

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Ketanji Brown Jackson is the latest Supreme Court nominee who got her start at Nathan Lewin's first firm; Orthodox Jewish groups rally against Daylight Saving legislation; Madeleine Albright's foreign policy was forged 'in the shadow of WWII'; Biden's man in Brussels; Israel's first ambassador to Morocco is building people-to-people ties; Abraham Accords Games to spotlight soccer diplomacy at Dubai Expo; For Holocaust educators in Poland, the war in Ukraine is more than just a teachable moment; and Oz defends dual Turkish citizenship and shift on fracking

MARCH 22, 2022

Ketanji Brown Jackson is the latest Supreme Court nominee who got her start at Nathan Lewin's first firm

Lewin, known for high-profile clients and representation of Orthodox Jews in religious liberty cases, launched a now-defunct firm that once employed Jackson, Amy Coney Barrett and Brett Kavanaugh

By Gabby Deutch

The three jurists most recently nominated to the Supreme Court had very little in common before they were tapped to sit on the highest court in the land. Brett Kavanaugh grew up near Washington, D.C., and attended Yale Law School; Amy Coney Barrett was raised in suburban New Orleans and went to Notre Dame Law School; and Ketanji Brown Jackson, a Harvard Law grad whose confirmation hearings take place this week, hails from Miami.

But they shared one formative experience: As young lawyers, each worked at a now-defunct boutique law firm in Washington called Miller, Cassidy, Larroca & Lewin.

"It was a very unusual firm," said Nathan Lewin, one of the firm's founding partners and a crusading attorney known for his decades of work on civil liberties cases. "It was both color-blind and gender-blind. We hired people regardless of race, regardless of gender. It was just the best people, a meritocracy."

Today, Washington's most prestigious

firms are multinational behemoths that employ hundreds of attorneys. But at Lewin's old firm — which was acquired two decades ago by Baker Botts LLP, a Houston-based legal giant — the number of attorneys never surpassed three dozen. Other alumni include a who's who of Washington power players over several administrations. Among them are David Cohen, current deputy director of the CIA; Stuart Levey, undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence at the Treasury Department under President George W. Bush; and Jamie Gorelick, deputy attorney general under President Bill Clinton.

"The people who came to us, both the summer law clerks and the associates, were people with fantastic records. We gave them a lot of opportunities to do exciting things because the litigation was interesting," Lewin told *Jewish Insider* in a recent phone interview.

Today, Lewin operates an even smaller firm: Lewin & Lewin, a two-lawyer operation with his daughter, Alyza Lewin, who also serves as president of the Louis D. Brandeis

Center for Human Rights Under Law. She joined him first at Miller Cassidy, which she called an "extraordinary place."

The pair has worked on several high-profile cases together, including that of Menachem Zivotofsky, who sued former Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014 in a bid to list "Israel" — rather than "Jerusalem" — as his place of birth on his passport. That was the first case Alyza argued at the Supreme Court, and when a journalist learned she would be arguing the case in lieu of her father, he asked Alyza if her father was sick.

"I tried to teach him what the word *nachas* meant. I said, my father really actually just wanted to *shep nachas* and sit back in his chair while his daughter argued her first case before the Supreme Court," she told *JL*. "Working with my father has been a privilege and a joy, and a real blessing." (They lost that case in the Supreme Court, 6-3.)

At 86, Lewin maintains a full caseload, and he filed a recent lawsuit on behalf of Ben & Jerry's Israeli distributor, who is suing

the ice cream maker and its parent company over its decision last year to stop selling its products in what it referred to as “Occupied Palestinian Territory.”

Even amid Lewin’s ongoing legal work, creating a firm that launched the career of three future Supreme Court nominees is quite the capstone for the lawyer from Lodz, Poland, who came to the U.S. as a young boy during the Holocaust.

The Senate Judiciary Committee’s four days of hearings for Jackson began Monday. Jackson, who currently serves as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, would be the first Black woman on the High Court if she is confirmed by the Senate. Committee Chair Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) kicked off the hearings by praising Jackson’s “record of excellence and integrity,” while Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) said Jackson’s past advocacy as a defense attorney has “gone beyond the pale.”

Lewin does not recall working with Jackson, who spent a year at the firm from 1998 to 1999, although he found the initials “KJ” scrawled in his notes from a case he worked on that year, suggesting she may have assisted him. (The case was about a school in Kiryas Joel, so the initials could also have referred to the town in New York.)

In 2020, amid Barrett’s confirmation hearings and concerns about her attitude toward the religious practices of American Jews, Lewin penned an op-ed describing what he viewed as a brief but noteworthy experience working together. “Having worked with Judge Amy Coney Barrett, I have seen her defend the rights of Jewish Americans firsthand,” Lewin wrote.

Barrett worked at the firm from 1999 to 2001 — just barely missing Jackson — at the time Lewin was litigating one of his signature cases. He helped the Chabad movement secure the right to place a menorah on public property in Jersey City, N.J., over the wishes of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The case was one of dozens that Lewin, an Orthodox Jew, has taken on representing Jewish clients over the course of his career. But when he was getting started as a lawyer, that was not his goal; he worked as a prosecutor at the Department of Justice as a young attorney, assisting in the trial of

the infamous union leader and mob boss Jimmy Hoffa.

“These cases came to me because I guess people thought, ‘Look, here’s an Orthodox Jewish lawyer who clerked on the Supreme Court,’ which was pretty unusual in those days,” noted Lewin, who clerked for Justice John Harlan and has argued 28 cases before the Supreme Court. “I sort of became known to those who had some interest in litigation for Jewish causes, so almost as soon as I went out into private practice, I began getting calls about these kinds of issues.”

The connections that spawned Miller Cassidy date back to the Kennedy administration, when Lewin, Herbert “Jack” Miller and John Cassidy worked together at the Justice Department under Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. The Hoffa trial, in 1962, was one of Lewin’s first, and it sent him to Nashville, Tenn., just before Yom Kippur.

“I had to inform the trial team of the fact that I would not be available,” Lewin recalled. He was unavailable for a day and a half for Yom Kippur, then two days for Sukkot and two more for Shemini Atzeret. “They’d been waiting for this fellow to come down to write their legal memoranda, and I was told they called up Bob Kennedy and said, ‘What have you sent us here?’ Turns out, they discovered that I was a workhorse, I guess, and on the days that I was available, produced a lot of stuff.”

Miller, who rose the ranks in the DOJ under Presidents John F. Kennedy and then Lyndon B. Johnson, later convinced Lewin to go into private practice with him rather than sticking around to work for President Richard Nixon.

“Of course, it turned out that ultimately we represented Richard Nixon when he resigned as president. But nonetheless, I agreed at that point to come as he was forming this law firm,” recalled Lewin, referring to one of his most high-profile clients.

The firm specialized in white-collar defense, and Nixon was just the first of several controversial clients that Lewin and his firm represented. “I’ve represented very unpopular men, I’ve represented unpopular clients. No question about it,” said Lewin.

In the 1970s, he represented Bernard Bergman, an Orthodox leader and nursing-

home operator who was convicted of Medicaid fraud and bribery. Lewin and Alan Dershowitz currently represent Mike Lindell, the CEO of My Pillow who has been sued by Dominion Voting Systems in a \$1.3 billion lawsuit related to Lindell’s claims that Dominion “stole” the 2020 election.

“What Mike Lindell did, and what he continues to do, is to say, ‘Look, I don’t believe that this election was free of fraud.’ He has a right to say that, and he has a right not to be sued for that,” Lewin explained. “I’m not claiming that I’m doing this pro bono or anything. He is a paying client. But his position in this litigation is, I think, fully correct.”

His work on religious liberty cases has sometimes put Lewin at odds with leaders in the U.S. Jewish community who “thought the most important part of the First Amendment was the Establishment Clause,” said Lewin, while “I believe the most important part of the religion clauses of the First Amendment was the Free Exercise Clause.”

Those groups, such as the American Jewish Congress in its civil rights-era prime, often sided with liberal organizations like the ACLU, who felt strongly that the government could not endorse or “establish” a religion, while Lewin believed the more important part of the First Amendment allowed Americans to practice their religion freely. He is working on another such case now: Lewin is representing a congregant at an Ann Arbor, Mich., synagogue who argues that weekly anti-Israel protests, which have occurred in front of the synagogue on Shabbat for 18 years, impinge on his freedom of religion.

“The people who are standing around this Ann Arbor synagogue are there to harass and intimidate you if you’re trying to exercise religion, and the people who are defending them, including the ACLU, and the Jewish people who are signed on to the ACLU briefs, claim it’s only free speech,” said Lewin.

More recently, this divide has manifested in *Carson v. Makin*, a case that was argued before the Supreme Court in December. The Court is expected to overturn a Maine law that limits parochial schools’ ability to receive public funds on behalf of students in rural areas who do not live near a public

high school. Lewin filed a friend-of-the-Court brief arguing in favor of overturning the law, while other Jewish groups including the Anti-Defamation League and the Union for Reform Judaism filed a brief supporting the Maine law.

In his own career, Lewin says he has faced limited discrimination for being an observant Jew. As a student at Harvard Law School in the late 1950s, students were required to take three classes on Saturdays. He and the one other Sabbath-observant law student in his section only had to take one, to which Lewin showed up each Saturday with no books, notebooks or pens.

Later, when he was thinking about

career prospects, some firms “were out-and-out antisemitic,” recalled Lewin. “There were firms who clearly said, ‘We do not want to talk to any Jewish applicant, period.’ That was permitted before the Civil Rights Act.” The ones who were known to be open to Jews often refused to hire an Orthodox Jew who observed Shabbat. Starting his own firm meant he wouldn’t face that problem.

Miller Cassidy had a kosher kitchen for Lewin in its downtown Washington office, and Lewin said his colleagues applauded his travel to Israel and his work representing Jewish clients pro bono.

“If I had to work late, I would call him up and he’d say, ‘Can I make you dinner?’ And I’d

say sure,” recalled Alyza, his daughter, who worked at another firm on the same street before she eventually joined Miller Cassidy to work with her dad. “I’d walk down the half a block and meet him for dinner and hang out with him and then go back to work.”

Now, the only law partner Lewin has to worry about is his daughter. But that’s not a problem for him.

“It’s fantastic,” he said. “It’s a capstone to a legal career if you can engage every day with your daughter, in trying to further the things that you’ve spent your life working on.” ♦

MARCH 23, 2022

Orthodox Jewish groups rally against Daylight Saving legislation

‘The reality is setting in in the House that we need to really think through this and discuss it more,’ Agudath Israel’s Rabbi Abba Cohen said

By Marc Rod

It’s a race against time for groups representing Orthodox Jews as they work to lobby Congress against making Daylight Saving Time permanent.

The Orthodox Jewish community sprang into action last week following the Senate’s unexpected passage by unanimous consent of a bill eliminating the twice-annual time change, an accomplishment that reportedly even surprised some senators who opposed the legislation.

“We were completely blindsided,” Rabbi Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel of America’s vice president for government affairs, told *Jewish Insider*. “This has been going on — it has a history already over the years — there should have been more notice and there should have been an opportunity for groups to really weigh in in a serious way and there wasn’t.”

Agudath Israel, the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America sent letters in recent days to House leadership raising concerns about the legislation, arguing that it would force young children

to travel to school in the dark and also make it difficult, if not impossible, for many Orthodox Jews to attend morning prayers prior to going to work at some points of the year. The OU and RCA also argue that the shift would have long-term negative health impacts on all Americans.

“From my perspective, the primary reason why it has not passed in prior efforts had a lot to do with opposition from the airline industry,” Nathan Diament, executive director of the Orthodox Union Advocacy Center, told *Ji*. “They seem to have dropped their opposition at this point. So that’s changed the dynamic a little bit.”

Cohen and Diament said the House has already appeared to slow down on the legislation, following initial speculation that the lower chamber might seek to fast-track the legislation as well.

“I think the reality is setting in in the House that we need to really think through this and discuss it more,” Cohen said. “It’s basically a different reality even just a few days later.”

“Where it’ll go in the next several months

is still not clear,” Diament added.

Cohen recounted that a previous push to address time changes around 2005 was defeated by a coalition including Orthodox Jewish groups, farmers, school groups and transportation groups.

“I think if we can form that coalition and get to that bottom line and educate people in the House, I think we can turn it around,” Cohen said, adding that he believes the new legislation can still be defeated. “There’s an effort right now on the Hill to find the allies that existed years ago and rebuild the coalition. So I know that effort is underway.”

Cohen also said he has heard from senators upset about the bill’s rapid passage, who he has urged to find aligned outside groups and lobby their states’ House delegations.

Cohen said Agudath Israel expressed concerns about the legislation to Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) — the lead sponsor — when he first introduced it last year, but said he never heard back.

Asked for comment, a Rubio spokesperson referred *Ji* to a floor speech

following the bill's Senate passage, in which Rubio argued that "strong science" indicates that switching times leads to greater heart attacks and car and pedestrian accidents, as well as increased child obesity, and restricts childrens' outdoor play time.

The spokesperson was unsure if Rubio's

staff was aware of the Agudath memo.

The U.S. experimented with eliminating time changes in the 1970s, but the move was widely unpopular and was rolled back. Cohen said he heard in 2005 from people who had dealt with the previous experiment.

Observant Jews, he said, were forced

to either find ways to pray at work or ask their supervisors to allow them to arrive at work an hour late. The experience "was not a pleasant situation, it did not create a comfortable atmosphere," Cohen said. "Nobody wanted to go back to that reality." ♦

MARCH 24, 2022

Madeleine Albright's foreign policy was forged 'in the shadow of WWII'

The barrier-breaking diplomat spent her early years in Europe before fleeing communist Czechoslovakia with her family

By JI Staff

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who did not discover definitively until later in life that her family was Jewish, died on Wednesday, her family announced in a statement. Albright, the first woman to hold the State Department's top job, was 84. Her daughter Anne said the cause was cancer.

Albright, who was born in Prague to a Czech diplomat, followed in her father's footsteps, becoming first the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations before serving as secretary of state in President Bill Clinton's administration.

The family received asylum in the United States after fleeing the communist regime in what was then Czechoslovakia, a formative experience that shaped Albright's approach to similar refugee crises around the world for the rest of her life.

"What was most impressive, I thought, about Madeleine was [that] she could talk about foreign policy in ways that went way beyond what too often is just a very small inner circle. She could talk as immigrants do," Ann Lewis, a former Clinton administration official, told *Jewish Insider*. Lewis first met Albright in 1984 when she served as a foreign policy advisor to vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro and Lewis was a senior Democratic National Committee official. "She never took the United States for granted. She never took our power for granted."

"It was a real breakthrough that a woman could hold this position, that a woman would bring the credibility and the power of the United States with her," Lewis noted.

"As one of the first women in high-level U.S. foreign policy posts, she stood out for her toughness on policy and her fearlessness in her views and her ability to attract media attention," the author and historian Stephen Schlesinger, who is a fellow at the Century Foundation, said in an email to JI.

The former U.N. ambassador and her family first left Czechoslovakia for London when Albright was a toddler, in 1939, following the Nazi occupation of the country. They returned after the war and her father was posted further east. In 1948 her family immigrated to the U.S., where she became a citizen nine years later.

Albright often described herself as having a "Munich mindset" — which set her apart from many diplomats in the next generation, including her friend and former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

"She explained to me once [that] the shadow of Munich compelled her into a certain mindset, a sort of risk readiness, a willingness to stand up for freedom and confront authoritarians through the use of military force," Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told JI. "Whereas some of her younger colleagues, she would say, grew up with the Vietnam mindset. And Vietnam generated, to a large degree, a

certain amount of risk aversion."

That mindset, Miller, who worked under Albright at the State Department in the 1990s, said, "explained a lot of her policies during her years as secretary of state, as well as her advocacy at the U.N. during some very critical years where you had horrendous events taking place, particularly in Bosnia."

"If you live in the shadow of World War II, and if you are a refugee, and if your father leaves Czechoslovakia as a diplomat, because his life could be threatened, then you will come away with a certain amount of risk readiness. You believe that authoritarianism and autocracies must be confronted. And if you were a product of the Vietnam generation, as Powell was... then risk aversion, not risk readiness is your sensibility."

Former Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT) told JI that he met Albright in 1992 when the two worked on the foreign policy portions of then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton's platform. "She went on to be a principled and effective ambassador to the U.N. and secretary of state, providing great moral and practical leadership in the American and NATO response to aggression and genocide in the Balkans."

The 2000 vice presidential candidate said that Albright had formed a special connection with his wife, Hadassah, "because they were both children of survivors of WWII and the Holocaust and both immigrants to America who believed

in the American Dream and were blessed to live it.”

Albright, he added, “made an enormous contribution to the security and freedom of the American people and so many millions of others throughout the world.”

Abe Foxman, the former director of the Anti-Defamation League, said he was first introduced to Albright prior to her tenure as secretary of state, and they remained in touch while she was in office.

“She was outspoken on antisemitism as part of authoritarian societies and outside. Staunch advocate and defender of democracy and its values — partially

because of her and her parents’ experiences,” he said. “We didn’t always agree on the Middle East, and we had serious discussions — but it was never angry. It was honest and sincere.”

Foxman said his relationship with Albright was “solidified” when details of her family’s Jewish background emerged. After she became secretary of state, Albright learned that her parents had converted to Catholicism, as a means of protection, during WWII and that 26 members of her family, including three grandparents, were likely killed in the Holocaust. Foxman — who himself was raised Catholic for a time

during the Holocaust — said he counseled Albright on how to handle the revelations.

“She needed friends and I felt that was the right thing to do,” he said.

“I said, ‘Tell the truth. And the truth is your parents raised you as a Christian... Why would you question what your parents said?’” Foxman recounted. “I understand the reason that she didn’t go looking for these distant relatives is because the people who loved her and who she loved... they raised her as a Christian, so why would she go looking for something else?” ♦

MARCH 23, 2022

Biden’s man in Brussels

As Europe responds to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, all eyes are on Washington’s ambassador to the EU, Mark Gitenstein

By Gabby Deutch

As Russian troops expand their invasion across Ukraine, President Joe Biden will travel to Brussels today for a series of high-level emergency meetings with NATO and European Union officials. When he lands in Europe, he will be greeted by a familiar face: Mark Gitenstein, the U.S. ambassador to the EU — and the president’s best friend.

Gitenstein arrived in Brussels in late January, just weeks before Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. In theory, Gitenstein’s position — as an ambassador to an entity that neither the U.S. nor Ukraine is part of — may appear ornamental, a prized political posting for a personal friend of the president.

But at a time when Russia is upending geopolitics on the European continent, Gitenstein suddenly finds himself as one of Washington’s most important representatives abroad.

“The European Union is the most important organization in the world to which the United States does not belong,” said Daniel S. Hamilton, a former deputy assistant secretary of state for European affairs and a non-resident fellow at the

Brookings Institution.

Ukraine is not a member of the EU, but Ukraine’s desire to join Western institutions like the EU and NATO partly touched off Putin’s military campaign in the country. Moscow’s 2014 effort to illegally annex Crimea came in response to a trade agreement between Ukraine and the EU.

“That’s why the discussion about NATO and all this is sort of a distraction, a diversion, which I think Putin is trying to orchestrate away from the real issue,” Hamilton explained, “which is that a successful and democratic Ukraine anchored into the institutions of Europe, primarily the European Union, would pose a threat to authoritarianism in Russia.”

Gitenstein, a lawyer, previously served as U.S. ambassador to Romania under President Barack Obama. Former colleagues and foreign policy experts suggest his time in Eastern Europe will leave him well-equipped to navigate the crisis in Ukraine. Gitenstein did not respond to a request for comment.

“I think he must bring with him a sensitivity to the concerns and the historical experiences that countries in the eastern part of Europe bring with them, post-

communist countries still dealing with lots of legacy issues from a Soviet time,” said Hamilton.

Soon after he arrived in Bucharest, Gitenstein came face-to-face with one of the early challenges he would have to handle: navigating the thorny politics of the Holocaust in contemporary Eastern Europe. He got to Romania at the end of a yearslong national struggle to come to terms with the country’s actions during the Holocaust, and he immediately had to learn to tread lightly when balancing Holocaust remembrance with the politics of an upcoming election.

In a ceremony marking the country’s Holocaust memorial day in October 2009, Gitenstein spoke before parliament about his Romanian roots, and shared the story of a relative he only recently discovered who left the country for Israel after the Holocaust, when his whole family had been killed.

“It is a particular privilege for me to participate in this dedication, as an American, as an American Jew and as a Romanian-American Jew. It is a moment of profound self-discovery. My journey of self-discovery is only a shadow of what you, the people of Romania, are engaged in. It takes courage and determination to face your

past,” Gitenstein said. The ceremony took place on the day a new Holocaust memorial was dedicated, a historic sign of progress in the country.

In 2003, former Romanian President Ion Iliescu tasked Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel with creating a commission to study what occurred in the country — where Wiesel was born — during the Holocaust. Like many socialist countries, Romania was known to have suppressed the truth about the Holocaust during the communist era that followed World War II.

Wiesel’s report, published in 2004, found that between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian Jews were killed in the Holocaust under the leadership of Romanian leader Ion Antonescu, who was sympathetic to Hitler’s policies and willingly assisted him in his plans to kill the country’s Jewish and Romani populations. The cornerstone for the country’s first official Holocaust memorial was laid in Bucharest in 2006.

“It all kind of came to its conclusion in October of 2009,” said Andrew Baker, director of international Jewish affairs at the American Jewish Committee. Baker expected a large American delegation to attend the dedication of the Holocaust memorial, but he was disappointed to find few American officials at the ceremony. A plaque for the memorial was not yet mounted, so the information about what, exactly, was being remembered was not made clear to visitors, and Baker was confused about the event’s somewhat under-the-radar nature.

“I didn’t really understand what the problem was. So [the Romanian president] said to me, ‘Well, it’ll take time for the Romanian public to understand, really, what happened, to accept this history, the role at the time of Antonescu, who led the Romanian government and ordered these deportations.’ He said, ‘It will take 30 days, 60 days,’” recalled Baker. “And I’m thinking, really, 30 days? 60 days? And then it dawned on me: elections. Elections were coming up in another month.”

No one wanted to say or do anything around the fraught issue of Holocaust remembrance that would lead to any uproar in the final days leading up to the election. In December 2009, after voting

ended in the country’s parliamentary and presidential election, the plaque went up. “He was on target and supportive of virtually everything,” Baker said of Gitenstein.

One lesson Gitenstein may have learned from his stint in Romania is that “history can have a very real impact on what goes on today,” Baker said, particularly at a moment when Putin is trying to rewrite the history of Europe.

Ukraine and Romania are young democracies, and both countries have faced challenges in their transitions out of communism. Gitenstein is familiar with those challenges. A White House press release announcing Gitenstein’s nomination to his current post highlighted how he “focused on fighting corruption and preserving democratic institutions” when he was in Romania.

Romania is a couple of steps ahead of Ukraine in that journey. Romania joined the EU 15 years ago; Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky formally requested last month that Ukraine be permitted to join the body. But the process of becoming a member is complicated, and membership in the EU requires an adherence to certain democratic principles.

“The further west you go in Europe, my personal experience is in Western Europe, they don’t have that same” sensitivity to the legacy of socialism and the Cold War, said Hamilton. “I think right now, [understanding] why Ukraine matters, why that part of Europe matters, I think would be probably the most important thing to bring. He would really know how to work within government structures that have been impaired because of the experiences, and how to address corruption issues and address all the things that the Ukrainians themselves also have to deal with.”

That Gitenstein already served as an ambassador for three years could help him in his current posting at this high-stakes moment.

“He already knows how to be an ambassador. He knows how to interface with foreign officials, how to listen, how to speak in terms that matter to them,” said Howard Gutman, who served as U.S. ambassador to Belgium when Gitenstein was in Romania.

And Gitenstein’s relationship with Biden doesn’t hurt, Gutman added. “It’s not like

Mark picks up the phone once a day and says, ‘Joe, how are you?’ But the fact that he could do that at any time gives him a gravitas and credibility in his dealings abroad.”

During an October 2009 visit to Romania, then-Vice President Biden called Gitenstein “my best personal friend,” and explained, “We have raised each other’s children. Our wives are close friends. My grandchildren consider the Gitensteins to be almost relatives.” He jokingly told then-Romanian President Traian Băsescu not to “take advantage of my friendship with the ambassador too badly.”

Their personal friendship dates back decades. Gitenstein worked in Biden’s Senate office in the 1970s. For a period, Gitenstein served as chief counsel of the Senate Judiciary Committee when Biden chaired the committee.

Gitenstein is just one of three American ambassadors in Brussels, along with Julianne Smith, ambassador to NATO, and Michael Adler, ambassador to Belgium. “Every ambassador in Europe is working on the same issue, but just to a different audience,” explained Hamilton.

“I think this is probably a very important time to be in that position, since we’re coming off of four years where we had a Trump administration that seemed to be dismissive of the EU generally, and our EU partners individually,” said Baker. “He’s obviously likely to have a better time now that we have an administration partnership, and we need it, with everything going on right now.” ♦

Israel's first ambassador to Morocco is building people-to-people ties

'Before I arrived, my expectations were at a certain level,' Govrin told JI. 'After arriving, however, I noticed that the reality was way beyond that'

By Ruth Marks Eglash

When Israel's newly installed ambassador to Morocco, David Govrin, recently addressed a gathering of young Israelis and Moroccans in Marrakesh, he summed up his first 14 months on the job by recalling a conversation with a local official: "He asked me if I'd encountered any problems so far; I told him I had one big problem," Govrin joked. "The food is simply too good here."

While there is no doubt that delectable and intoxicating Moroccan fare, which is also wildly popular in Israel thanks to the nearly half a million Jews of Moroccan heritage who reside in the Jewish state, might not be good for the waistline, Govrin told *Jewish Insider* in an interview last week that his answer was the truth – he has received a warm and genuine welcome since arriving in the Arab country in January 2021.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm," Govrin told JI. "We feel it and see it every day, the people here are genuinely very excited about Israel."

Govrin became Israel's first ambassador to Morocco just a month after the two countries agreed to establish full and open ties in December 2020, and has been working to both establish a fully functional diplomatic mission and build people-to-people ties that will enhance the already warm peace that is rapidly growing between the countries.

A veteran of Israel's foreign service and a fluent Arabic speaker, Govrin understands the difference between a peace that is warm over one that is not. A former ambassador to Egypt, from 2016 to 2019 – Govrin also served as first secretary in Cairo between 1994-1997 – he said Israel's relations with the two Arab states differ wildly.

"One has to bear in mind that Israel and

Egypt have engaged in five wars, this is not the same for Israel and Morocco," Govrin began, highlighting that powerful segments in Egyptian society – the Nasserists and the Islamists – have remained an obstacle to Egypt's ability to develop better personal ties with Israel.

"There are also no cultural relations between Israel and Egypt," he continued. "This is unfortunate because it is cultural relations that really bring people together."

During his short time in Morocco, Govrin has focused on building those cultural and people-to-people relationships. From a young leaders' seminar last month in Marrakesh to a Jewish women's festival in the Mediterranean city of Tangiers to mark International Women's Day, he said it has been easy.

"Before I arrived, my expectations were at a certain level," Govrin admitted. "After arriving, however, I noticed that the reality was way beyond that. There's so much enthusiasm and the people here are very excited and eager to visit Israel."

Indeed, the new consular section, which did not exist before Govrin's arrival, has received endless inquiries and requests from Moroccans wanting to visit Israel. Israeli airlines began direct flights to Morocco last summer, and the first Moroccan airline held its inaugural flight from Casablanca just over a week ago.

What sets Morocco apart from other Arab states, Govrin explained, is that "the Moroccan people fully understand the importance of the peace with Israel" and feel connected to Jews because of the community's long presence in the country.

"They have a positive and forthcoming approach to Jews because the Jews were an integral part of Moroccan society, history and heritage for many centuries," he

continued. "This has helped us to push the relationship forward."

Jews have had a permanent presence in Morocco for more than 2,000 years and with the arrival of Jews from Spain and Portugal – following their expulsion in 1492 – their impact in the country grew even further. Today, while the community has shrunk from an estimated 250,000 to 300,000 in the mid-20th century to only about 2,000 – most fleeing following waves of antisemitism after Israel's creation – those still living in the country remain openly and actively Jewish.

"In Morocco, the Jewish presence was welcomed for many years by the kings, and [the current leader] King Mohammed VI is very supportive and encouraging as far as relations with Israel are concerned," said Govrin. "And we have to bear in mind that leaders play a role in sending a message to their citizens."

As for the thorny issue of Israel's conflict with the Palestinian, which served been a point of contention for many Arab countries and prevented them from normalizing ties with Israel for decades, Govrin said the subject feels distant in Morocco. There were a handful of protests against the resumption of relations with Israel in December 2021, but following a recent national election in the country, the strongest voices opposed to normalization with the Jewish state – the Islamists – are now on the margins.

"Morocco's foreign policy is led by the king and [since] the Islamists are no longer part of the governing coalition, their presence in parliament was greatly diminished, and as far as the relationship between Israel and Morocco goes, we feel that the majority of Moroccans are very much in favor of bilateral ties," he said.

"The perception of the Palestinian issue

changed here following the Arab Spring,” continued the ambassador, author of a 2016 book about the ideological upheaval caused by the wave of popular protests that swept the Arab world a decade ago. “People here are focused more on domestic issues and the Palestinian issue is just one of many other regional conflicts.”

“The Moroccan outlook is towards Europe and Africa,” Govrin continued, adding that “Moroccans invest most of their energy on improving the relationship with

Europe and Africa.”

For Israel, Morocco is both a natural ally and a strategic asset exactly because it sits at the gateway to two continents, and, said Govrin, the Jewish state is utilizing the renewed relationship to expand cooperation on multiple levels – diplomatic, economic and cultural, as well as security cooperation.

In the short space of time since he arrived in Rabat, Morocco’s capital, he has already welcomed a slew of top Israeli officials from Foreign Minister Yair Lapid to Defense

Minister Benny Gantz to Economy Minister Orna Barbivai. Visits that have paved the way for stronger and deeper cooperation, said Govrin.

“We’ve achieved a lot over the past year,” the ambassador finished, and while COVID-19 has hampered the process somewhat, he promised that a reciprocal visit by a top Moroccan official to Israel is likely to happen very soon. ♦

MARCH 24, 2022

Abraham Accords Games to spotlight soccer diplomacy at Dubai Expo

Players from Israel, Morocco, Bahrain and the UAE are set to meet for the soccer match next week

By Gabby Deutch

As Expo 2020 Dubai comes to a close at the end of March, the United Arab Emirates will host a soccer match between teams from the Abraham Accords’ signatory countries, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides announced on Wednesday.

Players from Israel, Morocco, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates will face off in Dubai in the inaugural “Abraham Accords Games,” an effort being spearheaded by Nides and the UAE’s ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Al Khaja. The event will also feature a “dinner celebration” with chefs from each country.

“I fundamentally believe that travel, tourism [and] culture is the way to cement, in people’s psyche, the importance of these Abraham Accords,” Nides told reporters in a virtual press conference on Wednesday.

Since arriving in Israel in December, Nides has emerged as one of the most vocal proponents of the Abraham Accords — the 2020 pact that normalized ties between Israel, the UAE, Morocco, Bahrain and Sudan — within President Joe Biden’s administration.

The event will take place on March 29, and the delegations from each country will also visit the others’ booths at the Expo.

The culture ministers from each of the four countries will be in attendance. After the event, they will sign a “cultural cooperation declaration” with the goal of “fomenting and just continuing to advance the idea that cultural cooperation is the key to success to the Abraham Accords,” said Nides.

With the event taking place in an international hub like Dubai, Nides said he hopes the event will show other countries the benefit of joining the Abraham Accords.

“It just shows what happens when there’s cooperation,” he explained. “Obviously, the more people understand each other, the more ability there is to work together, not only on playing football or eating food, but how do we do economic ties? How do we do energy ties? How do we do security ties? How do we do cooperation?”

Sudan, which was a signatory to the Abraham Accords in 2020 but has been absent from most of the resulting cooperation, will not participate in the Abraham Accords Games. Sudan “is going through some complications with leadership,” said Nides, referring to a military coup that rocked the country last year, but “our hope is that we’ll all be doing all these events together.”

The Abraham Accords Games is the first

major event in a cross-cultural approach Nides is taking to advancing the Abraham Accords and showing their potential to other countries in the region. “I’m hoping that Israel plans to do something this summer for a month of different activities in the cultures of all the countries,” Nides said, explaining his vision for a “whole month of concerts and plays and arts. There’s just a massive amount of stuff that people don’t know about each one of these countries.”

Nides urged policymakers and practitioners in the Abraham Accords countries to “get in the mindset of kids” by working with “influencers, pop stars [and] cultural icons,” which he said he has a plan to do. ♦

For Holocaust educators in Poland, the war in Ukraine is more than just a teachable moment

‘When this kicked off, we couldn’t just sit down and do nothing,’ said JRoots founder Tzvi Sperber

By Ruth Marks Eglash

On the day the Russian army invaded Ukraine last month, Anna Niedźwiedz, a citizen of neighboring Poland, noticed a post on Facebook requesting shelter for a family from Kyiv that was fleeing the violence. She responded immediately.

“I sent a message saying that I have space in my house, and they are very welcome,” the Krakow resident told *Jewish Insider* in a phone interview. “I then called my husband to tell him.”

It was that phone call – as well as Anna’s act of pure kindness – that set into motion a series of events drawing a direct line between the chaos and inhumanity of the past few weeks in Eastern Europe and the forces of past horrors in the same area.

Anna’s husband, Wojtek, has worked for years as a security guard for JRoots, an organization that runs Holocaust educational trips to Poland, as well as other places of significant Jewish heritage. Her call to him on that day sparked the interest and compassion of the nonprofit, propelling its leaders to re-channel its regular activities into helping the more than one million Ukrainian refugees who have poured across the border into Poland. The group of educators is now putting into practice lessons that they have been imparting for years to thousands of visitors from all over the world.

“When this kicked off, we couldn’t just sit down and do nothing,” Tzvi Sperber, founder and director of JRoots, told *JI*. “We had been teaching about the Righteous Among the Nations and other lessons of the Holocaust, so we had to do something.”

Sperber, who is originally from the U.K. but now lives in Israel, founded JRoots 15 years ago with Rabbi Naftali Shiff. The two arrange Jewish heritage tours, exploring

individual and collective Jewish roots in Poland, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Spain, Hungary and Morocco. Each year, JRoots runs programs for around 150 groups, with thousands of participants from the U.S., U.K., Canada, South Africa, Israel and elsewhere.

With a broad infrastructure and manpower already in place in Poland, including contacts in the hotel industry, bus drivers and tour guides, Sperber said it was fairly easy for the organization to pivot its efforts into helping those in need and, almost immediately, the organization’s vast network of alumni responded with support, both financial and otherwise.

“Just this morning, I had a call from someone telling me that they needed 150 hotel rooms because a group of refugees is arriving from Moldova,” Sperber, who has been in Poland for the past few weeks while overseeing the effort, explained.

Since the war began on February 24, the group has helped to provide food, clothing, medicine and other essential items to one of the largest distributions centers in Krakow, assisted in turning the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow — which commemorates Holocaust victims and celebrates Polish Jewish culture — into a daycare center for refugee children and helped to convert the lower floor of the Chachmei Yeshiva in Lublin into a refugee center.

“Most of the refugees are women and children,” Sperber described, adding that the help they are giving is not limited to Jewish refugees. “The whole situation is just so heartbreaking and catastrophic on a humanitarian level.”

In Anna and Wojtek Niedźwiedz’s home, on the outskirts of Krakow, two families, including a 2-year-old and a small dog, have now settled in for the foreseeable future.

“I always heard about how my grandparents helped Jews during the Second World War and I wanted to help too,” said Anna, explaining why she did not hesitate to open her door to strangers and why she is making every effort to ensure her new guests feel welcome and comfortable.

She described to *JI* how the family arrived angry and dirty, with only the clothes on their back and how, with no shared language, they were forced to communicate with hand gestures, their eyes and smartphone translation apps.

Three weeks later, Anna said, everyone is more comfortable and the children have even begun to smile. “I know they are very grateful that I gave them a good place to stay,” said Anna, crediting JRoots for helping to provide her guests with many items they were unable to bring with them from home.

For Zak Jeffay, who works as an educator at JRoots, the switch from Holocaust education to helping those in need unfolded soon after Anna’s call to her husband. Jeffay told *JI* that he had been in the middle of guiding a trip for high schoolers from Manchester, England, when the war broke out, and overheard the group’s security guard talking to his wife.

It was a moment, he said, where Jewish and Holocaust education needed to be applied in a practical way.

“We always talk about the sparks of light in the darkness, acts of kindness despite the darkness all around, that can improve the lives of other people,” said Jeffay, describing how the students, 17- and 18-year-olds, just opened their wallets and said they wanted to help.

“They all understood, in that moment, that they had to do something to help,” he concluded. ♦

Oz defends dual Turkish citizenship and shift on fracking

The talk-show host running for Senate in Pennsylvania shared his views on a range of issues in an interview with Jewish Insider

By Gabby Deutch

Pennsylvania Senate candidate Dr. Mehmet Oz said on Wednesday that he doesn't think renouncing his Turkish citizenship is important but that he would do so if he wins the general election because he doesn't "want it to be a distraction," he said.

"I don't think it's important to do it. It's certainly a nuisance issue for me," Oz said of dropping his Turkish citizenship in an interview with *Jewish Insider*. Oz's leading opponent in the Republican primary, hedge fund manager Dave McCormick, has sought to suggest that Oz's dual citizenship poses a challenge to his ability to securely handle classified material as a senator.

"There's no problems with me being able to contribute to my nation," said Oz. "I'm only holding the Turkish citizenship to be supportive of my mom who has Alzheimer's."

Oz also praised Turkey's recent move toward rapprochement with Israel.

"I think there may be opportunities — this already started, I believe — for Turkey to soften and work with Israel more closely," said Oz, who holds dual citizenship with Turkey. He added that the move is "perhaps stimulated by the fact that Turkey witnesses what happens when bad actors like Russia invade neighboring countries. So when you have a crisis, it forces people to reevaluate their positions."

Oz's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be "primarily peace through strength," he explained, to "make sure that Israel is protected." He said a two-state solution is "challenged," given the lack of strong leadership on the Palestinian side. "If you could make a Palestinian state with strong leadership, that would be wonderful. But look what happened with Gaza."

Instead, Oz argued, the U.S. should take

a more regional approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "You don't really have a [Palestinian] counterparty to make a stable connection with," said Oz. "You do have a counterparty in the UAE. You have a counterparty in Morocco. So you have countries that you can create bilateral agreements with, and I think that creates a web that over time will stabilize the region."

The TV talk-show host and cardiothoracic surgeon would become the first Muslim senator if elected. "It's good for Israel to have a non-Jew, non-Christian strongly supporting its right to exist and actually highlighting the fact that it's a role model in so many ways," Oz argued. "I can certainly articulate what I think a lot of people in the Islamic world believe, which is that Israel has achieved milestones that will be wonderful to emulate if countries in the region can copy what they do."

In a conversation about his approach to foreign policy, Oz distanced himself from any ties to Turkey's government. "I don't really have a relationship with the leadership there," he said, although Oz has been photographed with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan several times. He said he would protect Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish religious leader who has lived in Pennsylvania in self-exile for more than two decades, from extradition to Turkey, where he is wanted for his alleged role in a 2016 coup attempt. "There are no credible allegations that he was involved in the coup. He will stay in Pennsylvania," Oz told *The Washington Post* in February.

Oz has made a point of calling out China on the campaign trail. He did not describe any specific legislation he would author on China, but said instead, "China has cheated on so many items that you can just go back and say, enforce the law."

Since his campaign began, Oz has come under fire from conservatives for statements he made on "The Dr. Oz Show" over the years on issues ranging from gun control to the Affordable Care Act. Recently, as gas prices have soared due to inflation and Western sanctions on Russian oil, Oz has spoken often about the need to expand hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, for natural gas in Pennsylvania — and come under fire for past columns he wrote where he described the health risks of fracking.

"I'm not against green energy solutions. That's fantastic. But I don't believe that the rhetoric around green energy is honest," Oz told *J.I.* "We're not going to achieve green energy on the timelines desired with the Green New Deal. There's also a dishonest narrative around natural gas."

Pennsylvania is a hub for fracking in the U.S., and Oz presented the state's natural gas reserves as one way to resolve the global reliance on Russian oil.

Right now, "we're not able to supply our liquid natural gas to our allies overseas, and quite the opposite, we're wasting energy," said Oz. "Because they're now beholden to Russia, we're allowing Ukrainians to be hurt. And we're watching Russians work with the Iranians to broker a [nuclear] deal, which is not going to be in the best interest of our allies, including Israel."

With Dr. Mike Roizen, then the chief medical officer at the Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute, Oz authored multiple columns over the years warning readers about adverse health effects from fracking, citing evidence that the process of extracting fossil fuels can pollute nearby water sources. Oz claimed that his position has not changed, but rather that any articles written at the time did not have his sign-off.

"It was an article written by a

collaborator of mine that I did not see before he published it,” Oz explained. “If I had said things on my show, then it would be a whole different ball game. When you’re running a media business, you delegate, you divide

and conquer the challenges.”

A *Fox News* poll from earlier this month showed McCormick leading in the primary race with 24% support, while Oz placed second with 15%. Conservative commentator

Kathy Barnette and real estate developer Jeff Bartos each had 9%, followed by former U.S. Ambassador to Denmark Carla Sands with 6%. Voters go to the polls on May 17. ♦