

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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DECEMBER 7, 2021

Bloomberg: Both major parties 'coddling antisemites,' not condemning them

The former New York City mayor was honored at UJA-Federation of New York's annual Wall Street Dinner

By Melissa Weiss

The fight against antisemitism was front and center at UJA-Federation of New York's Wall Street Dinner, held on Monday night at the Marriott Marquis in Midtown Manhattan, where former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg was honored with the UJA's Gustave L. Levy Award.

The former mayor addressed both political intolerance — singling out Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) by name — and efforts by Jewish groups to combat antisemitism.

"On the right, we have heard conspiracy theories about the COVID vaccine being a Jewish plot, and even Jewish space lasers starting the virus out west — you can't make this shit up, folks," Bloomberg said. "It would be funny if it were not so dangerous, because when we hear wild conspiracy theories, whether they were about vaccines or wildfires, or the election and [QAnon], or anything else, we must remember, antisemitism is the original conspiracy theory."

"In some circles on the left and on many college campuses," he added, "there are

those who are using the political situation in Israel to spread lies and prejudices. They assert that American support for Israel is about nothing more than Jewish money controlling politicians and Jewish people acting as oppressors."

Bloomberg suggested that both parties have been "increasingly coddling antisemites, rather than condemning them."

Bloomberg, who noted that his sister had been a member of the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, said his family had inspired his commitment to fighting hate in all forms. "When I was a young boy, I remember seeing my father write a check to the NAACP for something like 100 bucks, which was a lot of money for us back then," he recalled. "And we talked about it at the dinner table, and I asked my father, 'Why are you writing this check?' 'Because,' he said, 'discrimination against anyone is a threat to all of us.'"

In addition to Bloomberg, Goldman Sachs Global Co-head of Consumer and Wealth Management Stephanie Cohen was honored with the Alan C. Greenberg Young Leadership Award.

Lloyd Blankfein, Goldman Sachs's senior chairman and the event's emcee, joked that

the dinner — which raised \$32 million — was the first time he'd worn a suit in two years, before pivoting to UJA's efforts to combat antisemitism.

"This past spring, the conflict in Israel led to a dangerous rise of antisemitic attacks. Jews were targeted on the streets of New York City and around the world. UJA took a strong stance right away by mobilizing our communities and allies to denounce hate by creating the community security initiative to help protect Jewish institutions across the New York region, and by advocating for and obtaining government security grants."

UJA CEO Eric Goldstein told attendees, "We know that there's no vaccine for antisemitism, a virus of another type. That's only accelerated during the pandemic. Increasingly, we're seeing anti-Israel sentiment morph into virulent antisemitism in ways that have become more and more mainstream, and far too few are speaking up about it."

Blankfein also addressed the inequities experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We learned that this is really a small planet, where the discovery of a mutant COVID virus in South Africa results

almost instantly, in an elevation of anxieties here at home and threatens our economy, the markets and our lifestyles,” he said. “The

lesson from COVID that is most pertinent to tonight’s purpose is just how bifurcated our society is along class and economic lines,

especially as it relates to the consequences of life in the age of the COVID virus.” ♦

DECEMBER 7, 2021

NYTimes replaces ‘anti-Semitism’ with ‘antisemitism’ in updated style guidance

What’s in a hyphen? Move follows other publications, reflects broader debate about meaning of the term

By Matthew Kassel

Following the example of a number of publications that have made the switch in recent months, The New York Times has updated its style guide to replace “anti-Semitism” with “antisemitism,” *Jewish Insider* has learned.

The change, which removes the hyphen and lowercases the first S, comes in response to a growing chorus of Jewish activists who have argued that the traditional usage distorts the true meaning of the term.

The paper made no public announcement of the switch, which was formally adopted in August, according to Phil Corbett, the associate managing editor for standards at the *Times*.

While the new spelling by the paper of record may seem merely cosmetic, it reflects a deeper linguistic debate that has long been brewing within the Jewish community.

In 2015, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance began advocating for “antisemitism” over “anti-Semitism” — a term popularized in the late 1800s by the right-wing German polemicist Wilhelm Marr — out of concern that the “hyphenated spelling allows for the possibility of something called ‘Semitism.’”

That idea “not only legitimizes a form of pseudo-scientific racial classification that was thoroughly discredited by association with Nazi ideology,” the IHRA said at the time, “but also divides the term, stripping it from its meaning of opposition and hatred toward Jews.”

With the publication of *Antisemitism: Here and Now in 2019*, Deborah Lipstadt,

the Holocaust historian who was recently nominated to be the Biden administration’s special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, helped introduce the discussion to a wider audience.

“It should be spelled as one word,” she said in an interview with *JI* two years ago. “Its inventor wanted it to mean one thing and one thing only: Jew hatred. He coined this word because he want his word to encompass, not just Jews who are religious, but Jews who have abandoned all links to the religion. He wanted to depict Jews as a metaphysical enemy.”

The Anti-Defamation League also favors the un-hyphenated usage, arguing that the spelling is “the best way to refer to hatred toward Jews.”

Over the past year, mainstream media outlets have followed suit, including *BuzzFeed* and *The Associated Press*, the latter of which publishes a style guide that is widely consulted across journalism. Both publications adopted the new spelling in April. (*JI* switched to “antisemitism” in March of 2019.)

The *Times*, for its part, alluded to the AP’s decision in an internal note to editors on Aug. 16, which Corbett shared with *JI*.

“We are dropping the hyphen and lowercasing the S, which is now the style of *The Associated Press* and is preferred by many academics and other experts,” the memo explained. “Those who favor antisemitism argue that the hyphenated form, with the uppercase S, may inadvertently lend credence to the discredited notion of Jews as a separate race.”

The new spelling follows a separate, more public decision from the previous year in which the *Times*, like many publications that made the change amid a national reckoning over racial justice two summers ago, began “using uppercase ‘Black’ to describe people and cultures of African origin, both in the United States and elsewhere,” as the paper announced in a June 2020 editor’s note on its corporate website.

“We believe this style best conveys elements of shared history and identity, and reflects our goal to be respectful of all the people and communities we cover,” said the note, which was written by Corbett and Dean Baquet, the executive editor of the *Times*. “The new style is also consistent with our treatment of many other racial and ethnic terms,” they added. “We recently decided to capitalize ‘Native’ and ‘Indigenous,’ while other ethnic terms like ‘Asian-American’ and ‘Latino’ have always been capitalized.”

So, it seems, had “anti-Semitism,” at least until recently. But the paper still appears to be adjusting to that change, as some articles published since August have employed the old usage.

“It’s hard to get everyone to be completely consistent on style issues like this, so you may still see occasional discrepancies,” Corbett acknowledged in an email to *JI*. “But ‘antisemitism’ is now our official style.” ♦

Ritchie Torres endorses Jazz Lewis in Maryland's 4th

The endorsement from the freshman legislator from New York signals growing national interest in the race

By Gabby Deutch

As the campaign for an open congressional seat in Maryland gets underway, freshman Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) is flexing his political muscle in the race with an endorsement of Jazz Lewis, a former senior aide to House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, *Jewish Insider* has learned.

"I am proud to endorse Jazz Lewis, who would bring a powerful brand of pragmatic progressive leadership to the United States Congress," Torres told *Ji*. "As a longtime staffer and protege of House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, he is no stranger to problem-solving at the highest levels of government, as well as in moments of crisis."

Lewis, who earned Hoyer's endorsement last month, is taking on Glenn Ivey, a former prosecutor in Prince George's County who also ran for the seat in 2016, losing in a primary to Rep. Anthony Brown (D-MD). Brown will be leaving his seat in Maryland's 4th District to run for Maryland attorney general in 2022.

"I am thrilled to have the support of Congressman Ritchie Torres," Lewis told *Ji*. "In such a short time in Congress, he has been a vocal advocate for affordable housing

and infrastructure funding in communities that need it the most."

Over the last two years, Torres has attracted significant support from the Jewish community and is outspokenly supportive of U.S. support for Israel. In a 2019 interview with *Ji*, Torres described himself as "the embodiment of a pro-Israel progressive."

Torres "has also shown that you can be both a progressive Congressman and a strong friend of Israel," Lewis noted. "I look forward to working with him on some of our nation's most challenging issues."

In an interview with *Ji* in November, Lewis, 32, described himself as "unabashedly a progressive" who is also a "consensus-maker." Like Torres, Lewis says his support for Israel is in line with his progressive beliefs.

"I fell in love with the people. And that is the message I would carry to progressives on the Hill, to get to know the people," Lewis told *Ji* of his views on Israel.

Ivey has rolled out a host of endorsements from local political leaders in Prince George's County, which makes up the bulk of the district.

Josh Kurtz, founding editor of the nonprofit news site *Maryland Matters*,

wrote in an opinion column that despite the generational gap, Lewis "appears to be the insider, establishment candidate" due to his association with Hoyer while Ivey "might be seen as the renegade and the insurgent," even though their "records undoubtedly would be very similar."

No polling has been conducted in the race, which began in late October when Brown announced his retirement from Congress. The district is heavily Democratic.

Local political experts say former Rep. Donna Edwards, who held the seat before Brown, is considering entering the race, although Edwards has not said publicly whether or not she will run. She left the seat to run for Senate in 2016, losing to Chris Van Hollen in the Democratic primary. Edwards had faced criticism from leaders in the Maryland Jewish community for her views on the Middle East. Ivey briefly challenged her in the 2012 primary campaign with the backing of pro-Israel Democrats in Maryland, but dropped out of the race before the election. ♦

The ball's in Alex Lasry's court in Wisconsin

The Senate hopeful, a former White House aide on leave from his position with the Milwaukee Bucks, believes his message is catching on

By Matthew Kassel

MADISON, Wis. — Alex Lasry was easy to miss as he hovered near the counter at Colectivo Coffee on a recent afternoon in downtown Madison. The 34-year-old basketball executive could easily have been mistaken for a young professor at the nearby public university or perhaps a government employee in the Capitol building across the street.

It can be difficult standing out as one of a dozen candidates running in Wisconsin's crowded Democratic Senate primary.

But Lasry, a New York native who now lives in Milwaukee, believes his campaign is catching on. "We feel great about the prospects of the race," he told *Jewish Insider* last week, slinking into a table near the back of the café without having ordered anything. "We're seeing a ton of momentum and enthusiasm for our campaign."

Despite never having sought public office, Lasry held some built-in advantages when he announced his candidacy last February.

The Senate hopeful, a former Obama White House aide on leave from his position as senior vice president of the Milwaukee Bucks, has deep ties with the Democratic Party — connections that appear to have served him well even before launching his campaign.

In 2020, for instance, Lasry helped bring the Democratic National Convention to Milwaukee, where he settled about seven years ago after his father, the billionaire hedge fund manager and Democratic bundler Marc Lasry, became a co-owner of the basketball team that would go on to win the NBA championship in 2021.

Now that he is making his bid for the upper chamber, Lasry has benefited from relationships within both Democratic politics and professional basketball. His first-quarter filings with the Federal

Election Commission showed that he had pulled in donations from such NBA bigwigs as Commissioner Adam Silver and former All-Star player and now coach Jason Kidd as well as Chelsea Clinton's husband, Marc Mezvinsky. His family members also contributed approximately \$100,000, Lasry's campaign said in April.

Notwithstanding such support, Lasry argues that his candidacy is resonating because he has been speaking directly to voter concerns, at this point, for the better part of a year. "This race is too important to not be talking to voters right now and defining what this race is going to be about," he told *Ji*, "which is, how do we create jobs, raise wages and bring more investment back to the state?"

Since launching his campaign, Lasry has earned endorsements from several statewide labor groups while raising more than \$2.3 million, according to the latest FEC filings. He has also loaned himself \$800,000, despite a somewhat ambiguous claim, in an interview with *Ji* last March, that he had no plans to "self-fund" but instead would "invest" in his candidacy.

In recent weeks, he has used those resources to establish an early presence on the airwaves, having wrapped up a weeks-long advertising blitz last month that appears to have had a measurable impact on his polling numbers.

Lasry boasts that he is so far "the only candidate" who has been on TV. "We just did a six- or seven-week TV stretch, just letting people know who I am as a candidate and what we're about, because this race is going to be about not why not someone, but why us?"

The limited publicly available polling suggests that Mandela Barnes, Wisconsin's first-term lieutenant governor, is the man to beat. But Lasry has been catching up somewhat as the crowded field begins

coalescing around three or four top contenders.

Last week, the progressive think tank Data for Progress released a survey, conducted in mid-November, that put Lasry in second place at 16% among likely Democratic primary voters.

Though still trailing Barnes, who is one of two candidates in the race to have won statewide office, by double digits, it was a major improvement over an internal poll that the lieutenant governor had released in September, giving him a 29% lead over his opponents. Lasry, for his part, came in at just 5%, in a statistical dead heat with Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson and State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski.

The dynamics remain mutable, of course, not least because the primary to replace Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), who has yet to announce if he will run again, is scheduled for August 2022. In the Data for Progress poll, the most recent survey on the race, 29% of respondents said they were still undecided about who they would vote for.

For Lasry, that leaves an opening. "The way I differentiate myself from anyone in the field is I'm not a politician," he told *Ji*. "I'm someone who has worked in the highest levels of politics, whether on the Hill, in the White House or bringing the convention here to Wisconsin. But I've also got a track record of real accomplishment."

Among other things, the first-time candidate touts his role in creating "good-paying union jobs" with the Bucks, and he says he was proud to participate in racial justice protests two summers ago amid a national reckoning with police brutality that remains a raw issue within Wisconsin.

"We're kind of feeling that tension in Wisconsin right now, where it just kind of feels like one thing after another," Lasry said, describing the November acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse as "justice not being

served.” The Waukesha attack two weeks ago, when a driver plowed into a Christmas parade, killing six people, has only added to that sense of unease.

As he tours the state, Lasry says he has heard from voters about a variety of concerns, including China’s increasing prominence on the international stage. “The biggest things, I think, that we’re hearing about with foreign policy is, number one, competitiveness, and how are we going to make sure that we’re bringing jobs back from overseas and raising wages here,” he said. “How is that going to allow us to stay competitive in a global, interconnected world? I think the rise of China is a big deal.”

Still, he was somewhat reticent while discussing the NBA’s highly profitable business relationship with China. Such dealings have been a subject of renewed controversy since China pulled Boston Celtics games from the internet after the team’s center, Enes Kanter Freedom, called out Chinese President Xi Jinping as a “brutal dictator” on social media. In recent weeks, Freedom — who was raised in Turkey and recently changed his surname to celebrate becoming an American citizen — has remained outspoken while criticizing players for their silence on human rights abuses in China such as the forced internment of its Uyghur population in Xinjiang.

“These are atrocities,” Lasry said of China’s actions against the Uyghurs. “It’s terrible, and we need to make sure that we’re able to call it out and bring more attention to the human rights violations that are happening in China, without a doubt.”

But asked to assess recent tensions between the NBA and China, Lasry seemed eager to sidestep the matter. “When, I think, we’re talking about how we combat the rise of China, that’s the U.S. government’s role,” he reasoned. “I say this all the time — there are people in power right now who would rather criticize someone else rather than doing the job themselves. I’m running for Senate because, as a senator, you have the ability to influence and make change in how we’re dealing with and working with other countries.”

“We can’t just turn our back to growing and emerging markets,” he clarified, noting that ginseng farmers in Wisconsin are

dependent on export markets across Asia. “We can’t close down, but we have to make sure that China’s playing by the same rules as everyone else,” Lasry said, “and that’s where I think we need to take a tougher stand.”

Looking to the Middle East, Lasry praised the Abraham Accords for establishing trade relations between Israel and a number of Arab nations, including Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco, where his father was born. “When I was growing up in the ’90s and early 2000s, I never would have imagined the idea that my dad’s country,” said Lasry, who is Jewish, “would ever have diplomatic relations with the State of Israel.”

J Street, the left-leaning Israel advocacy group, is supporting Lasry in the race, along with Barnes, Godlewski and Nelson. The organization, which has yet to engage in other primaries, designated the four candidates as “primary-approved,” allowing them to solicit donations through its membership network, according to Laura Birnbaum, J Street’s national political director.

In an interview with JI on Monday, Birnbaum noted there are “variations” between the candidates, who were asked to submit Israel position papers as part of the approval process, “in terms of policy issues.” But she said they were all broadly in agreement with J Street on basic goals such as supporting a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and opposing settlement expansion in the West Bank. “We’re really encouraged that we can support so many folks in this race,” she said.

“I’m proud to have the J Street stamp of approval, and that’s because we agree that a two-state solution is the solution, and I can be very pro-Israel while also saying I believe very much in a Palestinian state,” Lasry, who says he is against Israeli settlement expansion, told JI. “I don’t think those two issues are at odds, and I think that’s where J Street and I both see very much eye to eye.”

Lasry’s campaign declined to provide JI with an Israel position paper.

Recently, J Street has begun advocating for a new policy objective, placing what it describes as “end-use restrictions” on U.S. aid to Israel that would ensure the Jewish state uses such assistance only for “legitimate security purposes.”

Birnbaum said that restricting aid isn’t a part of J Street’s endorsement criteria this cycle. “But it is something that we have serious conversations with every candidate about,” she told JI.

For his part, Lasry said he is against imposing “stipulations” on U.S. military assistance for Israel, though he did not explicitly clarify whether he agrees with J Street’s end-use restrictions, which, the group argues, differ from calls to condition aid to the Jewish state.

Either way, he said he was dismayed by opposition from some Democratic House members who, in September, voted against providing \$1 billion in supplemental funding to replenish Israel’s Iron Dome missile-defense system, a measure supported by J Street.

“We shouldn’t be saying, ‘Hey, we’re only going to help you defend yourselves if you do this piece of what we say,’” Lasry told JI. “I think the settlement expansion has to be part of the diplomatic course of how we work with Israel to bring the two-state solution.”

Still, Lasry said he understood “complaints that some of the aid we’re giving to Israel goes toward settlement expansion,” adding that “when we give defensive military aid to Israel, that should be used for defense purposes.”

But a more pressing issue, he believes, is that criticism of Israel often comes at the expense of denouncing Hamas. “We can’t get to a two-state solution with Hamas in charge,” he argued. “Unless Hamas is willing to change their stance or change their charter, we’re stuck, and it’s not because of Israel. We’re stuck because of Hamas, and I think that’s something that needs to be talked about more.”

In addition to J Street, Lasry said he has also engaged in conversations with AIPAC. “When it comes to anything going on with Israel, the Middle East, foreign policy,” he said, “I’ve talked with J Street, I’ve talked with AIPAC, making sure that I’m able to figure out what’s going on on the ground. You know, ‘What are you guys hearing?’”

As far as Lasry is concerned, the two groups, which haven’t traditionally been viewed as aligned on key issues — not least the Iran nuclear deal, which he supports, as does J Street — have more in common than

is immediately apparent.

“Both organizations want a strong and peaceful state for Israel, one that can live in peace and can be viewed as the strong, powerful democracy in the Middle East that it is,” he said. While they “might have a little bit of a different view of how to get there,” Lasry suggested, “they both want the same

thing.

AIPAC declined to comment on its engagement with Lasry.

Lasry has also spoken with the Wisconsin chapter of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, the group confirmed to JI.

Barring the May conflict between Israel and Hamas, Lasry said that Middle East

foreign policy issues haven’t often come up as he’s met with voters and other groups throughout the state.

More broadly, “what we’re talking about is what we would do” within the state, Lasry said. “We have to tell voters what we would do with that opportunity to be the next senator from Wisconsin.” ♦

DECEMBER 6, 2021

Steven Olikara’s next act: A Senate bid

A former Klezmer guitarist, jazz lover and political bridge-builder is challenging more experienced Democrats in Wisconsin

By Matthew Kassel

MADISON, WISC. — Steven Olikara, a 31-year-old political activist from Milwaukee, is likely the only Democratic candidate in Wisconsin’s crowded Senate primary who once played guitar in a Klezmer band — a personal tidbit that, on first glance, may seem largely irrelevant to his current campaign.

But on a recent afternoon in downtown Madison, he suggested that his experience communing with Jewish folk music was by no means trivial. Olikara pulled out his iPhone and shuffled through a few of the tunes he had recorded as a high school student with his former group, the Red Squares, including a sprightly rendition of “Shalom Aleichem” — the *sine qua non* of any Klezmer repertoire — as well as an incantational “Hana’ava Babanot,” featuring hand drums and violin.

The music was raw and the mix was off at points, as Olikara acknowledged, but despite the winking band name, there was no denying a genuine sense of respectful engagement with the form.

While none of the band members were Jewish, Olikara noted, they all shared a mutual affection for Eastern European folk music after watching “Dr. Zhivago,” the romantic epic based on Boris Pasternak’s novel of the same name that had introduced the balalaika to an international audience in the mid-1960s. It was only a matter of time, then, until “Lara’s Theme” led them to “Hava

Nagila.”

“One day, one of our biggest fans came over and said, ‘I’m going to pay for a full-page ad in the *Milwaukee Jewish Chronicle* for you guys,’” Olikara told *Jewish Insider* last week on a midday stroll through Madison’s Capitol Square, where he had just wrapped up a campaign event with the local Rotary Club. “We had a good number of gigs after that.”

Those days, of course, are far behind him. “We disbanded about 10 years ago,” he said, “but we were pretty big in the Milwaukee Jewish community.”

Olikara, who hasn’t held public office before, is the founder of a nonpartisan youth advocacy group, the Millennial Action Project, that aims to bridge political divides through involvement on such issues as voting rights, climate change and criminal justice reform. He says he is bringing a similar ethos to his Senate campaign, which he announced in September following a statewide listening tour.

But Olikara, who graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with joint majors in political science and environmental studies, said that his musical forays with a variety of groups over the past couple of decades have proven equally instructive for him as he meets with voters across the Badger State.

“I’ve talked about this sometimes on the campaign trail, about how music is a powerful force to bridge a lot of the divides

in our society,” he said, taking a seat on a nearby bench as he reflected on the driving ethos of his Senate bid. “When I was growing up playing music, I was connecting with all of these different cultures, and in many ways, I’m trying to bring that spirit of togetherness in music into our political sphere.”

Over the past few months, Olikara says he has incorporated live music into several of his campaign events, and he often brings his guitar with him on the trail, ever prepared for an impromptu jam session.

Though Klezmer was more than simply a passing fancy, Olikara said he first became interested in music when, as a second-grader, he saw a local rock band perform in Milwaukee and was immediately hooked. “I thought that was the coolest thing,” he told JI. Soon enough, he had convinced his parents to buy him a guitar, and joined his first rock band in fifth grade. He played his first show that summer.

Later, in high school, Olikara picked up the drums and began playing in “multiple jazz groups,” he said, influenced by such mid-century luminaries as Art Blakey and Philly Joe Jones.

It was jazz, the ultimate American art form, that would influence him most deeply as he began thinking about politics as a career path. “Jazz is the one that really formed me as a person and how I look at the world,” he said. “I think it’s because of the kind of spaces that jazz music creates. It all starts, first of all, with listening, which, I

think, is the most important skill in jazz.”

The second building block, he said, is improvisation. “What that means is it invites you to be fully present in conversations,” he told JI. “It’s not about checking your ideas or your values at the door — it’s about bringing your full self.”

Third but not last is call and response. “I think our democracy, at its best, is a call-and-response political system,” Olikara said. “But right now, it’s devolved into more of a call-and-shut-down kind of conversation.”

Olikara has brought that ethos to the stump, where he likes to think of his speeches as jazz pieces. “There’s a head, an A section, a B section, then a C, and then you go back to the head,” he said. “Jazz has not only helped inspire this political vision,” Olikara ventured. “It’s the framework for how I engage day-to-day at all of our events and how I connect with audiences.”

“The skills I learned in jazz, which create these spaces rooted in empathy, dignity and respect,” he said, have undergirded not only the campaign but his work with the Millennial Action Project for nearly the past 10 years.

Despite that unique approach, Olikara, whose parents settled in Milwaukee from Kerala, in southern India, in the early 1980s, had long anticipated a different path for himself. “Like a good son of Indian immigrants, I figured I would become an engineer for most of my life,” he said. “Every male in my family did go into engineering.”

Yet primarily through music, “I became interested in people,” he said. “That led to an interest in public service, particularly how you can bring people together across lines of division.”

Olikara is among a dozen Democratic Senate candidates competing to replace Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), who has yet to announce if he will seek reelection in the midterms next year.

The limited publicly available polling suggests that Olikara likely has some ground to gain if he hopes to contend with apparent frontrunners like Mandela Barnes, Wisconsin’s current lieutenant governor, and Alex Lasry, who most recently served as senior vice president of the NBA’s Milwaukee Bucks and previously worked in the Obama White House as an aide to senior advisor Valerie Jarrett.

But Olikara, whose most high-profile endorser so far is former Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton, argues that he is gaining momentum. “Really where I think our campaign differentiates itself is we are activating what some researchers have called ‘the exhausted majority,’” he said. “People who feel disillusioned by politics right now, and who feel left out, and feel like politics is not responsive to their daily challenges.”

More specifically, Olikara says the Indian-American community in Milwaukee, with whom he has done several events, is receptive to his vision. “We were recently at a Sikh temple, and just looking at the photos from that, I remember thinking, that’s just an image that’s never happened before, where you have an Indian running for the U.S. Senate at a Sikh temple and wearing the head covering,” he said. “It’s been really powerful, and I think the Indian community is able to see that this is going to be really powerful for their children.”

Growing up Indian in a largely white city, Olikara told JI, “probably” played a role in shaping his message. “Yes, there was discrimination when I was growing up as a South Asian person of color,” he told JI. “But there were also moments of true community, too, so both are true at the same time, and I want to try and increase the positive associations we have with people.”

He is also gaining support from Jewish community leaders as well as pro-Israel advocates at the state and national levels. Among those who have contributed to his campaign, which has pulled in more than \$160,000, are Moses Libitzky, a donor to Jewish causes in San Francisco, and Hannah Rosenthal, who was the Obama administration’s special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism.

“My interest in supporting pro-Israel issues and supporting the Jewish community here starts with the people who I love most — my close circle of friends,” said Olikara, emphasizing that his engagement with Jewish issues extends well beyond Klezmer. “Hearing their passion for Israel has truly moved me on a deep level, and so we’ve had conversations over the years about a number of the pressing issues both facing Israel and the Jewish community here in the U.S.”

Olikara, who lays out his Middle East foreign policy approach in a position paper shared with JI, said he had been scheduled to visit Israel in 2020 through the Schusterman Foundation’s REALITY program — but the trip was postponed because of the pandemic. “They just sent the email out about restarting the program,” he said. “I look forward to visiting soon.”

“When we talk about dignity for all, that extends to a lot of the pressing issues in terms of peace in the Middle East,” Olikara said, adding that he is also focused on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel, which he describes as antisemitic, and addressing the recent uptick in hate crimes across the country. “My passion for supporting the Jewish community and Israel,” he explained, “really aligns closely with the core mission of the campaign.”

Olikara said there is “no single archetype that fully captures” his approach, though he does express a strong affinity for Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), “especially when it comes to issues facing Israel and the Jewish community.” The 33-year-old Bronx congressman, who has described himself as “the embodiment of a pro-Israel progressive,” built a close connection with the Jewish community during his House campaign last year.

“In the Senate, I think Chris Coons is definitely a model,” Olikara said of the Delaware senator who chairs the Senate Ethics Committee and is well known for his extensive foreign policy experience. “He’s a true public servant,” Olikara said. “In Congress, you have people who are workhorses and you have show horses, and Chris Coons is definitely a workhorse.”

Olikara suggested that he would strive for a similar level of engagement if he is elected, though it will no doubt come at the expense of his other passion.

“I’m still playing music these days. I’ve been recording some stuff,” Olikara said. “But the campaign is pretty all-consuming.” ♦

A new cooking app has roots in Upper West Side Jewish cuisine

Manna Cooking, which debuted on the iOS app store yesterday, was created by a trio of Jewish day school grads

By Gabby Deutch

For people with dietary restrictions looking for suitable recipes online, finding the right ones is like manna from culinary — and swipe-and-click — heaven.

Maybe you keep kosher, and you find what looks like a great chicken recipe — but then you have to scrap your plans to make it when you scroll to the list of ingredients and realize it contains cream, or perhaps bacon. You could be gluten-free and find a delicious fish recipe that, you later learn, requires breadcrumbs. Or you've discovered over years of trial-and-error that apples make your stomach hurt, and you'd rather not see any recipes with the dreaded fruit.

A close-knit group of Jewish day school alums-turned-startup founders say they have the solution for these problems and others with Manna Cooking, a new app that launched on the iOS app store on Tuesday.

"The goal of Manna is to make food easy for real people," said Josh Abady, the company's CEO. His sister, Rachel Abady, is the chief marketing officer, and Josh's childhood best friend, Guy Greenstein, is Manna's chief technology officer.

The trio has spent the past several months in an incubator program run by Interplay Ventures, a VC firm that has invested in successful companies including Coinbase and Warby Parker. They raised \$400,000 to launch the app, which they began working on in 2019, and they aim to raise \$3 million in a seed round in the spring.

In a Zoom interview with *Jewish Insider* from their separate Brooklyn apartments, Josh and Rachel Abady — wearing matching Manna sweatshirts — shared an ambitious vision for their new startup, hoping to become something like the Goodreads or Spotify of food.

"We're taking the best parts of social

media that exist and the best parts of recipe tools that exist and putting them together in a way that does not exist," Rachel explained. "Instead of Instagram stalking, you're cookbook stalking."

The main interface of the app is based on dating apps like Tinder, with users able to swipe through recipe cards as one does for potential romantic partners. They see a photo of the dish, the title and type of cuisine, the difficulty, the price range of ingredients and the time it takes to prepare it; then they can swipe right to "like" the dish, or swipe up to save it to their cookbook. Clicking the card shows more information and specific details.

"People love swiping on stuff. It's fun, it's addictive. It's like food porn; even if you're not looking for something to actually cook, you just want to look at something that looks delicious," said Josh. "Half the battle with recipes is, like, 'What the hell do I cook tonight?' You need some beautiful, passive inspiration."

Users can also edit recipes, making note of changes like swapping oregano for thyme or adding more vegetable stock. They can then save their own versions, which other users can view, creating a chain of community engagement. In addition, app users can upload and publicly post their own recipes.

Unlike the food blogs that have proliferated online, users do not have to read through several paragraphs of explanation — a conduit for generating ad revenue for the blogs — to get to the actual recipe; the ingredients and the directions are right at the top.

"When you're in the kitchen, the worst experience is scrolling through ads back and forth, because you have six paragraphs about why someone loves lima beans. That

is not necessary," said Rachel. "Recipes and storytelling naturally go together. 'My grandmother's recipe is the reason I eat this.' But they don't go together when you're actually cooking in the kitchen."

For Rachel, 32, and Josh, 27, "food was a big part of our lives because of all the Jewish holidays," recalled Rachel. The family always had Shabbat dinner together, and also enjoyed the thriving food scene in their Manhattan neighborhood. "Outside our doors on the Upper West Side, beyond Jews being strong in numbers, you have every deli, every bodega, every restaurant you could possibly want. And so it was just like always integral [to us]."

Neither has experience with startups or mobile apps. Rachel worked in audience engagement at a number of media organizations, including *Vox* and *The New York Times*. Josh worked as a private tutor and played poker professionally.

As students at Solomon Schechter of Westchester (now the Leffell School), the Abadys met Greenstein, the tech expert of the group and the person who originally came up with the Manna concept. He, too, grew up steeped in food, but in a different way: His mother is a private chef for kosher and vegan clients. (His father, David Greenstein, an entrepreneur, is an investor in the company and the chair of its board.)

Greenstein and Josh Abady initially bonded over the food they couldn't eat. "Food is unfortunately both my greatest blessing and biggest hobby, and also my greatest curse, because I have extremely severe IBS [irritable bowel syndrome], and unfortunately so does Guy," Josh said. "That's kind of where this all started."

Manna users can input foods they are allergic or sensitive to or simply want to avoid, and those ingredients will then be

highlighted in recipes so users know to avoid them. Down the road, the app's creators plan to add a feature to search by a specific type of diet or restriction — kosher, Keto, vegan, gluten-free, halal, etc.

"We'll flag any ingredient for you that doesn't match your diet, and over the next months and years, that's going to get smarter and smarter and start to offer smart replacements and learn more and more about you," said Josh. This means the app might suggest tofu when a recipe calls for chicken, or imitation meat in place of sausage.

It's one of several features that the creators are excited about but which are not yet built into the app. A grocery tab on the app is "coming soon"; in the future, the trio hopes that Manna users will be able to directly order groceries from the app.

The company's founders also plan to add direct message capabilities and groups, so users can connect over shared interests — "busy moms," Rachel offered as an example, or "Jewish comfort food." Another goal is to build out a hands-free capability, so users can ask virtual assistant technology, such as Amazon's Alexa or iOS's Siri, to read the

recipe while they are cooking. They hope to add an ecommerce digital storefront, selling products from partner brands.

This will be one of two revenue streams for the app, which plans to also offer subscriptions for users to get better customization and additional features. They don't intend to sell advertising on their platform but acknowledge that could change.

"Right now and for the foreseeable a couple of months, we're not going to be generating any revenue, just focusing on community growth, and really just trying to get as many people on here as possible," said Josh.

The company has partnered with celebrity chef David Burke, who owns more than a dozen restaurants in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. His recipes appear on the app, along with several thousand other recipes the company has aggregated from an approved list of cooking websites. But it faces a major challenge in winning over devotees of more popular, established recipe sites.

"We're here to make friends and not enemies," Josh said, referring to the

requirement to remain within the bounds of intellectual property law and get permission from the websites from which it sources recipes. *The New York Times*, which has grown its cooking vertical significantly in recent years, is subscription-based, so its recipes can't appear on the app. Neither do recipes from some well-known blogs like Smitten Kitchen. "It would be ideal for us if every great recipe publisher in the world is like, 'Oh, that's so cool.'"

A selection of recipes that came up in the swipe feature on the app's first day: cauliflower-crust caprese pizza, scallion pancakes, matzah ball soup — the latter of which being one of several recipes that, like the app's name, pays homage to the founders' Jewish education.

"Manna supposedly fell from the sky to give the Israelites everything they need for nourishment. And that's the ethos of the app," explained Rachel. "We are supposed to give you everything you need in the kitchen, from inspiration to preparation to sharing to cooking to shopping. We want to be your proverbial manna." ♦

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Post Knesset, Stav Shaffir's new cause

The former MK is at the forefront of an initiative to provide educational and vocational programs to adults with autism at Israel's colleges and universities

By Hannah Brown

Former Knesset member Stav Shaffir rose to prominence in 2011 as a leader of social justice protests that quickly spread across the country. A decade later, and after seven years in the Knesset, Shaffir is taking on an issue that is even more personal.

Shaffir has gathered a group of families who are proposing an ambitious program that will support lifelong learning for people with autism, like her sister Shir.

"Just as Israelis take public healthcare for granted, they can take it for granted that Israelis with special needs have to have a system that continues their development,"

Shaffir said.

Shaffir's efforts are one of two parallel initiatives spearheaded by parents and family members in recent months that aim to provide more opportunities for adults with autism. They're a part of a quiet revolution that could transform and enrich the lives of autistic people, making it possible for them to become more integrated into the mainstream community and to lead more productive and fulfilling lives.

In Israel, individuals with autism "age out" of state-provided education programs upon reaching adulthood. With no pipeline to continued educational and vocational

opportunities, many experience a deteriorating quality of life, and the stresses of caretaking are put on their loved ones.

While Israel's education system has well-developed schools and programs for people on the autism spectrum, when autistic adults turn 21 they must leave school. Parents can rarely provide the kind of structure and all-day activities that they need, so they turn to *tasuka*, or occupational programs, some of them day programs and others with a residential component. The programs are run by the Social Affairs and Welfare Ministry, and most provide work that involves repetitive tasks, such as putting

pieces of plastic into boxes, while lacking any sort of educational component. Those who enter the programs at 21 will acquire no new skills unless they are able to learn from someone outside of their program.

Emanuel Cohen, 56, a Jerusalem father whose 22-year-old son has autism, recently went on a hunger strike outside the Knesset to draw attention to the problem. In a demonstration in October after he had been on the strike nearly three weeks, he appealed to Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Social Welfare Minister Meir Cohen to change the system. "Once people with autism turn 21, they are pushed out of a helicopter," he said, and given almost no services. Speakers at the demonstration — many of them parents like Cohen — described how the meaningless, repetitive work and lack of mental stimulation causes many people on the autism spectrum to deteriorate, noting that they sometimes become so frustrated they lash out violently against others and also harm themselves.

"All of us deserve to learn all our lives and work at something meaningful and fulfilling," Shaffir said. "When school ends for people on the spectrum — if they are not very high on the spectrum and can independently study for a degree — the framework they have been used to completely disappears. They don't have any chance to continue to study, or enjoy their hobbies within a suitable framework, with people their age and especially alongside people without cognitive/autistic disabilities."

That the existing programs are not designed to educate is not all that concerns her. "It's not only the educational part that the governmental programs are lacking, it's any kind of proper developmental care. Their perception is that [it's enough] to practically babysit those young adults, but not to expect them to progress in their skills and abilities, or to be happy. [These programs] do not measure their success with parameters of self-fulfillment, happiness, development — but only with the fact they keep them outside of their homes for eight hours a day. There's also no room for individuality — it's all a factory-like system," she said. There is rarely any attempt to match people with work, she said, that reflects their interests or makes use of their strengths.

The program Shaffir is seeking to build will create centers on university campuses, where individuals with autism will learn part-time, to the best of their ability in individual programs that will be run using university resources. They will also have an occupational component that will involve working alongside mainstream students, under the supervision of special-needs professionals. Work options might include gardening and recycling, services a campus needs, Shaffir said, and the courses of study would vary, depending on the interests and abilities of each person.

She became emotional as she spoke about her family's journey to find such a place for Shir, ultimately deciding to create one themselves. Her affection for her sister was palpable as she described Shir's talents, interests and her love of music. After having positive experiences in school and a program affiliated with the IDF, Shir went into a new program. "It looked right in the beginning. But then four people who had enough supervision became 12 people, without any increase in staffing."

Shir suffered the kind of breakdown that is tragically common among people with autism once they leave school, Shaffir said. There was a decision made by administrators at her old program "to start giving drugs.... all the progress she had made over the years disappeared. It was a terrible situation and we brought her home. We spent months being with her all the time. One day we just said, 'OK. If and when she gets out of this, we're going to build something that's better.'"

Shaffir comes from a loving, intact family where different people can share in her sister's care and she acknowledges that this is not always the case. "It shouldn't be that the families have to build this. But that is the situation."

She rejected the notion, as did Cohen and the parents who spoke at the demonstration in Jerusalem, that there is little people on the autism spectrum can accomplish.

"When they are given these jobs that are meaningless and repetitive and that a machine could actually do much better and more efficiently, they don't do well. They are capable of so much more," she said. "We want to create a new model: developmental centers located at the heart of academic

campuses, allowing people with autism or intellectual disabilities access to an inclusive environment adapted for them, in addition to studies of their personal choice — like any typical student in Israel."

She started a fundraising campaign to build the Shira Center to cover the expenses that the government and the universities are not able to absorb.

"Our first center is being established in Ruppin College in the Hefer Valley, and the first special students will start studying there already this year," Shaffir said. "The center includes a variety of employment opportunities within the college, and for students from relevant fields a unique autism care internship, as well as a volunteer program. Our members will learn to use innovative technologies to deal with everyday challenges, integrate into the local community, and also enjoy art, music and sports therapy. We believe that a person that feels significant develops, grows and becomes happier. The surrounding society will also benefit from working alongside people with special needs, becoming more open, giving, stronger, and confident in its ability to create a safe place for each and every one of us."

To date, they have raised over NIS 650,000 (about \$210,000) of their goal of one million shekels from over 3,000 donors. She and her family have been joined in this effort by many, among them Doron Somer, the father of a 24-year-old with autism and the CEO and founder of AngelSense, a GPS and voice-monitoring solution designed for children with special needs.

"We are now receiving requests from other universities that want a similar Shira Center — and therefore we need to fundraise 10 times more of what we did until now, in order to be able to develop this solution for many more young adults on the spectrum (and/or with intellectual disabilities). We are opening the first one in January," Shaffir said.

The parents protesting at the Knesset, whose goals were to secure an increase in the budget for occupational centers for people with autism to add educational and enriching activities and to raise the wages of the teachers and staff who work at such centers — who currently receive minimum wage and who are often forced to leave to

support their families — were able to claim a small victory with the approval of the new budget last month.

While they did not receive the increase of NIS 2000 (\$645) per month per person that they had requested, the government did approve an NIS 1000 (\$322) per month increase for stipends for those who have more severe autism, as well as 80 new training courses for staff members — many of whom currently receive little to no training — and the establishment of a commission on

occupational and educational frameworks which includes parents.

Tami Ben-David Yona, the mother of a young man in Jerusalem with autism, who is active in ALUT, the autism parents' network, said, "This struggle for our children now that they are in this phase of life parallels what we had to do to get their schools built. We have had to fight for everything." All the advances in the education system up to now, from the creation of preschool classes for people on the spectrum to the building

of special schools, came after pressure from parents on the government, she said.

For people like Shaffir, Cohen and Yona, failure in this quest is not an option. "When they do something they are passionate about, it wakes them up," said Shaffir, who noted that growing up with a sister on the spectrum fostered in herself a sense of empathy. "When we close our eyes to people who need more support, we are weaker as a society." ♦