On the state scene, Texas enacted legislation that prohibits organizations receiving state funds from counseling or referring women for abortion services. The law also prohibits public funding of any entity associated with another entity that provides, counsels, or refers for abortion. And in both Missouri and Pennsylvania, the states continue to provide funding for anti-choice clinics “that do not provide women with access to the full range of reproductive health options.” The Missouri bill was amended to create the Missouri Alternatives to Abortion Public Awareness Program and to prohibit organizations receiving state funds from counseling or referring women for abortion services, the same as the Texas law. The Missouri and Pennsylvania bills were signed by their respective governors in July.

On my mind this month...

An old Scottish prayer asks to be protected from “things that go bump in the night”. It, of course, refers to ghosts. If written today those bumps in the night could be the sounds of the Administration announcing new standards for eligibility for the State Children’s Health Insurance Plan (SCHIP). By way of background, this program provides funds to states that inure children whose parents cannot afford private insurance but make too much money to qualify for Medicaid. As employers reduce family benefits, states have opted to provide SCHIP funds to families making more than the poverty level but still not enough for adequate private insurance. Funding for the program will run out on Sept. 30 unless it is reauthorized. Both the Senate and House passed bills not only reauthorize the program, but add much needed funding to support the approximately 3-5 million children that are still uninsured. President Bush stated he has philosophical problems with the bills and threatened a veto. Then, adding insult to injury, came that bump in the night. Last Friday night, while Congress was in recess, the director for Medicaid and State Operations announced new standards that effectively impede the delivery of funds by the states to families with income above the poverty level. This action gives a whole new meaning to no child left behind. The House did not pass its bill with enough votes to override a veto. That is the consequence of a slim majority and the reason we must continue our efforts to increase that majority in November of 2008. You can reach me at jackieabelman44@aol.com or (202) 364-0044.
The Christian Embassy says it is “a non-political, multi-denominationa…

Senator 2008

This completes the list of JAC supported incumbents running for re-election in 2008.

South Dakota - Tim Johnson (D)

In December, 2006, Sen. Johnson suffered a severe brain hemorrhage. He underwent surgery and has been recovering and receiving therapy since that time. Johnson returned to South Dakota this week and is holding a public event on August 28. Although several of his friends in the Senate have been raising money for his re-election, Johnson has not yet announced his intentions. He would be running for a third term and is considered a vulnerable incumbent, having won with barely 50% in 2002. There are no declared opponents at this time. If Johnson chooses not to run, the likely Democratic candidate is JAC supported Rep. Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin.

West Virginia - John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV (D)

Jay Rockefeller is seeking a 5th term. He chairs the Select Intelligence Committee and sits on the Commerce, Science, & Transportation, Finance, Veterans’ Affairs and Joint Taxation Committees as well. Rockefeller’s voting record on JAC’s issues is excellent and the Senator always honors JAC’s

Research & Races

Separation of Religion and State

The Christian Embassy says it is “a non-political, multi-denominationa…

Federal law requires political committees to report the name, mailing address, occupation and employer for each individual whose contributions aggregate in excess of $200 in a calendar year. According to law, JAC cannot accept corporate contributions. Membership, gifts, or other payments to JAC are not tax deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.