

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Is it Miller time in Ohio's 16th Congressional District?; Islanders national anthem singer Nicole Raviv bridges nationalities and musical genres; Can Glenn Youngkin stem the blue tide in the Old Dominion?; Why Israel's move to CENTCOM matters; Kathryn Garcia sounds note of cautious optimism at Williamsburg watch party; and The politically lonely progressive Zionists

JUNE 23, 2021

Is it Miller time in Ohio's 16th Congressional District?

Max Miller, who worked in the Trump administration, is bringing the national GOP debate over Trumpism to the district

By Matthew Kassel

Despite a fiery campaign announcement in late February, Max Miller has maintained a relatively subdued local profile since he launched his primary bid against Rep. Anthony Gonzalez (R-OH), one of 10 House Republicans who voted in favor of impeaching former President Donald Trump after the violent Capitol riot that has since exposed deep divisions within the GOP.

Over the past few months, Miller — who worked as an aide in the Trump administration and was rewarded with an endorsement from the former president immediately after he announced his candidacy — has instead focused considerable attention on courting donors at Mar-a-Lago while sitting for interviews with national right-wing outlets like OANN, Newsmax and Fox News.

But Miller's challenge is likely to receive a major in-state boost on Saturday evening, when Trump is scheduled to host his first summer rally of the 2022 election cycle at the Lorain County Fairgrounds in Northeast Ohio. The former president, who has yet to declare whether he will run for office again,

is expected to gin up support for Miller's fledgling campaign — part of an ongoing effort to take revenge against those in the Republican Party who Trump believes crossed him following his departure from the White House.

Trump's speech is certain to increase the stakes of an already contentious congressional showdown that has come to embody a widening rift within the Republican Party between those who remain fiercely loyal to the ex-president and others who feel the events of January 6 were a deal-breaker. The outcome will, in many ways, serve as a barometer as to which side holds more sway among voters as speculation swirls over the possibility that Trump will mount a 2024 comeback campaign for the White House.

"It's going to be a very interesting test case of Trumpism in the Republican Party versus what used to be the establishment of the Republican Party," said David Cohen, a professor of political science at the University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics. "Right now, the momentum, the enthusiasm and the money is really on the side of Trumpism."

Whether Miller is capable of maintaining that energy with a year or so remaining until the primary — and with the boundaries of the electoral map set to be redrawn when Ohio drops a congressional seat next cycle — is also a key factor. But he claims that he is taking nothing for granted.

"I am going to get out there and meet every single individual within the 16th District, or whatever district it's going to be when it all is done with redistricting, and earn their vote," Miller told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. "It is not enough for me, and it should not be enough for the voter, just because I have President Trump's endorsement, to be the anointed one."

That Miller is eager to swat away suggestions of his privileged status in the race is telling. The 32-year-old Cleveland native and Marine reservist first gained a position on Trump's 2016 campaign thanks to a family connection — though in fairness, it is unclear how many applicants were vying to join what was then a deeply polarizing presidential bid. Miller, a 2013 graduate of Cleveland State University, earned the job in spite of an arrest record that came under scrutiny during his time serving in the White

House as a staffer in the office of personnel and then as the director of advance. Miller worked as a deputy campaign manager on Trump's 2020 re-election bid.

While in Washington, Miller established himself as something of a consummate Trumpworld insider. He developed a close connection with the former president and built a reputation as a fierce and devoted loyalist within Trump's inner circle, where his political and personal life were occasionally intertwined.

For a time, Miller dated Stephanie Grisham, Trump's former press secretary and communications director. The couple flaunted their relationship status at a state dinner for the Australian prime minister at the White House in 2019. According to a campaign spokesperson, Miller is now engaged to Emily Moreno, who worked on Trump's 2020 campaign and is the daughter of Cleveland businessman Bernie Moreno, a Senate candidate in Ohio's increasingly crowded Republican primary.

Miller is the scion of a wealthy Shaker Heights family with deep roots in the city's political and philanthropic milieu. His grandfather, Sam Miller, a co-chair of Cleveland's Forest City Enterprises, was a powerbroker whose influence extended well beyond real estate development before his death in 2019. The son of Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland, the elder Miller is credited with launching the career of Michael White, Cleveland's second-longest-serving mayor, while using his considerable wealth and political clout to support a number of causes that were personally important to him, including advocating for Israel.

But despite Miller's impressive pedigree, he remains something of an unknown entity in the region. Though early polling from the conservative Club for Growth, which has endorsed him, gave him a nine-point lead over Gonzalez with nearly 40% of the vote among Republican primary voters, 31% of respondents said they were undecided because they were unfamiliar with Miller's candidacy.

Few who spoke with JI were aware of Miller before he entered the primary in Ohio's 16th Congressional District, where Gonzalez, 36, is currently serving his second term. Still, the solidly red district,

a predominantly white, working-class, rural enclave including some western suburbs of Cleveland, remains a redoubt of Trumpism — which may give Miller a built-in advantage.

"If you take what we mean when we say 'Trump country' and we apply it to this district, I think you'd be pretty close to being on mark," said David Giffels, the author of *Barnstorming Ohio: To Understand America*. "There are a lot of pick-up trucks in the 16th District."

So far, however, Miller's fundraising suggests that he is benefiting more from out-of-state support, with a preponderance of donations flowing in from Trump's home base of Florida, according to the most recent filings from the Federal Election Commission.

Miller recently settled in Rocky River, a city on Lake Erie where Gonzalez also lives, as he seeks to establish a presence in the district after four years in Washington. "In a safely red district," Miller told JI, "I really saw an opportunity to get a stronger conservative leader in who is going to push the America First policies and agenda that President Trump had instilled in this country."

Under normal circumstances, Gonzalez would be the kind of politician Republican leaders seem eager to embrace. The son of a Cuban immigrant father, the Cleveland native played football at The Ohio State University — garnering widespread renown for a game-winning catch — and was drafted into the NFL in 2007. He played for the Indianapolis Colts for four years as a receiver before signing with the New England Patriots, retiring from football in 2012.

He earned a business degree from Stanford University and ran for Congress in 2018, winning his primary by more than 10%. Gonzalez ran uncontested in the 2020 primary and, before his impeachment vote, was overwhelmingly popular in his district, even among independents and some Democrats. Despite strong resistance from Trump supporters in the state and nationally, including calls for his resignation from Ohio Republican Party leaders, Gonzalez has defended casting his vote against the former president.

"The reality is the Congress and the vice

president were under attack by a mob and the president didn't step up in my opinion in nearly the right way to calm it down, to stop it," Gonzalez said in an interview with *The Dispatch* in late January.

Now, he is facing two primary challengers to his right, including Jonah Schulz, a Cleveland resident and former Republican congressional candidate who described himself as a "true conservative" in a mid-February Twitter announcement. "My RINO opponent Anthony Gonzalez voted to IMPEACH President Trump."

Just weeks later, Miller — who is by all accounts the most credible challenger — entered the race. "I'm running for Congress to stand up for Northeast Ohioans," he said on social media. "They overwhelmingly voted for the America First agenda. But their Congressman betrayed them when he voted to impeach President Trump. I won't back down. And I'll never betray them."

In the interview with JI, Miller said the Capitol attack was "a sad day for this country," but quickly qualified his remarks. "But I want to make something very clear," he said. "Nothing that the president did on January 6 and leading up to January 6 is an impeachable offense."

Miller said he discussed his candidacy with Trump before jumping into the race four months ago. "He said, 'It's going to be nasty, are you ready for that?'" Miller recalled. "That was his biggest concern."

But Miller seems more eager than Gonzalez — whose campaign declined interview requests from JI — to engage in mudslinging. Miller alleges that Gonzalez has been absent from the district throughout his tenure in office. "Anthony has abandoned the community and spends the vast majority of his time in Washington, D.C.," Miller charged. "It's troublesome."

He also accused the two-term representative of supporting Democratic policies, despite a voting record that put him in line with Trump's agenda more than 85% of the time.

"I don't know Anthony too well," Miller said when asked if he agreed with Gonzalez on any issues. "In terms of his policy record, I think it speaks for itself. He voted to keep troops in Syria, which really bothered me. As somebody who is in the military, I truly believe that we need to get out of these

endless wars.”

The first-time candidate said he is running for Congress, in large part, so he can work to advance Trump’s foreign policy agenda. Miller puts his Jewish identity, which he says is intimately connected with his strong and unequivocal support for Israel, front and center on his campaign website.

“Under the Trump administration, what he was able to accomplish for the State of Israel, he did more in four years than any other president could have ever done in the history of this country, bar none,” Miller said enthusiastically, using the kind of breathless rhetoric he often relies on while discussing the former president. “People said if you move the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, you’re going to have another intifada. Nothing happened. The Abraham Accords are historic,” he said, referring to the pact that normalized relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

“I mean, you cannot devalue that,” Miller added, “and I think anyone who says different truly doesn’t understand what President Trump and this administration [were] able to accomplish.”

Miller emphasized his vehement opposition to the Iran nuclear deal on the grounds that it is against Israel’s interests. “You could go over to Israel right now and you could take the most left-leaning Israeli and that individual would not support the Iran nuclear deal,” said Miller, who harshly criticized President Joe Biden’s Middle East foreign policy approach amid recent violence between Israel and Hamas. “If that doesn’t speak volumes to what this country is doing in terms of not being an ally to Israel, it is very alarming to me.”

“I look at the United States-Israeli relationship as the most important ally that we have, not only geopolitically and strategically, but it’s the only democracy in the Middle East,” Miller told JI. “We need to hold that to be true. They are just like we are. They value freedom of religion and the system of values and liberty and free elections. There are not too many countries, if any, over in the Middle East right now that have that, and it’s extremely important that we need to remain strong with Israel in lockstep and support them in any way that

we can.”

Miller also vociferously rejected the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel as antisemitic. “This is the exact type of rhetoric that we’re seeing from the left right now that we need to push back [on],” said Miller, who was appointed by Trump to the board of trustees of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. “This is exactly why I’m going to Congress to fight things like this and to shut these things down. I obviously have an emotional connection.”

Miller’s passion for Middle East foreign policy runs in the family: His uncle is Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former longtime Middle East analyst in the State Department as well as a peace negotiator.

Not that they seem to agree on much when it comes to geopolitics in the region. “I do have a great relationship with my uncle Aaron. I think he’s a wonderful guy, but I think we have a fundamental disagreement,” Miller said without going into specifics. “Look, I understand that he is a Middle East foreign policy expert and one of the top in the country, if not the world, but we do have fundamental disagreements.”

Aaron David Miller, for his part, declined to weigh in when asked for comment about his nephew’s bid for public office. “Love my sibs and their kids,” he told JI in a brief email. “But I never mix family and politics.”

Miller suggested that he will be a stronger advocate for Israel than Gonzalez if he is elected.

“There’s a lot of people in Congress, and I think Anthony is one of them, who say they’re pro-Israel. You can be pro-Israel, but are you going to be a champion for Israel? That’s what I boil it down to,” Miller said, adding: “When it really matters, and if something is going to happen to that country, are you going to go and fight for it, or are you just going to go be pro-Israel on paper? I’m telling you that I’m going to be a champion for the State of Israel.”

Boris Epshteyn, a political commentator and former Trump advisor who has donated to Miller’s campaign, agreed with that self-assessment. “I’m proud to have worked with Max Miller and am fully confident that once elected to Congress, Max will continue to be

a champion of [former] President Trump’s MAGA policies and a staunch supporter of the State of Israel,” he said in a text message to JI.

Still, a number of Jewish community members and pro-Israel advocates in Cleveland and the surrounding area are standing by Gonzalez.

“He showcases to us that he takes our community very seriously,” said Howie Beigelman, executive director of Ohio Jewish Communities. “On the record side,” Beigelman added, “because he has a record to run on at this point, he’s been there on the things we’ve asked him for.”

Gonzalez visited Israel in 2019 on a trip sponsored by the AIPAC-affiliated American Israel Education Foundation and has made clear to Jewish leaders in the Cleveland area that he is strongly devoted to safeguarding the U.S.-Israel relationship, according to Beigelman, who characterized the congressman’s commitment to the Jewish state as “from the heart.”

Beigelman, whose organization represents Ohio’s eight Jewish Federations as well as 150 affiliated nonprofit agencies throughout the state, told JI he suspects that many Jewish community members will remain loyal to Gonzalez in the upcoming primary even as Miller makes inroads in the district, which is home to a small but politically engaged cohort of Jewish constituents. “I feel people will like his *chutzpah*, of being independent,” Beigelman said of the congressman’s impeachment vote. “I think there are plenty of people in our community who value that.”

“He has demonstrated the kind of courage that I want all the representatives to demonstrate,” said Rita Schaner, a Canton resident who is active in Jewish causes, recalling a meeting with the congressman before the recent impeachment trial. “I was impressed with him then. I am more impressed with him now, and I have told his aides that I will actively work and encourage my friends who live in the district to vote for him.”

“Miller I know nothing about, OK?” Schaner added. “Nothing.”

Rob Zimmerman, a Shaker Heights city councilmember and pro-Israel activist, said he had never heard of Miller either, but remains concerned that Trump’s

imprimatur will give the rookie candidate an edge in the upcoming primary. Zimmerman told JI he is now working to boost Gonzalez, raising money for the embattled incumbent along with Democrats and Republicans. “I feel very strongly in country over party,” he said.

Such principled sentiments suggest that Gonzalez may have more allies than is readily apparent as Miller enters the scene with significant momentum.

“Congressman Gonzalez has fought to provide greater support for Holocaust survivors, has been a strong ally in the fight against antisemitism and has consistently supported a close relationship between the United States and Israel,” said Jason Wuliger, a pro-Israel advocate in the Cleveland area.

“When you have a congressman like that, you stand by him.”

Even a family member of Miller’s expressed optimism that the neophyte Republican challenger would meet some resistance in his effort to overthrow Gonzalez.

“I would hope that any decent person who is a part of the community he’s from would feel a moral obligation to repudiate him and all the lunatics like him — from Trump on down — in the strongest possible terms,” said Adam Ratner, a distant cousin of Miller’s who lives in New York City and did not hesitate to offer his views on the record in an email exchange with JI.

While Miller acknowledges the “target of opportunity that came up with the vote for

impeachment,” he insists that his candidacy is about more than simply enacting payback on behalf of Trump.

“I’m sick of seeing people like Congressman Gonzalez who say they’re going to do one thing and turn their back and do another and cozy up to these dinner parties and the social elites of Washington, D.C., New York and California,” Miller declared. “And they’re afraid to really stand up for the people, so instead what they do is they stand up for themselves.”

Miller is running, above all, “to serve the constituents of the 16th District and represent their interests,” he averred, “not my own.”

“That’s truly what I want to do.” ♦

JUNE 24, 2021

Islanders national anthem singer Nicole Raviv bridges nationalities and musical genres

The international artist taps into her multicultural background to create a new flavor of music

By Madeline Solomon

As the New York Islanders’ national anthem singer, Nicole Raviv was used to the spotlight when she took the stage on June 9 ahead of a playoff game against the Boston Bruins.

What she wasn’t prepared for, however, was a technical glitch that cut her microphone, resulting in an arena-wide singalong that quickly went viral.

After a year in which Raviv had largely sung to an empty arena due to COVID-19 restrictions, the moment was heartwarming. “I think at this point, it’s become a lot more intimate with these [fans] and less distant. This is a crowd, this is a performance... and more of like a collective environment,” she told *Jewish Insider* in a recent conversation.

The evening was very special for Raviv as the team’s national anthem singer, a job she first took on in 2019. She will soon head to Israel — where

her parents grew up — for the hockey off-season and plans to travel back and forth to North America.

The move is the next natural step for Raviv, who was born and raised in Montreal with her three siblings after her parents relocated to Canada. For years she has seamlessly woven her personal identity and her creative expression as a musician who moves between languages, cultures and genres.

“Hebrew is the first language I was taught at home. My father used to sing with me from a very young age and taught me my first melodies,” Raviv told JI. “I always felt a connection to the Hebrew language. I’m always asked to sing in Hebrew for Jewish events in America. When I’m on stage in Tel Aviv, I’ll throw in a few Hebrew cover songs, of course.”

Raviv, who can sound like a sultry pop diva one moment and an Israeli

folk singer the next, refers to her style as “world music” — a blurring of genres that focuses more on narrative than a particular sound. Her trilingual background is reflected in her music.

“I think that I’ve grown up like anyone would, and realized what I want to talk about. So lyrics are more important to me now,” Raviv said. “And sounds and textures of the music are important to me now. Even if I’m singing in English, I love putting Mediterranean sounds in there just to paint the story of me and who I am.”

Raviv seemed destined for an international musical career. Her mother, a child of Holocaust survivors who was born in Romania, and her father, who was born in Morocco — both actors — met on stage performing in Israel. When she was 18, she moved from Montreal to New York to study musical theater at the American Musical

and Dramatic Academy, and at The New School University, where she received a bachelor's in fine arts degree, and never left the city.

"New York was always the place I wanted to go to," Raviv said. "Because I think the opportunities were best for my industry — and for every industry."

She released her album "#GirlBoss" in 2017, and her single "Do It for Love" in 2019. Her next single, "What You Started," will come out in July, and she plans to release a new album later this year.

"I am excited to collaborate with the well-renowned saxophone player Richie Cannata [he played the soulful sax solo on Billy Joel's iconic song "New York State of Mind"] on my new song that comes out this summer," Raviv shared. "I'm working with producers from New York as well as in Israel."

Even in New York, Israel has never

been far from mind. During Israel's conflict with Hamas in Gaza last month, which she watched unfold from thousands of miles away, she found it "difficult to be far from my family and see everything unravel the way it did," she told JI. Raviv noted the recent rise in antisemitism in the U.S. that followed the conflict. "In America, things got bad too."

Rare for a musical artist, Raviv has incorporated visual of antisemitic attacks into her work. The video for "Do It For Love" includes a scene in which an identifiably Jewish man is pushed to the ground by assailants who swipe his yarmulke off his head. The video ends with Raviv dancing in the desert with an Israeli flag.

"Angel," released last year as a tribute to her late grandfather who passed away in 2018, was her first official bilingual song. Her grandfather, a Holocaust

survivor, moved to Israel after World War II and lived there the rest of his life. The music video is a mixed-media compilation of home movies and vintage clips of Israel that underscore Raviv's multicultural background.

Many of her songs are in Hebrew. "I've kind of been everywhere, but I've always been Jewish. I've always been Israeli, I speak the language," Raviv said. "So I've always just carried that with me. And that sense of pride has always been with me. I've been getting a lot of reactions from people saying, 'So nice to see someone Jewish and proud out there.' It gives them confidence to do the same," Raviv said.

"I want to take this melting pot that I am and that New York is and that Israel is and that all of us kind of are," Raviv said. "And bring it all together." ♦

JUNE 22, 2021

Can Glenn Youngkin stem the blue tide in the Old Dominion?

The former Carlyle CEO running for governor in Virginia hopes he can win over Republicans and moderates by avoiding Trump, but is going all-in on conservative culture war

By Gabby Deutch

For most of the last 12 years, Republicans in Virginia have been wandering in a political wilderness.

They watched in despair as Democrats swept statewide elections in 2013, then nearly won control of the General Assembly in 2017 — the final seat resulted in a tie that was broken when the Republican's name was pulled out of a bowl — before going on to wrest control of the House of Delegates and State Senate in 2019. Republicans' poor electoral fortunes were not limited to Richmond; former President Donald Trump lost the state by five points in 2016, but lost it by 10 points four years

later.

As the Virginia gubernatorial race begins in earnest, Democrats in the Old Dominion seem to think the status quo is working. In a landslide primary election earlier this month, Virginia Democrats nominated Terry McAuliffe, the prolific national fundraiser who already served as governor from 2014 to 2018. (The state bars governors from serving two consecutive terms.)

But the GOP hasn't given up on Virginia yet. From a primary field of well-known Republican politicians ranging from business-friendly state lawmakers to a self-described "Trump in heels," Republican voters chose

Glenn Youngkin, a political newcomer who most recently served as chief executive of investing giant The Carlyle Group. Youngkin has touted his business bona fides while running a campaign that's scant on policy details, in the hopes of appealing to both the Trump-supporting base of his party and the suburban swing voters who overwhelmingly shifted to Democrats during the past administration. His clearest argument seems to be that he is a new face on the scene — and he thinks Virginia needs change.

"I think common sense has been checked at the door," Youngkin told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview at

his campaign headquarters in Falls Church, Va., just inside the Beltway. He was wearing a white Oxford shirt with his campaign logo — the words YOUNGKIN GOVERNOR above the shape of Virginia — embroidered in red. “Being an outsider who brings a fresh perspective, I can say things like, ‘Well, why in the world do we do it like that?’”

Despite Democrats’ good fortunes in Virginia in recent years, a win is not a guaranteed outcome for McAuliffe. A recent poll showed the former governor beating Youngkin by only four points, a surprisingly close margin. Yet unlike 2017, when national money poured into the state’s down-ballot races, Virginia Democrats worry those donors might feel they no longer need to invest in Virginia. “We’ll have a challenging time convincing national donors that Virginia is at risk,” a former Democratic state official told JI.

“A Republican can win in Virginia,” said Mark Rozell, dean of the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University. “There are many analyses that I think are overstated, that claim that Virginia is a solid blue state now strongly in Democratic hands, and nearly impossible for Republicans to win statewide. We’ve been here before.”

In an interview with JI, Youngkin provided insight into how he plans to address two of his major priorities — education and the economy — and expressed concern over rising antisemitism in Virginia and around the country. Unlike many Republican Senate and House candidates who are clamoring for Trump’s endorsement, Youngkin did not mention the former president over the course of the interview.

“He’s making, I think, the right choice in presenting himself now as a mainstream, conservative Republican, and trying to move away from the taint of the Trump era,” said Rozell. “All of that is complicated by the fact that Trump gave a full-throated endorsement of Youngkin, and Youngkin responded by saying he was honored to have that endorsement.”

Since winning the Republican nomination at a statewide nominating convention last month, Youngkin has shied away from mentioning Trump on the campaign trail. This marks a change for Youngkin, who ran a markedly more conservative campaign in the primary, when he touted his Election Integrity Task Force, and refused to say whether President Joe Biden was legitimately elected. Just days after clinching the nomination, he began to acknowledge Biden’s election as legitimate.

He has also avoided taking concrete positions on culturally conservative issues like abortion and gun rights. His campaign website does not have an issues page, and a Washington Post editorial criticized Youngkin for “mastering the duck and the dodge.”

Democrats’ strategy involves taking Youngkin’s lack of concrete policy proposals and tying him to Trump, but Youngkin is attempting to pre-empt that by running TV ads across the state, part of his decision to invest millions of his own dollars into his campaign. “It’s giving Youngkin the opportunity to define himself prior to the time that the Democrats define him,” said Bob Holsworth, managing director at DecideSmart, a Virginia-based political consulting firm.

While Youngkin is tiptoeing around Trump’s legacy, he is offering a full-throated endorsement of the latest front in national Republicans’ culture war: the battle in school boards across the country, including in Virginia, over critical race theory.

“What critical race theory is clearly about is, first, identifying people by the color of their skin and dividing people into groups, and then providing judgments on those groups,” Youngkin explained. The term refers to a legal theory, which has historically been reserved for college courses, that asserts that racism is systemic in the U.S. Over the past few months, as many school boards around the country have mandated instruction about racism following widespread racial justice protests, the term has come into popular parlance.

Critics of critical race theory argue that teaching children that white Americans have “white privilege” due to their race, while Black people and other people of color are at a disadvantage, encourages strife between racial groups. “It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t talk about the challenges that so many folks and particularly black Americans have faced,” Youngkin noted. “In fact, it kind of pits kids against one another. And this just isn’t right.”

Republicans like Youngkin seek to limit recent school board curriculum changes that now mandate the teaching of topics like white supremacy and racism in greater detail.

“It was, in fact, mandated through the Board of Education, that we were going to teach this in the schools. We will de-mandate that,” said Youngkin. He did not provide further details on how he will attempt to fight critical race theory. “The goal is for us to actually not judge people by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character and by opening up opportunity for everyone,” he explained, quoting Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Board of Education is a commission whose members are appointed by the governor, and Youngkin would not have sway over the board until its current members’ terms expire, beginning next year.

In response to the racial reckoning that occurred last summer after George Floyd’s murder, the state Board of Education adopted some changes to Virginia’s state history and social science standards last fall. But the new standards do not refer to “critical race theory,” and ultimately most decisions about how to adapt those standards into concrete curriculums occur at local school board levels, which would be out of Youngkin’s direct control as governor.

Still, Youngkin and Republicans think the message sells. Critical race theory “clearly has some political appeal” as a campaign talking point, said Rozell. “If the Republicans can actually pivot away from the Trump era, and turn the tables, and try to characterize the Democratic left as

having gone way too far, there may be a strategy there to win over some swing voters in the critical suburbs and exurban communities.”

Jewish Republicans think the message is resonating in their communities, too. “I think it’s an issue that has really taken hold,” said William Kilberg, a former partner at Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher who served as solicitor for the U.S. Department of Labor in the Nixon administration and who lives in McLean. “I think people are very concerned. They’re seeing a lot of it in the schools, both public and private.”

Rabbi Dovid Asher of Keneseth Beth Israel, an Orthodox synagogue in Richmond, expressed concern that curriculum changes could target Jewish students, or unfairly leave out Jewish history. (The edited standards adopted by the state last year include the Holocaust, which has long been part of the state standards.) “I think a lot of us are concerned about efforts in other states, like California, in terms of what is going to be adopted or ratified for the curriculum, and whether Jews are going to be left out, or even worse, kind of attacked for a misunderstanding of our history,” Asher said, referring to the California state ethnic studies curriculum whose early iterations were widely criticized by the Jewish community for leaving out Jews and targeting Israel. “We certainly would like allies on the inside that have power with regards to these issues, to be more inclusive of the American Jewish narrative.”

In contrast to other Virginia Republicans who have run far-right campaigns in recent years, Youngkin has tried to present his campaign as a big tent; he put out a statement recognizing Juneteenth and last week announced a Latinos for Youngkin coalition.

“What’s been interesting is the enthusiasm for this campaign. What we’re doing is not just Republicans, it’s actually Republicans and independents and a lot of Democrats,” Youngkin told JI.

Still, Youngkin is new to electoral politics, and building a coalition is

difficult if voters don’t know who he is. A graduate of Rice University and Harvard Business School, Youngkin worked at Carlyle for 25 years. He has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Republican politicians, but was not widely known as a major donor.

Youngkin’s relative novelty also extends to the state’s Jewish community. “Most of my Jewish friends, candidly, are either in New York or Texas,” Youngkin said when asked who he is close to in Virginia’s Jewish community. Youngkin’s former colleague David Rubenstein, the Carlyle founder and a prominent Jewish philanthropist, declined to comment, noting through a spokesperson that he does not weigh in on political topics.

Youngkin is active in faith circles; he served as church warden at Holy Trinity Church in McLean, and until he ran for office, he was on the board of trustees at the Museum of the Bible in Washington. Funded by the Green family, the evangelical Christian family that owns Hobby Lobby, the museum aims “to invite all people to engage with the transformative power of the Bible.”

“What I loved about the museum — when I was in an exhibit, and I looked around, there were folks from every possible faith persuasion, and none,” Youngkin said. “There were folks from all ages and ethnicities learning about the Bible, and for all kinds of reasons: curiosity, to deepen a religious understanding, it was really neat.”

Last week, Youngkin unveiled a plan to combat antisemitism — his most specific policy proposal to date, on any topic. He pledged to create a “Virginia Holocaust, Genocide and Anti-Semitism Advisory Commission” and work with the General Assembly to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. The plan appears to be modeled off a bill that passed in Texas last week, which will adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism and create a state commission of the same name as the one in Youngkin’s proposal.

“Antisemitism is on the rise, and actually violence is as a result of, I think,

a lessening of understanding of, one, we have to treat each other with deep respect, but also, why do we teach about the Holocaust in Virginia? It’s to make sure that Virginians understand and can remember,” Youngkin explained.

McAuliffe has not released a concrete plan on confronting antisemitism, but his website notes that he intends to “improve identification and enforcement of hate crimes.” Reached for comment this week following Youngkin’s proposal, McAuliffe mentioned the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, which he called “a grim reminder that antisemitism and white supremacy are alive and well in our Commonwealth and in our nation” and noted that Youngkin’s “top endorser Donald Trump...called these domestic terrorists ‘very fine people.’” (In response, a Youngkin spokesperson noted that “the anti-Semitic march in Charlottesville was an abhorrent demonstration of hate that has no place in America.”)

Youngkin’s spokesperson told JI that when crafting the proposal, the campaign had consulted with Rabbi Yaakov Menken, managing director of the Coalition for Jewish Values, a conservative advocacy organization, and Rabbi Gershon Litt, the Hillel director at the College of William and Mary. When contacted by JI, both rabbis said they were approached by the campaign after the fact and asked to give a quote praising the proposal.

“I just gave a quote about the legislation but I have never spoken with the campaign,” Litt said. Menken said a campaign official called and gave him an overview: “I didn’t even look it over. She kind of ran it by me,” he noted. “I said, ‘That sounds like a great idea.’”

Other politically conservative Jewish community leaders agree that they are just now beginning to learn about Youngkin, but some like what they have seen so far. Kilberg believes the Youngkin campaign is trying to reach Jewish voters. “I have no doubt [he] will,” Kilberg, a longtime Republican activist, knows Youngkin from the business world, said. “He

shows sensitivity out of the box. I know him better, I suspect, than most of our co-religionists because we're more active and we're Republicans and most Jews are not."

Asher, the Richmond rabbi, said that Youngkin "has a little bit of a reputation, especially within the business community and with regards to his political interests and political connections, to be someone who is supportive of tradition, of religious observance, and somebody who is going to protect religious liberties."

Several Jewish Republicans remarked to JI that Youngkin had supported the Jewish community earlier this year when the Republican Party of Virginia announced that voting in the statewide nominating convention would take place only on a Saturday, with no exception for Shabbat-observant Jews. The party eventually added a Friday afternoon voting period. "He was very

supportive of that initiative and in that kind of outreach, so for Republicans in my congregation, that's a good sign — to have somebody who could be the leader of the Virginia Republican Party be on their side for those issues," said Asher.

Ultimately, Youngkin's pitch comes back to his experience as an executive, which he says can help him run the state more efficiently — a classic argument for business leaders-turned-politicians, and one that McAuliffe himself has used.

On the economy, he sounds like an old-school conservative, with the goal of cutting red tape and bureaucracy. His first step will be to "make sure that any residual executive order that the governor has put in place is removed immediately," Youngkin said. He pointed to an executive order that current Governor Ralph Northam signed in January making some COVID-19 workplace standards

permanent, though a more recent order in May ended the mask mandate and eased restrictions.

He proposed offering a tax holiday to new small businesses "in order to give them a chance to get back on their feet because we need that job engine cranked back up," Youngkin said. More broadly, he criticized bureaucratic regulations in the state. "Our job creation engine has had a blanket on it, which has really been a stack of challenging regulatory impositions," argued Youngkin. "As a business leader, there's just no excuse for it."

"The comprehensive nature of the Virginia government doesn't really intimidate me, because I've run something very big," said Youngkin. "But I also recognize that I'm going to need a lot of people around me who understand how to get things done in order to accomplish many of our goals." ♦

JUNE 23, 2021

Why Israel's move to CENTCOM matters

Moving Israel to the Pentagon's Middle East command could lead to progress on the Abraham Accords, experts say

By Gabby Deutch

When Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi traveled to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla., yesterday, the visit marked the beginning of a new phase in a military relationship between the U.S. and Israel that is already strong and extensive.

"The current operational cooperation and the planned improvements agreed during my visit attest to the mutual commitment between CENTCOM and the IDF to deal more effectively with the diverse and emerging challenges," Kochavi said in a statement.

The U.S. military has 11 combatant commands, each of which has a specific geographic or functional mission. For

instance, Cyber Command, which defends national security interests in cyberspace, and Africa Command, which strengthens the defense capabilities of African countries; and Space Command. Before Trump's announcement, Israel, despite its geographic location, had fallen under European Command, which works closely with NATO on security issues in Europe.

Kochavi's visit marked the first time the top IDF official had visited CENTCOM's Tampa headquarters since former President Donald Trump announced in January, days before leaving office, that Israel would soon fall under CENTCOM's area of responsibility, a shift from its current status as part of European Command

(EUCOM). The announcement marked the culmination of years of unofficial cooperation between Israel and CENTCOM, whose mission is to "build cooperation among nations throughout the Middle East."

The main reason for the longstanding arrangement was the icy relationship that historically existed between Israel and its Arab neighbors. But as Israel has begun cooperating with Persian Gulf nations — including recent diplomatic agreements with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, and reported behind-the-scenes coordination with Saudi Arabia — the U.S. made a change to its Unified Command Plan.

"The easing of tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors subsequent

to the Abraham Accords has provided a strategic opportunity for the United States to align key partners against shared threats in the Middle East,” the Pentagon said when it announced the change in January.

“We saw this as the next military step after the Abraham Accords,” said Michael Makovsky, president and CEO of the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA).

Two months before the Trump administration’s policy change, JINSA authored a report urging the Pentagon to make such a change. Makovsky, one of the report’s lead authors, told *Jewish Insider* that he first began to raise the subject privately in 2018. After the Abraham Accords were signed last year, “we also got wind that this was being seriously considered,” he said, leading his organization to publish the report.

Part of JINSA’s goal in advocating for the change is to push for an expansion of the Abraham Accords, potentially even bringing a powerhouse like Saudi Arabia into the diplomatic agreement signed last year. “It could facilitate cooperation even with those countries [that the Israelis] don’t have diplomatic ties to,” Makovsky said. “Is it possible the Saudis could be part of some military architecture that Israeli is part of, without having diplomatic ties? It’s possible, especially if you have the United States as a leader in all this.”

The change has not yet formally happened — CENTCOM Commander Marine Corps Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. told a Senate Armed Services committee hearing in April that the transition should take place by the fall — but Kochavi’s visit to the Pentagon and the Tampa headquarters this week show that both Americans and Israelis are already taking the change seriously. “I am absolutely confident that we will be able to retain Israel’s military advantage,” McKenzie said at the hearing.

So what does the change mean for U.S.-Israel military cooperation?

“Military officers are often quick to acknowledge that there is very close and ongoing coordination between Israel

and CENTCOM on issues of common concern, but right now, of course, there is no full-time Israeli presence at CENTCOM,” said Michael Eisenstadt, director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy’s Military and Security Studies Program.

When Israel is integrated into CENTCOM, the Israeli military will have staff stationed in Tampa. “Having a full-time military representative, or a team of representatives there, first of all, would enable Israel to see where they can contribute to CENTCOM’s mission on a day-to-day basis, rather than coming over for visits and having a set agenda,” like Kochavi did this week, Eisenstadt explained.

He compared the situation to that of college students who live off-campus, removed from the center of university life. “When you live in town, you come to school for classes, and then you go back home, and you don’t have a full understanding of what’s going on on campus,” said Eisenstadt. “When you live on campus, you have a much better handle of those things, and you get to know a lot more of the students” — and the same can be true of Israel’s new role at CENTCOM, Eisenstadt suggested. “Once the Israelis have representatives there, it will create opportunities for both official and informal networking with representatives from other countries, some of which Israel still doesn’t have diplomatic relations with,” he said.

Even before the move, Israel was edging closer to CENTCOM, with more collaboration happening between Central Command and the IDF. McKenzie said in April that Israel was historically not part of CENTCOM “particularly because of strains between Egypt and Israel. We are now well past that.” Former CENTCOM Commander Gen. Joseph Votel became the first leader of Central Command to visit Israel in 2018.

McKenzie told senators in April that the reason for moving Israel into CENTCOM was that “all of Israel’s threats really emanate from the east, which is in the CENTCOM area of

responsibility.”

One of those threats is Iran. “You had a president [Trump] that’s very focused on Iran. Israel is a primary player on the ground pushing back against the Iranians, which is in the overriding interests of other CENTCOM members, such as Saudi, UAE, Bahrain and others,” Makovsky explained. “If your orientation is that the Iran threat is the most important challenge in the region, then it makes a lot of sense for this to happen.”

Even before this change, U.S.-Israel military cooperation was already strong. Eisenstadt pointed out that in some ways, this move just streamlines a relationship that already exists.

“The coordination is so extensive, I’m not sure [the move to CENTCOM] will, in practical terms, have a major impact,” Eisenstadt stated. The U.S. and Israel already “have this long-standing, deep dialogue on Iran. But again, having people there, it’s just always better.”

Advocating for Israel to become part of CENTCOM has not been a talking point for pro-Israel organizations other than JINSA, in part because the U.S.-Israel military relationship is already a deeply ingrained part of U.S. defense infrastructure. “I don’t remember it ever being something that people have been discussing,” Makovsky said. “It seemed as though the reason why we came to it was part of our general work on how to bolster the U.S.-Israel security relationship, and we thought this was a way that would strengthen Israel’s military capabilities.”

Makovsky said CENTCOM officials did not reach out to JINSA to discuss its report, although it garnered some attention on Capitol Hill late last year. In December 2020, several Republican senators, led by Tom Cotton (R-AR), introduced legislation to study the transfer of Israel from EUCOM to CENTCOM. Within a month, before the bill even got a hearing, the legislation was moot. ♦

Kathryn Garcia sounds note of cautious optimism at Williamsburg watch party

The former sanitation commissioner is trailing Eric Adams but banking on her late surge

By Matthew Kassel

The nondescript venue, on a dead-end street in post-industrial East Williamsburg, was in some ways a fitting location for the end of a grueling campaign that until not too long ago was widely dismissed as unviable.

On Tuesday night, Kathryn Garcia, whose late-stage surge in the final months of New York City's contentious mayoral race represents one of the most remarkable turnarounds of any candidate in the crowded Democratic primary, gathered with supporters at her sister's event space in Brooklyn after polls closed and early vote counts trickled in.

Eric Adams, the frontrunner and Brooklyn borough president, had already taken an early lead by the time Garcia took the stage at around 11 p.m. in a white jacket and gray T-shirt with "Feminist" written in gold lettering. Andrew Yang, the former presidential candidate who failed to sustain an initially promising campaign, was admitting defeat across the river at a watch party in his home neighborhood of Hell's Kitchen.

But Garcia made clear she had no intention of conceding, despite being in third place while trailing Adams by about 10 points with 20% of the vote and the majority of precincts reporting in the first round of counting.

"This campaign has been about overcoming expectations," Garcia, 51, told the modestly populated room, sounding a note of cautious optimism. "When I got into it, people said, 'Well, I know you would be the best mayor, but I'm just not sure you can win.' Or, 'Women haven't ever won the race for mayor.'"

Garcia, the former sanitation chief who did double duty as outgoing Mayor Bill de Blasio's food czar during the pandemic, is a career civil servant who touts her extensive government experience and deep understanding of the city's vast and often unwieldy bureaucracy. The first-time candidate, who would be New York City's first female mayor, has pitched herself as a moderate and even-tempered crisis manager more interested in rolling up her sleeves and fixing intractable problems than engaging in partisan bickering.

In her campaign kickoff video, released in December, Garcia warned, using typically no-nonsense language, that the next mayor would inherit a "shitshow" as the city emerges from the ravages of the pandemic.

Still, while experts praised her competence and acknowledged her reputation as a workhorse, few believed she was capable of pulling off an upset in the primary — until a surprise *New York Times* endorsement in early May that brought renewed attention to her candidacy and imbued her campaign with an air of institutional credibility.

Suddenly, the mayoral hopeful shot to the front of the pack, with polls indicating that she was gaining momentum in the final stretch of the race.

Speaking to supporters last night, Garcia suggested that she was depending on that dynamic as the city implements its first ranked-choice election system, in which voters can choose up to five candidates by order of preference.

The new system would seem to benefit a candidate like Garcia, whom

voters might be more inclined to pick as their second or third choice rather than their first. A recent ranking in *Der Yid*, the weekly newspaper of the majority Satmar sect in Williamsburg, suggests as much. In an article published on Friday, Garcia was listed as the third choice behind Yang and Adams — a notable bump for the former sanitation commissioner, who edged out Scott Stringer, the city comptroller. He had previously held the spot until his campaign was hobbled by allegations of sexual impropriety.

"This is going to be about not only the ones, but also about the twos and threes," Garcia said on Tuesday evening. "To be quite honest with you, we're not going to know a whole lot more tonight than we know now, and it is going to come down to opening up those ballots and making sure that every single New Yorker's voice is heard."

Annika Reno, Garcia's deputy press secretary, was equally positive in a brief interview with *Jewish Insider* at the venue. "We're feeling really good," she said, noting that the campaign wasn't yet reading too deeply into the numbers while adding her expectation that it could take weeks until a victor is declared as all the votes are tallied.

Garcia, who was not made available for an interview, appeared in East Williamsburg after a long day campaigning throughout the five boroughs, beginning at a Department of Sanitation garage in Manhattan. "That was really a sentimental moment," said Reno. "A nice way to close out the campaign."

At the event, an intimate, low-key affair, campaign volunteers wore green shirts emblazoned with the phrase

“Garcia Gets it Done” as attendees munched on fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, tater tots and gourmet sandwiches from Court Street Grocers. The soundtrack included thematically appropriate numbers such as Curtis Mayfield’s “Move on Up,” Starship’s “We Built This City” and Prince’s “When Doves Cry,” whose lyrics Garcia wrote on the walls of her childhood bedroom in Park Slope.

David Freedlander and Ross Barkan, local political reporters who had both been denied entry to Adams’s event nearby at a Williamsburg dance club, could be seen lingering on the sidelines

at Garcia’s shindig — their apparent number-two choice for watch parties.

Joe Lhota, the former chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority who ran unsuccessfully as a Republican in the 2013 New York City mayoral race, was also in attendance. He told JI he has been supporting Garcia’s campaign “right from the very beginning,” adding: “The city right now is in need of good management.”

“I wish it was a little closer,” Lhota said of the early vote count, still maintaining a hopeful outlook. “Let’s see how the ranked choice works out. You know, certainly, this whole thing

is new to all of us. So we’ll see. I’ve tried to go through so many different permutations. It’s mind-boggling.”

Garcia, for her part, seemed eager to put such considerations aside, at least for a couple of hours, after six months on the stump. “You know what?” she said from the stage. “I think we need to party like it’s 1999.”

She disappeared for a few minutes after concluding her speech as she changed into a more comfortable outfit, then re-emerged to mingle with supporters. ♦

JUNE 25, 2021

The politically lonely progressive Zionists

In a new book of essays, pro-Israel progressives tell the American left and conservative Zionists: we’re here, and we’re struggling

By Gabby Deutch

As rockets flew between Israel and Gaza last month, American Jews watched with alarm as anti-Israel rhetoric became the norm in some left-wing circles. Accusations of Israel’s alleged genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid spread widely, even reaching the halls of Congress.

“It’s become a very common experience for rabbis, and Jews of really any kind who lean to the left progressively, to find, at the very least, difficulties in progressive circles with the love for Israel,” said Rabbi Menachem Creditor, the Pearl and Ira Meyer Scholar-in-Residence at UJA-Federation of New York. Among people like him — American Jews who support progressive policies but also support Israel — “the language of being lonely has been getting louder.”

With Zioness founder Amanda Berman, Creditor is the editor of *Fault Lines: Exploring the Complicated Place of Progressive American Jewish Zionism*, a book of essays released this week. The idea behind the book was to allow

members of the Jewish community to grapple, collectively, with the increasing difficulty of being a Zionist in progressive spaces. “Why should people continue to feel lonely when it’s a very obvious problem?” Creditor asked.

The book contains four dozen essays, half of which are original; the rest were reprinted from other publications or taken from speeches or sermons given by the book’s contributors over the past couple of years. Writers include rabbis, journalists, nonprofit professionals and activists; organizations represented include the American Jewish Committee, the National Council of Jewish Women and the pro-Israel LGBTQ organization A Wider Bridge, along with major Reform and Conservative congregations around the country.

The essays contend with what it means to be a Jew who supports Israel and who also supports progressive causes in the U.S., and to refute common misconceptions from people

on both the political left and right. “The presumption from anti-Zionists in the progressive world is that you cannot be a good person and love Israel, and that’s just wrong,” Creditor told *Jewish Insider*.

The problem, he argued, is an “anti-Jewish fundamentalism at the fringes of progressive politics,” such as the recent removal of an Israeli food truck from an immigrant food festival in Philadelphia. “If it isn’t countered, it becomes the core of the progressive movement.” The response should be “to show up as loud, proud Jews,” Creditor said.

The idea to put together a volume of essays came after Creditor saw a *Times of Israel* blog post authored by Jeremy Burton, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston. “The American left has embraced moral maps that, while they may provide helpful frameworks for understanding some of America’s foundational and ongoing issues, warp understanding and discourse when applied to other parts of the world,” Burton wrote, in a post published the

day before Israel and Hamas agreed to a cease-fire.

“I found it to be one of the most important statements today, about how an American-left lens can get Israel wrong,” said Creditor. “It sparked my thinking that we could put together a collection relatively quickly because this is not a new question.”

Creditor has a history of progressive activism, including as founder of the Rabbis Against Gun Violence movement. But he sees himself first and foremost as a Jewish educator — so while he hopes the book might inspire progressive politicians to engage in dialogue on these topics, his desired audience is the Jewish community.

“I want to support those who are showing up with courage as Zionists in progressive spaces, for them to feel the camaraderie and community of those who are experiencing similar struggles,” said Creditor. He also wants to remind right-leaning pro-Israel advocates that progressives — including those who might criticize, but deeply love, the Jewish state — are, in fact, Zionists.

“As a Jewish community, we have to stop alienating each other when we

disagree. We should not deem as anti-Zionist someone who is a progressive American voter who loves Israel. Within Israel, there’s robust debate about what building a better society looks like. That’s a healthy democracy,” Creditor explained. “The presumption that a critical voice is treasonous is itself incorrect.”

As Creditor sees it, progressive Zionists have their pro-Israel bona fides questioned by both the anti-Israel left and some in the Jewish community. “Progressive Jewish Zionists are not receiving the dignity they deserve in progressive circles, and they’re not receiving the dignity they deserve in conservative Zionist circles,” he argued. “Certain conservative Zionist circles typically judge progressive Zionists as naive or disloyal. Those are the same arguments, the same aspersions that progressive Zionists receive from progressive circles.”

Neither Creditor nor Berman define what the book means by “progressive,” but Creditor argues that this is by design. They did not want to limit participation in the project.

“I’m not quite sure what ‘progressive’

means, and there was no litmus test for the authors, because I’m not really sure how to define the word to begin with,” noted Creditor. “I just know how it generally lumps together people who favor LGBTQ equality, combat the American gun violence epidemic [and] who stand for criminal justice reform.”

Still, even though the editors did not set ideological boundaries about who could contribute, the book mostly falls within mainstream pro-Israel discourse. Numerous contributors wrote about trips to Israel with AIPAC, and one essay made the argument that progressives should attend AIPAC’s annual policy conference.

“There were no submissions rejected based on any institutional affiliation,” said Creditor. After putting out the call for submissions, Creditor and Berman did not receive any from people who affiliated with more left-wing Israel-focused organizations like J Street or IfNotNow.

The one requirement was that contributors consider themselves Zionist. “This is about how to navigate the world of progressive Zionism, not how to reject Zionism,” he noted. ♦