

JAC NEWSbreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

June 17, 2012

On my mind this month...



Gail Yamner

Freedom of religion is once again a rallying cry for the far right. This phrase is flung out to rouse their political base. They see it as discriminating against

people of faith because it does not match their religious beliefs but they fail to respect the religious and cultural pluralism that is the hallmark of American democracy. It is a slippery slope and can lead to unanticipated consequences.

Last week voters in North Dakota understood the dangers and rejected by 65% Measure Three that would amend the state Constitution to allow individuals or religious organizations to refuse to obey laws that violate their religious beliefs. This measure was a prime example of exploiting religious liberty to advance an extreme political agenda.

Anti-abortion forces are tossing the phrase religious liberty around to help pass restrictive abortion legislation. The Catholic hierarchy is hard at work to deny the option of contraceptive coverage to those who work for a Catholic Hospital or Catholic University, whatever their moral or religious beliefs, and despite the fact that these institutions receive federal funds.

Those who claim the current administration is hostile to religion use their twisted logic as a means to oppress the rest of us. Since 1981, JAC has recognized that efforts to foster one religion as a guiding American principle need to be fought and overcome. JAC does that by helping elect candidates who share our values. And you make it possible by your support. It's the only way to marginalize those who would marginalize us.

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Israel

The Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Human Rights Act of 2012 was unanimously passed by the Senate last month. It targets Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, requires companies that trade on the U.S. stock exchange to disclose any Iran-related business to the SEC and expands penalties for joint energy and uranium mining ventures with Tehran. The bill would also deny visas and freeze assets on individuals and companies that supply Iran with technology that could be used to crack down on its citizens. The House passed a similar bill last December and now the Senate and House will go to conference on the legislation.

On June 13th, President Obama awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Israel's President Shimon Peres. "The man, the life that we honor tonight is nothing short of extraordinary," Obama said. "Shimon has been serving his nation and strengthening the bonds between our two nations for some 65 years." Peres then thanked President Obama for helping to build an international coalition to impose sanctions on Iran. "The Iranian people are not our enemies, it is the present leadership that...aims to rule the Middle East, spreading terror all over the world. They bring darkness to a world longing for light. The Iranian threat must be stopped and it cannot be delayed....Mr. President, you have pledged a lasting friendship for Israel. You stated that the Israeli security is sacrosanct for you. So you pledged, so you act, so you are acting. Thank you again." And, following Shimon Peres' remarks, President Obama reiterated his vow to stand by Israel. "The security of the state of Israel is non-negotiable and the bonds between us are unbreakable." (*Politico* 6/14/12)

A U.S.-Israeli consortium began supplying Israel with natural gas from its offshore Pinnacles well on June 13 to help curb a national energy shortage expected this summer.

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United States

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Mitt Romney, the Republican Presidential nominee, has repeatedly called for overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Romney, when asked in an interview with Diane Sawyer, responded that he wants the Supreme Court to reverse the decision and, again allow states the opportunity to protect women and unborn children from abortions. "I would love the Supreme Court to say, 'Let's send this back to the states,' Romney said. "Rather than having a federal mandate through *Roe v. Wade*, let the states again consider this issue state by state." (*Life News*, 2012)

The implications of this policy would be devastating for women's reproductive rights in America. The House of Representatives has spent the last 3 years introducing numerous bills limiting women's access to abortion, as well as contraception. Recently the Prenatal Non-Discrimination Act (PRENDA) was narrowly defeated. This bill would have outlawed abortion when performed on the basis of sex selection. Although this is a problem in many countries, this is not a problem in the United States. (*Daily Beast* 5/31/12) Marcia Greenberger, co-president of the National Women's Law Center, said the bill fosters discrimination by subjecting women from certain racial and ethnic backgrounds to additional scrutiny about their decision to terminate a pregnancy." A Homeland Security spending bill included a provision that would have banned Immigration and Customs Enforcement from providing abortions for illegal immigrant detainees. This provision was thrown into the spending bill even though the agency has not paid for abortion services since it's inception and has a strict abortion policy in place – only in cases of rape, incest or if the life of the mother would be endangered. (*Huff Post* 6/7/12). Also on the federal level, the House is planning to announce a very strict anti-abortion bill that would severely limit abortion access in Washington DC. The bill, being authored by Rep. Justin Amash

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Research & Races

New York's 8th Congressional District is populated by many African Americans and many Russian Jews. The district has been represented for 30 years by African American Democrat Edolphus Towns. Rep. Towns is not running for re-election. Rep. Towns feels that he was not given an important committee assignment in Washington. That "snub" weakened his position in the district and left him vulnerable to a primary defeat by Assemblyman Hakeem Jeffries. As a result, Rep. Towns is backing City Councilman Charles Barron for his congressional seat. Mr. Barron, a former Black Panther, has called Muammar Qadhafi a "freedom fighter, brought Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe to Manhattan's City Hall, condemned the Israeli government as the "biggest terrorist in the world" and likened Gaza to a "concentration death camp." Russian Jews make up 20% of the population of the district. The primary date has been pushed to June 26 (in past elections, New York's primary was in September), and the confusing redistricting process could keep many of them from the polls. Mr. Barron has a realistic chance of winning the primary. The majority of the New York congressional delegation has thrown their support behind Jeffries. "Doing what's best for the people of NY. 8th district is not what's behind Ed Town's support of Barron. It's a poorly handled, misplaced effort

to exact political revenge against those who never supported Ed Towns," said a New York Democratic aide. Former New York Mayor Ed Koch, Rep. Jerry Nadler and other Jewish leaders have condemned Barron. "We need representatives who will focus on uniting communities, not dividing them. Charles Barron's support of dictators and comparing Israelis to Nazis is dangerous and abhorrent rhetoric that makes him unfit to serve in Congress," said Nadler. JAC will support Hakeem Jeffries, who has an excellent position paper on Israel.

The newest member of the House of Representatives is Democrat Ron Barber, who will serve out the unexpired term of Rep. Gabby Giffords. Barber is a former aide to Giffords and was also wounded in the assassination attempt on Giffords in January, 2011. He defeated Republican Jesse Kelly 52 to 46% and is likely to face Kelly again in November when he runs for a full term.

Several states held primaries earlier this month. The following Senate races are important to JAC:

Nevada -- The primary on June 12 officially made Democrat Rep. Shelley Berkley and GOP Sen. Dean Heller the nominees. JAC is in this race with Berkley who has been a JAC member since the early 1980s. Democrats

hold a small demographic edge, but Nevada's high unemployment rate and disastrous housing market will definitely play a role. The Latino vote could make the difference.

New Mexico -- Both the presumed nominees were their party's primary winners on June 5. Rep. Martin Heinrich (D) will face former Rep. Heather Wilson (R). JAC has supported Heinrich during his tenure in the House and is supporting him in his Senate race. This is likely to be very close down to the finish in November.

North Dakota -- Democrats nominated former attorney general Heidi Heitkamp who will face GOP at-large Rep. Rick Berg. After a lunch meeting with Heitkamp last month, JAC decided to enter this race and is waiting for position papers before making a commitment. North Dakota is a conservative state and this will be a difficult race, but Heitkamp is popular and a strong campaigner.

Virginia -- This race features two well known Virginia politicians with divergent points of view: former Governor Tim Kaine (D) vs. former Governor and Sen. George Allen (R). Kaine had no primary opposition; Allen defeated three challengers to secure the Republican nomination. JAC support goes to Kaine.

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(R-MI), would require parental notification, prohibit non doctors from performing abortions, and include right of refusal for health care providers and facilities. D.C. Del. Eleanor Holmes (D) says this bill would overturn local laws with no accountability to the residents. (*The Hill* 6/6/12).

On the state level, things are even worse. Texas Gov. Rick Perry is outlawing Planned Parenthood clinics and cutting all women's reproduc-

tive funding. Colorado is introducing a Personhood Initiative for the third time. This would outlaw all abortions as well as many forms of contraception. Planned Parenthood Colorado is working hard to defeat this bill. (*Colorado Statesman*, 6/8/12)

North Dakota just defeated an anti-choice ballot that would have allowed domestic abuse and child abuse if a man felt it was his religious right to abuse his wife or child. This bill would

have also taken away a women's right to choose in North Dakota.(NARAL)

A new omnibus spending bill in Michigan, HB 5711, contains onerous requirements for abortion facilities, restrictive guidelines for dispensing contraception, and new abortion rules that could effectively ban abortion in the state. The Michigan Catholic Conference is strongly backing these new rules. (*Huff Post Detroit* 6/13/12)

Israel, continued from page one

Israel lost about 40% of its natural gas supplies in 2011 when saboteurs in the Sinai peninsula began attacking the pipeline that carried gas to Israel from Egypt as part of a 20-year agreement. Last April, Egypt officially terminated the deal.

American-born Israeli scientist Daniel Hillel has won this year's World Food Prize for his water-saving agricultural methods that have increased crop production on arid lands in 30 countries. Kenneth Quinn, President of the World Food Prize Foundation said that "[Hillel's] nomination for the World

Food Prize included seconding letters from Arab scientists and experts from Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. He is a remarkable example of what one person can achieve by taking a leap and crossing cultural borders for the sake of the greater good." (*Forward.com* 6/14/12)