

## Public Affairs & Advocacy

### Federal Issues

**Fair Pay Restoration Act:** Last Summer, the US Supreme Court rules in Ledbetter v. Goodyear that an employee facing pay discrimination has only 180 days from the issuing of the first paycheck containing the discriminatory wage to file a claim against the employer. This ruling overturned years of precedent and policy. The House acted quickly, passing the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2007. The Senate has delayed the passage of this legislation (S1843) due to pressure from business interests. NCJW supports the Fair Pay Restoration Act. The bill may come up for a vote in the Senate this week. Many of you have already acted on this bill, but now is the time for a final push. Tell your senators again to support S1843.

**Judicial Nominations:** Richard H. Honaker has been nominated to a seat on the Wyoming District Court. He has a record of hostility to reproductive rights and religion-state separation. In February, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing. No vote has been scheduled on this nominee. NCJW opposes Honaker's confirmation. Watch for an action alert directed for Senator Durbin and other members of the Judiciary Committee.

NCJW also opposes the nomination of Robert Conrad to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. He has a record of hostility to reproductive rights and he was one of the first prosecutors in SC to successfully impose the death penalty. Robert Conrad has not yet had a hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee. Traditionally, during an election year, the Senate stops consideration of judicial nominees who are considered to be controversial. NCJW and other coalition partners are urging Senate leadership to continue this precedent. NCJW will continue to push for an end to consideration of controversial judicial nominations for the remainder of the 110th Congress.

### Illinois Issues

**Comprehensive Sex Education:** April 15th was a Day of Action sponsored by Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health. They held a demonstration in downtown Chicago to urge the Governor to make Illinois the 18th State to reject abstinence-only-until-marriage funding from the federal government. During today's board meeting we are going to sign postcards to the Governor on the issue and at our May 14th meeting we will also have everyone participate in signing postcards.

### Israel Issues

**Divorce Laws:** On January 8th, a Knesset committee voted overwhelmingly for an amendment to the Division of Property Law that would provide equality for women in Israeli divorce laws. The amendment would allow for the division of assets before the granting of the get (the divorce) in cases where the proceedings have exceeded 12 months. The amendment was to have been voted on in the Knesset at the beginning of February. In an action alert, NCJW members and supporters urged the Knesset to pass this amendment. However, the vote was postponed, as it has been for the past several years. NCJW will continue to monitor this issue.

The Ministerial Committee for Legislation approved a bill recently calling for the expansion the authority of rabbinical courts in property cases, over the objection of the Minister of Justice. Because of the opposition of the women's organizations and other civil rights parties, the bill was withdrawn and it is expected to go back to the Ministerial Committee for Legislation.

**Gender-Segregated Buses:** Nearly a year ago, the Israel Religious Action Center filed a challenge to the gender-segregated, publicly-funded bus lines that operate in Israel. Originally intended for strictly Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods, these buses are now employed across and between several cities, without any alternative public bus service. In February, the High Court of Justice handed down a decision, giving the Israeli Minister of Transportation one month to look into the issue and suggest a solution. NCJW members and supporters used the NCJW Action Center to voice their concern over gender-segregation in Israel, joining with the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) and the author Naomi Ragen, a plaintiff in the case. We look forward to a new change in public policy.

**Abortion:** Every now and then (the last time was in 1997) the issue of abortion is raised in Israel. Last month, a religious party in the Knesset authored a new bill that would dramatically change standing abortion laws in Israel. If ratified, the bill would outlaw the termination of a pregnancy after its 22nd week. Abortion laws in Israel are based on Jewish law and are generally lenient. A free and legal abortion must be approved by a special health committee but are often automatically authorized if the pregnant woman is younger than 17 years of age or older than 40, if the conception was a result of rape, incest or extramarital relations, if the pregnancy is likely to endanger the mother's physical or mental wellbeing, or if the fetus has been diagnosed with a possible birth defect. Contraceptive devices and medication as well as over the counter medications (such as the morning after pill) are available freely at any pharmacy. The vote on this issue as well was withdrawn within a few days of its being introduced. Most political analysts agree that all of these personal status issue bills that are being introduced and then withdrawn recently are another attempt by some of the religious parties to use these issues as bait in order to force compromises on other issues. We join the women of Israel in rejecting these tactics and using the rights of women as political fodder. This is another example of the tension resulting from religion and state not being separate in Israel.