

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE August 24, 2007

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 insure 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.

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Jackie Abelman-Cohen

✧ 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 aggravating 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.” (HaroldTribune.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.

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Separation of Religion and State

The Christian Embassy says it is "a non-political, multi-denominational ministry that has been caring for, encouraging and equipping our country's leaders and decision-makers for nearly 30 years." The Christian Embassy was founded by Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International and its mission is "to help diplomats, government leaders and military officers find real and lasting purpose through faith and encouragement." A report released by the Defense Department's inspector general on August 2, 2007, found that the Christian Embassy evangelizes members of the military and politicians through daily Bible studies and outreach events. The group holds prayer breakfasts on Wednesdays in the Pentagon's executive dining room. The DOD report found that several high ranking Army and Air Force personnel participated in a promotional video. The film crew was not escorted or monitored during production of the video inside the Pentagon, and the Pentagon's chaplain's office gave at least 34 "religiously affiliated volunteers" unrestricted access to the Pentagon. The investigation was launched last year after the inspector general received a letter from Mikey Weinstein, the founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a

non-profit government watchdog group, whose purpose is to enforce the separation of church and state within the US military. Weinstein's group discovered the video on the Christian Embassy web site. "The report confirms the total destruction of the Constitutionally-mandated wall separating supernatural and natural, metaphysical and physical, spiritual and temporal, church and state at the highest levels of the technologically most lethal organization ever created by humankind; our honorable and noble United States military," said Weinstein, a former White House attorney under Ronald Reagan, and the author of the book "With God on Our Side, One Man's War Against an Evangelical Coup in America's Military." "This administration has turned the entire Department of Defense into its own personal faith-based initiative." Weinstein has called for Congressional oversight hearings into the matter. (Christian Embassy website; Truthout.org) The first Jewish-themed taxpayer-funded charter school is set to open in Hollywood, Florida, this month. Ben Gamla's charter was approved in March. The school is the "brainchild" of former Rep. Peter Deutsch, who says "it could serve as a national model, providing families with a financially

accessible option at a time when most non-Orthodox households are opting not to send their children to Jewish Day Schools." Critics are concerned that the school will serve as a "road map" for religious communities working to lower the wall separating church and state. Ben Gamla's director is an orthodox rabbi, Adam Siegel, who says students will learn Hebrew, Jewish culture and Jewish history two hours a day. Faculty will not be permitted to teach Torah or prayer. Rabbi Allan Tuffs of Temple Beth El, a Reform congregation in Hollywood, says "the Jewish community has succeeded in America largely thanks to the principle of separation of church and state...with charter schools like Ben Gamla, we are opening the door for public money to be used to support all sorts of religious ideologies across America." Eric Stillman, president and CEO of the Broward County Jewish Federation, said he is keeping a close watch on the new school. "We are concerned about the ability of the Broward school board and its administration to monitor the Ben Gamla Charter School to maintain separation of church and state... I think there is legitimate concern that this model could pave the way for other faiths to propose similar schools structured around their culture and history." (JTA, 7/31/07)

Research & Races

Senate 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. He was re-elected in 2002 with 63%. Rockefeller's voting record on JAC's issues is excellent and the Senator always honors JAC's requests for appointments.

House 2008

Four GOP members have announced their intention to retire:

J. Dennis Hastert(IL-14) - former Speaker of the House, currently in his 11th term.

Ray LaHood(IL-18) - currently in his 7th term

Charles (Chip) Pickering, Jr. (MS-03) - currently in his 6th term

Deborah Pryce (OH-15) - currently in her 8th term; former GOP Conference chair

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