

Separation of Religion & State

The Christian-right and Evangelicals are exerting a growing and alarming amount of influence in our country. They have joined forces with local officials to remove books from schools and public libraries. In one Florida county, at least 102 books have been removed from the shelves of school libraries.

A far-right, Christian cellphone company 'took over' four Texas school boards when they found 11 candidates to support. They all won. By fielding candidates and taking control of these boards, they are using their religious views to influence education and public policy.

Forty-five percent of American adults believe the United States should be a "Christian nation," according to the results of a survey by the Pew Research Group. These results threaten religious freedom for all groups as the wall between religion and state erodes.

GOP lawmakers have been pushing waves of bills targeting the LGBTQ+ community. More than 200 bills have been filed this year to limit protections for LGBTQ+ Americans. Florida's "Parental Rights in Education" bill ("don't say gay") banned classroom instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity. A recent law in Texas classifies medical treatments for transgender adolescents as "child abuse" sends the same discriminatory message.

House Republicans have introduced legislation that mimics the Florida bill. But the GOP bill actually goes further. This bill would impact schools and public events and literature at any federally-funded institution.

SCOTUS is getting closer to permitting prayer in school. This year they ruled in favor of allowing a high school football coach to pray on the field after games. Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote that this decision does a disservice "to our Nation's longstanding commitment to the separation of church and state."



Marcia Balonick with Rabbi David Saperstein, former U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and Ellen Weiss at the White House Hanukkah party.

Gun Violence Prevention

In June, President Biden signed the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA). JAC was later at a White House event to celebrate the passage of this landmark gun violence prevention bill.

The BSCA contains many provisions to address the nation's gun violence crises including strengthening background checks. But the act did not ban assault weapons.

Nine days later in Highland Park, IL, steps from JAC's office, a mass shooter killed seven and wounded 48 with an assault weapon at the village's annual July 4th parade. Many of our local members were at the parade with their families and one was even seriously wounded. This horrific event renewed JAC's commitment to fight even harder to end gun violence.



Stacy Rudd with Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) at the White House celebrating the passage of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act

JAC was able to quickly mobilize, rally, and call Members of Congress demanding a ban on assault weapons, the weapon of choice for mass shooters. We held several events with leading Members of Congress, including Reps. Brad Schneider (D-IL) and Robin Kelly (D-IL), to discuss ways to address this issue.



JAC members with Illinois Reps. Robin Kelly & Brad Schneider discussing ways to stop gun violence.

The House passed Rep. David Cicilline's (D-RI) assault weapons ban at the end of July. This was the first vote on the measure in nearly 30 years. The bill now sits in the Senate. In the meantime not a single week has passed without at least four mass shootings.

This December was the 10th anniversary of the Sandy Hook School shooting. Earlier in the year, families of the victims settled a lawsuit with Remington, the maker of the gun used in the school shooting.



A sold-out event to raise money for gun sense candidates co-hosted by HP Strong

Under a law signed by President Bush, gun manufacturers are exempt from liability and accountability in court. This case worked around that law to award the largest amount of damages to date and will hopefully set a precedent for future cases.



JAC members showed up for a gun violence prevention rally in Highland Park, Illinois