

Briefly noted

News in the [July 28, 2009](#) issue

President Obama signed long-sought legislation June 22 authorizing the Food and Drug Administration to regulate tobacco products, and among those cheering were the 25 faith groups in the Faith United Against Tobacco coalition. “Better late than never,” said Wesley “Pat” Padillo, a key advocacy official for the National Council of Churches. The coalition includes the NCC, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), American Baptist Churches USA, Episcopal Health Ministries, the United Church of Christ, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Reform Judaism’s Commission on Social Action and the Islamic Society of North America.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has appointed a special representative to Muslim communities, Farah Pandith, who has worked in the state department’s European Bureau. “She was a special adviser for outreach to Muslim communities in Europe,” State Department spokesperson Ian Kelly said June 25. President Obama has made outreach to Muslims a priority, as highlighted by his speech in Cairo in early June, in which he quoted from the Qur’an and emphasized the importance of religious freedom.

Reform Judaism’s flagship institution will keep all three of its U.S. campuses open, despite its serious financial crisis, officials have announced. Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, which trains 400 rabbinical students in New York, Los Angeles, Cincinnati and Jerusalem, had announced in April that one or more campuses might be closed due to its projected \$8 million deficit over the next two years. The news had prompted an outcry from alumni and religious and community leaders, leading the school’s board of governors to give administrators seven weeks to come up with ways to cut costs. “This direction calls for the unity and consolidation of our entire institution,” said Rabbi David Ellenson, seminary president. “We will continue to work over these next months to complete a plan that achieves the targets of quality, sustainability and presence.”

South African churches and the country’s new president, Jacob Zuma, are at loggerheads over repeated remarks by the leader that his party, the African National Congress, will rule until Jesus comes. The South African Council of Churches, which

includes most of the nation's churches and the Roman Catholic bishops' conference, said in late June that it was "deeply concerned" about President Zuma's statements. Zuma made his latest utterance June 21 while addressing thousands of ANC supporters. "The ANC will rule until the Son of Man comes. He must come back while we are still in power," said Zuma. "We want the ANC to win all the forthcoming elections and rule this country." SACC general secretary Eddie Makhue said that on "religiously controversial" statements it would be important for the president "to consult with the religious leaders and particularly with us in the SACC.