

JAC NewsBreak

VITAL NEWS & RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR JAC LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

September 25, 2009

On my mind this month...



Barbara Bluhm-Kaul

One of the prayers recited during Rosh Hashanah services is a prayer for the welfare of the national government and its

leaders. I learned that such a prayer has been part of Jewish liturgy since ancient times and first appeared in a prayer book in the 14th century. The prophet Jeremiah, after the first exile from Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., tells the exiled Jews, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have caused you to be exiled, and pray to God on its behalf, for in its prosperity you shall prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7).

In Jeremiah's time it was essential for Jews to recognize that in exile they were physically, economically, and politically dependent upon the good will of their rulers. The situation of powerlessness and dependence required that they pray for the leaders of the country to rule the Jewish population in a just and merciful way.

I am thankful that today in America we are no longer powerless and we have many ways to address our government directly. In JAC, we join together and participate freely in the electoral process. We can and do communicate with our elected officials to hold them accountable. We help elect those who share our point of view. We still pray that they will do the right thing, but we have additional options.

I wish everyone a sweet, healthy and prosperous New Year, a year of peace in Israel, freedom from oppression for women around the world, and a year in which affordable health care will become a right, not a privilege.

Israel

U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice has described the Goldstone report of the UN Human Rights Council as "unbalanced, one sided and basically unacceptable...We have very serious concerns about many of the recommendations in the report. We will expect and believe that the appropriate venue for this report to be considered is the Human Rights Council and that is our strong view." The report said the U.N. fact-finding mission investigating Israel's conduct during the January 2009 war in Gaza found evidence of Israeli war crimes. Israel has denied the allegations. The report barely mentioned acts of terrorism committed by Hamas and ignored the fact that Israel's incursion was precipitated by the firing of many rockets on Israeli towns and civilians. The White House has said that the Obama administration is ready to use the U.S. veto at the U.N. Security Council to deal with any other "difficulties" arising out of the report. The administration also has made clear to the Palestinian Authority that Washington is not pleased with a P.A. petition to bring the report's allegations against Israel to the International Criminal Court.

The *Jerusalem Post* analyzed the September 22 tripartite meeting of U.S. President Barack Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as ushering in the "end of the dramatic age of Middle East diplomacy" and the beginning of "the long haul and drudgery of trying to change the reality on the ground." Abbas has been quoted as saying he is in no hurry, that "life was improving in the West Bank" and that negotiations would not begin until Israel declared an all-out settlement freeze. Netanyahu's offer to freeze any new authorization for settlement construction for six months is not enough. The "waiting game" seems to serve Netanyahu as well. The Palestinians continue institution building: improving their ability to govern, improving their security apparatus with the help of U.S. Lt. Gen.

(Israel, continued on page two)

United States

CHOICE

The Family Research Council has been running an ad in several states "contending that" if health-care reform goes forward, "federal money will go toward abortions." An elderly man sitting at the kitchen table says to his wife, "They won't pay for my surgery, but we're forced to pay for abortions." This is how the argument goes. "Most of the proposals for expanding coverage include a provision for people who can't afford private health insurance. They could receive federal subsidies to help them buy insurance. If the private plan offers abortion coverage and a federal subsidy is used to purchase it, this would mean taxpayers are subsidizing abortion." The President, in his speech about his healthcare plan to a joint session of Congress, reiterated that the plan would not lead to government funding of abortion.

Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA) offered an amendment to ensure that no federal dollars pay for abortions. The Capps' amendment, which passed in the House Energy and Commerce Committee, seeks to distinguish between public and private money. Separate accounts would be created to keep federal dollars from co-mingling with an individual's contributions. If federal dollars helped pay for some health coverage, they would not support abortions. Abortion foes call this "an accounting scheme" and say that the amendment does not give them the guarantees they require. The Hyde Amendment, passed on September 30, 1976 by the U.S. House by a 207-167 vote bars the use of federal funds to pay for abortions except in cases of rape, incest or the life of the mother.

The administration does not want the healthcare discussion to become an abortion debate, but abortion opponents do not accept the President's assurances and do not consider the Hyde Amendment a strong enough barrier. (latimes.com 9/16/09)

JAC NEWSbreak, for JAC Leadership Circle, is a monthly publication of JACPAC.
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Research & Races

2009 SENATE

The newest member of the Senate, appointed on September 24 by Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick is Paul Kirk, Jr. Kirk will fill the seat held by Senator Edward Kennedy until the special election scheduled for January 2010. Kirk will not be a candidate in the special election. Kirk is the chair of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, a former chair of the Democratic National Committee, and a former aide to Senator Kennedy.

2010 RACES

History tells us that the party in power always loses congressional seats in the next midterm election. Many freshman Democrats were elected in districts that demographically favor the GOP. Those members are particularly vulnerable. And, because of history and declining poll numbers, Republicans, so far, have been able to recruit several top-tier candidates.

Here Come the Republican Women

Colorado--Former Lt. Gov. Jane Norton announced last week that she plans

to run for the Senate. Norton joins Weld County DA Ken Buck, Aurora City Councilman Ryan Frazier, businessman Cleve Tidwell and attorney Luke Korkowski in seeking the GOP nomination. Incumbent Democratic Senator Michael Bennet was appointed earlier this year when Senator Ken Salazar became Secretary of the Interior. This race is Bennet's first run for office. And, he has primary opposition from st. House Speaker Andrew Romanoff.

Connecticut--Former World Wrestling Entertainment CEO Linda McMahon has joined at least three other declared GOP candidates vying for the nomination to challenge Democratic Senator Chris Dodd. She does not have the "political" name ID of the other three, former Rep. Rob Simmons, former Ambassador Thomas Foley, and st. Senator Sam Caligiuri, but she is the only woman and she can certainly claim to be an "outsider."

Nevada--Former state Republican Party Chairman Sue Lowden is doing

everything that makes her look like a candidate to take on Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. She faces a tough primary with four declared candidates already seeking the GOP nomination: physician Robin Titus, former st. Rep. Sharron Angle, (another GOP woman, but not considered a top tier candidate) attorney Chuck Kozak and businessman Danny Tarkanian. Any disapproval of the Obama Administration falls on Harry Reid's shoulders and as the President's approval ratings drop, so do Reid's.

New Hampshire--Kelly Ayotte stepped down in July as New Hampshire's attorney general to concentrate on running for this open Senate seat. GOP Senator Judd Gregg is retiring. Other Republicans are looking at the seat, but none are declared candidates at this time. The Attorney General's position in New Hampshire is an appointment by the governor, so this is Ayotte's first run for political office. The Democratic candidate is likely to be Rep. Paul Hodes, serving his second term in the U.S. House.

Right Wing Watch

In the September 2009 issue of Church & State, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State writes about an organization called The Fellowship Foundation, informally known as "The Family," and a house that it owns in Washington on Capitol Hill. The Family is one of the largest Religious Right groups in the country with a budget of just over \$19 million (from 2007 IRS filings). It is also one of the oldest, founded by Norwegian immigrant and evangelical preacher Abraham Vereide in 1935. The Fellowship has been led by Douglas Coe since 1966. The core purpose of this group as stated by Coe "is to provide a private forum for public officials to hold Bible Studies, prayer meetings, worship services, or to share their

troubles." The group is known for organizing prayer groups around the world as well as in the United States and is the convenor of the National Prayer Breakfast, launched in 1953. The house on C street popped up in the news recently, connected with high profile Republican politicians who were accused of having extramarital affairs. South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford said he "sought counseling from 'C Street.' Senator John Ensign (R-NV), who admitted an affair with the wife of his chief of staff, is a resident of the house. Current residents include Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Reps. Mike Doyle (D-PA), Bart Stupak (D-MI), Heath Shuler (D-NC), Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Zack Wamp (R-TN). Jeff Sharlet, author of *The*

Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power, says "if Bible studies and prayer meetings were the only activities under way, there would be little cause for concern" but "here's an organization that has organized powerful men into coalitions to oppose organized labor and support a foreign policy of allegiances with killers, often at the cost of American principles and American interests." Douglas Coe's influence in Washington has been likened to that of Billy Graham and yet few people outside of Washington have ever heard of him. Sharlet concludes, "Doug Coe has said, 'the more invisible you can make your organization, the more influence it will have.'"

Israel, continued from page one

Keith Dayton, and improving their economy. The Palestinians say they will have institutions in place so that in two years' time, they will be able to declare a state - unilaterally if necessary. This fits Netanyahu's "economic peace" approach that holds that "peace will come from the bottom up, not the top down." Netanyahu's govern-

ment is stable and the U.S. has turned down the pressure, realizing that a total settlement freeze is impractical. Both Abbas and Netanyahu appear willing to wait. But President Obama continues to press. "...[A]ll the history, all the mistrust, we have to find a way forward." Special envoy George Mitchell will start talks with Israeli

and Palestinian negotiators next week, with the hope of restarting negotiations. There is not likely to be any dramatic breakthroughs, rather "accelerated incrementalism." (Jerusalem Post, New York Times 9/23/09) Mitchell proved in Ireland that he has patience and the ability to stay with the process. (JTA 9/24/09)