

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

September 25, 2007

On my mind this month...



Jackie Abelman Cohen

As my term comes to an end, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge what an honor it has been to serve as president

of JACPAC. As a die hard political junkie, it has been exhilarating to help elect and work with the JAC supported members of Congress. Equally important was the opportunity it gave me to meet and befriend so many wonderful people across the country.

On October 18, during the JAC Fly-In, I will turn the gavel over to Amy Dean. Space does not allow me to dwell upon the myriad of skills she brings to JAC. Amy is a lawyer, former judge and has deep roots in the Jewish community including national chair of the Women's Young Leadership Cabinet and chair of the Community Relations Committee of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. Equal to her talents is her incredible enthusiasm. In politic speech, she is ready to hit the ground running!

The presidency is changing, but the core mission of JAC remains the same that is was when it was founded 26 years ago. We continue to live in turbulent times both internationally as Israel continues to fight for her very existence and domestically as the Jewish community continues to fight for critical funding for domestic programs. Amy will need your continued commitment and support as we approach the 2008 congressional elections. Thank you for the privilege of serving. I hope to see you on October 18 in Washington.

Israel

ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST Prime Minister Ehud Olmert spoke to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on September 23 as part of a diplomatic overview. He stated that "Israel will definitely make a large-scale withdrawal from the West Bank." Opposition leader Bin-yamin Netanyahu rejected Olmert's statements and told the PM, "You're the only one who genuinely thinks that Abbas is a partner who can keep Israel secure." Olmert responded that refusing to talk to the Palestinians "means an endless cycle of violence." He went on to say that since the Palestinian leadership wants to move forward with the peace process, if Israel won't talk with PA President Mahmoud Abbas and PA Prime Minister Salaam Fayad, there's no one else to talk to. Olmert said that he saw the collapse of the PA unity government as an opportunity to strengthen ties with moderate Palestinian elements. (*Jerusalem Post* online 9/24)

President Bush is scheduled to meet President Abbas this week during the U.N. General Assembly meetings. White House Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe said the meeting will "continue discussions on helping the Palestinian Authority and on issues related to an eventual two-state solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security." The meeting follows a round of talks last week between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Abbas and Olmert. Rice said "Olmert and Abbas had come a very, very long way" since she hosted a "frosty" meeting between them last winter in Jerusalem. (*Reuters* 9/20) According to the *Washington Post* (9/21) Israel's decision to bomb a suspected nuclear site in Syria on September 6 came after Israel shared intelligence with the Bush administration concerning an apparent collaboration between Syria and North Korea. There has been no comment from the administration

Israel, continued on reverse side)

United States

CHOICE

Aurora, Illionis has become the center of the abortion debate. The story began last winter when Gemini Office Development LLC applied to build a 22,000 square foot clinic on land zoned for medical use. The design plans called for surgical rooms and various security features. Construction went forward. In July local newspapers reported that Gemini Office Development was actually a subsidiary of the local Planned Parenthood organization. In early August, the city issued a temporary permit, only requiring more exit signs and that glass be used at the service counters. Abortion opponents organized protests and jammed city council meetings. On September 12, the city capitulated to the protesters and told Planned Parenthood that it would not be allowed to open for business. The following day, Planned Parenthood brought suit in U.S. District Court to block the city's efforts to stop the clinic's opening. September 15 saw hundreds of abortion opponents outside the clinic and for most of the weekend, police officers stood guard at the entrance. Steve Trombley, CEO of Planned Parenthood's Chicago branch, said his group "initially used Gemini to shield the building's contractors from harassment...I was surprised our opponents didn't figure us out sooner - they monitor our every move - we answered every question the city asked...this is about political pressure from anti-abortion groups." Last year, Planned Parenthood provided birth control to about 2.5 million patients nationwide; abortions accounted for only 3% of its services nationally. *The Chicago Tribune*, on September 20, urged U.S. District Judge Charles Norgle "to deny Aurora City officials the right to stop the opening of a Planned Parenthood clinic and to affirm the need to keep affordable women's health care accessible in Aurora, as in other cities and towns."

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Research & Races

Senate 2008: *There have been new developments in the 2008 Senate race outlook since the last Newsbreak. Two are open seats that could offer Democrats pick-up opportunities. The third is a rematch in which the challenger lost by a very small margin in 2002.*

Nebraska - GOP Sen. Chuck Hagel announced his retirement. Since that announcement, three Republicans, including Nebraska attorney general Jon Bruning have declared their intention to run and several other prominent Republicans are considering the race. No Democrats have formally declared, but former U.S. Sen. Bob Kerrey and '06 Congressional nominee Scott Kleeb are often mentioned as possible candidates. Sen. Hagel won his last term with 83% so this race would have to be rated as "lean GOP." At the

same time, a strong Democratic candidate could turn it into a "toss-up."

New Hampshire - This seat is held by incumbent GOP Sen. John Sununu. Sununu was elected in 2002 with 51%. Former Gov. Jeanne Shaheen, has decided to challenge Sununu in a Presidential year that should favor Democrats because of the low approval ratings of President Bush and numerous GOP members of the House and Senate. It is still possible that Gov. Shaheen will have a primary, but two of the previously declared Democratic candidates have already withdrawn in favor of Shaheen.

Virginia - After 5 terms and an uncontested race in 2002, GOP Sen. John Warner has decided not to seek re-election. Former Gov. Mark Warner

is seeking the Democratic nomination and is unlikely to be challenged. On the GOP side, there will be a primary between Rep. Tom Davis and former Gov. Jim Gilmore. Mark Warner's tenure as Governor was very successful. Virginia elected both a Democratic Governor and Democratic Senator in 2004. This race will be a "toss-up."

House 2008: *There are now 10 open Republican House seats and 3 open Democratic seats.*

MA 05 -Rep. Martin Meehan left the House in July to become the chancellor of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. A special election will be held on October 16. Niki Tsongas, widow of Sen. Paul Tsongas won the Democratic primary. She will face ret. Air Force Col. Jim Ogonowski. This is considered a Democratic seat.

Separation of Religion and State

Last month's Newsbreak wrote of the first Jewish-themed publically supported charter school due to open in Hollywood, Florida. Approximately 400 students started classes at Ben Gamla the last week in August. But, until September 11, the school was not allowed to teach Hebrew. The Broward County School Board was con-

cerned that teaching Hebrew would be in violation of the separation between religion and state. Approval on September 11 came with stipulations. Lesson plans must be submitted to the district for approval on a monthly basis. District and school staff must undergo religious studies. "The courses are intended to help educators under-

stand the difference between teaching students about religion and teaching in a way that promotes religion." If this tax payer funded "cultural" school can meet the separation criteria, it could be the forerunner of many other religious themed charter schools around the country. (*Sun-Sentinel.com*, 9/11/07)

Right Wing Watch

Since the 2006 election, newer leaders in the evangelical community are promoting issues such as the environment and poverty in their agenda, while old school leaders do not want to dilute their traditional anti-choice, anti-gay message. James Dobson who heads the huge Focus on the Family organization, has been keeping a low profile, but the organization is still very influential, especially on a state level. Focus's Citizenlink reports that the Family Policy Institute of Washington state is the 32nd state policy

council associated with the parent organization. A similar state council has been started in West Virginia. Both are working to energize their voters for the 2008 elections. "God has brought this organization together..." said John Paulton, of Focus on the Family Action. The West Virginia Values Coalition seeks to create "an army of soldiers" that will lobby to pass laws that the organization considers Biblical-based, such as an anti-gay marriage constitutional amendment. (People for the American Way *Right Wing Watch*).

USA Today reports that a new poll taken by the First Amendment Center shows that 55% of Americans believe "The Constitution establishes a Christian nation." Judge Roy Moore, former chief justice of Alabama, who refused to remove a Ten Commandments monument from the courthouse, says "the Bible is the foundation of U.S. law." He called on Congress to prevent the first Muslim member, Keith Ellison (D-MN), from taking office and spoke out against a Hindu chaplain giving a guest convocation in the U.S. Senate.

Israel, continued

and President Bush refused to answer questions related to the issue at last week's press conference. The *Post* says that the US is "believed to have provided Israel with some corroboration of the original intelligence before Israel proceeded with the raid." Syria and North Korea both denied that they were cooperating on a nuclear program. Unlike its destruction of an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, Israel made no announcement of the raid and

imposed strict censorship on reporting by the Israeli media. Syria made only muted protests following the raid and not much was heard from other Arab leaders. This week, Syrian officials say the Israeli raid "has all but finished off chances for resuming peace talks between the two foes...after this raid, you can forget about peace...."

In a 312-110 vote on September 18, the House passed a bill protecting

travelers from denial of life insurance because they travel to Israel. The measure now needs to be approved by the Senate and signed by the president. "If we allow companies to deny life insurance for legal travel abroad, we give in to those who want to restrict our freedoms. Terrorists such as al-Qaida will not dictate where and if we can travel," said bill sponsor Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL).