

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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Who's in the majority now?

Democratic Majority for Israel notched a big win in Ohio and Justice Dems is none too pleased

By Matthew Kassel

In the summer of 2020, Georgette Gómez, the former president of the San Diego City Council who was then running for Congress in Southern California, found herself in an untenable position. Months into a competitive runoff battle against a well-funded opponent, Gómez was at risk of losing a crucial fundraising lifeline from Justice Democrats, the feisty progressive group, amid an ongoing and increasingly acrimonious dispute over her unequivocal support for Israel. Making matters even more strained was a recent endorsement from Democratic Majority for Israel, whose political arm had just launched a series of attack ads targeting Jamaal Bowman, a Justice Democrats-backed primary challenger to longtime pro-Israel stalwart Eliot Engel in the Bronx.

DMFI, the formidable pro-Israel PAC founded in 2019, has quickly gained a reputation for its combative presence in a number of congressional races where far-left insurgents have sought to unseat longstanding House Democrats. And last June, in the final weeks of a heated New York City primary contest, DMFI was in the process of spending nearly \$2 million to prop up Engel's foundering bid for re-

election. But the TV ad, which hit Bowman over unpaid taxes, backfired, and even Engel renounced it.

Gómez, for her part, was in a unique bind — not least because DMFI's president and CEO, Mark Mellman, is a veteran Democratic pollster whose firm was employed by her campaign. Incensed by the ad and seeking payback, Justice Democrats presented Gómez with an extraordinary ultimatum, two sources familiar with the campaign who asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal told *Jewish Insider*. Fire Mellman, she was told by Justice Democrats, or lose their support. Gómez refused, and the group all but officially revoked its endorsement while putting an end to active fundraising and promotional efforts — likely contributing to her double-digit loss in the general election.

Justice Democrats refused to comment on the record when asked about the ultimatum, which has not previously been reported. Gómez herself declined an interview request from *JL*.

While the ultimatum was no doubt atypical, the larger proxy war that ensnared the Gómez campaign speaks more broadly to a fierce and unusually personal intra-party rivalry between two opposing Democratic groups that has animated several high-profile contests in recent cycles, particularly

amid growing divisions between the hard left and moderates over Israel. The closely watched House primary in Cleveland last week, where Shontel Brown defeated Nina Turner in a stunning upset, represents the latest in an ongoing battle that is likely to play out in the 2022 midterms.

"There is a conflict over Israel in the party that plays out in platform fights, that plays out in elections, that plays out on Capitol Hill," Mellman, who says he was unaware of the ultimatum, explained in a recent interview with *JL*. "But at the end of the day, it's an important fight that we have to wage."

DMFI's political action committee spent more than \$2 million on Brown's behalf in the high-stakes race to succeed former Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-OH), who vacated the seat for a Cabinet position in the Biden administration. The significant exertion of resources, which financed an onslaught of TV ads and mailers that blanketed the district in the final months of the race, was in many ways a refinement over a losing strategy in the Bronx primary matchup last cycle where Engel was defeated by a decisive margin.

This time, DMFI carefully calibrated its engagement over about four months of voter surveys and targeted advertising tailored to

match the ebb and flow of a dramatic race in which Brown overcame an initial polling deficit of more than 30 points and prevailed over Turner, who was endorsed by Justice Democrats as well as a number of leading progressives like Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY). Brown, who bested Turner by six points with just over 50% of the vote, is all but certain to win the general election because the district is heavily Democratic.

But as in previous races, DMFI's involvement was not without controversy. DMFI first made headlines last year during the presidential primaries, when it launched an attack ad against Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) questioning his fitness for office while highlighting his recent heart attack. Months later, the pro-Israel group angered some progressives with a series of ads blasting former Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse in his failed bid to unseat Rep. Richard Neal (D-MA).

In Ohio's 11th district, which includes most of Cleveland as well as a slice of Akron, DMFI was accused of misrepresenting Turner's record as it launched a litany of attack ads in an effort to tip the scales in Brown's favor. Turner, whose campaign was also criticized for releasing misleading ads, addressed the influx of outside money in her concession speech on Tuesday night, without directly naming DMFI. "I am going to work hard to ensure that something like this doesn't happen to another progressive candidate again," she said. "We didn't lose this race, evil money manipulated and maligned this election."

Such rhetoric, coupled with similar accusations from other progressive leaders, has drawn scrutiny. The Anti-Defamation League announced on Twitter that Turner's comments, intentionally or not, "echo long-standing antisemitic tropes," while adding that its local office was "reaching out to her to discuss." The ADL had no further updates as of late last week, and Turner's campaign — which, along with outside supporters, likely spent more money than Brown in the race — did not respond to an interview request.

Mellman, for his part, took the criticism in stride. "I've been there, I know losing hurts, and when people are hurt, they lash out in sometimes unfortunate ways," he

told JI. "The suggestion that their money is somehow more pure than ours is, I think, ludicrous," he added. "Most candidates' definition of clean money is the money that's supporting me, and dirty money is money that's opposing me. And I think that's the definition that's being employed here as well."

DMFI was hardly the sole outside group spending money on behalf of either candidate. Brown, facing a steep fundraising deficit, also benefited from the centrist Third Way's PAC's hefty independent expenditures, while Turner was supported by The Democratic Action PAC, affiliated with Justice Democrats and established to counter DMFI.

"The narrative from Turner's camp is that this was wrong, that it shouldn't have been allowed, and that is nonsense because they had outside groups as well," said a national Democratic consultant with ties to Ohio who was not involved in the race. "I think it's just a case of being a sore loser. There was no pact or pledge to not accept outside spending in this race."

Pro-Israel groups aside from DMFI were also involved in the race. The political arm of Jewish Democratic Council of America, which endorsed Brown, launched a five-figure ad campaign targeting the 22,000 Jewish voters who make up about 5% of the electorate, and Pro-Israel America's PAC raised \$800,000 for Brown's campaign while reaching voters through text messages and phone calls. PIA's billboards were also plastered throughout the district, highlighting — as did DMFI — past comments in which Turner likened voting for President Joe Biden to eating a "bowl of shit."

Still, DMFI, which spent more than JDCA and PIA, remains a unique source of frustration among hard-left progressives, all the more so now that Turner has lost. The group has been criticized for accepting contributions from donors who have also given money to Republicans while downplaying Israel in its advertising for political candidates. In April, a DMFI board member drew controversy for making an insensitive Twitter remark after Emily Mayer, a co-founder of the left-wing Israel group IfNotNow, announced her engagement to Waleed Shahid, a

spokesperson for Justice Democrats.

"DMFI is a convenient funnel for Republican money to be rebranded as Democratic in order to stave off progressive candidates in primaries," Shahid charged in an interview with JI. "That was true in Jamaal Bowman's race and that was true in Nina Turner's race. If they wanted to have a real discussion about foreign policy, which is what the organization claims to be about, they would run ads about the issue that they're focused on and have a debate about the issue. But they don't want to do that because they know their stance is increasingly unpopular with Democratic primary voters given all the recent polling in the past year on U.S. aid to the Israeli government."

Shahid was referring to recent polls suggesting that Americans voters are in favor of conditioning aid to Israel, a policy Justice Democrats favors, as do all of the candidates now backed by the progressive group. "Our general stance is not having U.S. support for human rights abuses abroad, and we do ask about that in our endorsement process," said Shahid. "I think what has happened is that the progressive movement's stance on foreign policy, and Israel-Palestine more specifically, has become more unified," he added, "and candidates are responding to voters' preferences."

But Mellman disputes that view, arguing that questions in those polls are "biased and irresponsible," leading respondents to "presume that there are no conditions on the aid," he said. "That's completely ridiculous."

"There are people on Capitol Hill in the Democratic party that reflect a very anti-Israel point of view," Mellman told JI. "But it's a distinct minority. Part of that is, we're winning more elections than they are, and part of it is, we've been able to, I think, convince more Democrats than they are of the rightness of our position and the wrongness of theirs."

Mellman rejected accusations of coziness with the GOP. "Most of us at DMFI are quite progressive in our views. The real question is, are they willing to accept pro-Israel progressives?" he mused. "We are an indigenous Democratic organization," Mellman said of DMFI. "Everybody who's on our board, everybody who's active in our organization, is a long-term Democrat, have

raised money for Democrats, have worked in Democratic administrations, have worked in Democratic campaigns. That's who we are. We are part and parcel of the Democratic Party, and their goal is to expel pro-Israel forces from the Democratic Party."

"It's up to them to decide ultimately whether being anti-Israel is their most important concern or whether the rest of the progressive agenda is more important to them," Mellman said of Justice Democrats. "If they're deciding that the only issue that ultimately matters to them is whether someone is anti-Israel, then we're going to clash more often."

Brown's primary win was a major victory for DMFI in that battle, though it was by no means assured. The Cuyahoga County councilwoman and party chair was operating at a significant disadvantage in the race against Turner, a former Ohio state senator and prominent Bernie Sanders presidential campaign surrogate. DMFI, which endorsed Brown in February, first looked at the race in April and found it was facing long odds, commissioning a poll that gave Turner a 30-point advantage in name recognition. In June, DMFI began advertising for Brown, at first emphasizing a positive message about her accomplishments in the district.

By July, as the pro-Israel group pivoted to attack mode, a new DMFI poll found that Brown, at 36%, was trailing Turner by just five points among likely Democratic primary voters. Near the end of the race, about a week out, DMFI commissioned a final poll that showed Brown was in contention. The poll, which wasn't publicly reported on at the time, put Brown at 39%, just one point behind Turner.

"On the one hand, the data was clear that it was an uphill battle," Mellman recalled. "We knew it was very much an uphill battle. But we also knew it was a critically important battle to try and win, and so you're weighing two considerations. How important is it to try to win, and how likely are you to win? There were times when we thought it was very unlikely. But we always knew in the back of our minds that we had this very clear path, and that if we trod that path there was a real opportunity to win the race."

While most of DMFI's advertising made no mention of Israel, the group did publish

some local newspaper ads characterizing Turner as an "anti-Israel candidate" and ran phone banks targeting the sizable population of Jewish voters in the district. Brown had largely locked up support from Jewish community members in Cleveland by election night, but she didn't take such backing for granted. Early internal polling from the Brown campaign, conducted in April and provided to JI, showed Brown at just 18% among Jewish voters compared with Turner at 42%.

As the race developed, however, the contrast between both candidates over Israel came into view, most notably amid violence between Israel and Hamas. In May, Brown released a statement defending Israel's "right to defend its citizens" that was widely circulated among Jewish voters in the district, while Turner shared a social media post accusing Israel of apartheid. By mid-July, after months of Jewish outreach, Brown had inverted the dynamic, garnering 63% among Jewish voters against Turner's 27%.

In her victory speech last Tuesday night, Brown thanked her "Jewish brothers and sisters," who were credited with helping swing the election thanks to an organized effort to increase voter turnout in traditionally Jewish enclaves like Beachwood and Cleveland Heights.

"When you look at places like Beachwood where an overwhelming majority voted for Brown, they obviously got it," said Jeff Rusnak, a Democratic strategist in Cleveland who supported Brown but wasn't involved in the race. "They understood what was at stake."

In thwarting Turner, a left-wing stalwart and outspoken Israel critic, Brown charted a path that DMFI and other centrist groups will no doubt be analyzing in detail going forward. "This is a clear rejection for a national progressive movement where Israel and Jews are a significant part of the rhetoric," said Hank Sheinkopf, a veteran Democratic strategist. "But they shouldn't get too carried away, because it's only one."

Not everyone is enthusiastic about DMFI's success. "It's very dangerous for any organization to get involved in a party primary because if they're not successful there's going to be a lot of bad feelings," said David Cohen, a professor of political

science at the University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics. "Instead of making enemies of these potentially new members of Congress," he said of DMFI, "they should be thinking in terms of lobbying and persuasion."

Logan Bayroff, a spokesperson for the left-leaning Israel advocacy group J Street, which did not make an endorsement in the Cleveland race, argued that DMFI was "injecting Israel as a sort of a partisan football in a way that misrepresents the views of a lot of people in our community," as he put it in a recent interview with JI. "It doesn't seem to be healing any kind of divide inside the Democratic Party."

Mellman, who has claimed Brown's victory "reaffirms that being pro-Israel is good politics as well as wise policy," dismisses such charges. "People said that to the pro-choice people in my memory," he told JI. "What they said, rightly, was it's the right moral position and it's the right political position for the party to be in. We make exactly the same argument."

Either way, DMFI insists it didn't start the fight. But the Cleveland battle is likely not its last as Justice Democrats prepares to take on a growing number of pro-Israel House Democrats in the upcoming midterms.

"We're a threat to them from inside the tent, and they want to get us out of the tent, and they want to win the fight, and we're a problem from both points of view," Mellman said. "This is a battle, and they are on the other side of that broader battle in the Democratic Party." ♦

What was Bakari Sellers thinking in Ohio 11?

In an interview, the mainstream Democrat and pro-Israel advocate explains his support for progressive stalwart Nina Turner

By Matthew Kassel

Bakari Sellers, the former South Carolina state legislator who has appeared frequently at AIPAC events and is a close ally of Vice President Kamala Harris and other establishment Democratic figures, turned some heads when he threw his weight behind Nina Turner, the outspoken progressive candidate and prominent Bernie Sanders surrogate, in Ohio's recent hotly contested 11th Congressional District special election.

Sellers, who has openly criticized Sanders on social media, seemed to be making an unusual statement as he campaigned for Turner last week in Cleveland on the eve of the primary.

Mainstream Democrats, including former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC), the influential House majority whip, had given their blessing to Shontel Brown, a Cuyahoga County councilwoman and party chair, who ultimately prevailed over Turner in a remarkable upset. Sellers, who interned for Clyburn in the early aughts, has publicly declared his interest in succeeding the 15-term congressman after he retires from office.

The sizable population of Jewish voters in the district had also expressed their overwhelming support for Brown, the pro-Israel favorite, over Turner, a vocal critic of the Jewish state.

Sellers, who is closely connected with the pro-Israel community, wasn't exactly backing a candidate whose Middle East foreign policy views one would expect he'd be eager to see gain prominence in the House, even as he has occasionally found himself at odds with Democratic leadership in recent years.

Cornel West, the public intellectual and former Harvard professor, who supported Turner, campaigned alongside Sellers in the district last week and, in a YouTube

interview after the race ended, seemed at pains to make sense of their shared interests.

"He and I did a thing together, you know, and that was a fascinating moment because, I mean, Bakari, he has been so tied to very, very right-wing Jewish lobbyists in terms of money and status and so forth," West said in pointed comments to progressive talk show host Tim Black. "Very tied to Biden, and of course, you know, very close to Kamala Harris. But he said he loved me and he wanted to come out. Well, the question then becomes, you know, how do you have a campaign that keeps its mold and spiritual content and substance, and yet also has an openness to the Bakari Sellers of the world?"

The 36-year-old lawyer, CNN commentator and memoirist — who is the son of civil rights leader Cleveland Sellers — acknowledged that his alliance with Turner would likely create some tension in a video posted to her Twitter page last Monday.

But he ultimately defended his decision. "I tell people all the time, look, I supported Hillary Clinton in the primary, the list goes on and on and on," he said alongside Turner. "But the unique thing about all of those things is I support Nina Turner, too."

Sellers, who has known Turner for years and counts her as a close friend, suggested that his support was borne of a deep and long-standing loyalty as well as a faith in her abilities as a lawmaker.

"She's somebody who can get it done," he said of Turner, a former Ohio state senator and Cleveland city councilwoman before she gained prominence on the national stage. "We don't need on-the-job training. Somebody who can get it done on day one. She's a fighter and I love her with my whole heart. So people are like, you're going to Cleveland to support Nina Turner? Who? What! On Twitter they're going crazy."

"I'm glad we're driving them crazy," Turner said mischievously.

Despite the playful banter, Sellers's

involvement in the high-stakes race was no laughing matter among mainstream Democrats, pro-Israel advocates and others in the district who viewed Turner as a divisive presence within the party, not least because of her harsh criticism of President Joe Biden.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Monday evening, Sellers elaborated on his seemingly curious commitment to Turner's failed candidacy. While Sellers said he did not agree with her on every matter, particularly on Israel, he argued that he had hoped to serve as a competing voice who could help influence her policy views, however significantly, in Congress.

"I'll continue to be pro-Israel, and I'll continue to be nuanced in my political positions," he averred. "And people I love, when we disagree, I'll try to be in the room to help them understand my point of view. I don't have any regrets."

The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Jewish Insider: Tell me about the thought process that went into your support for Nina Turner.

Bakari Sellers: So, first, Twitter is not real life. That's first. But second, I've known Nina for 15, 16 years. I consider her a friend. We reach out to each other often about our respective families. When my daughter was going through her liver transplant, of course, Nina was there. [I worked] with Nina at CNN. We were both young legislators. So we're friends. I mean, we're genuinely friends.

Ji: How did you meet her originally?

Sellers: I can't recall actually. That's how long it's been. But I was invited to the Ohio Black Caucus fundraising dinner, where I spoke. She was a state senator. I campaigned for Barack Obama in '08. I was a part of the

YEO, the Young Elected Officials. So that's what it was.

When [rapper and activist] Killer Mike made the comments about Jim [Clyburn], I reached out to her. I was like, you know, you've got to get that under control. You can't do things like that or say things like that. I mean, we had those conversations. We're literally close enough to have those conversations about issues from foreign policy, which is probably why you're calling, to the issues of just who says what on the campaign trail.

JJ: *Was she receptive to your entreaties, on Killer Mike in particular?*

Sellers: Always. She said to me that she didn't recognize what was said at the time, and that Michael — she refers to him as Michael; I call him Killer Mike — but she said that Michael wasn't even trying to disrespect him like that by any stretch. I said, you've got to fix it. I don't know if they ever did. That's not my business. But those are the types of conversations we had.

JJ: *When exactly did you make your endorsement in this race?*

Sellers: I never really made an official endorsement. That's kind of the weird thing. I just donated money to her and came out to see her and retweeted an article. I never really made an endorsement. But she's a friend. I don't know what else you want me to say.

JJ: *What it was like for you appearing on the campaign trail where some of Turners' more ardently hard-left supporters like, for example, Cornel West, were also turning up. I don't know if you saw this, but in an interview after the race was over West expressed surprise that you were rallying behind Turner while describing you as "so tied to very, very right-wing Jewish lobbyists in terms of money and status and so forth."*

Sellers: I don't have shit to say about Cornel West. If Cornel West runs for office I won't be there standing by him. To be honest with you, I'm a child of the civil rights movement, and I'm also very, very, very pro-Israel. I think you know that. I think

everybody acknowledges that. You know, I don't have a lot of respect for individuals who — I didn't see the clip; I heard about it — but we were there for a singular purpose. I was there because I love Nina, and I don't want to dignify Cornel. You know, at one point, Cornel utilized antisemitism as political currency a lot like [former President] Donald Trump used racism. Now, it's pretty fair to say that Cornel West is an antisemite just like Donald Trump is a racist.

JJ: *Given those feelings, your affinity for Turner must have been pretty overwhelming.*

Sellers: Human beings are more nuanced than that, and I believe that on the issues of foreign policy, particularly when it comes to Israel, we have to have people in the room who can have conversations. I just wanted to be somebody in the room who could give her another perspective. Whether or not I pulled her one way or another, I don't know. But on the issue of Israel, I wanted to give her another perspective if possible.

JJ: *Did you have any conversations with her about Israel?*

Sellers: I mean, we love each other. So yeah, you know, there isn't anything that's off limits with us.

JJ: *The Jewish community and the pro-Israel community in the district rallied pretty hard behind Shontel Brown in this race. There was a moment in May, during the conflict between Israel and Hamas, when Brown put forward a pretty direct statement defending Israel's "right to defend its citizens," which we published, while Turner retweeted a comment from IfNotNow likening Israel to an apartheid state.*

Sellers: Yeah, I mean, that's bullshit. Look, Nina and I disagree on that issue wholeheartedly. But if we're going to continue to move the ball forward on this issue and continue to make it a nonpartisan ideal, then some of us are going to have to, especially when we have friends in the race, take those chances and see what happens.

I appreciate your questions, but I would tell you, while I was supporting Nina, I also hosted an event for [Rep.] Richie Torres. I

think politics is more complicated than that, and whatever banter Cornel or anybody else wants to lay on me, I'll continue to be pro-Israel, and I'll continue to be nuanced in my political positions, and people I love, when we disagree, I'll try to be in the room to help them understand my point of view. I don't have any regrets.

JJ: *What do you make of Shontel Brown? Do you think she'll be a good congresswoman?*

Sellers: Oh, I love her. Both of them had huge, huge shoes to fill. I'm a part of a Black cohort of individuals who are pro-Israel. I just was one of the 300 who supported Nina. They were campaigning for her. I mean, Black folk ain't monolithic. Politics isn't "pick this" or "pick that." And I think she's going to be great. They were both going to have to fill Marcia Fudge's shoes, which were huge. But she's going to do fine. I'm going to donate to her and give her money.

JJ: *Have you spoken to her?*

Sellers: I texted with her. I haven't spoken to her. We tweeted the night she won, and she responded. Listen, I think she's going to be good. I don't know her. I have 15 years-plus of history with Nina. So when she runs for re-election I'll put on my Shontel Brown T-shirt.

JJ: *Were you surprised Turner lost?*

Sellers: I was, I was, I was. I just think that there were some things she couldn't overcome. I think that there was a huge Achilles heel with the progressive left. But like I said on my podcast, not Monday but last Thursday, you know, a lot of the reasons that we're having conversations around student loan debt, universal health care, climate change are because of Nina's push in the progressive left. The same day Nina lost you had Joe Biden extend the eviction moratorium because of the efforts of [Rep.] Cori Bush. For some reason I'm not somebody who believes that you've got to put people in a particular box. I am surprised she lost. I think if she could have taken back the criticisms, in the way that she made them of Joe Biden, she would. I think that if she could have taken back the

criticism of Killer Mike, she would. But in politics, you can't. I think that Shontel ran a flawless campaign, and I think that Nina had too many missteps.

JJ: *What kind of impact in the race would you attribute to spending from groups like Democratic Majority for Israel, which put up more than \$2 million boosting Brown.*

Sellers: They played their role. They played their part. But at the end of the day, that's not why anybody won or lost. It was a hyperlocal campaign. When you're on the ground, people, people care about the issues, and I think that Nina kind of accidentally took a bet on the Democratic Party and its popularity and underestimated how popular it was, maybe. You know, I've been called all types of names. It's kind of funny. But I am a Democrat. I love Hillary Clinton. I absolutely adore Kamala Harris. I just supported Nina Turner.

JJ: *Given your close connection with the pro-Israel community, did you find yourself on the receiving end of any pushback of criticism because of your support for Turner?*

Sellers: No, I mean, they know where I am, and they know that if she would have won, and I had an opportunity to speak to Congresswoman Turner, then I would be one of the voices in the room that says we need to talk about the fact that Israel has a right to defend itself. Whether or not that voice would have won over, I don't know. But we would have had a voice in the room. We wouldn't have been locked out of the room.

And I think that's important in this. We have to do a better job of meeting people where they are. We have to be voices in all rooms. And I'm not concerned about that because people know — I mean, like I said, I hosted an event for Richie Torres the same time I supported Nina, so I'm not concerned about that.

JJ: *What about your decision to campaign for Turner just a day after Jim Clyburn was in the district stumping for Brown? Was that tense for you?*

Sellers: No. Me and Jim, we love each other. We go way back. He'll give me hell when I see him. I haven't seen him since. But he'll give me hell. He's 2-0 against me. I supported Karen Carter Peterson and Nina Turner; he supported Troy Carter and Shontel Brown. He won both of those races, so he gets the one-up on me.

JJ: *Have you talked to him since the election?*

Sellers: No. You know, I worked for Jim back in '03. My father is one of Jim's heroes. So it is what it is. We go beyond one race in the 11th district. And one of the things that people have to realize is that the winner of that race is just number 435. It's not the future of the Democratic Party as people try to make it out to be.

JJ: *All things considered, are there any lessons, however small, that you feel we can draw from this race?*

Sellers: The lessons are, campaigns are won on the ground. You've got to meet people where they are. You've got to knock on doors. Shontel had a stronger campaign, and if the race was probably a week early Nina probably would have pulled it off. There are a lot of lessons. But the lesson that you should not take from this is that all of a sudden the heart of the Democratic Party was on the line. That's just not true.

JJ: *You've previously expressed interest in running for office again after Clyburn retires, though it's unclear when that day will come as he recently announced that he will run for re-election next cycle. Any updates on your end?*

Sellers: You know, I have twins. I would love to be the congressman from the 6th Congressional District. Will that time ever — how about this: There are a ton of people in the cemetery who thought they were going to replace [former Sen.] Strom Thurmond, and he outlived them all. So every time I shake Jim Clyburn's hand I check his pulse, and we'll just see what happens.

JJ: *You would never mull a primary challenge?*

Sellers: Against Jim?

JJ: Yes.

Sellers: No. Now don't print everything else and not print that part! ♦

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Jewish groups hear echoes of Hitler's Games in run-up to 2022 Beijing Olympics

A coalition of smaller groups say China's treatment of the Uyghurs means the Games should face a 'diplomatic boycott'

By Gabby Deutch

At the start of the 1936 Summer Games, the final runner in the torch relay arrived in Berlin

with the Olympic flame. The man, wearing an all-white running ensemble, stood next to dozens of Nazi soldiers in

dark uniforms and leather boots. They stood among hundreds of athletes, surrounded by massive Nazi flags

adorned with swastikas.

This was Adolf Hitler's Germany. He presided over the Games' opening ceremony. The government had removed most of its anti-Jewish signs in the capital before spectators and athletes arrived, but Jews from the U.S. and around the world had been speaking for months about the horrors that were beginning to unfold in Germany.

A handful of Jewish athletes and Jewish organizations in the U.S. called for a boycott of the Games. While the idea spread among a handful of university presidents and Catholic groups, nothing significant came of it.

After the Tokyo 2020 Summer Games came to an end last week, a number of Jewish organizations in the U.S. and abroad are again seeking to call attention to another Olympic Games hosted by a country widely known for human rights violations. This time, it's China — and instead of hosting an opening ceremony with swastika flags in the background, the country will welcome athletes from more than 200 countries against the backdrop of its widespread persecution of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang.

"It was very clear that there are similarities with what's happening in Beijing as to what was happening in Berlin in 1936, leading up to what would be the beginning of a horrific Nazi era that would lead to death and destruction for millions of Jews and millions of other people as well," said Serena Oberstein, executive director of Jewish World Watch, a Los Angeles-based human rights organization.

Jewish World Watch is a leading member of the Berlin-Beijing Coalition, a Jewish-led interfaith network demanding a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Games.

"We feel like an overall boycott doesn't make sense, because there are lots of athletes, Jewish and not, from a variety of countries who have worked their whole lives to compete in these Games, and we don't want to punish the athletes," Oberstein told *Jewish Insider*. "However, U.S. leadership, European leadership, any sort of showing of diplomats supporting what they know is going on in China — [that] goes against any moral and ethical compass that those of us who hold values of human rights and dignity uphold."

The members of the Berlin-Beijing

Coalition do not include the most prominent national Jewish organizations in the U.S., and many of them have not yet stated whether they will take a position on next year's Olympics.

A spokesperson for the Jewish Federations of North America declined to comment, saying the organization does not typically weigh in on international issues. Representatives of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the Anti-Defamation League declined to comment. The Orthodox Union Advocacy Center did not respond to requests for comment.

The American Jewish Committee, which has spoken out against China's treatment of the Uyghurs but has not previously announced a stance on the Beijing Olympics, told JI that the organization would support a diplomatic boycott of the Games.

"The 2022 Olympic Games in Beijing is an opportunity for the United States to lead in protesting China's treatment of the Uyghurs and Hong Kong. The U.S. government should not send any official representation and discourage American spectators from attending," said AJC CEO David Harris. "NBC and other media should cover fully the human rights abuses situation in China. American athletes, who have trained hard for years, however, should be allowed to compete, and bring home medals."

After adopting a resolution in April 2021 condemning the Uyghur genocide, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs — an umbrella organization representing Jewish community relations groups — begun discussing its plans for the Beijing Olympics. "JCPA has previously encouraged U.S. officials to use the Olympics as an opportunity to highlight opposition to China's human rights abuses, and we would expect our country to continue those efforts next year," JCPA associate director for policy, advocacy and communications Tammy Gilden told JI.

President Joe Biden has not said whether he will attend the Winter Games, and his administration has not offered details on how it will approach the event. (First Lady Jill Biden attended the Tokyo Olympics last month, and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff will lead the U.S. delegation to the Paralympics in Tokyo later this month.)

State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters yesterday that the U.S. is "consulting closely with our allies and partners" to "define those common concerns and to establish a shared approach. But again, I don't want to get ahead of where we are, given that we still have some time to go."

A diplomatic boycott has widespread support in Congress, including from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). "It just seems so strange that we would have history repeat itself," she said in a May 2021 speech, comparing the 2022 Beijing Games to the 1936 Berlin Games. "For heads of state to go to China in wake of a genocide that is ongoing while you're sitting there in your seats really begs the question: What moral authority do you have to speak again about human rights any place in the world if you're willing to pay your respects to the Chinese government as they commit genocide?"

At a congressional hearing last month, bipartisan lawmakers pressed senior executives from some of the major companies sponsoring the Games on how they will use their influence to speak out about China's treatment of Uyghurs, which former president Donald Trump officially deemed a genocide on his last day in office.

"We do not have a say in the selection of the host city, nor on whether an Olympics is postponed or relocated," Coca-Cola's global vice president for human rights, Paul Lalli, said at the hearing. His prepared testimony about the company's commitment to human rights did not mention the Uyghurs.

Part of Jewish World Watch's Olympics campaign also involves pressuring the corporate sponsors of next year's Games.

"There are 82 multinational corporations that are doing business in China and using Uyghur forced labor in their supply chains. We've identified at least four of them that have direct ties to the Holocaust," said Oberstein.

One of those four is Coca-Cola, which created Fanta in Nazi Germany due to embargoes that kept Germany from importing the syrup used to make Coke. "Our hope is that the sponsors do pull out of the Games and hold China accountable," Oberstein added.

Although many national Jewish organizations have not taken the same stance regarding the Olympics as Oberstein's

organization, it has become a point of concern for many Jewish advocacy groups.

But the Jewish community in the United Kingdom has coalesced more clearly around the cause, led in part by Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who signed onto a campaign seeking to pressure the companies that are sponsoring or profiting from the Winter Games. “We must ensure that the Winter Olympics becomes a platform for solidarity with the Uyghur population rather than a tool for distracting the world from this most appalling injustice,” he said in June. The Board of Deputies of British Jews put out a statement last month calling for a diplomatic boycott.

“When we introduced the issue of the Uyghurs [2.5 years ago], the response from the community was remarkable and

really cut across all stakeholder groups, from community leadership to youth movements to spiritual leadership to different individuals,” said Mia Hasenson-Gross, executive director of René Cassin, a leading Jewish human rights group in the U.K. “Two and a half years down the line, the U.K. Jewish community is believed to be by far the leading faith community in the U.K. speaking out and acting on behalf of the Uyghurs.”

Irwin Cotler, an international human rights lawyer and Canada’s special envoy on preserving Holocaust remembrance and combating antisemitism, told JI that democratic countries and institutions were slow to speak out because of China’s global influence.

“It wasn’t only Jewish community

organizations, but I would say the community of democracies that was slow to reach that position [against China’s treatment of Uyghurs],” Cotler argued. “It was because China was using its economic power in an asymmetrical way to bully the democracies.”

Cotler believes the Games should be relocated, not just subject to a diplomatic boycott. He also argued for a similar boycott prior to the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing. “It isn’t only the Uyghurs,” Cotler explained. “It’s the targeting of what China’s called the ‘five poisons’ — Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, the Falun Gong, Tibetans and Taiwanese.

“The Holocaust was really unique. I make no analogies,” said Cotler. “That being said, genocide is still genocide.” ♦

AUGUST 11, 2021

New York Jewish leaders recognize a familiar face in Kathy Hochul

Hochul prepares to become the first female governor of New York

By Matthew Kassel

As New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo prepares to resign amid an escalating sexual harassment scandal, bringing his 10 years in office to an ignominious end, the spotlight is now turning on his immediate successor, Kathy Hochul, the Democratic lieutenant governor. Hochul, who assumed the office in 2015 following a stint in Congress, will become the first female governor of New York when Cuomo steps down in two weeks, a timeframe he detailed in a surprise announcement on Tuesday.

In his remarks, Cuomo described Hochul, his second-in-command, as a “smart and competent” lawmaker, emphasizing that she will “come up to speed quickly” after he vacates the governor’s mansion.

“It is the right thing to do and in the best interest of New Yorkers,” Hochul said of Cuomo’s impending departure in a statement on Tuesday. “As someone who has served at all levels of government and is

next in the line of succession, I am prepared to lead as New York State’s 57th governor.”

The mild-mannered lieutenant governor from Buffalo represents a departure from the personality-driven governorships of such brash and ultimately self-destructive New York City natives as Cuomo and Eliot Spitzer, who resigned in disgrace amid a prostitution scandal in 2008.

But despite a low profile, Hochul, 62, is no doubt a familiar face among the scores of community leaders with whom she has built a deep network of connections while traversing the state over the past seven years.

The Jewish community is no exception. “She understands the importance of really advocating for every group of people,” said Anna Kaplan, a Jewish state senator from Long Island. “I believe she will be a big advocate for the Jewish community.”

Jewish leaders across New York say they expect Hochul to be a dependable ally in her role as governor, noting that she has

long been sensitive to their needs and eager to follow up on a range of issues, including security grants, Jewish day school funding and hate crimes, among other things.

“Kathy Hochul has spent her years in office cultivating relationships with the leadership of the Jewish community,” David Greenfield, the Met Council CEO and a former New York City councilman, told *Jewish Insider*. “I vividly remember during the start of the pandemic how she reached out to me to offer to be helpful fighting food insecurity at Met Council. She’s accessible, transparent and is widely liked.”

Nily Rozic, a Jewish assemblywoman in Queens, said Hochul has often demonstrated her commitment to the Jewish community in a manner that extends beyond mere formality. In February of 2020, Rozic recalled, Hochul sat down with Ezras Nashim, the all-female Orthodox paramedic group whose bid to secure an ambulance in Brooklyn had been denied at the city level. “They were going through this rough

transition trying to get licensing,” Rozic said of the organization, which she had invited to Albany.

Later that year, the emergency medical group found that its request had been approved — an outcome Ezras Nashim attributes to its meeting with Hochul. “She actually had just come in from Poughkeepsie from speaking and she made time,” Michael E. Pollock, the organization’s director of intergovernmental affairs, said appreciatively. “I have a strong belief that the lieutenant governor was able to reach out to the proper people and recommend that this is a fight that shouldn’t be going on.”

“We walked out of there feeling like we were heard,” Pollock told JI. “I don’t know what the female of *mensch* is, but I’m saying this in all sincerity: I genuinely like her.”

While Cuomo developed strong Jewish ties during his time in office — notwithstanding recent allegations of sexual impropriety — communal leaders emphasized that Hochul will be sworn into office with her own unique set of longstanding relationships.

“This is someone who’s not going to have to learn on the job the issues and needs of the community,” Maury Litwack, the executive director of Teach Coalition, a nonprofit educational advocacy group affiliated with the Orthodox Union, told JI.

Within just the past few months, Litwack said, the lieutenant governor had visited two yeshivas and spoken at a rally against antisemitism in Westchester. “I just find her to be someone who’s deeply in touch with New Yorkers and really cares about them,” he averred.

“We both lit Rabbi Butman’s giant Hanukkah menorah this last Hanukkah,” David Weprin, an Orthodox assemblyman from Queens, said of the annual menorah

lighting ceremony at Grand Army Plaza in Manhattan. “She’ll be a good liaison with the Jewish community, and I think she certainly has had plenty of preparation.”

That goes beyond her tenure as a statewide elected official, according to Weprin. In 2011, Hochul won a special congressional election in a traditionally conservative enclave of Western New York, but failed to defend the seat after redistricting two years later. Still, while in the House, Hochul positioned herself as a strong supporter of Israel, said Weprin, who told JI that the former congresswoman was “very involved” on matters impacting the Jewish state.

“Although she was in Congress briefly, she had a solid voting record on Israel,” Weprin said.

Michael Miller, CEO emeritus of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, said Hochul displayed a “firm grasp of the challenges Israel was facing” at the nonprofit organization’s annual meeting during her first term as lieutenant governor about five years ago. “Her identification with Israel, her knowledge of Israel — its challenges and its needs — was very up to date,” he told JI.

From a social services perspective, “she’s also well aware of the issues impacting the Jewish community and its network of agencies,” Miller said of Hochul, who often represented the Cuomo administration at meetings with Jewish organizations throughout the state. “Her relationships to date will serve her well.”

Hochul, who grew up Irish-Catholic, worked as a former lawyer and congressional aide before entering politics at the hyperlocal level beginning with a position on the Hamburg town board outside Buffalo. She served as a county clerk

prior to mounting her first bid for Congress. While she now represents the entire state, Hochul remains “well-known and highly respected throughout the Buffalo Jewish community,” said Mara Koven-Gelman, director of the Buffalo Jewish Community Relations Council.

“She shares many of our community’s values and is particularly appreciated for advocating for women’s rights, strengthening civic relationships and combating hate,” Koven-Gelman told JI. “We look forward to working with her in her new role.”

Jacob Neiheisel, an associate professor of political science at the University of Buffalo, characterized Hochul as a “pragmatic” lawmaker who has evolved through the years. “She’s pretty good about coming around to wherever her constituency is,” he told JI, while adding that Hochul would “need to make a pretty big break from the Cuomo administration” if she has any hope of charting her own path free of the governor’s now tainted legacy.

“Hochul will be very different from Cuomo,” argued Robert Spitzer, a political scientist at SUNY Cortland, noting in an email to JI that the lieutenant governor “is not known for having a confrontational style.”

The chief question is whether Hochul “has the gravitas to be an effective governor, or whether she will serve as more of a caretaker,” Spitzer mused. “Her service as lieutenant governor has been as a booster of Cuomo’s agenda. While she is a centrist Democrat, like Cuomo, there will be a reservoir of good will for her, and the contrast in style between her and Cuomo may serve her in good stead, especially if she decides to seek a full term.” ♦

Yogi Oliff, Jewish hoopster, gets D1 offer from West Point

The All-Conference point guard from Skokie, Ill., has thrived while remaining Sabbath-observant

By Jacob Miller

For an Orthodox Jewish kid who fell in love with basketball as a boy, nothing could keep Yosef “Yogi” Oliff out of the gym on game day — not even braving the bone-chilling Chicago winters on a long Sabbath walk before tip-off. The star point guard from Skokie, Ill., knows firsthand the dedication it takes to play in a competitive Chicago-area high school league, and to be an observant Jew.

“I’ve walked four miles to the gym, I’ve walked in snow, I’ve walked in negative weather,” Oliff, who received a Division I offer from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, told Jewish Insider in a recent interview.

Given his religious beliefs, the rising senior at Niles North High School in Skokie, Ill., does not drive to and from games on Shabbat; he often spends the Sabbath with family or at a hotel located near the gym. To attend winter games, he often has to walk long distances in the cold, in accordance with Jewish custom.

Oliff, 17, has played for his school’s varsity team since his freshman year, an unusual feat at Niles North, whose team is ranked No. 55 among all Illinois high school teams, according to the MaxPreps rankings. The offer from West Point marked the start of the

recruiting process for the 6-1 point guard, who made the Central Suburban League All-Conference team the past two seasons.

Oliff’s prowess caught the eye of the Niles North Vikings coach Glenn Olson when the guard played in the school’s youth basketball camps. Olson tapped him for the varsity squad as a freshman. “He thought that’d be the best for my development,” Oliff surmised.

The Vikings playmaker — who averaged double digits in scoring his sophomore and junior years — has served as team captain since his sophomore season.

Basketball has enthralled Oliff since he was a child. The youngest in his family, he played with his older siblings and at a JCC travel league as a child, and cheered his siblings at their basketball games.

“I was always at [my siblings’] games, always around [the gym]... I guess I fell in love with it,” remembers Oliff.

During the off-season, Oliff competes in a travel league, working on his game against stiffer competition. This summer, after recovering from a hand injury in June, Oliff played in Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) tournaments, and is slated to begin his final season for the Vikings in the fall.

For now, although he is “blessed and grateful” to receive his West Point offer,

Oliff is keeping his college options open. “The goal is to see how many [offers] I can accumulate,” he explained, “and then make the best decision from there.”

“Obviously I think it’s everyone’s goal as a kid to play Division I — it’s the highest level, it’s the level that offers scholarships,” acknowledged Oliff. But other concerns — academics and Jewish life on campus — remain important for Oliff’s calculation, too: “If I think that a D3 school who’s recruiting me is a better fit for me to grow as a person and a basketball player, then I’ll go there,” he said.

If Oliff accepts a D1 offer, he will be following in the footsteps of Tamir Goodman, an Orthodox Jew who played for Towson State in the early 2000s, whom Sports Illustrated dubbed the “Jewish Jordan.” Additionally, more recently, Yeshiva University’s Ryan Turell was considered to have a shot at the NBA.

Skills from the court extend to everyday life for Oliff: “I’ve learned dedication,” he observes. “If you want to be good at something, if you want to see results, you have to dedicate time. You have to sacrifice, whether that’s sacrificing, time with friends, or things that are more gratifying in the moment.” ♦

From the Archives:

20 years later, Joe Lieberman reflects back on the moment he was picked by Gore

Lieberman shares what it meant to be the first Jewish member of a major party presidential ticket

By Sam Zieve-Cohen

The evening before Democratic presidential nominee Al Gore, then the vice president, announced his choice for running mate in the 2000 presidential election, Joe Lieberman, then the junior senator from Connecticut, received a call from his press secretary relaying some bad news. According to insider reports coming from the Gore campaign, the Democratic presidential nominee had made the tough decision to choose then-Sen. John Edwards (D-NC) as his running mate from a final list that included Lieberman and then-Sen. John Kerry (D-MA).

Lieberman, at home in New Haven, descended the stairs, opened a bottle of kosher wine and asked his gathered family to drink a l'chaim to an America that could provide the mere chance of considering the first Jewish vice president.

In reality, Gore had yet to make a decision, waiting until well after midnight to finalize his pick. The next morning, on August 7, 2000, Lieberman awoke to find media vans outside his Connecticut house, cable news blaring his name and reporters peering through his windows. The sudden media attention was unexpected, nearly catching the unaware candidate preparing the morning coffee in his boxers. A clip of Lieberman's wife, Hadassah, taking out the trash barefoot made national television.

A few hours later, the campaign's pre-selected vice presidential campaign staff arrived in New Haven. Like everyone outside of Gore's inner circle, the staff had been previously unaware of the final choice, standing by with a charter plane in Nashville prepared to immediately fly to New Haven for Lieberman, Boston for Kerry or North

Carolina for Edwards. Upon reaching the Liebermans' door, they were surprised to be ushered by Hadassah directly into the basement where the candidate waited. And so, the 2000 Democratic campaign for vice president serendipitously began underground, in a cool respite from the August heat and prying media cameras.

Gore's choice of Lieberman was predicated largely on the desire to appear independent from then-President Bill Clinton. Lieberman was not only widely considered a moderate with friends across the aisle, he had previously made national news after publicly rebuking Clinton on the Senate floor two years earlier during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

In a 24-minute speech that played across network news, Lieberman did not hold back in accusing Clinton of embarrassing "all of us as Americans." The response was enormous, burnishing a growing reputation for Lieberman as a politician committed to public values.

In a testament to the chaotic strangeness of the Democratic Party at the time, the move caused Lieberman's stock to rise even among the party establishment.

The media praised Gore's "bold" choice, with Clinton himself calling it "gutsy." As Lieberman describes in his book reflecting on the campaign, the president called him immediately, not only offering his best wishes and congratulations, but providing advice for how Lieberman and Gore should emphasize the independency of the ticket.

In a recent interview with *Jewish Insider*, Lieberman reflected on the culmination of circumstances leading to his addition to the ticket. "Every choice of a running

mate is reflective of where the presidential candidate is and where that candidate thinks the country is at a given moment," he said.

But when the papers came out the following morning, it was Lieberman's faith, not political positions, that captured the headlines.

Two decades later, Lieberman continues to praise Gore's boldness in choosing a Jewish candidate, adding, "I don't know if any presidential nominee would have had the courage to do it 20 years, let alone 50 years, before."

When Gore and Lieberman met for dinner in Nashville following the announcement, the vice president admitted he reached out to his friends in the Jewish community seeking their advice on choosing a Jewish running mate. According to Lieberman, all of them counseled caution, afraid of any backlash. But when Gore asked for advice from fellow Christians, they unhesitantly approved the choice.

"Obviously the Jewish ambivalence or anxiety comes from Jewish history," Lieberman said. "It's really a marvelous story, and very hopeful because the Christian confidence says that — this being a majority Christian country — this place was different. It wasn't like other places and other times."

Of course, the choice of Lieberman came with a caveat unusual for politicians. He was not only Jewish, but observantly so. From the outset, Lieberman let it be known that his religious practices would remain an unbreachable commitment.

But in the formulaic microcosm that is a presidential campaign, this caused immediate disruption to the habits of the scheduling and advance staff who suddenly

needed to learn the laws of kashrut and requirements of Shabbat.

"I've never seen more cellophane everywhere," Tom Nides, who served as the vice presidential campaign manager and who travelled alongside Lieberman for the length of the campaign, laughingly recalled in a recent conversation with JI. "Every hotel room was covered with cellophane. I think people got a little carried away with it."

Nides, who recalled Lieberman joking about his 24/6 commitment to the campaign, maintains that the Connecticut senator's religiosity affected little more than logistics and planning.

Meanwhile, the Jewish community immediately embraced Lieberman's candidacy, devouring the weekly coverage of Lieberman's choice of congregation to join for Shabbat or mentions of fast days on national television.

"He made being a religious Jew not unusual" to the rest of the country, said Nides. "I think it was a broken barrier. It looks like you can be an observant Jew and run for president. You don't have to work on Saturdays to run for president. And I think that itself was a barrier that I think was really important for people to understand."

On the stump, Lieberman suffused his remarks with biblical mentions and, as he describes it, frequent "hoshannahs." According to Matea Gold, who covered the Lieberman campaign for the *Los Angeles Times*, Lieberman's "most often refrain to audiences was, 'Is America a great country or what?'" Gold recalled that "he would frequently throw around Yiddish phrases, invoke God and would say that Al Gore had yiddishe neshamah, or Jewish soul."

After a speech in Detroit in which he quoted George Washington's farewell address to "with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion," Lieberman was met backstage by a — in his description — "furious" Nides, concerned the speech might cause unpopular controversy. To Lieberman's delight, after hearing the thunderous applause, Nides relented.

Still, according to Nides, Lieberman's faith was never a campaign theme. "He ran as Al Gore's vice president on principles. He was proud to be the first Jew. He was proud of his religion, his beliefs. He was proud of

his family. But it wasn't like that was the defining issue of Joe Lieberman."

Even still, Lieberman's Jewish references left an indelible mark. "The big song that summer was, 'Who Let the Dogs Out?' and for some reason, the advance staff would blare that anthem as he took the stage — an odd choice for an observant Jew, to be sure, but one that gave his events the feeling of a pep rally mixed with a Shabbat sermon," recalled Gold.

But Lieberman's expressions of faith were not universally applauded in the Jewish community. A few weeks after joining the campaign trail, Lieberman faced criticism from the Anti-Defamation League for openly professing his faith at campaign events. In an August 29 statement, the ADL called Lieberman's statements "contrary to the American ideal," concluding "There is a point at which an emphasis on religion in a political campaign becomes inappropriate and even unsettling in a diverse society such as ours."

Despite that critique, Lieberman and Nides pushed on, focusing on polling data that showed Bush leading Gore in the 'shares our values' category. In October, they scheduled a speech on faith at Notre Dame University, which received praise in the press.

In the first post-impeachment election, the authenticity displayed by Lieberman's commitment to his values proved popular.

"For him, Jewish heritage was not the soft stuff of culture, but was a deep well of wisdom to help him formulate the right way to lead," explained Michael Granoff, a supporter and friend who spent significant time on the trail with Lieberman during the 2000 campaign.

Lieberman's faith was not just for show. Those who surrounded him on the trail — including staffers to the media, who Gold says he endearingly called nuchschleppers — found him courteous, gracious, and pleasant.

"Even in the darkest days — and there were plenty of them, especially during the recount — he couldn't have been more solicitous, more charming and decent to people," Nides recalled.

Granoff readily concurred. "If the Jewish people arranged to put their best foot forward with the first of them to run in a

national campaign," he said, "they could not have invented someone more well-suited to the task than Senator Lieberman."

In the "political time" schema described by scholar Stephen Skowronek, the Gore-Lieberman campaign occurred during a period of relative ideological stability of the Reagan era, now likely to have ended with the disjunctive Trump presidency. Lieberman's candidacy is in many respects a perfect emblem of that period, when norms and political extremes were far more restrained.

Gore's choice of a political moderate as a running mate appears antiquated by 2020 standards. The choice of a Lieberman-esque vice presidential candidate would appear bold for the opposite reasons it did in 2000.

Lieberman's legacy was complicated six years after his vice presidential run, when he left the Democratic Party following his Senate primary loss. In 2008, Lieberman endorsed his longtime friend and Republican senator John McCain in the presidential election, further cementing a dramatic move away from the Democratic Party. The endorsement unsettled many former allies, including many Gore-Lieberman campaign alumni.

"What happened after the Senate race and how he morphed a little bit, I didn't support that," Nides admitted. "He's still a decent, wonderful human being, but I don't support him, going to the Republican convention and endorsing John McCain."

Granoff, who remains close to Lieberman, defended the former senator. "There is no question that Joe's support for the 2003 Iraq war, the events surrounding his 2006 reelection to the Senate, and his endorsement of his friend John McCain's 2008 campaign severely diminished his standing in the eyes of many," he said. "It was not Joe who changed — it was them."

Regardless of whether the change lies with Lieberman, the party, or a combination, Gore's choice in 2000 appears in stark contrast to Joe Biden's expected choice of a running mate positioned to his left.

In particular, the choice of a Jewish running mate appears distinctly disjointed in an era of rising antisemitism, including towards political candidates.

Reflecting on the 2000 campaign, neither Lieberman, nor his top aides could recall a single incident of antisemitism.

“There is no way I would have imagined during the euphoria of that moment that 20 years later we would look upon an America where so many of the virtues of that experience are nearly unimaginable,” Granoff now says.

Lieberman remained more circumspect. When asked whether another Jewish candidate could emerge in this era he responded in the affirmative, before hastening to reiterate the “unique set of circumstances” that led to his pick. “You know what they say, *Baruch Hashem*. God works in mysterious and wonderful ways.” ♦