

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Shelley Berkley sounds the alarm on antisemitism across the political spectrum; Michael Oren dives back into the 1970s; This NY congressman says Democratic socialism and support for Israel don't contradict; What explains Tom Carper's recent approach on Israel?; and Seth Siegel's next chapter

MAY 7, 2021

Shelley Berkley sounds the alarm on antisemitism across the political spectrum

The former Nevada representative said the right 'are as antisemitic as the Nazis' and some left-wing Democrats 'are just as hateful and antisemitic as the right'

By Marc Rod

Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-NV) left politics nearly a decade ago. In that time, she has seen antisemitism increasingly consume elements of the political right — and is concerned that the same thing could happen in her own party. In her new role as the co-chair of the Jewish Federations of North America's security and antisemitism committee, she wants to address the issue head-on.

"If you look at the right, they are as antisemitic as the Nazis," Berkley, who represented Nevada's first congressional district from 1999 to 2013, remarked in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Thursday. "When you look to the left, there are Democrats on the far left that are just as hateful and antisemitic as on the right."

"It upsets and angers me that there is a segment of the Democratic Party that is not only anti-Israel, but from their rhetoric there is no other conclusion than they are antisemitic," she said. "It worries me on the left that mainstream Democrats are not taking a stand against the antisemitic, pro-BDS rhetoric coming out of the left," she said, referring to the Boycott, Divestment

and Sanctions movement that targets Israel.

Candidates aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America, which supports BDS, recently won control of the Democratic Party apparatus in Berkley's home state.

As co-chair of the JFNA committee that leads the federations' advocacy, education and training efforts fighting antisemitism and securing Jewish institutions, Berkley is attuned to the growing threats facing the community.

Berkley said she plans to actively oppose legislation like a recent bill from Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) that would place restrictions on U.S. aid and any BDS initiatives, as well as to support the National Security Grant Program and bills promoting Holocaust education.

"These issues are very important to me," Berkley said, adding that she sees her new position with JFNA as a complement to her job as the chief executive officer and senior provost of Touro University's Western Division.

As a legislator, Berkley was actively involved in Jewish community issues and was known as one of the most prominent pro-Israel members of Congress. Berkley

left the House for an unsuccessful bid for Senate, later joining Touro.

Berkley said that right-wing antisemitism "once was a fringe" but is "becoming far more mainstream on the right," pointing to incidents like the January 6 Capitol riot and the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va.

"Now, members of the Republican [Party in] Congress do not want to investigate that insurrection. The only conclusion is that they agree with it," Berkley said, "or they would be far more anxious to get to the bottom of how that happened and ensure it never happens again."

Berkley also reflected on the legacy of another major figure in Nevada and pro-Israel politics, Republican megadonor Sheldon Adelson, who died earlier this year.

Berkley and Adelson had a long and complicated relationship — she was a high-ranking lawyer for the casino mogul in the '90s, but the two split over a union dispute, and Adelson ultimately dedicated significant resources to her political opponents. A 2012 Politico article during Berkley's Senate run described the two as "mortal foes."

"One must give credit where credit is

due. Some of the issues that came to the forefront under the Trump administration — moving the embassy to Jerusalem, which I have always supported, and initiating the Abraham Accords — I suspect came from Sheldon,” Berkley said. “Sheldon and Trump were very close allies. And I know that Sheldon had Trump’s ear. So I applaud those initiatives.”

Berkley praised the Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and several Arab states, as “a miraculous

step forward,” which she hopes is expanded further.

“Imagine that region in the world if there was cooperation... Everyone will be better off for it,” Berkley said. “It makes absolutely no sense to continue these petty hatreds and refuse to recognize Israel’s right to exist. I don’t want to shock anybody in the Arab world, but Israel exists and it’s flourishing.”

The former congresswoman said she has confidence that President Joe Biden and his foreign policy team will continue to support

the U.S.’s close alliance with Israel and create opportunities for Middle East peace.

“President Biden has been in public office at the forefront of foreign affairs for his entire career and almost his entire life... He has assembled a great foreign policy team,” she said. “As our most reliable ally and the only democracy in the Middle East, it is essential that Israel remain strong. And while they are certainly self-sustaining, it is the most important alliance in the world, the American-Israeli relationship.” ♦

MAY 11, 2021

Michael Oren dives back into the 1970s

The former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. has a new novel, ‘To All Who Call in Truth,’ set in the decade of his childhood

By Amy Spiro

For Michael Oren, the 1970s in America represent a lost era.

“The 1970s was the last moment when being Jewish in America was an ethnicity,” the former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. “We didn’t grow up thinking of ourselves primarily or even secondarily as white people — we were a separate ethnic group.”

At the time, Oren asserts, “that ethnicity had many expressions — of course, there’s a religious expression, but it was our food, our humor, our problems.”

Oren himself grew up in West Orange, N.J., in the 1970s, in what he describes as a “white-bread America.” The diplomat, historian and author draws on his own experiences during that decade for his latest novel, *To All Who Call in Truth*, which hits bookshelves today.

To All Who Call in Truth centers on Sandy Cooper, a junior high school guidance counselor and football coach who finds himself dragged into a twisted relationship and a mysterious murder case amid a wave of racial and political turmoil in an otherwise quiet town.

“This is the world I grew up in,” Oren said.

“I grew up in a non-Jewish working-class neighborhood. I encountered antisemitism pretty much regularly. It was a fact and feature of our lives.”

His family came home one night to find “dirty Jew” scrawled on their windows, and the synagogue he attended as a youth was blown up in 1971 in what remains an unsolved mystery.

And while the book’s plot touches on many elements that were a part of Oren’s childhood, the novel, he said, is so much more.

“The book is not just about the period and not just about being Jewish,” he added. “It’s about a relationship, it’s about obsession, it’s about betrayal, it’s about violence. Ultimately I think it’s about hope.”

The book takes its title from a verse in Psalms, which is repeated three times a day in the traditional “Ashrei” prayer — and is emblazoned on the walls of the fictional synagogue in Oren’s novel, as well as the real one from his childhood: “The Lord is near to all that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.”

“It’s a beautiful line,” Oren said. “It’s a fundamental article of faith: If you actually turn to God, God will be there. It’s a

remarkable line.”

The novel features cameo appearances from unnamed figures that directly echo some of the most dominant Jewish personalities of the era: Elie Wiesel, Shlomo Carlebach and Meir Kahane.

“For my generation, we had towering Jewish figures who everybody knew,” Oren recalled. “For better or for worse... but we don’t have these figures anymore. And I knew them all.”

Their fleeting appearances are his way of “paying homage to them in this book. And I didn’t want to use their real names because it’s not important for the book. It’s important for what their influence is.”

One scene also features the characters in the novel meeting an unnamed Israeli ambassador to the U.S. — who would have been Yitzhak Rabin at the time. That scene echoes the real moment when a teenaged Oren shook Rabin’s hand in 1970.

“If you read my book, Ally, it opens with me shaking his hand,” Oren said. “And I was a starstruck 15-year-old kid.”

Oren is better known for his nonfiction works, including *Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide* as well as *Six Days of War* and *Power, Faith and Fantasy*.

But *To All Who Call in Truth* is far from his first foray into fiction; in 2001, he published *Sand Devil*, a series of novellas set in Israel's Negev, in 2012 he released a novel, *Reunion*, and last year he published a collection of short stories titled *The Night Archer*.

And he shows no sign of easing up on writing anytime soon. The COVID pandemic, he said, provided him with more time to sit at home and write, as well as to reflect on the changing world.

"It gave me more time," he said, "and it enabled me to think more deeply about these issues, and the world that no longer exists — that Jewish world that I grew up in that no longer exists."

As the world begins to reopen, Oren is still focused on his writing projects — his next novel is written, and he has two nonfiction projects in the works as well as regular op-eds published in the media.

Following his time as Israel's ambassador

in Washington, Oren served in the Knesset for four years, departing shortly before what became the first of four national elections in two years. And amid Israel's ongoing political quagmire, Oren is not particularly optimistic.

A fifth election, he suggested, "would be a win for Bibi [Netanyahu]," but a loss for the State of Israel. "The country desperately needs a government."

But the escalating violence in Jerusalem, he said, throws the possibility of a government that includes Arab political parties into question.

"It seems to me that if the Arab parties are supporting riots in Jerusalem in which policemen are getting seriously hurt, it's going to be really hard for someone like Naftali Bennett to cooperate with them in a government," Oren suggested, speaking to *J* a day before violence in Israel's capital escalated further and Hamas launched

barrages of rockets at Israel. "It also indicates the problematic effect of, everytime we're going to have some kind of security issue with the Arabs, the government is liable to fall."

And despite the malaise plaguing the Israeli political system, Oren wouldn't rule out a return to the Knesset at some point in the future.

"I always say, if they call me to the flag I'll go to the flag," he said. "Even if it means giving up publishing." ♦

MAY 13, 2021

This NY congressman says Democratic socialism and support for Israel don't contradict

Rep. Adriano Espaillat, who represents New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood, has spent his tenure bringing Jews and Latinos together

By Gabby Deutch

As Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-NY) sees it, the Jewish and Dominican communities in his diverse Manhattan district have a lot in common. Both are diasporas: The Jewish community keeps close tabs on happenings in Israel, while Dominicans remain closely connected to their Caribbean homeland.

"Both are very family-oriented and religious. Both, of course contribute back home," said Espaillat, who came to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic as an undocumented immigrant when he was a child. "Of course, they love politics back home, they follow it like a national sport. And as a result, I think because of those similarities, we have been able to build

bridges."

The 13th congressional district, located in New York's Washington Heights neighborhood, is more than half Hispanic, but it also contains a sizable Jewish population centered around Yeshiva University that developed when German Jewish refugees arrived in the area (which some called "Frankfurt on Hudson") in the 1930s and 1940s. Members of that community included Henry Kissinger and sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who at 92 still lives in the neighborhood. A *New York Times* report from 2013 found that Washington Heights' Jewish population had increased by 144% in the previous decade, and Hamilton creator Lin-Manuel Miranda immortalized the neighborhood in his first

musical, *In the Heights*, set to be released as a feature film this summer.

"Back in the '90s, when crack was everywhere, and the city was in a tough situation and crime was really rampant in Washington Heights, the Jewish community stayed there, and built bonds and bridges with the Dominican community to push and help reduce crime," Espaillat noted. The congressman has stayed in the neighborhood for the more than 50 years he has lived in the U.S. "Grew up on 153rd Street, went to 181st, now I live on 215th Street. I've been moving up," he joked.

When he was elected to Congress in 2016, after 20 years in the New York State Assembly and state Senate, Espaillat, 66, joined a high-level effort to create

ties between the Jewish and Latino communities. In a recent interview with *Jewish Insider*, Espaillat said that members of the Latino-Jewish Congressional Caucus, of which he is the co-chair, are the “guardians of that good relationship.” The caucus will soon officially relaunch in the 117th Congress, with co-chairs Reps. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), and Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA).

“Democrats and Republicans were not talking to each other, and [we thought] maybe as Latinos and Jews, they will find another space to establish these connections,” said Dina Siegel Vann, who serves as director of the American Jewish Committee’s Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Institute for Latino and Latin American Affairs and had the initial idea for the caucus.

The caucus’s work includes educating other members of Congress about the culture and history of each community. Vann noted that for Espaillat, a crucial part of that is the story of Sosúa. The coastal Dominican city accepted about 1,000 Jewish refugees from Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, in part because the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo wanted to curry international favor after he massacred 25,000 Haitians in 1937.

“It was controversial, because a dictator had opened the doors. But he saved 1,000 Jews,” said Vann, who noted that Espaillat “promoted the issue of Sosúa, the knowledge of Sosúa in American society, as an example, of course, of human solidarity, but also the connections between Latinos and Jews.”

It’s “these kinds of connections,” Espaillat said of Sosúa, that “make both communities work well with each other.”

Another key issue for the caucus is promoting immigration reform, which has failed to progress in Congress in recent years. The members are “trying to ensure that the narrative of this country as a country of immigrants and recognizing the contributions of immigrants to this country,” Vann explained. “That is something very important to the caucus, and that brings both communities together.”

In Espaillat’s experience, coming to the U.S. as an immigrant “shapes you into being someone that’s a little bit more sensitive about others,” and noted that he has worked to reunite immigrant families separated at

the southern border. Yet when asked about the migrant surge that occurred in the early days of the Biden administration, resulting in some young people being separated from their families, he blamed Biden’s predecessor. “The Trump administration really left the entire system in shambles,” Espaillat argued.

After the results of the 2020 election showed that former President Donald Trump made inroads with Latino voters, Democrats have focused on outreach to those communities. Espaillat cautioned that the Latino community is “very diverse within itself, so it requires a special type of messaging.”

“You don’t communicate with a Cuban the way you communicate with a Puerto Rican, or you don’t communicate with a Puerto Rican the way you communicate with a Dominican,” he explained.

Republicans have also seen the political expediency of winning over Latino voters — and Espaillat admits they’re doing a good job. “I think the other side of the aisle has done a far better job of reaching out to what should be, to us, a very accepting constituency, one that probably should embrace us because of values that we have as a party,” he explained.

In New York, Republicans are looking to expand their base by capitalizing on Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s recent scandals, including alleged instances of sexual harassment and reports that his administration covered up information about COVID-19 nursing home deaths. Espaillat called for Cuomo to resign in March, along with nearly all of New York’s congressional delegation. He would not say whether he believes Democrats should put forth another candidate to challenge Cuomo if he seeks a fourth term in 2022.

“That’s a decision that he will have to make,” said Espaillat, “and I think that’s the decision that people will have to make. But right now, it’s really in the hands of the [attorney general, who is conducting an investigation] and the state legislature.”

Espaillat also recently walked back his endorsement of Scott Stringer, a New York City mayoral candidate accused of sexual impropriety by a former campaign volunteer. A spokesperson for Espaillat told *Ji* that he would not comment further on the topic.

In Washington Heights, the

congressman’s work bridging divides between Jewish and Latino communities has put him in a unique spot amid the city’s changing politics.

In recent years, the Democratic Socialists of America has exercised its growing clout in city politics by urging candidates in New York to condemn Israel and pledge not to travel to the Jewish state. “I haven’t felt any pressure” from the DSA, said Espaillat, a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. But, he pointed out, he is not an outsider to the group: “One of my mentors in college was Michael Harrington, who was the founder of that movement,” Espaillat explained. “I know the philosophy and the backbone of that movement, much of which I agree with, but I don’t think that being there and supporting Israel, or being against war and nuclear armaments — I don’t think that that’s mutually exclusive. I think you can be both.”

Espaillat “understands the importance of maintaining strong ties between the Hispanic and Jewish communities, and he does know that those two categories are not mutually exclusive,” said former Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), who was one of the Latino-Jewish Congressional Caucus’s original co-chairs when it was created in 2011. “From his first days in Congress and even before, he refused to let groups drive a wedge between our two communities.”

Michael Miller, executive vice president and CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, who leads Israel trips for New York legislators, traveled with Espaillat early in his career in the New York State Assembly.

“We all know that the DSA has their questionnaire for the New York City Council,” Miller told *Ji*. “They ask two questions: ‘Do you support BDS and if not, why not?’ And the other is, ‘Would you pledge not to travel to Israel on a trip such as the trip that the JCRC takes?’ And I think that these trips are really crucial. You could hear it from everybody who’s ever traveled on these trips or wants to travel on these trips, how much they want to see Israel with their own eyes, and not just to be educated about Israel through the media or through affinity groups, through advocacy groups.”

Espaillat said his strongest memory from his trip to the region was the constant

stress of the looming possibility of violence. “That is so intense, to wake up and live every day and go to school and go to work and do the things that you have to do with this tense feeling around you that anything could happen at any time. It’s very stressful,” he noted. “The Jewish people are very resilient. They do a great job under very adverse conditions, and I’m a strong supporter of Israel.”

Espallat was not in Congress in 2015 when the body voted on the nuclear agreement with Iran, but he said he is urging the Biden administration to renegotiate certain aspects of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. “I also think that this is a great opportunity to strengthen the previous agreement and to include any elements or provisions that were not included the first time,” Espallat said. “The ballistic missile

piece is one, and financing terrorist groups is another.”

Unlike other members of the Progressive Caucus, Espallat did not suggest that Washington should move more quickly or offer more concessions to Tehran. But he suggested his stance is not at odds with progressives. “For peace to come, there must be a disarmament, and that includes, of course, the nuclear arsenal that Iran is trying to build,” Espallat noted. “I think that’s very progressive.”

The bonds that Espallat has nurtured with the Jewish community for decades are designed to build a lasting trust between the groups.

“The best outcome is the building of trust among leaders so that when there are moments of conflict or potential conflict or misunderstanding, that there is somebody

you can pick up the phone and go and talk to,” said Arturo Vargas, CEO of the National Association of Latino Elected Officials, which worked with the AJC to create the Latino-Jewish Caucus.

On Monday, after Hamas began firing rockets from Gaza into Israel, Espallat tweeted his support for Israel: “I condemn these rocket attacks on Israel, and all violence against civilians.” ♦

MAY 10, 2021

What explains Tom Carper’s recent approach on Israel?

Former Sen. Joe Lieberman told JI he was ‘puzzled’ by Carper voting with Warren and Sanders against preventing the U.S. Embassy being moved out of Jerusalem

By Matthew Kassel

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE), a deeply religious Christian who looks forward to weekly Bible study, has frequently told friends and colleagues that he prays every night for a peaceful end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Despite his personal hope for a two-state solution, however, the senior senator from Delaware has hardly staked out a claim for himself as an active or outspoken voice in foreign policy circles over the years, focusing more on domestic issues like finance, transportation, homeland security, infrastructure and the environment throughout two decades in the upper chamber. His most high-profile cause, at the moment, is D.C. statehood.

But over the past few months,

Carper, 74, has indicated he is pursuing a new and more distinctive path on Middle East issues. In early February, for example, Carper was only one of three senators — alongside Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) — who voted against a budget amendment preventing the U.S. government from moving its embassy outside Jerusalem or downgrading it to a mission. Carper’s vote came as a surprise in large part because he says he supports keeping the embassy in Jerusalem.

“I was puzzled when I saw that he was with Warren and Sanders,” former Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT), who was recently enlisted by Carper to help with the D.C. statehood effort, said in a recent

interview with *Jewish Insider*. “I just generally had the impression that he sort of had a mainstream, Democratic, pro-Israel position.”

In March, Carper signed a letter asking that the Biden administration “urge the Israeli government to do more to help the Palestinians” with vaccine distribution “in the occupied territories.” And a week later, Carper abstained — as he did the previous year — from signing onto a letter denouncing the International Criminal Court’s newly launched investigation of Israel for alleged war crimes.

Taken together, this trio of seemingly principled stands represents a “troubling” direction for Carper, according to David Margules, a member

of Delaware's tight-knit pro-Israel community. Yet as Carper throws his support behind "statements coming from the fringe of the Democratic Party," Margules was at pains to explain the senator's motivations. "I'm really not quite sure, to be honest with you."

Barry Kayne, a pro-Israel advocate in Delaware, was equally mystified. "I can't understand why he's taken the positions that he's taken," he told JI. "I mean, it's absolutely infuriating to me. But I don't have an explanation."

Such bewilderment underscores a sense of mounting frustration among some in the state who say they have long struggled to make sense of Carper's approach, which until recently had been somewhat more muted. "Tom has been a conundrum for me for over a decade," Kayne added. "I've lobbied him for years. I've written to him relative to pro-Israel legislation or U.S.-Israel legislation, and he's always ambiguous."

In a statement to JI, a spokesperson for Carper defended the senator's embassy vote as "a principled stance on the belief that President Joe Biden — like presidents before him — should have the ability to develop and pursue his foreign policy agenda in any area of the world without limitations set by Congress, especially just a couple of weeks after taking office."

"The rationale for the senator's vote was simply to ensure the Biden administration is not constrained in its ability to conduct its own foreign policy," the spokesperson added. "Additionally, at the time of the vote, the Biden Administration had repeatedly made it clear that it had no intentions of moving the embassy from Jerusalem or altering the operations there, and Sen. Carper supports the decision not to move the embassy."

Lieberman said he was satisfied with Carper's reasoning. "I was concerned about the vote, but I think it's a good explanation, and I accept it," he told JI.

Critics, though, seized on a number of holes in Carper's logic as evidence of an uneven approach. If Biden had already committed to leaving the embassy in Jerusalem, why not affirm

that with a vote in favor of his decision? Moreover, his critics point out, Carper did not seem to hesitate in signing on to a letter in mid-April directly exhorting Biden to reenter the Iran nuclear deal — a clear demonstration of the senator's effort to influence the administration's foreign policy.

"I think he's full of it in that regard," said one source who has known Carper for decades but asked for anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the discussion.

Other activists at the local and national level suggested that Carper's recent actions cohere with longstanding convictions. "I think Carper is generally in the J Street camp," said Gil Sloan, a Democratic activist and Jewish community member, referring to the left-leaning Israel advocacy group. "So I'm not surprised at Carper's positions."

Carper has always held more progressive foreign policy views, according to Muqtedar Khan, a professor of political science and international relations at the University of Delaware who sits on the board of J Street's Delaware chapter, at least in contrast to Chris Coons, Delaware's other Democratic senator who is well-liked among pro-Israel advocates and positions himself as a foreign policy expert in Washington.

But until now, Carper — who before he was senator served as Delaware's lone congressman and as governor for more than a decade — has had few occasions to make his views known, Khan argued. "The U.S. terrain is changing," he said of Carper's apparent shift leftward. "He would not have had opportunities like this in the past. If he had probably the same opportunities 10 years ago, maybe he would have done it."

"We believe that, like many of his Democratic colleagues, Sen. Carper's record demonstrates a nuanced and principled position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American policy in the Middle East," said Dylan Williams, a senior vice president at J Street. "He co-sponsored resolutions in support of normalization with the UAE in the fall of 2020, has co-sponsored a bill authorizing full security assistance

to Israel in 2020, and also co-sponsored a bill reaffirming U.S. policy in favor of a two-state solution and opposing unilateral annexation of portions of the West Bank."

The budget amendment in particular "was, like so many of the amendments that arise in that process, a non-binding messaging vehicle," Williams told JI. "There was legitimate concern among some Hill offices and advocates that the amendment's language on embassy operations was intended to signal opposition to President Biden's pledge to reopen a separate consulate serving Palestinians that Trump harmfully closed and incorporated into the embassy."

In a lengthy email to JI, Carper clarified his underlying philosophy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a function of what he described as deeply held religious views.

"As my colleagues can tell you, my favorite activity of the week is Bible study. And every week, the Chaplain will ask us how our faith should guide us in the work we do here and at home, and he reminds us of one of the two greatest commandments — to love our neighbors as ourselves, treating others as we'd want to be treated," Carper said. "The Chaplain often invokes Matthew 25, one of my favorite lines, which paraphrased says 'When I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was thirsty did you give me a drink? When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was a stranger in your land, did you take me in?'"

That was Carper's way of emphasizing that he understands "the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no easy feat to address," as he put it. "But in the process of working towards an equitable resolution, we must never lose sight of the people — on both sides of the conflict — that are affected every single day," Carper continued. "When it comes to our foreign policy in the Middle East, and the multitude of issues the United States and our allies face and have to consider, we must never lose sight of the innocent men, women, and children that are impacted by the decisions that

are made.”

Still, members of Delaware’s pro-Israel community remain at odds with the senator. “He is a deeply religious man who feels a spiritual connection as well as a kinship based on Israel’s democracy,” Margules acknowledged. But while he concedes that Carper is “committed to Israel’s security,” Margules believes the senator is ultimately misguided. “He has fundamental views about Israel’s security that I just think are not historically justified.”

Carper, who has visited Israel several times throughout his career in public office, sees things differently. “Israel and the United States are connected by a shared set of democratic values and I’m proud to have a voting record that clearly shows my commitment to Israel’s security and prosperity,” he told JI.

Such policy disagreements have also arisen as Carper pushes for a negotiated return to the Iran nuclear deal. “He was in one of the first, if not the first, U.S. congressional delegations that went to Vietnam, and he often talks about this as an example of how entrenched enemies can become friends and have a constructive relationship,” Margules said of Carper, who is a former naval aviator. “If we support the moderates, then the moderates will have a greater capacity to influence their societies in a constructive fashion. Personally,

my view is that that perspective defies historical experience.”

The senator, however, characterized the agreement as “a good deal for our country, our allies, and Israel, one of our closest allies — especially when the alternative to this deal was increased tensions, the possibility of Iran acquiring nuclear arms, and maybe even war.”

Carper maintains widespread support throughout the state, according to recent polling. Having faced a progressive challenger last cycle, he prevailed with nearly 65% of the vote, continuing his statewide winning streak of 15 straight elections.

“He is very well respected in Delaware,” said Jack Markell, the state’s former governor. “He’s an extraordinarily hard-working guy. I mean, he is everywhere, and he is great about staying in touch with people. He does his homework. He understands the issues, and you can see that this electoral record. He’s been very easily reelected every time.”

Joe Pitka, a professor emeritus at the University of Delaware who specializes in local politics, said that “as a moderate liberal Democrat,” Carper can “appeal to a broad swath of Delaware’s generally pro-business voters.” The longtime senator, he added, “combines a successful mix of moderate policy positions on economic issues” with

“more progressive positions on some social issues.”

On U.S.-Israel relations, the senator made clear he was open to dialogue while firmly establishing his approach. “I believe the United States should be committed to the pursuit of comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and that must include supporting and working closely with Israel, which is our strongest ally in the region, and a nation I’ve had the privilege to have visited as a congressman, a governor, and a U.S. senator,” he said.

“Additionally, I am proud to be a firm supporter of a two-state solution that enables Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace, security and prosperity,” Carper added. “Not only would this outcome give the Palestinian people a place to govern and call home, but it would also provide Israel with greater security and strengthen regional stability.”

But for some, Carper’s views have only become more elusive. “He’s always made himself available to the community, but when the rubber meets the road, he doesn’t walk the walk for us,” Kayne said. “I just don’t get it. When we go to lobby him, I’m usually chosen as the person to handle the conversation, as much as I don’t want to, because every year I come up empty-handed. But we keep at it.” ♦

MAY 7, 2021

Seth Siegel’s next chapter

At a time when some might look to retire, Seth Siegel, known for his expertise on water sustainability, is taking on his next challenge

By Melissa Weiss

Seth Siegel has been many things in his life: a CEO, a Broadway and television producer, an author.

Now he’s taking on a new role: chief sustainability officer at N-Drip, the manufacturer of a pioneering gravity-

powered Israeli irrigation system.

It’s the natural next step for Siegel, 67, who has spent the last six years entrenched in the world of water sustainability, with an eye toward Israel’s progress on the issue.

Siegel is a veteran of the branding world and a serial entrepreneur, known until a handful of years ago for not only his business acumen, but also his activism and philanthropy. A Cornell University graduate, he chaired the

university Hillel's board of trustees, and was a board member of the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, a pluralistic day school in Manhattan, for more than 30 years. His activism with AIPAC brought him to Israel many times.

"In the process of trying to become really expert about Israel, you can't really do that without understanding the geography and the environmental challenges of the region," Siegel told *Jewish Insider*. "And that led me to becoming smart about water scarcity, and that in turn led me to spend a lot of deep reading about water scarcity globally."

Siegel, who is based in New York, interviewed more than 200 people for his first book, *Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution for a Water-Starved World*, released in 2015. One of them was Uri Shani, a Hebrew University professor and a former head of Israel's Water Authority.

Siegel and Shani crossed paths again after the book's release, when both were speaking at an event in Milwaukee. Shani tried to pitch him on an idea for his next book. "[Shani] says, 'I've invented something that's gonna change the world.' I said, 'Well, that's pretty good. That's a big statement,'" Siegel recalled.

Israel has long been a global leader in drip-water irrigation, the technological innovation that revolutionized farming in arid and drought-plagued regions. But it is not without its downsides; namely, the significant expense of installation, as well as the amount of energy used in order to power the systems. Because Shani's systems instead rely on gravity, they are more energy efficient and can cover larger expanses of land, providing a higher yield for the work.

Siegel first joined Shani's N-Drip as an investor. His relationship with the company evolved to a point of daily communication with N-Drip executives, giving advice and facilitating connections made originally during his years of research for his books. When he was offered the opportunity to come on board as an employee, Siegel was unsure how to proceed.

"Now first of all, I'm kind of at retirement age," he said. "Second of all, last time I had an employer, I was 27 or 28 years old. So now it's been a while since I had a boss. And third of all, you know, it's seven time zones away from where I live."

After giving more thought to the idea, Siegel eventually put aside his reservations and signed on.

N-Drip may well change the world, and if it does, some of the credit will go to Siegel, who now facilitates meetings with government officials, multilateral organizations and global corporations in an effort to scale up the company's work around the globe. N-Drip has already set up gravity-powered irrigation systems in Australia, Israel, the U.S. and the southern African nation of eSwatini (Swaziland).

For someone who admits to be approaching retirement age, Siegel shows no sign of considering a typical retirement. After the success of his first two books (the second, *Troubled Water: What's Wrong with What We Drink*, was released in 2019), both focused on water and technology, he wrote a third book, one that is markedly different from his prior writings but has been in the works for many years. That book, *Other People's Words: Wisdom for an Inspired and Productive Life*, hit stores this week.

When Siegel was a teenager, he began collecting notable quotations wherever he saw them: in books or in the text of news articles, scribbled or posted on walls. What started as a collection of scraps of paper with a few sentences scribbled down and shoved into a drawer morphed into a collection, typed onto index cards, of thousands of thoughts, words of advice and ruminations.

The book itself is a collection broken down by category: the chapter "Taking Charge," for example, includes quotes from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel ("In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible") and Princess Diana ("I want to do, not just to be"), while the "Arts and Entertainment" chapter features such voices as tennis legend Billie Jean King ("Champions

keep playing until they get it right") and Alexandre Dumas ("I have finished my play, now all I have to do is write it down").

Owing to Siegel's personal interests, the chapter titled "Our Fragile World" includes sections on technology, water and the environment. There are also a number of quotes from Jewish and Israeli figures, including the Baal Shem Tov, Menachem Begin and Golda Meir. Siegel is considering future editions, including one focused on Jewish speakers and quotes.

"It's an intellectual biography in a strange way, because these are the quotations that have formed the basis, the DNA of my worldview, and propelled me and what I've done in life," he said. "It's a way of looking at who I am as well, and not just for others, but for myself, [I can] look back and think, well, I remember when I clicked on this quotation, how it impacted me, I remember how it helped shape my thinking about things, or how it helped me to look at the world in a different way." ♦