

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

July 21, 2009

This week's messages are-

- Act now for peace for Israel/Palestine - August summer recess district advocacy
- Resources for health care reform
- Save the date: briefing call on climate change in the Senate
- U.S. workers get a raise: a release from Let Justice Roll
- Psalm 146: 1-7 - praise for God's help

Act Now for Peace for Israel/Palestine - August Summer Recess District Advocacy

Following President Obama's historic speech in Cairo last month in June, momentum continues to build in Washington behind robust U.S. efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East. The June 4 [Christian leaders' letter to the President](#) in support of bold action for peace also provides a special opportunity for ecumenical grassroots organizing. Help keep the momentum going! In coalition with Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), the Presbyterian Washington Office is supporting summer recess district advocacy.

[Sign up now](#) to attend or organize a district meeting in your area.

The upcoming summer Congressional recess is a great time to engage your members of Congress on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking issues. During the recess, scheduled for August 3 - September 7 (House) and August 10 - September 7 (Senate), you can schedule a meeting with your Member or his or her staff and urge them to support the Obama Administration's efforts to resolve the Holy Land conflict. To learn more about how to organize a district meeting, please visit CMEP's [District Meeting Organizing Resource page](#).

There are resources and guidance available to help you hold productive meetings and effectively engage your senators and representative. The district meeting information packet will guide you through the process of setting up the meeting, connecting with other volunteers, and planning your agenda to raise specific policy points.

We are seeking both meeting participants as well as individuals who would like to volunteer to serve as district meeting organizers. Organizers will help to schedule the meeting(s) with their elected officials and coordinate with other volunteers

interested in participating in the meeting. Please check the organizer box on the [district meeting registration form](#) if you are interested in taking on this role.

Let's keep the movement towards a just peace in the Holy Land going strong - [sign up](#) today to hold a district meeting! If you have any questions about organizing a district meeting in your area, please contact the organizing staff of Churches for Middle East Peace at field@cmep.org.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 215th General Assembly (2003) Asks pastors, lay leaders, sessions and individual members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

Pray, and invite others to pray, to the God of Peace to direct the hearts, minds, wills, and actions of those in positions of authority or influence in the Middle East, as well as those who know only aggression and violence, to seek the ways of peace.

Seek out other Christians, Jews, and Muslims, in their own areas, to work together through interfaith peacebuilding, and in support of every effort made, whether by Israelis, Palestinians, the U.S. government, the United Nations, the Christian churches, and/or other religious and secular organizations that aim toward bringing about a just, honorable, secure, and viable peace in the Middle East.

Take individual and collective initiatives to tell the truth, having "listened with both ears," and to advocate for a just peace in the Middle East with their representatives in Congress, the administration, United Nations officials, local/regional/national newspaper editors and other opinion makers.

Resources for Health Care Reform

The health care reform debate in Capitol Hill seems to be changing by the hour. Two of three committees in the House have approved the House-version of the bill, while the third is currently reviewing it, with a committee vote anticipated as early as tomorrow. On the Senate side, one committee has released a version of health reform, and we wait on the other Senate committee to release its version of the health care bill. Debate about what to include and how to pay for it continues to create daily news headlines and headaches for Democrats who have said they plan to pass bill out of both chambers of Congress before they take a break for the August recess.

Are you interested in being involved in the health care reform debate? You have a number of opportunities to raise your voice and learn more about the debate.

Briefing Call Opportunity:

Call in this Wednesday, July 22 at 2PM, EDT to be briefed on the current state of the debate and viewing the proposals through a lens of faith. This call is being sponsored by [Faithful Reform in Health Care](#) together with the [Presbyterian Washington Office](#) and other ecumenical colleagues.

Visit [Faithful Reform in Health Care's RSVP page](#) to register for the call.

Call Your Members of Congress:

Call 888-797-8717 toll free to reach the office of your Member of Congress. This number is generously provided by the United Church of Christ. When you call, you will reach the Capitol switchboard - ask to speak with your member of Congress and call back to reach your Senators. If you don't know who your members of Congress are, visit the [Presby Legislative Action Center](#) and enter your zip code to find out.

Click [here](#) for more information and talking points (please note that even though the flyer points to June 22-24, the call in number and talking points are still accurate). When you call, tell your member what you think about health care reform or follow this link for talking points.

Plan a Health Reform Event

Faithful Reform in Health Care has just released "Let Your Light Shine," a new toolkit of interfaith resources for: Candlelight Vigils, Prayer Breakfast, and Prayer services.

[Download the new toolkit](#) (20 pp. PDF).

General Assembly Guidance:

In 2002, the General Assembly approved "Advocacy on Behalf of the Uninsured," in which it:

- Reaffirm[ed] the church's commitment to advocacy for a national medical plan.
- Encourage[d] presbyteries, sessions, and the members of congregations to be advocates for universal health care and to support advocacy efforts in their local communities to bring public and private entities together in this effort.
- Urge[d] presbyteries and sessions to provide educational programs and advocacy efforts on behalf of persons, especially those with low incomes and fixed incomes, without medical insurance.

Save the Date: Briefing Call on Climate Change in the Senate

As you know, the House of Representatives recently passed comprehensive climate and energy legislation.

This is the first of 4 key steps to addressing climate change here in the U.S., responding to the urgent need to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

The next step in the process is to get the Senate to pass a bill as well.

We know there are thousands of folks out there working to address this issue in their congregations and communities and would like to invite you to join us for an update on the bill the House passed and prepare for the bill that is being developed in the Senate.

The National Council of Churches will host this call on **July 30th from 12-1pm EDT**. Below is the call in information. Please RSVP to Tyler Edgar at tedgar@nccecojustice.org so that she can make sure that there are enough phone lines for all the callers.

The Presbyterian Washington Office staff and other denominational staff from various NCC member communions will join this conversation to answer questions and outline their specific priorities!

What: National Climate Call for State and Grassroots leaders

When: July 30th from 12-1pm EDT

Phone number: (866) 939-8416

Passcode: 7420302

General Assembly Guidance:

The 218th General Assembly (2008) approved "The Power to Change: U.S. Energy and" in which it:

- Urge[d] individuals and families in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following... Advocate for change and leadership within the church and in all forms of government regarding energy policy and global climate change.

U.S. Workers Get a Raise: a Release from [Let Justice Roll](#)

A Higher Minimum Wage: The Best Stimulus

The recession is no excuse for paying poverty wages, assert workers, business owners, organizers and faith leaders

When the federal minimum wage rises from \$6.55 to \$7.25 an hour on July 24, the national Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign will celebrate - and call for another increase to \$10 in 2010.

"The minimum wage was enacted during the Great Depression to put a floor under workers' wages and stimulate the economy. We need that boost today," said Holly Sklar, Let Justice Roll Senior Policy Adviser and author of the just-updated [Raising the Minimum Wage in Hard Times](#) and [Raise the Minimum Wage to \\$10 in 2010](#). *"The long-term fall in worker buying power is one reason we are in the worst economic crisis since the Depression. \$10 in 2010 will foster a productive economy fueled by living wages rather than destructive debt and speculation."*

Why \$10 in 2010? The decade between 1997 and 2007 was the longest period in history without a minimum wage increase. Recent raises are so little, so late that even with the increase July 24, workers will still make less than they did in 1956, adjusting for inflation. It would take \$9.83 today to match the buying power of the minimum wage of 1968. *"You can't build a strong economy on poverty wages,"* said Sklar. *"A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it."*

Critics oppose minimum wage increases in good times and bad, claiming they will increase unemployment. Extensive research, summarized in [Raising the Minimum Wage in Hard Times](#), shows that increasing minimum wage does not increase unemployment.

Minimum wage workers are also consumers. Minimum wage raises are well-targeted stimulus because they go directly to those who most need to spend additional dollars on food, fuel, rent and healthcare.

Rev. Paul Sherry, Executive Director of Let Justice Roll, says, *"It is immoral that the minimum wage does not cover the cost of basic human needs. A recession does not justify poverty wages to prop up a troubled economy. We need a wage ethic to go with our work ethic."*

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The [PC\(USA\) Washington Office](#), together with [Let Justice Roll](#), celebrates the increase in the minimum wage, but General Assembly policy calls us to do more to lift full-time workers out of poverty.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 2006, the 217th General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the PC(USA) to "communicate to all members of Congress its desire that legislation to increase the minimum wage be swiftly passed and at least reflect the increase in the cost of living since the last minimum wage increase in 1997, with the goal of a wage level sufficient to lift full-time workers out of poverty. Additionally, middle governing bodies, local

congregations, and individuals are encouraged to support efforts to increase the minimum wage at federal, state, and local levels as well. Presbyterians are also encouraged to take advantage of the resources and advocacy opportunities of the National Council of Churches' 'Let Justice Roll' campaign." (*Minutes*, 2006, pp. 894-895)

Psalm 146: 1-7 - Praise for God's Help

Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

Help Us Help You!

To support the work of the Washington Office, send a contribution to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Individual Remittance Processing
P.O. Box 643700
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700.

Designate the Washington Office, ECO # 865714.

Or click here to give online: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/support.htm>

Thank You.

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