

Earl Raab

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THE SACRAMENTO SCENE: 1977

The state legislature last week closed its doors on the regular 1977 session, and on several bills which were of interest to the Jewish community, including:

Arab Boycott: The "Carpenter Bill" was launched in this session. This bill would have gutted California's landmark anti-boycott law. The passage of a strong federal law was made possible by the prior passage of the California laws, the strongest in the country. If the California law could be watered down, then it would be easier to pass a watered-down federal law. That was a purpose of the Carpenter bill. So, it was important to hold the line in California until the Federal law was passed. And that is what happened, despite pressure from some of the strongest commercial and industrial forces in the state.

Actually, a face-saving amendment was passed which said that "the same activities permissible under federal law are permissible under state law." That would have been the case, anyway, since the federal law specifically pre-empted all state laws on the boycott.

Released Time: Another attempt was made to radically extend released time, whereby public schools would administer programs for off-campus religious instruction. Jewish children have always suffered from such a program, constitutional questions aside. This bill, pushed heavily by Christian evangelist forces, passed the Assembly, but never got out of the Senate Education Committee because of lack of votes.

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Religious Prayer: This was one of those "camel's-nose-in-the-tent" bills. It would have made permissible the daily observance of a minute of silence, for religious contemplation in public schools. This one, again pushed heavily by the evangelists, also passed the Assembly - although a "two minute bill" was defeated. However, the one-minute bill also came to a halt in the Senate Education Committee, when it failed to come up with more than one vote.

Religious Organizations: One bill would have jeopardized the ability of religious associations to hire members of their particular religion for key jobs. The bill was amended to remove that jeopardy.

Aging: A bill was passed to permit senior citizens in adult day health centers to Medi-Cal funds to pay for senior citizens in adult day health centers. Two Jewish institutions in San Francisco have such centers.

Soviet Jews: A law was passed to ease college tuition costs for political refugees. The bill had been amended carefully to make sure that it fit the the circumstances of Soviet Jewish emigres.

It wasn't by chance that these bills were respectively defeated, amended or passed. More often than not, the result had something to do with the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California JPAC, which was created about a half-dozen years ago. Actually, the San Francisco Jewish community created the idea, which received a

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national award for providing an innovative model for Jewish communities in the rest of the country. (Last year, the San Francisco Jewish community received a similar national award for its pioneering anti-Nazi program in the schools). But all the major Jewish communities of the state comprise JPAC, and have made it work.

JPAC brings the consensual wisdom of the organized Jewish community to bear on state laws affecting Jews. It also helps to prevent the cardinal sin of Jewish social action, which we hopefully learned in the 1930's: a fragmented community is an ineffectual community. All organized segments of the California Jewish community are part of this consensual action, because they are all part of the various community relations councils in the state.

JPAC works without fanfare - but without Jerry Sampson, its legislative analyst, a San Franciscan who has been a familiar and forceful figure in the legislative halls of Sacramento for almost twenty years, and was once the director of the state social welfare board. Sampson is one of those rare individuals who has more interest in results than in applause. But maybe we can spare a few hand-claps and a whistle for this year's record.