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Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace PAC Announces First-Ever Congressional Endorsements

JStreetPAC Backs 7 Candidates

WASHINGTON – JStreetPAC, the first pro-Israel, pro-peace PAC, today announced its inaugural round of endorsements of Congressional candidates.

“Today’s endorsements are truly ‘firsts,’” said Jeremy Ben-Ami, the PAC’s Executive Director. “Never before have candidates received tangible political support for agreeing that pursuing both a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and aggressive diplomacy to solve political conflicts in the Middle East should be central to American foreign policy.

“These endorsements – and the entire J Street initiative – will open up much-needed political space needed for honest discussion of American foreign policy and for debate over what policies are in fact in the best interests of both the United States and of Israel,” Ben-Ami added.

The PAC today endorsed:

- Rep. Charles Boustany (LA-07)
- Darcy Burner (Candidate, WA-08)
- Rep. Stephen Cohen (TN-09)
- Donna Edwards (Candidate, MD-04)
- Debbie Halvorson (Candidate, IL-11)
- Mary Jo Kilroy (Candidate, OH-15)
- Dennis Shulman (Candidate, NJ-05) and

The endorsements were released in a press teleconference in which several of the candidates participated. [Audio recording: http://www.jstreet.org/files/JSTREET_061608.mp3]. This is the first of several rounds of endorsements that the PAC – launched in April 2008 along with J Street, a corresponding lobby – will make in this election cycle.

Responses from the each of the candidates to their endorsement follow below.

“For too long, the only voice representing ‘pro-Israel’ Americans have come from the far right,” said Ben-Ami. “Meanwhile, a majority of American Jews and their friends opposed war in Iraq, are against a pre-emptive military strike against Iran and favor a two-state solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

“These endorsements represent a significant step in making it clear to candidates that the single most pro-Israel thing they can do is help to bring about a two-state solution and a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and her neighbors,” he added.

In keeping with its mission to establish a new voice in American politics on Israel and the Middle East, JStreetPAC’s endorsements highlighted fresh faces – junior members of Congress, challengers and competitors for open seats – whose public records and campaign platforms are in line with the PAC’s positions on a range of issues. The diverse group includes a rabbi, an African American community leader, a freshman Jewish member of Congress and a Lebanese-American, among others.

Ben-Ami also announced on the call that the J Street organizations combined have now raised over \$1 million in operational and political funds and that the effort’s email list has grown to more than 30,000 in just two months.

JStreetPAC is the first and only federal Political Action Committee established to explicitly promote meaningful American leadership to end the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts peacefully and diplomatically. The PAC will provide political and financial support to candidates for federal office from Americans who believe a new direction in American policy will advance U.S. interests in the Middle East and promote real peace and security for Israel and the region. The PAC is a legally unconnected to J Street, a 501(c)4 lobby and advocacy organization.

In the two months since its inception, J Street has initiated two major netroots campaigns, both of which have elicited the support of over 30,000 Americans. The first took President Bush to task for going to Israel’s 60th birthday celebration without having made real progress in the peace process and urged the candidates to succeed him to learn from his failure to aggressively pursue a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The second campaign, launched in partnership with both MoveOn and Democracy for America, exposed Pastor John Hagee’s extremism and the danger it poses to Israel, demanding that both Senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman sever all ties with the pastor and his apocalyptic vision for Israel’s future.

More information on JStreet and JStreetPAC is available at www.jstreet.org.

FROM THE CANDIDATES ON THEIR ENDORSEMENT

Representative Charles Boustany(R-LA-07):

"JStreetPAC represents an important and growing segment in American politics, and I am pleased to have their support as we work toward our mutual national security and economic goals. The US must continue to strengthen its alliance with Israel in a responsible manner, and work vigorously together toward a sustainable peace to the Middle East. I look forward to working with the leadership and members of JStreetPAC."

Darcy Burner (D-WA-08):

"I am honored to be among the first group of candidates endorsed by J Street and applaud your efforts to bring about a new American conversation on Israel and the Middle East. Your support means so much to my campaign, not just for the resources it brings, but because it speaks

volumes about our mutual commitment to diplomacy over military action. Voters in Washington's 8th District recognize that it is time to move away from the policies of past administrations and choose leaders who will work to bring about a just and lasting peace for Israel and all the Middle East."

Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN-09):

"I am honored to be endorsed by J Street PAC-a new political voice calling for a new direction for American policy in the Middle East.. My constituents in Memphis and I share J Street's goal for strong American leadership to end the conflicts in the Middle East both peacefully and diplomatically."

Donna Edwards (D-MD-04):

"It is time for a comprehensive and non-stop approach to ensure real implementation of a two-state solution for a peaceful and coexisting Israel and Palestine. This approach includes the United States again exercising its diplomacy and leadership to help foster a spirit of open-dialogue and cooperation among those in the region. I look forward to working with leaders in this country and our counterparts in the region to forge positive solutions for the region to create a more stable and peaceful Middle East."

Debbie Halvorson (D-IL-11):

"I am very pleased to have the endorsement of JStreetPAC. Israel has long been the United States' most valued ally in the Middle East, and as a member of Congress, I will be an ardent supporter of the continued strong alliance between our two nations. In a part of the world where Israel is the most important democratic ally, the U.S. must continue to support its efforts to achieve security and peace within the region."

Mary Jo Kilroy (D-OH-15):

"We can't have another 8 years of policies that only divide the region and cause more strife. I will work to bring a real, lasting peace to Israel and the region and I am proud to be endorsed by JStreetPAC because they share in that crucial goal."

Dennis Shulman (D-NJ-05):

"I enthusiastically welcome the support of the pro-Israel community. Having visited Israel over the past three decades and having had the opportunity to discuss Israel with many people in this congressional district, our nation, and in Israel, I know how central the security of Israel and peace in the region are to our national interest. I look forward to taking my seat in Congress in January 2009 and being a strong and clear voice arguing for the security of Israel and for peace in the Middle East."