

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

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NOVEMBER 30, 2021

## Israeli ambassador hosts first Washington event: Lesson of Hanukkah alive today

*Speaking alongside Sens. Schumer and Cardin, Amb. Michael Herzog framed Israel's conflict with its foes as 'a struggle between light and darkness'*

By Marc Rod

In his first public event as Israeli ambassador to the United States, Michael Herzog framed the conflict between Israel and its regional foes as a “struggle between light and darkness” and a fight against “radical forces who resist any progress.”

Hosting the Israeli Embassy in Washington's annual Hanukkah party on Monday evening, Herzog said, “When I light this candle, I dedicate it to our effort to spread hope as well as to our unbreakable bond with the United States, our best friend and ally, which is a force multiplier in this quest for light.”

“May these flames symbolize the light that we will pursue together, in the quest for a brighter future for generations to come,” he added.

Herzog also compared the story of the Maccabees to that of the modern State of Israel, reaffirming Israel's duty and ability to protect itself. The new ambassador's comments came against the backdrop of renewed nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna, and a statement earlier Monday from Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett opposing the negotiations.

“If our core identity and the values that define us are ever in danger, we as a nation must fight to maintain them and be prepared to make the necessary sacrifices, as our ancestors did,” he said. “The lesson of Hanukkah is as alive today as it was over 2,000 years ago. Today, we have a state that is thriving and strong, capable of defending itself against aggressors and ill-wishers.”

Herzog added that Israel's “higher calling” is to “improve the lives of people in our neighborhood and beyond.”

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) also delivered remarks at the event.

“It is such an honor to be here at your first official appearance as ambassador to the United States,” Schumer said. “I know the relationship between the United States and Israel will grow even stronger with you here in Washington and with recently confirmed Ambassador [Tom] Nides in *Yerushalayim*. It's a great team.”

Schumer, who sat shiva on Sunday night for his father, who died last week, noted that the *Mi Chamocha* prayer he recited at the shiva relates to the name of the Maccabees. “The first four words of the prayer – *Mi*

*Chamocha* – start with the letters Mem-Khaf-Bet-Yod, which spells Maccabee,” the majority leader explained.

He also reflected on the meaning of Hanukkah.

“On the one hand, the season is a reminder that for millennia, Jews have been driven from our temples and our homes, oppressed by regimes who not only sought our subjugation, but also our annihilation,” he said. “In spite of that history of diversity, Hanukkah teaches us to never lose faith in Adonai's divine presence... So many have tried to annihilate the Jewish people and our spirit. All have failed... But the Jewish people live on in America and in *Eretz Yisrael*.”

Cardin also related the Hanukkah story to that of modern-day Israel.

“The Maccabees rescued Jerusalem. Built the second temple. It shows that a small but mighty people can do wondrous things,” he said. “That's the state of Israel. That's what the state of Israel has been able to do in a part of the world where it's a small nation, but a mighty nation. And it's guided by its values. And that's why this special relationship between the United States and Israel has only grown stronger over time.”

"Tonight we light the candle in hope for our future, recognizing that Israel and the United States are together in our commitment to make this world a safer world, for a more peaceful world for all —

one in which our values, values of respect for each other, are embedded in our principles," he continued.

The hanukkiyah used at the event was one of three created for the Clinton White

House by Maryland-based sculptor Zachary Oxman and lent to the embassy by Kira Epstein-Begal and William Begal. ♦

DECEMBER 2, 2021

## Amb. Al Otaiba: Ties between Emiratis and Israelis are flourishing

*The UAE ambassador delivered the remarks at a ceremony celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Gulf nation's founding at the Kennedy Center on Wednesday evening*

By Amb. Yousef Al Otaiba

Back in 1971, a small place on the banks of the Potomac, called the Kennedy Center, opened its doors for the first time.

Back in 1971, a small place on the banks of the Potomac, called the Kennedy Center, opened its doors for the first time.

In the spring of that year, NPR broadcast for the first time coverage of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

Down in Orlando, people flocked to the grand opening of Walt Disney World.

And an MIT graduate, somewhere in his spare time, sent the world's first email.

And while all this activity was happening here in 1971, 7,000 miles away, a brand new country was born in the heart of the Arabian Gulf.

Fifty years ago, on Dec. 2, leaders from independent Emirates, gathered in Dubai and founded a sovereign country that ultimately became known as the United Arab Emirates.

Today is a remarkable day for my country. And I am extremely honored to represent my country as an ambassador.

I'm so proud of everything that we have managed to accomplish in just five decades. It's a very long list, and I am not in the business of giving long speeches. So what we'll do is we'll do a quick run-through the greatest hits from just 2021.

In 2021, the UAE became a major contributor to the global effort to produce and distribute COVID vaccines for the countries

with the most vulnerable populations. And so far, we've provided vaccines and medical support to 135 different countries.

In February, we became the first Arab country and the fifth nation ever to reach Mars.

Just this last September, we marked the one-year anniversary of the historic Abraham Accords.

A month ago, Dubai Expo opened its doors for the first time and started welcoming millions and millions of visitors from every corner of the globe.

We also doubled down on our strong advocacy for the global climate change agenda by launching new initiatives with the U.S. and pledging to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

I saw John Kerry here, I don't know if he's still here. If he is, a big thank you goes to him for everything he's been doing with us. (applause)

He has been a fantastic partner and deserves just as much credit as all of our guys for making all these things happen.

And also on climate, the UAE was selected to host COP 28, which happens in 2023. Also a big thank you to John Kerry.

And this coming January, next month, the UAE takes a seat on the U.N. Security Council.

None of these achievements, none of these things I just described would have been possible without the man that we're honoring here tonight. Our founder, our

father, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

He underscored the importance of unity, a necessity to provide a better life and to ensure stability and realize the hopes and aspirations of our people.

He had the vision and the voice of modernism that would pave the way for our unprecedented development.

But he also knew that the true asset of any advanced country was its people.

He always stressed the importance of education and equality, while staying true to Emirati traditions and values. He recognized the important role of women in advancing our society. He was a champion of gender equality, access to education, and health care to men and to women. And this is back in the early '70s.

Sheikh Zayed instilled values of tolerance and inclusion that remained a pillar of who we are today.

From this vision, a nation was formed that embraces the traditions of others, while at the same time proudly holding on to its own.

We are incredibly proud to be one of the most diverse countries in the world, home to over 200 nationalities, and virtually every religion you can imagine.

In fact, there was this diversity that was a catalyst for their historic visit of His Holiness Pope Francis back in 2019.

The Pope's visit highlighted the ways that followers of the Abrahamic faiths are

united not divided.

This is reflected further by the Abraham Family House, which will open in Abu Dhabi next year. It will be home to a mosque, a synagogue and a church.

Sheikh Zayed's legacy of building consensus lives on through our values and interactions with the US and other members of the international community. And 50 years on, the UAE-U.S. relationship has grown to become our most important one with broad human, economic, cultural and security dimensions.

Take the Abraham Accords for example.

With U.S. support, we accomplished something extraordinary that creates a path towards a more peaceful Middle East.

And no, he's not here. But my Israeli colleague was invited. I think he's on the way. And I think it's kind of cool for our 50th anniversary to be the first time we welcome an Israeli ambassador to the UAE National Day event. (enthusiastic applause)

And somewhere on the other side, U.S. Ambassador Tom Nides will be attending UAE National Day in the first UAE Embassy in Tel Aviv. (applause)

In a little over a year, people-to-people connections between Emiratis and Israelis are flourishing. And those connections have generated opportunities in trade and technology and culture and education. And just recently, Emirati, American and Israeli

officials met in Washington for a historic trilateral meeting, to discuss ways to deepen that cooperation even more.

Our shared outlook for the region in the world is critical to our efforts of security, peace and stability.

The strong and lasting relationship that both our countries enjoy has evolved and strengthened throughout the years. We work together to combat climate change, we work together to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of vaccines, we work together to advance global food security. And we work together to explore space and advance our understanding of our planet and beyond.

And in a time of unprecedented challenges and adversity, we must continue to collaborate on the most pressing issues of our time.

COVID-19 was a wake up call for all of us. And it really drove home the need for more cooperation, not less.

And we've worked tirelessly with the international community to support the logistics and distribution of vaccines worldwide. And we continue to work closely with the U.S. and international organizations to transport millions of doses from the UAE to places with the greatest need.

Both of our countries continue to have an enormous stake in each other's economic well-being and open trade and investment,

and in a speedy global recovery.

And over the last 50 years, we've become one of the largest international investors in the U.S. And we're also the biggest market in the region for U.S. goods and services. And we're home to thousands of American companies.

As we prepare to take our seat on the [U.N.] Security Council next month, it's another important opportunity for us to make a significant international contribution and to strengthen relationships with our partners and project our values on the global stage.

In many ways, the courage associated with the Abraham Accords, the Emirates Mars mission, our efforts on COVID and climate. Together, they all represent the culmination of Sheikh Zayed's vision for the UAE's place in the world.

These achievements taken together will be our guide star for the next 50 years.

They represent our embrace of diversity, of global engagement and our pursuit of knowledge.

They represent who we are. And they have set the course for our next 50 years of progress. If you all thought the last 50 years were impressive, wait till you see the next 50 years. Thank you so much for being here with us tonight. ♦

DECEMBER 2, 2021

## Peace is being written in new Israeli-Emirati art exhibit

*In the flow and swirl of calligraphic scripts, Israeli and Emirati-based artists write a new story in wake of Abraham Accords*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

**A**t a new Jerusalem exhibition featuring works by Israeli and Emirati-based artists, the writing is literally on the wall.

Entitled "Maktoub," which means both "written" and "destined" in Arabic, some 29 pieces by 10 artists – five based in each country – display swirling calligraphic

scripts in Hebrew and Arabic. The show is a result of the cultural flowering that is beginning to take root in the wake of the signing last year of the Abraham Accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Part of the monthlong 5th Biennale for Contemporary Jewish Art taking place in

the city through the end of the year, the exhibit, mounted in a quiet corner of the Jerusalem Theater, offers an eclectic mix of geometric and flowing letters, as well as words and texts forming mystical and defined shapes such as hamsas and horses, stars and circles.

And the twist? The co-curators, one

based in Jerusalem and one in Dubai, in the UAE, like to paint letters belonging to each other's languages.

"There are connections and similarities between the languages in the works and the way the artists think about letters, modernizing them and doing different things with the scripts — there is already a lot of common ground," Lenore Mizrachi-Cohen, a New York-born artist of Syrian heritage, who conceived the installation and is one of the co-curators, told Jewish Insider in an interview last week.

Mizrachi-Cohen, 31, who made aliyah to Jerusalem two years ago, was raised in the Syrian-Jewish community in Brooklyn where Arabic customs and language are part of everyday life. The daughter of a sofer, or scribe, who works with Hebrew texts, Mizrachi-Cohen said that "Hebrew didn't appeal to me in the same way Arabic letters did. Artistically, I have always loved the beautiful form and flow and curvature of Arabic."

Being able to write in Arabic but not converse fluently has always been a source of frustration for the young artist. So has the lack of formal instruction in an artform that is strict and uncompromising in its rules.

"Even if it appears to be a more free-form, flowy type of script, it still has its own structure and to the trained eye it looks ridiculous if you're not doing it properly," Mizrachi-Cohen, who taught herself using videos, told JI.

It was this frustration that led Mizrachi-Cohen to connect with teachers in the Arab world — easy when she was living in New York but a challenge that proved harder after she moved to Israel.

But in the summer of 2020, after the signing of the Abraham Accords, Mizrachi-Cohen described having a "light-bulb moment."

"My brain just started turning and I was like, 'This is amazing, because I'm sure that there are other artists who would also benefit from having in-person instruction,'" she recalled. "I said, well, if a bunch of artists are coming together, we should do a residency together, then we will also have the opportunity for a cultural exchange. It would be a real opportunity for connection and learning."

Mizrachi-Cohen reached out to

Moroccan-born, Dubai-based artist and jeweler Chama Mechtaly, who joined her in curating the exhibition. For more than 13 years, Mechtaly, 30, who was raised Muslim but has Jewish roots, has used visual arts to explore her own and Morocco's Jewish heritage. A social activist, she works to build bridges between Muslims and Jews, advocating for more recognition of Jewish and Mizrahi history in the region.

"I grew up in a Muslim context and only knew about Jews from the lens of the Palestinian conflict," Mechtaly, who studied at Brandeis University in Boston, told JI in an interview. "It was quite disruptive to learn that my grandfather came from a Jewish family, and I sought to understand what that meant."

Mechtaly's journey has taken her from painting portraits of indigenous Moroccan Jewish women to Hebrew calligraphy work — featured in the exhibition — that includes a reimagined Moroccan flag bearing a six-point Star of David in place of the five-point pentagram and the word "Shalom" in Hebrew interwoven with Amazigh symbols, referencing the North African indigenous ethnic group.

Her artwork, she said, draws a variety of responses in her native Morocco, ranging from raw emotion over the loss of the Jewish community there to censorship. In 2015, she was forced by government officials to remove the reimagined Moroccan flag from an exhibition in Casablanca, she said.

As for the Jerusalem exhibit, Mechtaly said it was important for her to show that the Abraham Accords "were not forced."

"The agreements come in the context of long-term activism and civil society efforts to engage with the Jewish community and Israel," she said, adding that many Arab artists wanted to join the "Maktoub" exhibit but could not due to limited finances.

"I really want to make sure the Accords are not limited to political, economic and security deals, but they can also relate to the social fabric of this region," Mechtaly continued. "Art can transform how we speak about each other and can facilitate discussion more effectively than any policy."

Both Mizrachi-Cohen and Mechtaly say the show is a first step, designed to signal a willingness between regional artists to engage with each other on a cultural level.

"We can create a foundation for sustainable peace in the region and use this as a launching pad," said Mechtaly. She described future plans for an artist's residency in the UAE and taking the exhibition on the road.

Mizrachi-Cohen said the COVID-19 pandemic had severed budgets for the arts but that the show would "show whoever may be interested in supporting such initiatives how nice it can be when we put our best work forward, and when we all get together this is what we can accomplish." ♦

# A nouvelle rugelach from the Best Damn Cookies guy

*Just in time for Hanukkah, Dave Dreifus is honoring his Ashkenazi roots in every batch*

By Matthew Kassel

For many people at the beginning of the pandemic, baking cookies, cakes and other treats was a coping mechanism — a sugary salve for the soul. For Dave Dreifus, it was a matter of professional survival.

The 29-year-old private chef, who lives in New York City, had recently found himself out of work last year when he turned to baked goods, churning out cookies from a friend's restaurant in Williamsburg. "I was biking 30 miles a day selling chocolate chip cookies," Dreifus recalled in a phone conversation with *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday.

Business has grown considerably since then. Best Damn Cookies, as the company is called, now operates out of a permanent storefront in the market line at Essex Market food hall on the Lower East Side, where Dreifus oversees production at a nearby commissary kitchen. He says he is making thousands of cookies a week, while shipping orders nationwide.

When he spoke with *JJ*, Dreifus was on his way to the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant to pick up 30 pounds of chocolate. "A classic day," he chuckled, "in the owning of a bakery."

While Dreifus had previously done tours of duty at such Michelin-starred establishments as the French Laundry and SingleThread, Best Damn Cookies is, in many ways, a return to his roots: His paternal grandfather, Armin Dreifus, once ran a Jewish pastry shop, Stern's, in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Midwood.

"It's deeply personal," Dreifus said. "He came to this country from Germany as a Holocaust survivor, and it's just kind of in my blood to open up this bakery."

Until recently, Dreifus had largely ignored his Ashkenazi culinary heritage, highlighting different cultures instead. "If

people inquire and are interested, there's deep meaning behind each one of our cookies," he told *JJ*, citing one collaboration with a local Mexican restaurant, Sobre Masa. "We use their roasted corn and cinnamon and chile de árbol to make this gluten-free pinole cookie."

His latest offering, however, hits closer to home. "Every cookie that we've made has a story to tell, except the most recent one, which is rugelach, because that is my story," Dreifus said. "This is the first one where, basically, I'm collaborating with myself."

Just in time for Hanukkah, which begins Sunday at sundown, Dreifus unveiled his latest creation, as part of a limited initial run, earlier this week. "I want it to feel sexy and exclusive," he told *JJ*. "I want people to feel really proud to eat this, versus just like, 'Ugh, it's just rugelach.'"

Even for an old-fashioned Jewish pastry, his approach, as he described it, is somewhat high-toned. Call it Jewish fusion. "My grandpa traditionally used walnuts, golden raisins and cinnamon. I was like, 'Walnuts, raisins ... that's basically charoset,'" Dreifus said, referring to the sweet, chunky mixture traditionally served at Passover Seders. "So I started making a charoset rugelach."

His take includes cinnamon walnut butter, apples and golden raisins, stewed with white wine and apple brandy — all combined with homemade cream cheese and sour cream.

For Dreifus, his foray into Jewish cuisine, particularly after years in fine dining, represents the answer to a question he has long been mulling. "It's about finding my identity and how I feel," he said. "I think most chefs grow up feeling this idea about, like, 'What am I going to cook?'"

"To be frank, I felt a little like, 'Am I going to make knishes?'" he said. "Like,

'What am I going to make, Lipton soup mix, pot roasts?' Which I love. But I don't know if that's necessarily what I want to do professionally."

The rugelach, he suggested, is just the first step in a new direction, one that includes moving beyond cookies as he seeks to celebrate his past. "I'm an Ashkenazi Jew — German, Hungarian and Russian," he said. "I have aspirations of opening up my own deli one day, named after my grandparents, Hannah and Armin Dreifus."

The deli, which, he suggested, is likely a year or two in the future, will highlight "Central European food" through a "Jewish lens," as he put it. "I have every intention of making this a reality," he said, "of trying to push Ashkenazi cooking a bit further."

"My family had very specific traditions, and I'd really like to show them in a little bit more of a microcosm, but also I have all these skills I've gotten from all these fancy restaurants, and I'd like to utilize them," he said. "What's the best way to showcase brine or mackerel, herring and pickles? Everybody freaks out about eating mackerel when you go to a Japanese restaurant, but maybe they're a little bit more reserved when they go to Russ & Daughters."

Persuading customers otherwise, he said, will take what he described as "a bit of chutzpah" and "a bit of pride."

"What we have to offer is badass and amazing," he said. "I don't want us to feel timid by our food." ♦



# Inside Israel's push to join U.S. Visa Waiver Program

*With wait times for U.S. visas currently topping more than a year, Israeli leaders are stepping up efforts to join the Visa Waiver Program*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

When it comes to visiting the United States, Israelis sometimes feel like the proverbial child: Nose pressed up against the window of the candy store: so near, yet so far.

Unlike entry to Europe and most states in Asia, to visit the country government officials like to refer to as their closest and most strategic ally, Israeli citizens must obtain a visa — a bureaucratic and burdensome process to which most equivalent visitors to Israel are totally oblivious.

Now, with wait times for U.S. visas topping more than a year, Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, are stepping up efforts to get the Jewish state included in a special Visa Waiver Program that allows 90-day visa-free tourist and business visits. And, they are hopeful it could happen as soon as 2023.

Yet major obstacles exist to Israel's inclusion in the program. The percentage of Israeli visa applicants rejected annually remains high, well above the cut-off allowed and, in the past, American officials have raised concerns about Israel's treatment of Palestinian-Americans at its borders, among other things.

Bennett discussed the issue during a meeting with President Joe Biden last August in Washington, D.C. The president said at the time that he was committed to "working together towards Israel's inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program." Last week, while in the U.S., Israeli Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked emphasized the matter to her counterpart, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. He later tweeted, "DHS remains committed to working with Israel to help it meet all Visa Waiver Program requirements."

On Monday, 58 members of Congress

sent a bipartisan letter to Mayorkas and Secretary of State Tony Blinken urging that Israel be added to the program. The letter cited U.S. Travel Association figures that more than 400,000 Israelis visited the country annually pre-COVID-19, accounting for \$1.2 billion in spending annually.

But, it is unclear how much sway, if any, the letter will have and many in the U.S. and Israel, including those who have worked on this in the past, remain skeptical that Israel will find a way to qualify in the near future.

Approved by Congress in 1986, the Visa Waiver Program has strict requirements — a visa application refusal rate below 3%, reciprocal entry policy, as well as biometric passports and the sharing of criminal databases. Currently, only 40, mostly European, countries enjoy the benefits of the coveted program.

"I have been dealing with this issue for more than a decade," Shaked told Jewish Insider from Washington, last week. "I worked with Mayorkas during the Obama administration and we have identified the problems."

Shaked, who served as justice minister from 2015-2019, told JI she was confident Israel would be able to overcome the barriers. She said representatives from her ministry will now meet once a month, virtually, with counterparts at DHS to iron out specifics such as lowering the refusal rate and addressing the problems of U.S. citizens of Palestinian descent entering and leaving Israel.

"On a professional level I know what needs to be done in Israel," Shaked added, highlighting that both Mayorkas and incoming U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides, with whom she also met during her visit, "really want this to happen."

"Mayorkas loves Israel and I know he is

dedicated to this," she said.

Shaked explained that being part of the program would "reduce stress" for many Israelis who want to visit America. "Israel is so close to the U.S. and Americans can enter Israel without a visa, while Israelis need to wait. It is a headache for us."

"Israelis look at other countries who are in the program and say, 'Why not us?'" former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren, who was posted to Washington between 2009-2013, told JI. "They want to go to the U.S. to travel or study. Many have family connections."

"Politically this would be very popular in Israel," added Oren, who says he also worked intensely on the issue during his tenure. "I used to tell my staff, 'Whoever does this, they will erect a statue to them in Dizengoff Square.'"

But Oren remains skeptical that it will happen, despite best intentions.

"The U.S. is going through a period of cutting back on immigration," he observed. "Americans are not thinking about newly demobilized soldiers who want to go backpacking to the Grand Canyon; they don't want anyone coming in who will burden the U.S. economy or take jobs."

Oren did offer some hope, however, saying that the rate of rejection for visa applications was "arbitrary." In the past, he pointed out, Israel's rejection rate reached below 2.8%. When former President Barack Obama entered office, the rejection rate increased to nearly 10%. Figures from the U.S. State Department show that the most recent visa refusal rates for Israel were 6.52% in 2020 and 5.33% in 2019.

Israel has pushed to join the program in the past. In 2017, Shaked tried for inclusion but faced opposition over difficulties experienced by Americans of Palestinian

heritage at Ben Gurion Airport. Similar concerns were expressed in 2014, when Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a formal request to join the program.

In 2013, former Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) worked on a bill to ease the requirements specifically for Israel but reached the conclusion that “under U.S. law, to enter the Visa Waiver Program, a country's visa refusal rate must be below 3 percent. Israel's is at about 10 percent.” And the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act that followed in 2014 supports Israel's entry into the program, but only if it meets the requirements.

In response to a request from JI, an official from the U.S. Department of State said, “At this time, Israel does not meet all of the Visa Waiver Program eligibility requirements. The United States is fully supportive of Israel joining the program once it meets all requirements for program participation.”

Scott Lasensky, a senior adviser to former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro, told JI that the visa issue “looms large for Israelis,” while “Americans, including American Jews, are nearly blind toward it.”

“It has really outsized impacts on certain segments of Israeli society, thousands of people who work in certain industries, anyone who's working with the Diaspora, especially North American Jewry,” Lasensky said. “On the radar in America, I know it goes largely unseen. Jewish American groups don't advocate [for] it, with the exception of AIPAC, and they don't understand it.”

The Jewish Federations of North America, which employs dozens of Israeli emissaries each year, does not intend to do any advocacy work related to adding Israel to the Visa Waiver Program, a spokesperson told JI.

Lasensky, who was also an advisor to U.N. Ambassadors Susan Rice and Samantha Power, added that “Americans

who travel the most to Israel — Jewish Americans, people in high-tech, evangelical Christians — don't need visas to enter Israel, they just wake up in the morning and buy a ticket.”

“There was probably no issue that Israelis — whether taxi drivers, neighbors where I lived, or people in civil society and political positions — brought up more with me than the visa waiver issue,” he continued.

Lasensky said that Shapiro also tried unsuccessfully to work through barriers and, he noted, “Trump-era politics weren't very generous toward incoming travel.”

However, he added, Biden's statement to Bennett following their meeting might help make a change. “One thing missing until now was attention and commitment at the highest levels,” Lasensky finished. “Now you have that.” ♦

*JI's Capitol Hill reporter Marc Rod contributed to this article.*

DECEMBER 2, 2021

## Expectant olim hoping for exemption to allow parents into Israel

*Women due to give birth in the coming weeks are pressuring the government to allow their families into the country*

By Tamara Zieve

Immigrants to Israel due to give birth in the coming weeks are feeling a mix of anxiety, neglect and anger as their parents are locked out of the country due to the latest COVID-19 restrictions.

A 14-day ban on the entry of foreigners to the country went into effect on Sunday in response to the Omicron variant. Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz said Tuesday that the ban will not be renewed automatically. But many due to give birth in the coming days will have to go through the emotional milestone without the support of their immediate family — unable to share their joy with them or to lean on them in those often difficult and exhausting initial postpartum weeks. Others, due to give birth in several

weeks time, remain anxious and skeptical that the restrictions will be loosened in time for their due dates.

The Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) has made exceptions for weddings and bar mitzvahs, leaving mothers and soon-to-be mothers fuming.

American-Israeli Deena Moskowitz Hikri expressed her outrage to former Knesset Member Dov Lipman, the founder of the NGO Yad L'Olim (“a hand to immigrants”).

“I'm seriously confused at the new exceptions for bar mitzvah and weddings,” she wrote to Lipman. “How can this be in front of grandparents coming to help their olim (immigrant) children who have zero help here! I can't believe big party simchas, spreader events, are before births, where the

relatives will be in the house helping olim the whole time.”

Yad L'Olim works to assist immigrants in Israel and has been active in supporting those split from their families during the pandemic. In April, Lipman helped get permission for Moskowitz Hikri's parents to enter the country when she had a stillbirth.

The former politician made a plea on behalf of pregnant immigrants, as well as lone soldiers, at a Knesset committee meeting on Tuesday, where he spoke about the suffering of foreign first-degree relatives of immigrants. He organized a letter-writing campaign that saw dozens of expecting mothers sending emails to Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked on Wednesday, urging her to let parents into the country

for their grandchildren's births. A virtual demonstration is also in the works.

A template of the letter being sent to Shaked reads: "I understand that there is a new variant circulating in the world, and the importance of public health. But, what is happening here is not a matter of public health and safety. We are talking here about a lack of caring from you about the serious needs of women giving birth. Are you in favor of the appearance of the Miss Universe Pageant but against the physical and mental health of women giving birth and immigrants?!"

The letter refers to the decision to permit entry to contestants taking part in the Miss Universe pageant which is set to take place in Eilat on Dec. 12.

"It's solely the decision of Ayelet Shaked, 100%," Lipman told *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday. "If she says yes, the parents can come."

Shaked did not respond to a request for comment by press time.

Lipman told JI that Israeli officials explained that they are allowing entry for weddings and bar mitzvahs because those dates are more fixed and certain than a due date, which officials say allows for more control.

"It's insanity," said the American-born Lipman. "There's no greater humanitarian need than parents being there to help their children give birth. I just look at my grandchildren that were born three months ago. If my wife and I weren't here to help our children — I don't want to get into the details of things that happened — but they would not have functioned during that time."

"I believe that the State of Israel is actually being cruel and inhumane by not allowing vaccinated parents to come for births," he added. "We are going to continue this battle and go wherever we need to go for this to be changed."

One participant in the campaign, Danielle Fox-Mann, who made aliyah from New York, is expecting her mother to fly in from Florida in mid-December. If her mother is barred from entering, Fox-Mann, 33, doesn't know who will take care of her toddler when she gives birth this month. "We got all the paperwork ready already and we applied for an exemption but got declined," she told JI. The letter she received

from PIBA, which she shared with JI, states that she does not meet the criteria set for entry into Israel at this time.

"I just feel anxious and helpless because there is nothing I can do to affect the outcome of the situation that changed basically overnight. I choose to live in this country because I am a Zionist, but I will be distraught if my mother won't be able to be with me and support me and my toddler through this emotional transition in our lives," she said.

Another American-Israeli woman who spoke to JI on the condition of anonymity is due to give birth to her second child in less than two weeks and had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of her mother ahead of the birth. "I have a toddler at home. My mom was invaluable to me last time I gave birth. She was in the birthing room with me and my partner. I can't imagine going through this time in my life without her at my side. She was supposed to arrive tomorrow. She just canceled her ticket and we are hoping and praying that she will be able to come soon. I'm beyond upset and angry," she said.

French immigrant Alison Emmanuel, 34, feels so abandoned by Israel that she is considering moving back to Paris.

She has her mother on standby in Paris, ready to fly in for the birth of her first child. Emmanuel was also hoping for her father and brother to attend her son's *Brit Mila*. But she fears her family won't be there for the key moments.

"With the restrictions, the uncertainty of the birth date and the three days' isolation, plus the fact that my brother can't even get a third shot in France, I will end up going through this alone," she lamented.

"Israel is stealing our joyful moments. I had to cancel my wedding twice. By the time they were accepting parents again I was pregnant and not up to having a wedding and finally now that I will have my baby, I will be once again separated from my family. I just feel more and more that it's time to leave this country which fails to protect us and provide us basic rights of seeing our loved ones," she said.

Emmanuel is not surprised by news that Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's wife and children have gone abroad on vacation, despite his recommendation on Friday that Israelis refrain from traveling overseas.

Bennett's office said that his family had changed their original "red country" destination in accordance with the updated guidelines for Israeli citizens.

"There are, like always in Israel, two kinds of political decisions: the ones that concern the people of Israel and the ones that concern the rich and influential people," she said. "Do as I say and don't do as I do. Because if you do as I do, you won't do as I say." ♦



# Israel's dilemma as negotiations resume on Iran's nuclear program

*Former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe 'Bogie' Yaalon told JI it is in Israel's best interest to be coordinated with the Biden administration*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

As diplomats return to Vienna this week to resume negotiations on Iran's nuclear program, Israel faces a strategic dilemma: Ramp up the rhetoric that, in the past, has put it at odds with its closest allies; or find a quieter, more polite, way to work within the renewed diplomatic push and perhaps achieve a more acceptable outcome than the deal negotiated with Iran in 2015.

Thus far, Israel's new government, including Prime Minister Naftali Bennett — who met with President Joe Biden in August, after the most recent round of talks — seems to be adopting the latter approach, a clear departure from the combative and divisive tone of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But, as the new round of talks begin, Israel could once again find itself on a collision course with major world powers, including the United States.

Opinions differ on how best to monitor and challenge the Islamic Republic's militaristic nuclear ambitions. Israeli officials are advocating for a maximum-pressure campaign with crippling sanctions and international isolation, while global powers, led now by the Biden administration, are opting for a more muted, diplomatic process.

"I believe and consider the relationship between Israel and U.S. as the cornerstone of our national security, and it is [in] our interest to be coordinated with the administration and with Europe," Israel's former Defense Minister and former IDF Chief of Staff Moshe "Bogie" Yaalon told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. "There might be disputes but those should be discussed indoors, not publicly."

Yaalon, who held various positions in Netanyahu's cabinet, slammed the former

leader for using the Iranian nuclear issue for "political interests" and for openly meddling in internal U.S. politics — most notably Netanyahu's controversial 2015 speech to a joint session of Congress in which he publicly opposed the Obama administration's efforts to secure the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"I did not like it at the time — the whole idea of an Israeli prime minister intervening in U.S. politics," said the longtime Israeli politician. "We should work to keep the bipartisan relationship and though I was not then serving in any official capacity, it was Netanyahu who pushed [President Donald] Trump to withdraw [from the nuclear deal in 2018]."

"The JCPOA was a historic mistake, but the withdrawal from it was even worse," said Yaalon. "At least in 2015, we had an international coalition, the P5+1 voted together in the U.N. Security Council. But by withdrawing and going alone, the U.S. lost Europe, Russia and China. It was a tremendous mistake."

There are signs that Israel's new leaders also recognize the flaws in the previous government's public approach, keeping their criticisms of the Biden administration's diplomatic strategy under the radar.

Speaking last week at the Institute for Policy and Strategy at Reichman University in Herzliya, Bennett alluded to a reevaluation, saying, "We need to look at what we've accomplished and examine if we need to recalibrate this vast effort. And the answer, if we look openly and reasonably, is yes."

The prime minister highlighted only that "the State of Israel must maintain its capabilities to act and its freedom of action, in every situation and under any political circumstances." Israel's army chief of staff,

Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, said that Bennett had already authorized more funding for planning and practicing attacks.

At the same event as Bennett, Defense Minister Benny Gantz, who will travel to the United States in the coming weeks said that a diplomatic solution on Iran was "preferable," he said, but "the use of force should be on the table."

He urged the world to "add a 'Plan B' to the diplomatic option."

And Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who is scheduled to be in London and Paris this week, is likely to press respective leaders to toughen their stance on Iran, while reiterating Israel's message not to rejoin the JCPOA, which it viewed as fatally flawed.

Yaalon, who recently announced his first foray into the business world heading a new Israeli venture capital fund, said it is unlikely the JCPOA will be revived.

"In order to bring them to a deal or make any real decisions on their military nuclear and missile project, the Iranians must be put under pressure," Yaalon told JI. "To force this, there needs to be a combination of political isolation, crippling sanctions and a credible military option."

Biden has said publicly that if diplomatic efforts with Iran fail, the U.S. would seek alternative options. Last week, U.S. Special Envoy for Iran Rob Malley stated that while the U.S. was prepared to return to the deal, if Iran continued to "drag its feet at the nuclear diplomatic table and accelerate its pace when it comes to its nuclear program, if that's the path it chooses, we'll have to respond accordingly."

In Vienna this week, Iran, led for the first time by hardline President Ebrahim Raisi, is expected to call on world powers to lift both nuclear and non-nuclear sanctions, as well as ask for a guarantee from the U.S. that no

future president will unilaterally abandon any agreement, as Trump did – a demand Biden is unlikely to accept.

However, some Middle East analysts believe that, desperate for a solution, the U.S. will cave to some of Iran's demands, settling for an interim agreement that will halt Tehran's progress temporarily in exchange for removing some of the harshest sanctions put in place by the Trump administration.

"There will be a shorter deal, a less-for-more deal, where the U.S. requests fewer restrictions and Iran will get more for their

economic recovery, then Biden can say it's done, put it on back-burner and move on to other policies," Mark Dubowitz, CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), told JI. "They will say this is not the final deal, that they want a longer and stronger deal, but it's likely that this temporary deal will become permanent."

Yaakov Nagel, Israel's former acting national security advisor under Netanyahu, said he does not believe the new Israeli government's approach on Iran had changed

too much, just "the music."

"Bennett and Lapid do not want to confront the U.S. publicly," Nagel noted.

"Israel must explain to the world by every means that it will not be part of any foolish agreement, [that] we will not allow Iran to become nuclear and we will protect ourselves by ourselves," said Nagel. "When our closest ally is making mistakes then, we have to tell them, even if there are clashes, especially when it concerns an existential threat against Israel." ♦

NOVEMBER 23, 2021

## Alex Edelman's quest for comedy in unfunny places

*The comedian's one-man show 'Just For Us,' based on a meeting of white supremacists, premieres Off-Broadway next month*

By Gabby Deutch

Alex Edelman is a comedian who spends a lot of time doing one of the least funny activities imaginable: tracking down and reading antisemitic hate on Twitter, Gab and Telegram.

"The first time I saw it directed at me, I did cry. It was a bad day. I cried in the Apple store," Edelman told *Jewish Insider* in a Zoom interview last week. His friend asked why he was crying. "I was like, 'Just, you know, when is the iPhone 9 coming out?'"

And yet it's this activity — lurking in virtual white supremacist spaces — that serves as the inspiration for Edelman's latest production, a one-man show called "Just For Us," which premieres Off-Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre in Manhattan. The show runs from Dec. 1-19.

"It's never funny," Edelman said of the antisemitism he has observed online. "Just because something is interesting doesn't mean it's great." But, he added, "Comedy always comes from stuff that's interesting to me... My Judaism is really interesting to me, and I'm also interested in the position that Jews occupy in the United States in the 21st century."

"Just For Us," produced by comedian

Mike Birbiglia, is about a meeting of white supremacists that Edelman attended several years ago. "I used to say Nazi or neo-Nazi freewheelingly, and now I'm just like, 'These are nerf Nazis.' These guys are Nazis the way that people who fight each other in the park with, like, tinfoil swords are the Knights of the Round Table."

The meeting did not feel especially dangerous for Edelman, but it did provide a useful window into some of the thinking behind the most extreme accounts he had been following on social media. "They're very concerned with 'white identity.' They feel very strongly they should be allowed to celebrate it. They do believe that diversity is basically a genocide for them," said Edelman. "They also blame the complacency of fellow white people," which Edelman called the "spicy" part of the meeting.

"I've always been interested in places that are closed off to me," explained Edelman, an Orthodox Jew. But, he said, "the show is really about me," and not about the white supremacists he met. (Edelman has not seen "Long Shot," the 2019 movie in which Seth Rogen plays a journalist who unsuccessfully goes undercover at a white supremacist meeting, before the organizers

realize he is a Jewish reporter. "Weirdly, I sometimes pass [as not being Jewish]," Edelman said. "People in the past have said casually antisemitic things in front of me, and I'm always like, 'You can't read my... this is a Jewish person!'"

"Just for Us" premiered in 2018 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to positive reviews, and Edelman has also performed the show in Los Angeles, Melbourne, Montreal and elsewhere in New York. But the Cherry Lane show is his first time performing it since the pandemic, when Edelman brought his Judaism and his comedy together in a new way. He was the lead writer and executive producer of "Saturday Night Seder," a virtual production that took place in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic to raise money for the CDC Foundation, a nonprofit set up by Congress to support the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Seder" set us up in a really interesting way. It was right at the beginning of the pandemic, and there's a bunch of really fascinating stuff happening," said Edelman. "I helped rabbis prep for the High Holy Days, which was more rewarding and interesting than it should have been," explaining that

he led discussions with rabbis on how they could be engaging over Zoom. He has also since done fundraisers for Sharsheret, which works on breast cancer prevention and education; and on his BBC radio show, he used an episode to explore his Jewish identity.

Edelman has been doing stand-up since he was in high school, but his first and abiding love is sports — Boston sports, in particular. As a 14-year-old growing up in Brookline, Mass., he was hired by the Red Sox to write the Red Sox Kid Nation newsletter, a publication for young sports fans that was distributed by the team. (His brother AJ Edelman is an Olympic athlete who is working to put together Israel's first-ever bobsled team for the 2022 Beijing Olympics.)

His love for the sport eventually landed

Edelman one of his first professional gigs in the media world. "I was hired by this ad agency to make a series of videos on sports in American culture," Edelman recalled. These short documentaries, commissioned by the State Department, were meant to provide light videos to people visiting consulates or other American diplomatic offices around the world. "It was stuff that plays in waiting rooms," Edelman added.

In one nearly 10-year-old video, which Edelman shared with JI — "I have not looked it up in years, oh my God" — the State Department's special representative to Muslim communities discussed how high school sports serve as a unifier for Americans of different ethnic and faith backgrounds.

Edelman's comedy is not distinctly focused on his Jewish identity. But he says

his Judaism comes through because it's a big part of his life. "If you have a really heavily Jewish interior life, then if you talk about it in any sort of honest way, it's definitely gonna come out," he said. "It's not unintentional, but also, that's not the only thing I talk about."

"Comedy comes from tension. There's a natural incongruity in living a life, in a modern world, that is focused on tradition, or living in a traditional world where you'd like to have a little bit of the aspects of modernity," noted Edelman. "There's a joke in my act about how I never tried bacon. I have tried cocaine, but I've never tried bacon. Something about that deals with this sort of funny incongruity between a modern world, with unusual electric fences for the people in it." ♦

DECEMBER 3, 2021

## Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene has a GOP challenger in Jennifer Strahan

*Strahan, who runs a healthcare advisory firm, is one of three Republicans challenging Greene*

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By Matthew Kassel

**T**he standard narrative suggests that Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) remains safely ensconced in her district of northwest Georgia, despite the behavior that has defined her brief if tempestuous first year in Congress. But one Republican who is challenging her in next year's primary, Jennifer Strahan, argues that voters are fed up with provocations from Greene that, she says, have only further exposed the congresswoman's political impotence.

"I think there is a fallacy that Marjorie Greene has a stronghold on northwest Georgia and that everyone thinks the same way that she does," Strahan, a healthcare executive and visiting assistant professor in the business department at Georgia State University, told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. "That's just simply not true."

Presenting herself as a sensible and even-tempered alternative to the freshman flamethrower she has vowed to unseat, Strahan, 35, believes that voters will naturally be drawn to her candidacy as she makes her pitch traveling Georgia's deeply conservative 14th Congressional District in the coming months. "People are tired of the antics," she said, "and ready for real progress."

This week's controversy, in which Greene unleashed a viciously worded social media broadside against a fellow House Republican, setting off a cascade of hostile recriminations, underscored Strahan's argument. Though Greene, 47, has proven highly capable at generating headlines, she is otherwise ineffectual because, for almost a year now, she has been barred from advancing legislation in the House and seems uninterested in regaining that

privilege. "That shows where her priorities are," Strahan told JI. "It's a lot easier, to be frank, to complain about things on social media."

Still, in recent months, Greene has established herself as a prolific fundraiser, despite holding virtually no procedural power in Congress. Last February, following a contentious House vote, she was stripped of her committee assignments over past comments in which she had endorsed violence against her political opponents and perpetuated antisemitic conspiracy theories — and social media has in many ways become the most valuable resource in her limited arsenal.

Even for a House member who breathes controversy, however, Greene's Tuesday morning Twitter tirade, in which she denigrated Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC) as "the trash in the GOP conference," felt like

something of an escalation.

Mace, for her part, had placed herself on the congresswoman's list of enemies after publicly condemning remarks in which Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO), a Greene ally, had used an Islamophobic slur while insinuating that a Muslim legislator, Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN), was a possible suicide bomber.

The controversy mutated into an intra-party feud when Greene retaliated and other Republican House members jumped into the ring, even as Mace — who shot back with a string of emojis describing the congresswoman as “batshit crazy” — seemed capable of holding her own.

Naturally, Strahan sides with Mace. “Rep. Greene’s attack on Rep. Mace is unwarranted and proves why she no longer belongs in Congress,” she told JI this week. “Going after a fellow Republican when Democrats are in full control of government is counterproductive and further alienates Rep. Greene from the GOP conference. This is why I am running. We need real leadership.”

Greene’s office did not respond to a request for comment from JI.

As for Boebert’s comments, which echoed the inflammatory language Greene herself has often leveled at Omar, Strahan was cautious but still made sure that she had appropriately distanced herself from the GOP fringe. “While I ardently disagree with much of what Rep. Ilhan Omar stands for, religious bigotry is not what America stands for,” Strahan said. “The First Amendment protects everyone’s right to practice their religion freely.”

Strahan is one of three Republicans who have declared against Greene, including Mark Daniel Clay and Charles Lutin, who announced his candidacy just last month. Strahan, who runs a healthcare advisory firm in metropolitan Atlanta, lives in the southeast portion of the district and entered the race in September.

It is still possible that additional candidates will jump in. But at this point, Strahan appears to have established herself as the most viable contender, having outlasted her opponents while building what she describes somewhat needlingly as a “grassroots movement that is uniting conservatives who want a congresswoman who can accomplish something other than

managing to embarrass the Republican Party and the entire state of Georgia.”

But whatever grassroots support she has built hasn’t yet translated to a cash advantage over the well-funded incumbent. So far, Strahan has only pulled in around \$56,000, according to the latest filings from the Federal Election Commission — a number dwarfed by Greene’s comparatively imposing haul of \$6.3 million.

That presents a major challenge for Strahan, according to Jay Williams, a GOP strategist in Atlanta who is not involved in the primary. “It’s going to be very difficult for her to overcome that money difference just alone,” he told JI. “Marjorie Taylor Greene has a ton of money, like real money, millions.”

Marcus Flowers, one of four Democrats now vying for the chance to dethrone Greene, has meanwhile raised a formidable sum of \$3.3 million, according to the FEC. Nevertheless, political observers agree that Flowers, an eccentric Army veteran who is almost immediately recognizable in his signature black cowboy hat, remains a long shot at best because of the partisan makeup of the district, even as a redrawn congressional map included deep blue portions of southwest Cobb County in metropolitan Atlanta.

The new boundaries are slightly more hospitable for Democrats but have still preserved a safely Republican seat. Despite a favorable outcome, Greene castigated the resulting lines, which Democrats aren’t happy about either. In a statement last month, the congresswoman argued that “this year’s redistricting by the Georgia GOP will prove to be a fool’s errand that was led by power-obsessed state legislators.”

Strahan believes that Greene would have no reason to express frustration if she “spent more time serving her constituents instead of herself,” she said in response to the congresswoman’s gripe. If Greene “were in any way effective at advancing Georgia’s priorities in Congress, she would not be worried about representing 78,000 new voters,” Strahan added. “But, sadly, she is the epitome of what’s wrong with Congress.”

Whether those new voters present an opportunity for Strahan is at least hypothetically conceivable in Georgia’s open primary system, according to speculation

from political observers. But there are still many obstacles in place complicating that possibility. “If I were a strategist for Strahan, I’d say definitely go for the new folks,” Williams told JI, adding the caveat that reaching such voters can be prohibitively expensive, because “Atlanta is a sinkhole for media.”

Strahan says she is “confident” of her ability “to raise the funds that are needed” as she seeks support. In the months since launching her campaign, she claims to have generated interest throughout the district as well as at the national level, including conversations with Jewish and pro-Israel groups such as AIPAC, the Republican Jewish Coalition and CUFI Action Fund, the lobbying arm of Christians United for Israel, that she characterized as promising.

The race is of interest to Jewish community leaders across the country who have condemned Greene’s antisemitism, which includes support for QAnon conspiracy theories as well as past social media comments in which she suggested that California wildfires were caused by a space laser controlled by a Jewish banking family. More recently, Greene has likened mask and vaccine mandates to Nazi Germany, even after apologizing for such comments and visiting the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Last month, in a series of unusual tweets, the congresswoman said she had found “common ground” with the Nation of Islam — whose leader, Louis Farrakhan, has espoused a litany of antisemitic conspiracy theories while railing against Israel and “Zionist Jews” — after flipping through an issue of its newspaper.

“I think comments like that show how unprepared and just uninformed she is in terms of being able to represent our district,” Strahan said of Greene. “There’s a lack of self-awareness.”

For Strahan, who describes herself as a devoted evangelical Christian, such comments are also personally offensive to her faith. “I do believe, as Americans and as Christians, that we’re called to defend and support Israel and God’s people,” she explained. “I believe that we have a responsibility to do that.”

“I’m very grateful, as a born-again Christian, for being able to keep my



relationship, first and foremost, with God above everything else,” Strahan elaborated. “That’s a big reason as to why I feel called to do this is — to be able to stand for Christians, stand for Israel and stand for God.”

Strahan has never been to Israel but says it has long been “on the list.” In a position paper provided to JI by her campaign, she warns that “Middle East Christian communities are being destroyed by daily threats of terror attacks, imprisonment and even execution,” adding that, if she is elected, “I will raise awareness of the worsening plight of Middle East Christians and work to protect The Holy Land, the shared birthplace of the Jewish and Christian faiths.”

Elsewhere in the paper, Strahan expresses support for the Taylor Force Act, which withholds U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority on the condition that Ramallah ends payments to the families of terrorists. “The Palestinians must end the practice of financially incentivizing attacks on innocent Israelis,” she writes, “and the Palestinian Authority should receive no more funding from the United States until that happens.”

In the interview with JI, Strahan said she is in favor a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and believes that encouraging “direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians” is the best approach, rather than an agreement “directed by a third party” such as the United Nations.

Strahan argues that Jerusalem should “remain” Israel’s “indivisible capital going forward,” while supporting Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Like most Republicans, she expressed a positive view of former President Donald Trump’s Middle East foreign policy approach, including moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and exiting the Iran nuclear deal.

Greene, who earned Trump’s endorsement last year, was baptized in 2011 and often invokes her faith. Despite having shared a video, just a year before she was elected, asserting that “an unholy alliance of leftists, capitalists and Zionist supremacists has schemed to promote immigration and miscegenation,” Greene has argued that it is far-left Democrats in the House who have contributed to rising incidents of antisemitism. Following the May conflict

between Israel and Hamas, she charged in a combative Twitter post that Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) was “responsible for attacks on Jewish people” because of what she described as her “hate-Israel stance.”

“I don’t think it’s uncommon for her to speak out of both sides of her mouth, to be honest,” Strahan said of Greene’s engagement on Israel issues. “I mean that in a respectful way. But she says she supports Israel, and then she just recently talked about the Nation of Islam and ‘common ground.’”

The Georgia congresswoman appears to have found some measure of support within segments of the Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn, while receiving positive coverage in *Ami Magazine*, the right-leaning Orthodox weekly.

But other groups dedicated to pro-Israel advocacy say her rhetoric is unforgivable. “Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene is an embarrassment to her constituents and to our country,” Sandra Parker, the chairwoman of CUFI Action Fund, told JI in a statement. “Her absurd, antisemitic statements make it unambiguously clear that she does not share the values Christian supporters of Israel hold dear. In stark contrast, we’ve gotten to know Jennifer Strahan and we can say unequivocally that she will fight for Israel and against antisemitism. The people of Georgia’s 14th District deserve better than their present representative, and they have a fine, values-driven alternative in Jennifer Strahan.”

Notwithstanding such enthusiasm, the organization was unable to disclose whether it had plans to invest any resources in the race. Boris Zilberman, director of public policy and strategy at CUFI Action Fund, said the group is now “evaluating which races and to what degree we’ll be getting involved in,” adding in an email: “This one is obviously high on our radar but can’t confirm anything yet.”

Likewise, the RJC has yet to determine whether it will actively engage in the race, despite its firm and public opposition to Greene. “Our position as it relates to Marjorie Taylor Greene and her comments and actions is absolutely clear,” said Matt Brooks, the RJC’s executive director. “We opposed her in the primary last time because we had fundamental differences with her, and she

has done nothing so far during her term to change our opinion.”

But the qualities that many critics view as disqualifying were, it seems, largely what drew voters to Greene in 2020, and may help boost her again in the upcoming midterms, according to Charles Bullock, a professor of political science at the University of Georgia. “I think Majorie Taylor Greene is actually a pretty good fit for that district,” he said. “It’s a district that believes everything that Donald Trump says.”

Alan Abramowitz, a political scientist at Emory University, offered a similar view. “Greene’s antics should stand her in good stead with the large majority of Republican primary voters in her district,” he told JI. “It’s all about ‘owning the libs.’”

“Barring her conversion to the Democratic Party, Greene is going to be reelected,” Daniel Franklin, an associate professor emeritus at Georgia State University, said in a matter-of-fact assessment.

Still, Strahan still thinks she is strongly poised for an upset, not least because, unlike Greene, the congressional hopeful will, if elected, be capable of serving on committees where she can properly fulfill her duties as a House member by advancing legislation.

Strahan floated some possible committee assignments she would like to receive, including Ways and Means, Small Business, Agriculture, and Transportation and Infrastructure. (Greene had previously sat on the Education and Budget committees.) “These are things that are very relevant and appropriate and important for my district,” Strahan said, “so that would make them important for me.”

More broadly, Strahan suggested that she is running on the conviction that, even just a year into her tenure, Greene’s theatrics are already growing stale. “I’ve never seen someone change their mind by just yelling in their face,” she said. “That’s just not the way you get things done. That’s not the real world. These are very serious concerns that we have. We need someone who can have those tough conversations. That doesn’t mean you’re compromising your values, but it does mean you’re respecting the other individual enough to be able to have a real and productive conversation.”

Andra Gillespie, an associate professor of political science at Emory University,



believes that Strahan's criticisms "are eventually going to be" Greene's "undoing."

"It took a number of years for voters in Iowa to get tired of Steve King," Gillespie noted, referring to the former Republican congressman who was removed from his committee assignments in 2019 after an interview in which he had questioned why terms like "white nationalist" and "white supremacist" had "become offensive."

Long a divisive presence within the GOP caucus, King, who was known for making racist remarks, lost his bid for reelection last year in the primaries and no longer serves in Congress.

Gillespie predicts a similar fate for Greene, but questions the timing. "Eventually, her antics will ring hollow," she said. "It's not clear that's going to happen this time around." ♦