On my mind this month...

I pride myself in being an informed citizen, but apparently I am not. In the past two months, I have picked up the Miami Herald (hardly a font of information) and discovered that children in my state have not been allowed to use the “E” word – EVOLUTION. Incredible.

My kids went to private school and I know they were taught about evolution, I even thought the actual word was used, but apparently not. Yesterday, the Florida Board of Education voted to allow the use of the phrase “theory of evolution” in our public schools (private will follow). The fight was over allowing teachers to discuss intelligent design under the guise of what was called the “academic freedom” amendment. Some argued that to prohibit this “freedom” was to allow the “standards that call evolution the fundamental concept underlying all biology” to pass unchallenged. These are code words for let’s teach “creationism” to pass unchallenged.

Florida is not alone on these separation issues. Illinois had a prayer amendment passed last year after it was quietly placed in an unrelated bill.

We must always be vigilant. The Middle Ages can still overtake us. We must always support those who fight the effort to impose one religious belief over another. Notably, one of the Florida Board members voiced concern that they would be lynched if they were teaching evolution. The ongoing rocket attacks total more than 4,000 since Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. The resolution recognizes “the difficult balance Israel faces as the competing pressures of being the primary supplier of numerous necessities for Palestinian civilians, such as fuel, electricity, and medicine, even while rockets are being fired at Israel from Palestinian areas.” It also “calls on all nations, including Egypt, to take affirmative, transparent, verifiable steps to stop the flow of rockets and other terrorism-enabling materials (including human resources) to the Palestinian territories.” There are currently 121 sponsors. (JTA,AIPAC Alert 2/12/08)

The Israeli Cabinet continues to discuss military options to end the firing of missiles from the Gaza Strip. Reports from the Cabinet meeting held on February 10 said that Prime Minister Olmert has instructed the army to continue preparations for a large scale operation in Gaza, but has put the green light on hold. “The policy of killing senior terrorist leaders will also be stepped up, but within limits.” Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak agree on these decisions. (The Media Line, 2/11/08)

The assassination of Hezbollah’s international operations chief, Imad Mughniyeh, was welcome news in Washington, Buenos Aires, Tel Aviv, and according to Middle East scholars and analysts, in Beirut and Baghdad as well. Mughniyeh was implicated in some of the most spectacular terrorist attacks of the 1980s and 1990s, earning him a place on the FBI and EU’s most wanted lists. Syria provided a safe haven for Mughniyeh and

South Carolina GOP state Rep. Greg Delleney has introduced the Right to Life Act, a bill that asserts life begins at fertilization. State Attorney General Henry McMaster says that if the bill becomes law, it would not affect abortion rights protected at the federal level. But supporters say the bill is a step in the right direction should the U.S. Supreme Court overturn Roe v. Wade. “I would like to see South Carolina be the reason Roe v. Wade folds,” said Johnny Gardner, director of the anti-abortion group The Voice of the Unborn. The Right to Life bill has come before the South Carolina House subcommittee four times. Last year, it made it out of the House but died in the Senate. Opponents say this bill is the latest attempt to chisel away at abortion rights in the state. (The State.com 2/15/08)
There are now 29 open House seats currently held by Republicans and
4 open seats held by Democrats. Six vacancies exist in the House,
all of which will be filled within the next two months. JAC is in two of
the races. In CA-12 Jackie Speier (D) hopes to fill the seat of recently
deceased Dem. Rep. Tom Lantos. She is favored to win. Democrat Bill
Foster is running in IL-14 for the seat vacated by GOP Rep. Dennis Hastert
who resigned at the end of 2007. Foster won the special primary on Febru-
ary 5 and will face Jim Oberweis on March 8. These two candidates also
won the regular primary and will face off again on November 4. At that time,
one of them will have the advantage of incumbency. Foster is a scientist
and a businessman making his first run for elective office. He designed
the software equipment that helped JAC-supported Rep. Patrick Murphy
(D-PA) win his seat in 2006. Oberweis is an ultraconservative millionaire
businessman who has twice run unsuccess-
fully for Governor and Senate. Demographically, the district favors
Oberweis, but this is a year that could defy the trends.

More GOP seats may become open during the next few months. The
National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) is having trouble
recruiting top tier candidates to fill these slots. It can be deflating to be in
the minority, especially if you’ve been a committee chair; to be a freshman
minority member is even less appealing. Many state primaries won’t occur
until later this year so the nominees have yet to be selected. Only Illinois
and Maryland have had congressional primaries so far. Ohio and Texas are
scheduled for March 4. As mentioned last month, JAC is in the race with
Dem. John Adler running for the open seat in NJ-3. Adler does not have
primary opposition. And, JAC is in with Dem. Debbie Halvorson in the
open seat in IL-11. She will face New Lenox GOP mayor Tim Baldermann
in November. Other possibilities are both the 1st and 3rd district seats in
New Mexico, open because their cur-
rent representatives are running for the Senate. There are multiple candi-
dates on both sides of these races and JAC stays out of contested primaries,
except when the PAC has already
supported one of the candidates.

Minnesota’s 3rd district could be an
opportunity, as could Arizona’s 1st and
3rd, New Jersey’s 7th, Ohio’s 15th,
and even Wyoming’s at large seat.

If you live in one of these districts
or states, you can aid our research by
keeping us informed of the local buzz
on candidates.

Research & Races

Separation of Religion and State

President George W. Bush has nomi-
nated Richard H. Honaker to the
US District Court for the District of
Wyoming. Mr. Honaker has stated
his belief that public policy decisions
should be based on Christian doctrine
as he interprets it. He believes that
the Constitution creates a “Christian America” and in one speech, he said,
“I came to know that if the Bible is
true, if Christianity is true, it is then
ture in...all facets of human endeavor. I
know that with only such a world view
can Christians have any impact upon
the culture around them.” Honaker
has also devoted much of his career
to anti-choice activities. As a member of
the Wyoming House of Representa-
tives, he tried and failed three times to
pass a state law banning abortion. He
also served as counsel to the Unseen
Hands of Prayer Circle, a political
action committee formed to put the
“Human Life Protection Act” on
the ballot as a statewide initiative. This
nomination is being considered by the
Senate Judiciary Committee. Please
let your Senators know that you op-
pose Richard Honaker’s nomination
to the federal bench. 202 224-3121.

At the end of 2007, Rep. Randy
Forbes (R-VA), introduced H.Res.
888, a nonbinding resolution creat-
ing an “American Religious History
Week.” The resolution makes dubious
claims about America’s religious his-
tory. It asserts that the Supreme Court
affirmed that the U.S. is a “Christian
Nation,” based on an 1892 quote
by a justice who later clarified his
words and rejected the notion that the
nation’s laws are based only in Chris-
tianity. The resolution also claims that
because the Constitution is signed “in
the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven,” that
is evidence that the founders added a
“religious punctuation mark” to
the document. In truth, that was standard
language at the time.

Israel, continued

his assassination on Syrian territory
highlights a weakness of the Assad
regime in that it can no longer pro-
vide real security for the terrorists it
harbors. Israel has denied carrying out
the assassination, but at the funeral,
Hezbollah’s leader, Sheik Hassan Nas-
rallah, threatened to retaliate against
Israel saying, “Let it be an open war
anywhere.” Hezbollah has chosen not
to respond with volleys of rockets
aimed at the Galilee. Retaliation could
occur anywhere. “As Hezbollah draws
no fine distinctions between the United
States and Israel, both nations, along
with Jews around the world, might
well have to pay the price for the loss
of the man whose mystical aura was as
important as his operation prowess.”
(NYTimes, 2/18/08)

Actions taken by President Bush
on February 14 expanded sanctions
against Syria. The Syrian Account-
ability Act, passed in 2003, banned
travel from Syria to the United States,
banned all exports to Syria except
food and medicine, and froze property
of individuals and entities involved in
the manufacture of weapons of mass
destruction. The expanded sanctions
block the property of persons “deter-
mmed to be responsible for actions
or decisions of the Syrian regime that
undermine efforts to stabilize Iraq, or
allow Syrian territory to be used for
this purpose.” Bush’s executive order
said, “the Syrian regime continues to
pursue other activities that...undercut
the peace and stability of the region.”
(JTA, 2/14/08)

The White House’s 2009 national
budget includes a clause guaranteeing
military aid to Egypt and Israel. All
military financing for other countries
will total $4.58 billion, of which $2.4
billion will go to Israel and $1.3 bil-
lion to Egypt. The condition on the
military aid requires that most weap-
ons procurement must be from Ameri-
can defense contractors. In 2009,
Israel will be allowed to spend $631
million in Israel.