

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

*Could Biden's pick for envoy to Saudi Arabia facilitate normalization with Israel?; The first UAE minister to visit Israel got her start on climate change while scuba diving; Speaking at Warsaw Jewish museum, Yellen urges 'fierce resistance' to Putin; Rob Bassin on the impact of the United Democracy Project; Kosher poké and poker amid dealmaking at ICSC real estate conference in Vegas; and Amar'e Stoudemire clarifies he quit his job due to Shabbat observance challenges.*

MAY 13, 2022

## Could Biden's pick for envoy to Saudi Arabia facilitate normalization with Israel?

*If confirmed, Michael Ratney's nomination holds promise for Israel-Saudi relations but possible challenges for U.S. ties with the kingdom, analysts told JI*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Could President Joe Biden's nominee to be America's next ambassador to Saudi Arabia – a career diplomat who most recently served overseas as the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem – be the key to bringing the kingdom into the Abraham Accords, or, barring that, help take the country one step closer to normalization with Israel?

While Jerusalem and Riyadh are known to have long-standing, under-the-radar ties, at least on a security level, the nomination of Michael Ratney, a fluent Arabic speaker who is well-versed in Israel affairs, could certainly help to firm up that covert relationship and even encourage formal ties, some experts and analysts interviewed this week told *Jewish Insider*.

However, with ties between the Biden administration and the House of Saud still frosty, dispatching a career diplomat as opposed to a political appointee to such a high-profile posting might inversely be perceived as an insult, other observers pointed out.

Ratney, who was charges d'affaires in Jerusalem for several months last year prior

to the arrival of current U.S. Ambassador Tom Nides, is considered one of the State Department's most experienced Middle East diplomats. From 2012-2015, he served as consul general in Jerusalem dealing with Palestinian affairs, and in addition, was acting deputy assistant secretary for the Levant and Israel-Palestinian affairs. Following his time in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Ratney was the U.S. special envoy for Syria from 2015-2017. He has also served as deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Doha, and held diplomatic posts in Rabat, Beirut and Baghdad.

David Makovsky, director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, argued that Ratney's nomination was a "great choice."

"He is very bright and one of America's veteran Middle East hands," Makovsky noted. "Sending him now to Riyadh is a signal by the Biden administration. In a previous time, having served in Israel was even considered a taboo for being ambassador in Saudi Arabia, but that was then and this is now."

Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro, who overlapped with Ratney in his role as consul general in Jerusalem, agreed that he was a great choice to represent U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia.

"It's critical to have a U.S. ambassador in Riyadh to manage this important and complicated bilateral relationship," Shapiro, who was recently appointed as a distinguished fellow in the Atlantic Council's Middle East programs, told JI.

Shapiro added: "[Ratney] knows the Gulf well, and Israelis found him to be a good partner during his tour as charge d'affaires. He has a deep and sophisticated understanding of regional dynamics, including opportunities for expanding normalization and the Israeli-Palestinian issue."

"Any deal to bring Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords, or to bring them and Israel closer to normalization, is going to be a multi-sided puzzle," Shapiro stated. "Michael is who you want at the table trying to solve that puzzle."

While Ratney's nomination, which has yet to be approved by Congress, ends a 15-month diplomatic snub of Saudi Arabia

by the United States, he will be the first U.S. ambassador in many years not to be a political appointee. That fact has led some to speculate that the move might not be viewed as favorably in Saudi Arabia, where only the highest-ranking officials are sent to represent the country in Washington.

"[Ratney] certainly knows Israel and the Palestinian issue and he might be able to help promote formal relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel," said David Ottaway, a Middle East Fellow at the Wilson Center in Washington. "But I don't think Ratney has an inside track to Biden, and the Saudis always want someone who has a pipeline right into the White House."

Calling Biden's approach to Saudi

Arabia a "pariah policy," Ottaway, a former Washington Post Middle East correspondent, added that the key question "is whether this guy has a special mission ordered by the White House to promote special recognition between Saudi Arabia and Israel?"

A lingering question is whether Washington has the political capital to facilitate such an agreement amid heightened tensions between Riyadh and the White House.

"The U.S. and Saudi Arabia still have a long way to go to repairing the damage to their relationship," observed Yoel Guzansky, a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv.

Guzansky said that sending Ratney, who currently holds the rank of minister-counselor, might send a negative signal to Riyadh that the Americans are not sending "their strongest card" and. He added that while in the past the line to Washington might have been via Jerusalem, today, in order to widen the Abraham Accords, Washington needs to be involved.

"The fact that the Americans are finally sending someone to Riyadh is much more important," Guzansky continued. "The fact that he was in Israel is secondary... It's true that he knows people here, and he knows the country, but the Saudis have their own contacts here." ♦

MAY 18, 2022

## The first UAE minister to visit Israel got her start on climate change while scuba diving

*Mariam AlMheiri, the Emirati minister of climate change and the environment, wants to spur faster innovation in sustainable technology — and sees Israel as a guide and partner*

By Gabby Deutch

When Mariam bint Mohammed AlMheiri landed in Tel Aviv last year, she didn't know what to expect. A serial startup founder and environmentalist, AlMheiri is used to experimenting and exploring. But as the first United Arab Emirates minister to visit Israel after the Abraham Accords normalized ties between the countries in 2020, she was taking a new — and particularly noticeable — leap of faith.

"I remember at the hotel I was staying at, they put a label on the water bottle and the chocolate, saying, 'Thank you to the first minister of the UAE,' with my name on it," recalled AlMheiri, the UAE's minister of climate change and the environment. "When I was at restaurants or cafes, they wanted me to sign a book, because they said it's the first time we have someone from the UAE and a minister." People asked for selfies everywhere she went.

"For us, the Abraham Accords is a historic moment for both countries," AlMheiri told The Circuit in an interview

earlier this month in Los Angeles, where she was speaking at the Milken Institute Global Conference about energy and food technology.

AlMheiri's approach to her posting has been characterized by a drive to innovate and an attention to detail that she has cultivated since before launching her first business, when she lived in Germany after college and engineered steel bearings for race cars. Last year, when she visited Israel, AlMheiri was serving as minister of state for food and water security. Now, after a promotion, she is responsible for helping the UAE reach ambitious clean energy and sustainability goals. For a major oil-producing nation in a region that is especially susceptible to the ravages of climate change, this is a task both improbable and of paramount importance.

"Things have to move faster. Our government wants to be very agile, very focused on game-changing initiatives," AlMheiri said.

Asher Fredman, a founder member of the UAE-Israel Business Council, said the UAE

is "investing in building the infrastructure to realize the vision of the UAE's leadership of moving away from fossil fuels and reducing their emissions," he said, and the Abraham Accords allow for collaboration on this goal.

There is potential in "integrating Israeli startups, or Israeli research, into these major projects that the UAE is developing, both in the UAE and also in other countries around the world," said Fredman, who also serves as Israel director for the Abraham Accords Peace Institute, an NGO founded by former President Donald Trump's senior advisor Jared Kushner to advance the Accords.

During AlMheiri's visit to Israel last July, she and Israel's environmental protection minister, Tamar Zandberg, signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate on preservation efforts and environmental protection.

"Israel and the United Arab Emirates have common environmental challenges, and the right way to deal with them is regional cooperation in finding and implementing solutions," Zandberg told *The*

*Circuit* in a statement. The MOU represents “an extraordinary opportunity to advance the capabilities of both countries in the fields of the environment and the fight against the climate crisis.”

AlMheiri has spearheaded the development of the UAE’s “FoodTech Valley,” a play on Silicon Valley, that is meant to drive the discovery of the next big ideas in food technology. Aside from its geopolitical significance, her trip to Israel last year was also intended as a way to connect with Israeli entrepreneurs and urge them to take part in the FoodTech Challenge, a tech competition that will award up to \$2 million to companies on the cutting edge of food and agriculture technology.

“Here you have two countries that really think of innovation and technology in the heart of everything they do,” AlMheiri said of Israel and the UAE. “We have similar challenges. And having our mindsets put together and using our strengths for mutual benefit, it’s just going to help for regional security, and for the people in our region as well.”

Convincing Israeli entrepreneurs to come to the UAE is easy, AlMheiri said, but getting Emirati businesses interested in Israel is more challenging. “I’ve seen more interest in Israel working in the UAE, but I think that’s because they are further down the line in their business mindset,” she noted. “The UAE is still coming along to this idea of being also a kind of ‘startup nation’ as well.”

The Abraham Accords provided Israeli businesses with an unexpected and lucrative opportunity: access to one of the most dynamic business hubs in the world. And the new relationship gave the UAE a model of how to build a collaborative, interconnected tech ecosystem.

“The UAE being a new market for them is suddenly really attractive, because they want to be the first,” AlMheiri said of Israeli businesses. “You’re seeing that they’re jumping on that ship a lot faster than the UAE companies, because the UAE companies already have access to, let’s say, India or China.” What Emirati companies are looking for, she explained, is “technology partners more than looking at market access.” Israel has the tech know-how; the UAE has the market opportunities. It’s a

pairing that makes sense, she said.

AlMheiri easily alternates between savvy business language, scientific jargon and casual conversation. She was educated as a mechanical engineer, but it was a passion for scuba diving that led her, almost by accident, to work for the Emirati government.

She took up deep-sea diving as a hobby while trying to find work in aeronautical engineering when she returned to the UAE, where she grew up, from Germany.

“Going diving, it’s just a different world because you can’t talk to each other. And you’ve got the silence, but you’re just observing and enjoying,” she said. “I think that was when I first started to also see what we’re doing to the environment.”

She noticed fishing traps that had been left behind in the Persian Gulf waters off the country’s coast. Once the big nets get lost at sea, “a fish goes in, gets trapped inside, becomes bait and then attracts other fish to come in,” she explained. So all those fish get trapped, which is bad for marine life and for the ocean. She flagged the issue for the climate change ministry and ultimately got it to prohibit that type of fishing equipment in some areas.

“I was observing a lot of things underwater, which kind of was an eye-opener for me,” AlMheiri recalled. “It started to get me thinking about things like aquaculture. Like, why are we not thinking of growing local fish in a more sustainable way?”

At a sustainability event, she approached the minister of environment and water to speak about marine research, and suggested she could help.

“The minister said, ‘Why don’t you come and join the ministry?’” said AlMheiri. So she did — first as an expert advising the minister, and then as the director of the Sheikh Khalifa Marine Research Centre, where she created a hatchery for the country to produce fish domestically and launched a marine innovation park in conjunction with an Australian university. She has since risen through the ranks to her current position overseeing the nation’s efforts to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

She argues that food safety and security are closely connected to questions around climate change. Making the UAE “food

secure” is a priority, referring to “when a country ensures that the people in my country have access to safe, nutritious, affordable food at all times,” AlMheiri explained.

She spearheaded a research project to understand the UAE’s “food basket,” meaning the two dozen food items that make up 80% of the country’s diet. “Then you look at those 24 items [and ask], what makes sense to grow in the UAE sustainably where innovation is available, and what makes more sense to store?” she asked. A lot of vegetables can be grown year-round in the UAE, despite its desert climate, due to innovations in agricultural technology. Other food will still be imported, but it must come from a variety of places, so a major natural disaster or other catastrophic event doesn’t cut the UAE off from its food sources.

The rest of the world has learned this lesson in the nearly three months since Russia invaded Ukraine, which is a major exporter of wheat. “We’re in a very good situation, because now that there’s nothing coming from Russia and Ukraine, we’re OK, because we’ve already built that kind of diversification,” said AlMheiri. Delegations from other countries in the region have been making pilgrimages to the UAE to learn what they need to do to catch up.

Her position requires big-picture strategizing and an awareness that it takes many years of incremental steps to reach those long-term goals — a realization that any nation hoping to adapt to climate change will have to come to on their own. Take, for instance, the UAE’s goal to get to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, which it announced last fall.

“We started from being just oil and gas. By 2050, we want to have 50% clean and renewable,” explained AlMheiri. “We’re working now on a detailed plan with interim targets of 2030, 2035, 2040, so that things become more real. Because 2050 sounds like a long way away, but there’s so many steps we need to do.”

But any nation that hopes to limit the effects of climate change knows it cannot do so alone. “We need to put all hands on deck to solve the climate crisis,” said AlMheiri.

“One of the projects that we’re really proud of now is the Project Prosperity,” a UAE-brokered deal that will see Israel and

Jordan trade Israeli desalinated water for Jordanian solar energy, she explained. "It's a beautiful idea because it's about regional stability and energy security and water security." U.S. climate envoy John Kerry traveled to Dubai in November to be present for the signing of a letter of intent from the three countries.

"We want to be the mediator, to try and build those bridges," said AlMheiri. She

noted that the UAE will host the COP28 international climate conference next year. Could the country use its desire to lead on climate as a way to advance the Abraham Accords?

"I don't work so much in the ministry of foreign affairs," she said, when asked whether climate change cooperation can bring other Emirati allies like Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords. "All I can say is

that the climate agenda touches us. Each of us has a role to play."

AlMheiri has not gone scuba diving in years. Who has the time, when the world is on fire?

"When you're driven by passion, you sometimes feel guilty to take a few days off," she said. "There's so much to do and so little time." ♦

MAY 16, 2022

## Speaking at Warsaw Jewish museum, Yellen urges 'fierce resistance' to Putin

*The Treasury secretary spoke at the POLIN Museum, where she honored the legacy of Polish resistance fighters: 'Taking action to confront evil'*

---

By Gabby Deutch

In a speech in Warsaw on Monday, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen drew upon the legacy of her family members who were killed in the Holocaust to highlight the importance of American efforts to support Ukraine in its response to Russia's invasion.

Speaking at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, located on the site of the Warsaw Ghetto, Yellen shared that most of her father's relatives were murdered in Sokółów Podlaski, the small town where they lived 50 miles outside of Warsaw.

"Yet the region where my relatives lived was also home to resistance," said Yellen, who praised the Polish resistance fighters who, "in the face of insurmountable odds and almost unthinkable risk," fought back against the Nazis.

"That is part of the legacy I am here today to honor: taking action to confront evil," she added. That legacy, she said, "is also at the core of the Treasury Department."

She did not announce any new policy initiatives, instead using her remarks to make a moral case for sustained financial support for Ukraine and sanctions on Russia.

"Putin's ongoing attacks on Ukraine require that we think about what we can do to confront brutality," said Yellen. "We at Treasury are also doing what we can to

ensure that Putin's brutal war is met with fierce resistance internationally."

She cited the "unprecedented financial pressure measures" taken against Russia by the U.S. and nearly three dozen global partners. "We are firm in our resolve to hold Russia accountable and to strengthen the hand of the Ukrainian people at every turn," Yellen said.

In her speech, Yellen, who was in Europe to hammer out a global tax rate deal, told museum visitors about World War II-era Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, who persuaded President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1940 to freeze the assets of Denmark and Norway, making "it impossible for the Nazis to capture overseas assets of countries that they were invading." Later, Morgenthau convinced Roosevelt to create the War Refugee Board, which rescued Jews from Europe.

The lesson of these "decisive actions" is to "use the tools at our disposal to fight oppression, and that lesson must be applied today," said Yellen.

"A few hundred miles to our east lies another place where people are bravely fighting for their freedom," she said, referring to Ukraine. "I'll continue to take these lessons of the past with me as we work toward a better future." ♦



# Rob Bassin on the impact of the United Democracy Project

*Steve Irwin found himself down 25 points; after UDP PAC's infusion he finished neck and neck*

By Matthew Kassel

United Democracy Project, a super PAC recently launched by the pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC, claimed decisive wins in two races for open House seats in North Carolina on Tuesday, but fell short of delivering similar results in a closely watched congressional contest in Pittsburgh and its suburbs.

That matchup, where UDP had spent most heavily, remains too close to call.

The trio of primaries had been viewed as the first major test of UDP's political muscle as the group — which represents AIPAC's first foray into campaign politics — prepares to engage in a number of upcoming races where opposing approaches to Israel are likely to fuel tension.

It remains to be seen if the pro-Israel outfit will achieve a clean sweep as final votes are tallied in Pennsylvania's 12th District, where progressive state Rep. Summer Lee has already declared victory over UDP-backed attorney Steve Irwin.

But Rob Bassin, UDP's chief executive and former longtime AIPAC political director, summarized the results in a positive light during an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday. "It was," he said, "a very good night for pro-Israel progressive candidates."

In North Carolina's 1st District, state Sen. Don Davis defeated former state Sen. Erica Smith by a two-to-one margin, while in the neighboring 4th, state Sen. Valerie Foushee prevailed over Durham County Commissioner Nida Allam and "American Idol" star Clay Aiken.

UDP spent \$2.1 million backing Foushee and \$2.4 million supporting Davis and opposing Smith.

The super PAC topped out at a staggering \$2.7 million on behalf of Irwin, a mainstream Democrat who — even with

backing from the party establishment in Allegheny County — had struggled to gain traction until the final weeks of the bitterly contested race to succeed outgoing Rep. Mike Doyle (D-PA).

UDP worked aggressively to reverse that dynamic, unleashing a barrage of negative ads casting Lee, a Democratic Socialist aligned with the Squad, as a far-left radical who had "attacked" President Joe Biden's "character" and was "more interested in fighting Democrats than getting results" — messaging her campaign rejected as grossly misleading.

In an open letter, Lee's allies, including Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey, also condemned UDP's attacks, noting that an AIPAC-affiliated political action committee had endorsed more than 100 Republican incumbents who voted against certifying the 2020 presidential election results.

The race came to embody the growing divisions between moderates and progressives that have been thrown into sharp relief in several recent Democratic primaries, not least where opposing approaches to Israel have emerged.

With backing from Justice Democrats, J Street and other progressive groups, Lee, 34, argued in favor of conditioning U.S. aid to Israel and drew scrutiny from Jewish voters in the district for social media comments in which she had harshly criticized the Israeli government last year during the May conflict with Hamas.

Irwin, who is Jewish, described himself as a proud supporter of Israel, emphasizing a deeply held connection with the Jewish state.

He earned support from a number of pro-Israel groups, including Pro-Israel America, a bipartisan organization that listed the race as among its top priorities in the midterms,

and Democratic Majority for Israel, whose political arm spent more than \$400,000.

The current vote tally shows Lee ahead by some 400 votes. It is likely to be updated as early as Friday.

While Irwin, 62, called for a "need to respect the process of counting the ballots" in a statement on Wednesday, Lee had claimed victory by late Tuesday night as the vote count inched upward in her favor.

"They hit us with everything they had, and we clawed and we ran, and we got the power of the people," she said in a triumphant speech. "We're out here in Western Pennsylvania fighting for the future of the whole country."

Bassin, however, scoffed at such declarations.

"I think it's kind of amazing that Summer Lee is being described as the comeback of the night," he said in the interview with *JI*, noting that Lee, who rose to prominence in 2018 after unseating an entrenched Democratic incumbent, had launched her campaign "as the prohibitive favorite to win the seat."

By late March, Lee — who would be Pennsylvania's first Black congresswoman — had opened up a daunting 25-point lead over Irwin, according to a poll conducted by an outside group supporting her campaign.

But by late April, following UDP's entry into the race, Irwin had mounted a late comeback and had narrowed the margin to a statistical dead heat, according to polling obtained by *JI* and conducted for the Irwin campaign.

Bassin confirmed that UDP's own polling had shown a similar trajectory, but drew a different lesson from the outcome. "The fact that Steve Irwin went from being a relatively almost completely unknown

figure to contesting this race,” he said, “is rather extraordinary.”

He noted that Justice Democrats as well as other groups including the Working Families Party had spent more than \$1.7 million on Lee’s behalf, though that number was dwarfed by UDP.

“The fact that she may barely eke out a victory,” Bassin argued, “suggests that her brand of anti-Israel, far-left, out-of-the-mainstream doesn’t resonate with the majority of Democrats.”

Lee’s campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment from JI.

UDP has said it is targeting races where “there is a clear difference between a candidate who supports a strong U.S.-Israel relationship” and “a candidate who will seek

to undermine that relationship.”

But while critics have noted that UDP’s ads have so far made no mention of Israel, Bassin dismissed such charges as hypocritical. “I think it’s ironic that the anti-Israel left doesn’t complain when anti-Israel organizations run independent expenditures against mainstream pro-Israel Democrats,” he said, “but find it highly objectionable when organizations supporting mainstream progressive pro-Israel Democrats get involved in politics.”

“In all of these cases, I think that anti-Israel organizations hope to make an issue out of the candidates’ pro-Israel support, to no effect.”

UDP is currently involved in a runoff for Texas’s 28th District next Tuesday, where

it has spent more than \$1 million boosting embattled Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-TX), a conservative Democrat who is facing off against progressive challenger Jessica Cisneros.

Bassin said UDP would be making “some additional independent expenditures” in “another race,” but declined to elaborate further.

In the meantime, he suggested that Tuesday’s results, while still somewhat unsettled, were an encouraging development for pro-Israel advocacy.

“I think it’s notable,” Bassin said, “that in a very short period of time, the pro-Israel community has demonstrated it can be a significant political force.” ♦

MAY 20, 2022

## Kosher poké and poker amid dealmaking at ICSC real estate conference in Vegas

*Inside the Jewish scene at the world’s largest retail real estate convention, kicking off this weekend*

By Gabby Deutch

With more than 22,000 people expected to attend this weekend’s ICSC confab in Las Vegas, the event is a standby on the conference circuit — and one of the largest to relaunch, in splashy Sin City fashion, after the pandemic.

The annual real estate gathering organized by the International Council of Shopping Centers offers some of everything, from dealmaking to dance parties, for the industry leaders who convene in 100-degree temperatures in the desert. (Poolside private cabanas are known to be hubs for schmoozing.)

The conference, which is the largest retail real estate convention in the world, turns Vegas — briefly — into a hub for the Jewish community. Kosher food is available through the three days of the festival, which runs from Sunday to Tuesday. Multiple hotels offer morning minyans for the Shacharit prayer service, and they don’t need to worry about hitting the 10-person

prayer quorum; more than enough people show up.

“We do believe that the lower the place is spiritually, the higher the potential,” said Rabbi Levi Harlig, a born-and-bred Las Vegas and Chabad emissary who is running Shabbat programming at the conference. “There’s no lower place in Las Vegas than the Strip, so to be able to transform that, to have a Torah reading and keep Shabbos properly is pretty powerful.”

Chabad of Southern Nevada will have an outpost at the Wynn on the Strip from Friday through Tuesday, with about 50 people expected for Shabbat meals. Harlig and his twin brother, also a Chabad rabbi, will offer prayer services throughout Shabbat, along with three-times-a-day weekday prayers during the rest of the conference. (The Wynn works with Harlig on helping guests observe Shabbat; the nearby Venetian Hotel has Shabbat rooms.)

“People can gather together, do a little Torah study, keep them connected while

they’re still here. Daven with a minyan and what not,” Harlig said. “It’s difficult to get away and go to a shul that’s a 15-minute drive. So it’s very convenient for them.”

Chabad’s daily minyans are sponsored by Meridian Capital Group, whose founder and CEO, Ralph Herzka, is a major donor to religious institutions in the U.S. and Israel. Each year at ICSC, Meridian Capital sponsors a high-end kosher lunch in a custom event space designed by a New York event management company. Last year’s offerings included a salad bar, a poké station and a smoothie bar.

After a day spent wandering the booths and exhibitions at the Las Vegas Convention Center, attendees angle to land invites to exclusive cocktail parties and dinners hosted by major firms. Kosher food is surprisingly easy to come by, and not just a shrink-wrapped Glatt kosher meal.

Jeff Wild, a partner at the Cleveland-based law firm Benesch, has been going to ICSC for more than 20 years. At Benesch’s

Monday night party at the Bellagio, the firm will order extra kosher food, and Wild plans to extend an invite to anyone he meets who's looking for kosher food.

"We tell people, if you happen to know other people who are kosher, even if they don't do business with the firm, we want to make sure that we're welcoming, and we invite as many people as possible to come in to enjoy the kosher food," Wild told *Jewish Insider*. "In this situation, people get a chance to actually relax and enjoy the food of their choice without having to make difficult decisions about being able to eat or not."

People who keep kosher haven't always been able to find high-quality food at the convention center. Marc Tropp, senior managing director at the commercial real estate firm Eastern Union, said the kosher scene used to be mainly pizza deliveries.

Now, "the *frum*-owned companies both days will have a lunch, like a catered lunch, fully kosher," said Tropp, who has been going to ICSC since 2005. "It's really open to anybody, and it's really amazing. It's truly unbelievable."

The benefit isn't just the food, of

course. "It's helpful because it's sort of like a networking event within a networking event," he said. "You're talking specifically to people that you're spending 30-45 minutes with, eating a meal."

Tropp is based in Bethesda, Md., and his firm sponsors the kosher food at the annual Maryland party, an invite-only event at the Wynn where state officials including Gov. Larry Hogan will mingle with developers and retailers who might be thinking of making investments in Maryland.

In 2018, many of ICSC's biggest dealmakers skipped the conference when it coincided with Shavuot. Others who are not observant Jews reflected that their absence would be obvious: "If you know the popular kids are not going to the party, then you are not going to go," Jonathan Adelsberg, a partner at the New York law firm Herrick Feinstein, told real estate site *The Real Deal* at the time.

In the past, Jewish and Israel-focused organizations like the federation and AIPAC have tried to set up events parallel to the conference, one longtime ICSC attendee and philanthropist told *JJ*. But people come to the conference to make deals, so the events

were not especially successful.

"After a long day of walking the convention center and having meeting after meeting after meeting, you're quite tired at the dinner," Wild said. "A lot of us don't really take advantage of it being in Vegas. Vegas just happens to be an easy place for them to have this convention every single year."

Not everyone agrees: Tropp plans to take clients to live performances, maybe a magic show or a comedy show. And he'll hit the casino a bit, even though "I'm not a huge gambler," he said. But he's most looking forward to being face-to-face with colleagues and clients. "It's good to see that the industry is still surviving. I will say, outside of hospitality, I think when COVID hit the retail sector, I think everyone thought it was going to get destroyed," said Tropp.

For Simon Ziff, president of Ackman-Ziff Real Estate Group, a real estate capital advisory firm, the most exciting part will be "my three dinners, unfortunately non-kosher restaurants, with 20-plus year relationships from all over the country," he told *JJ*. "I'll admit that I will enjoy some great DJs as well." ♦

MAY 19, 2022

## Amar'e Stoudemire clarifies he quit his job due to Shabbat observance challenges

*The Brooklyn Nets player development assistant explained his decision to leave his post after two years arose from religious considerations*

By Jacob Miller

Amar'e Stoudemire revealed on Wednesday that he quit his position as an assistant coach for the Brooklyn Nets because of difficulties fulfilling his job as a Shabbat-observant Jew.

Stoudemire explained his decision in an Instagram post clarifying his earlier announcement that he was leaving his post after two years as the Nets player development assistant, which he first revealed last week on ESPN.

In the video, Stoudemire explained the

decision was a "mutual understanding" with the Nets, and discussed the challenges posed by his Shabbat observance.

"Not working on Friday night and Saturdays is difficult for anyone to grow in the coaching space, because coaching is such a grind. It requires you to be there full-time," he said.

Stoudemire called the Nets a "beautiful organization," and claimed, "there's no hard feelings, no way, no how."

Stoudemire, who played for teams in both the U.S. and Israel, including the

Phoenix Suns, the New York Knicks, the Dallas Mavericks, Miami Heat, Hapoel Jerusalem and Maccabi Tel Aviv, became interested in Judaism through his mother's Black Hebrew Israelite heritage, and underwent an Orthodox conversion to Judaism in August 2020.

Speaking about his time with the Nets since his conversion, Stoudemire reflected, "I was there for two years, sacrificing my time away from my family for those two years, but still was able to hold down the fort and fulfill my obligation. So there's no

quitting from that standpoint.”

Stoudemire also pushed back against media coverage of his disapproval of Nets player Kyrie Irving for his refusal to be vaccinated against COVID-19, and highlighted his respect for the All-Star guard

in his Instagram post.

“Why would I criticize someone who’s similar as I am?” he said. “I also fast during the NBA season, for Yom Kippur. [Irving recently confirmed speculation that he had converted to Islam.] I’m also a guy

who has a religious intake. I’m also a guy who’s an activist, who speaks about African American communities, and so forth. So why would I criticize someone who’s very similar to I am?” ♦