

THE WEEKLY PRINT

A new soccer field in the Bronx courtesy of the Abraham Accords; Emiratis estimate trade volume with Israel will reach \$5 billion in the next few years; Israeli CEOs fly to Casablanca to offer Morocco a dose of startup culture; Cora Neumann's sweet home Montana; Michigan mayor Kelly Garrett takes on Rashida Tlaib; Delia Ramirez hopes Springfield will be her springboard to Congress; and Socialist staffer on Jamaal Bowman's team details congressman's efforts to placate DSA.

MAY 26, 2022

A new soccer field in the Bronx courtesy of the Abraham Accords

Bronx soccer field, a benefit of the Abraham Accords, is part of emerging friendship between Rep. Ritchie Torres and the UAE

By Sam Zieve Cohen

Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) is no stranger to government malaise. Prior to his election in 2020, the Bronx congressman spent seven years as a New York City councilmember, working to wade through the sea of red tape that is government bureaucracy. So it surprised Torres when, last Friday, only a few months after first discussing the refurbishment of a soccer field in the Bronx's Crotona Park, he was handed a pair of golden scissors as he stood on newly laid synthetic turf at the ceremonial ribbon-cutting.

More surprising, the unusual source for the project's success: Middle East peace.

The project was made possible thanks to a \$363,000 donation from the United Arab Emirates and the New York Football Club (which is majority-owned by members of the Abu Dhabi royal family). At the ceremony, Torres was joined by UAE Ambassador to the U.S. Yousef Al Otaiba, standing alongside the congressman and a contingent of local politicians and city officials.

Otaiba has served as the UAE's ambassador since 2008, but his public profile in Washington increased following

his integral role in negotiating the Abraham Accords agreement that normalized relations between the UAE, Bahrain and Israel. Since then, Otaiba has become a popular figure at Jewish and Israel-related gatherings in Washington — frequently appearing at events to tout the Accords.

Through the ambassador's new role as cheerleader for a changed Middle East, Torres, who has gained popularity in the Jewish community as a pro-Israel progressive, and Otaiba formed a friendship. The idea to rebuild the Crotona Park soccer field first occurred to Torres several months ago, when Otaiba mentioned that the UAE was seeking to fund the building and refurbishment of public soccer fields across the U.S.

"There's no reason to think that the construction of the soccer fields would have gone forward without the Abraham Accords," Torres observed in an interview this week with *Jewish Insider*. "The Abraham Accords has first order-, second-order and third-order consequences."

Crotona Park covers 127 acres in the South Bronx, just below the Cross Bronx Expressway. Established in the 1880s, the

land remained relatively undeveloped until the 1930s, when Robert Moses secured almost \$3 million in funding from the Works Progress Administration to renovate the park, including building a public pool, tennis courts, and bathhouse. The park has remained relatively unchanged — undergoing a renovation of the bathhouse and pool in 1984 — with the exception of a 1945 expansion of the Cross Bronx Expressway that cut off the upper portion of the park. The highway expansion was one of the many under Moses that controversially cut through majority-Black neighborhoods in the city.

Before the refurbishment, the field was in disrepair, one of the many New York City parks left languishing by either a lack of funding or the snails-pace process of committee hearings and permitting. According to Torres, the UAE and NYFC funding not only sped up the process from years to months, it likely saved the city millions of dollars.

Prior to the park visit, Otaiba joined Torres at the Riverdale Jewish Center for an off-the-record conversation on the Abraham Accords before a local audience

of around 60 people, including former Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and former Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY). Otaiba and Torres, sitting on a stage with Rabbi Dovid Zirkind, spent over an hour in conversation.

“The Abraham Accords is a monumental achievement in the diplomatic history of the Middle East. It’s an achievement that few in the foreign policy establishment predicted or thought was possible,” Torres told JI afterwards, asking rhetorically, “Has there ever been a moment in human history when a Christian majority country, a Muslim majority country and a Jewish majority country came together to form, not merely a cold peace, but a genuine friendship?”

“I pointed out that the 1967 Arab League

Summit infamously passed the Khartoum Resolution, which is summarized by the three nos: no recognition of Israel, no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel,” Torres said of his remarks on Friday. “For me, there’s nothing more powerful than an Arab rejection of the Khartoum Resolution.”

Torres is one of the more high-profile members of this Congress’ freshman class. The New York 15th Congressional District he represents encompasses both wealthy communities of the West Bronx and lower-income areas of the South Bronx.

“I represent the South Bronx, which is often said to be the poorest congressional district in America. There’s a chronic lack of access to amenities and programming.”

Torres added. “For the children of the South Bronx to have access to a state of the art soccer field is both a game-changer and a lifesaver. It has a transformative impact on the lives of underserved children in the South Bronx.”

At the soccer field, scant mention was made of the Abraham Accords or Israel.

And while the events on Friday reflected the two sides of the district, the biggest takeaway was the surprising impact the Abraham Accords had on the entire district.

“Something as seemingly unconnected as a soccer field is, in its own way, a testament to the new trilateral friendship that has taken hold among the United States, the UAE and Israel,” Torres concluded. ♦

MAY 26, 2022

Emiratis estimate trade volume with Israel will reach \$5 billion in the next few years

Officials discussed the Abraham Accord’s future at the 2022 World Economic Forum

By Jacob Miller

This article first appeared in The Circuit.

Trade between the United Arab Emirates and Israel is expected to reach \$5 billion in the “upcoming few years,” Emirati Minister of State for Foreign Trade Thani Ahmed Al Zeyoudi predicted at the 2022 Davos World Economic Forum.

Al Zeyoudi detailed the economic benefit from the Abraham Accords at a Davos session titled “The Future of the Abraham Accords” alongside co-panelists Dorit Dor, the chief product and technology officer at Check Point Software Technologies Ltd; Stuart Eizenstat, the State Department’s special adviser on Holocaust issues and partner at Covington & Burling law firm, who currently serves as the State Department’s Special Advisor on Holocaust Issues; and Khalid Bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, an advisor to Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

Less than two years since the signing of the historic normalization agreements, the trade volume between Israel and the UAE

has eclipsed \$2.5 billion, leading Al Zeyoudi to forecast that bilateral trade between Israel and the UAE will exceed \$2 billion this year and that 1,000 Israeli companies will operate in his country by year’s end.

Al Zeyoudi also noted both countries share common challenges — water scarcity, agriculture, and energy diversification — and referenced past areas of cooperation, including the creation of a water research institute, Israel’s sale to the UAE of stakes in its Tamar gas field and the two countries’ collaboration on launching the Beresheet 2 space mission.

The panel also touched on long-standing obstacles in the Middle East, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran and relations between the Gulf states and Turkey.

Al Khalifa reiterated that his country remains committed to the Arab Peace Initiative, a proposal to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and claimed the 2002 document was a tacit acknowledgement of Israel’s legitimacy by the Arab world.

“It’s a de facto acceptance by every Arab country of the State of Israel in the region,” he said.

Sounding a note of optimism, Eizenstat expressed confidence that Israel’s relationship with Abraham Accords countries could deepen, and proposed the U.S. create “Qualified Industrial Zones,” regions in which the U.S. allows free trade on products manufactured with Israeli help, in Abraham Accords countries.

“As much as we’ve had remarkable change for the good in a little over a year, there is room for enormous expansion if we do the right things and we continue down this path,” Eizenstat said.

Asked about the possibility of promoting peace between other Middle Eastern countries, Al Khalifa stressed the importance of patience, but said, “We will need to work harder and harder and harder to make that go at a faster pace.” ♦

Israeli CEOs fly to Casablanca to offer Morocco a dose of startup culture

Rabat's goal is to 'build a startup ecosystem,' Morocco's minister for digital transformation told The Circuit

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

CASABLANCA, Morocco – A planeload of Israeli executives who landed here this week drew government ministers, corporate leaders and a senior royal adviser seeking their advice on developing a startup business culture.

The Israelis, representing technology companies largely involved in agriculture, water conservation, health systems and sustainable energy, are spending three days at a conference in the North African kingdom, mixing with potential Moroccan investors and looking to make deals.

“Our goal is to build a startup ecosystem,” Morocco’s minister for digital transformation, Ghita Mezzour, told *The Circuit* after addressing the conference’s opening session on Monday. “We’re looking at Israel’s expertise in how to build the components and how to make them interact.”

Also greeting some 150 executives and government officials from the two countries in the Sofitel Casablanca ballroom were Moroccan Transportation Minister Mohammed Abdeljalil, Commerce and Industry Minister Ryad Mezzour, and Andre Azoulay, a longtime adviser to King Mohammed VI and his father, King Hassan II. Azoulay is often described as the country’s most influential Jewish citizen.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog sent a recorded video address hailing the diplomatic ties between the two countries that emerged from the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords in September 2020. He said he hoped business cooperation will “promote progress and peace throughout the Middle East, Africa and beyond.”

The conference, billed as the “Morocco-

Israel Connect to Innovate Forum” was organized by Start-Up Nation Central, a nonprofit group based in Tel Aviv that promotes Israeli business through what it describes as technology diplomacy. The group’s CEO, Avi Hasson, the Israeli government’s former chief scientist, said he hopes Morocco can serve as a beachhead for Israeli companies seeking to do business throughout Africa.

“We believe that Morocco, under the leadership of His Majesty Mohammed VI, is uniquely suited to partner with Israel in blazing a trail to a new MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region, one that is connected by a genuine desire for peace and prosperity,” Hasson said.

The conference ends on Wednesday with Israel’s science, technology and innovation minister, Orit Farkash-Hacohen, scheduled to deliver an address. At least 13 Israeli-Moroccan memorandums of understanding between business and government entities are being signed at the gathering.

Among the agreements, Israel’s Watergen, whose technology extracts water from air, signed a distribution deal with Morocco’s Waman Solutions. Israel’s Mehadrin formed a partnership with Adolam under the name “Global Farming Morocco” to grow and export avocados, and Israel’s Alma Lasers signed with Casablanca-based Guess Clinic to bring Alma’s aesthetic surgery devices to the Moroccan market.

Azoulay said it was critical that normalization with Arab countries be extended to include the Palestinians and bring “serenity” to the region. He said his remarks reflect popular consensus in Morocco that peace with Israel lead to an overall solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The May 11 death of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in the course

of a firefight between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian gunmen in the West Bank city of Jenin has heightened tensions across the Arab world and led to increased security for the Israeli-Moroccan conference.

Israel and Morocco maintained low-key business and diplomatic ties until agreeing to normalize their relations under the Abraham Accords in December 2020, partly due to the many Israelis who come from Moroccan descent and are estimated to number close to 1 million. Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid visited the Moroccan capital of Rabat to open a diplomatic office last August and Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourista came to Israel for the Negev Summit in March that brought together the top diplomatic officials who were party to the Abraham Accords with U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken. ♦

The Circuit was invited to the conference as a guest of Start-Up Nation Central.

Cora Neumann's sweet home Montana

The public health leader got her start in global affairs in the Jewish nonprofit world. Now she's brought it back to her roots with a run for Congress

By Gabby Deutch

The Jewish community in Montana is so small that for half a century, the Treasure State did not have an operating synagogue, until Congregation Beth Shalom opened in Bozeman in 2001.

Beth Shalom is now home to 120 families, but the temple's president, Jake Werner, only knows of one person in the community who was born and raised in Montana: Cora Neumann, a Bozeman native who is now running to represent one of the state's two congressional districts.

"Montana has always been my home," Neumann told *Jewish Insider* in a recent Zoom interview. When the nonprofit executive and public health expert moved away for college in the 1990s, she spent more than two decades living far from home. But Montana remained her north star, she added: "It's like the story of so many Montanans, where you grew up here, you leave for school and work, and you're on your journey home the whole time."

Neumann, a Democrat, is making her deep ties to the state an integral part of her campaign, which has centered on the state's affordability crisis, brought on by wealthy remote workers who moved there since the start of the pandemic.

"In Congress, I'll go after rich outsiders driving up costs," she said in a voiceover of a campaign ad showing a private jet and multimillion-dollar mansions. What that really means, she told *JI*, is "making sure that Montanans have good jobs and wages, that they can afford the cost of living [and] making sure that our small businesses can succeed."

Neumann, who briefly ran in the Montana Democratic Senate primary in 2020 until former Gov. Steve Bullock entered the race, faces long odds in making it to Washington. She's running in the newly created 1st District, which covers the western

part of the state; it's the first time the state has had more than a single statewide district in three decades. And while it includes some Democratic strongholds such as the university towns of Bozeman and Missoula, the nonpartisan *Cook Political Report* has rated it as "Likely Republican."

"The odds are slightly against her if you look at just the kind of Republican-Democrat stuff, but the candidate quality matters," said Ed Stafman, rabbi emeritus at Beth Shalom and a Montana state representative. "Montana has a fierce streak of independence."

Neumann, who is 47, has raised more money than her Democratic competitor, attorney and former Olympian Monica Tranel. But her chief Republican opponent, Ryan Zinke, the former Interior secretary who stepped down during an ethics investigation, has fundraised heavily and earned an endorsement from former President Donald Trump. And like Neumann, the Bozeman-born Zinke is no carpetbagger.

Still, central to Neumann's pitch is that she understands the experience of locals and their challenges — the rising costs, the difficulty of finding good-paying work, the inability to access quality medical care within a reasonable distance. With a doctorate in international development and a career focus on public health, Neumann argues that her experience in healthcare is a crucial asset at a time when the state is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond coronavirus, the issue of how to help people access good care is personal.

"The reason I went into public health was because my dad was a logger, and he died from injuries in a lumber mill accident when I was a baby," Neumann recalled. Her mom became a widow at 21. "The community here in Montana, in Bozeman, raised us. It was a wonderful place to grow

up. But what we went through, obviously, it was very traumatic. And if we had been closer to good care, he probably would have survived. So I just had a really early life lesson in the importance of public health and healthcare for rural communities and tribal communities."

Her father was Jewish, and when he died, Neumann's mom was committed to raising her and her brother in the faith. But a sense of Jewish community was hard to find in Bozeman at the time. The siblings spent each summer with their grandparents "who fled the Holocaust and ended up in Colorado," said Neumann. Her grandfather, Alfred Neumann, practiced as an attorney in Vienna, but when he left Europe as a refugee, he trained in social work in New York. He went on to serve as executive director of Jewish Family and Children's Service of Colorado for nearly three decades.

Neumann's time with her grandparents sparked an interest in travel and global affairs. They spoke German to each other, and as a teenager Neumann participated in an exchange program to Germany and later studied at Oxford, where she earned her doctorate.

"I was raised with stories of geopolitical [importance] — of war, really understanding the power and the importance of leadership," she explained. "That's probably where that interest came from, just the stories I heard growing up and the sense that I had of the importance of having really good leaders who are committed to democracy."

That fundamental belief in democracy colors her approach to Israel. "I think it's really important that we continue to strengthen and promote the democratic ideals that we share between the U.S. and Israel," Neumann told *JI*. "I support the very strong, ongoing relationship and bipartisan relationship that the U.S. has with Israel." She called for the U.S. to support Israel and

the Palestinian Authority “in their work toward a two-state solution,” and also expressed support for Abraham Accords and the “growing, improving relations in the region, which is great for everyone.”

Neumann pledged to support the Biden administration’s quest to reenter the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action “and make sure that Iran does not reach the capability of producing nuclear weapons.”

Early in her career, Neumann worked briefly in the Jewish professional world before earning her graduate degrees, first as a reporter at the New Mexico *Jewish Link* and then as a communications professional at the American Jewish Committee.

“I felt really connected to the Jewish side of my family, and I was really interested in learning and working with an organization that works globally, and then learning more about Israel and about international relations in general,” she said. Neumann has traveled to Israel twice with the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation’s REALITY trips to the country.

“She came [to AJC] with a deep interest in global affairs,” the AJC’s director of media relations, Kenneth Bandler, told JI. Neumann was Bandler’s first hire after he started at the organization in the late 1990s. Bandler remembers her helping to organize a relief concert after a massive earthquake struck Turkey in 1999. The event, organized with the Turkish and Israeli consulates in New York, featured bands from both Turkey and Israel. “She had a very positive outlook,” he said.

While working on her doctorate, Neumann got on-the-ground experience at the intersection of global health and international development. She spent time doing research on the Thai-Burma border, and she later served as a senior advisor to the State Department’s Global Women’s Business Initiative, a program started by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Neumann also developed the Global First Ladies Alliance, which worked with the wives of leaders around the world to help them develop and implement their own priorities. “Nobody ever asked them what their opinion was, necessarily. They have never been treated with respect, to be honest, fully,” said Neumann, who helped create the program that convened first ladies

to discuss how to make an impact.

Her interest in topics like women’s empowerment and equitable healthcare wasn’t politics but a sense of justice. “I was the kid on the playground who would get mad at the bullies,” she said. Later, in the course of getting her degrees, she worked with “rural communities, tribal communities, displaced populations, and witnessed just huge amounts of need,” Neumann said.

Living in Washington, D.C., it took years before Neumann and her husband, who grew up in Hungary and Germany, could both find opportunities back in Montana in their chosen fields. “My entire generation, the majority of us had to leave for work or school,” she said. “Being able to stay in Montana your whole life is often a privilege.”

The couple moved to Bozeman in 2015, when Neumann started a nonprofit that built coalitions with Native communities, conservationists, hunters and ranchers to preserve public lands. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she put her public health background to use. She had worked on the Ebola virus previously, and she knew a pandemic would be the most devastating for “our rural and remote and tribal communities,” noted Neumann. “That’s my expertise. So I wanted to just put myself to the best use possible to serve our communities during that time.”

The nonprofit she started, We Are Montana, worked with local leaders to bring aid and personal protective equipment to communities in need across the state. “People can have to drive five or six hours to get care. So we were also bringing supplies by plane to some of the communities and just making sure, trying to keep our ear to the ground and respond to the highest need populations in the state,” said Neumann.

Her discussion of public health on the campaign trail has not focused on COVID-19, which she noted will “become endemic.” But she called for a better national reckoning with the toll of the virus, and a stronger response to the mental health crisis that emerged in its wake. “We have, as a country and a world, just gone through a mass trauma event,” she noted. One result, she argued, is that “hate is on the rise in all forms,” and called for a multifaceted approach.

“Between political division and mass trauma and loss, we can’t wait. We need to make sure that people are getting the care they need on one hand, and that we’re protecting those that could be targets,” she noted.

Voters won’t see that political division or partisanship from Neumann. Her TV ads leave out her political party, opting instead for an image of a folksy, no-nonsense Montanan in a fleece-lined vest and a prominent belt buckle.

“I hate political ads, but I love my granddaughter,” her “Noonie” says in one ad, where the two women are chatting over cups of coffee. “Give ‘em hell, babe.” ♦

Michigan mayor Kelly Garrett takes on Rashida Tlaib

‘What [Tlaib has] demonstrated is not the politics of most of the people and the constituents that I represent here,’ Garrett told JI

By Marc Rod

The Democratic primary race in Michigan’s 12th Congressional District became a three-way contest last month with Lathrup Village Mayor Kelly Garrett’s entrance into the race against Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) — a development that could shake up efforts to unseat the divisive incumbent.

“It’s nothing against Rashida personally, but I know that the politics that I have seen and what she’s demonstrated is not the politics of most of the people and the constituents that I represent here,” Garrett told *Jewish Insider* earlier this month. “You have some progressives that might be in our area, but it’s a wide range.”

Garrett said she’s had her eyes on Congress since 2013, but wanted to “get some more political knowledge under her belt” before making a run herself. She also was unwilling, in previous cycles, to run against Rep. Brenda Lawrence (D-MI), who currently holds the 12th District seat, but is retiring at the end of the congressional session. The newly drawn 12th District includes more than 60% of Tlaib’s current 13th District constituents.

“When I found out she was retiring I was ecstatic, especially in the fact that I might have the opportunity to represent the people that she was representing,” she said.

Garrett said her run was prompted in large part by her son’s death from sickle cell anemia in October 2021, which she said showed her the “disparity in treatment between people of color and everyone else.”

“I just think that everyone deserves to have access to affordable healthcare,” she said. “So I felt as though some of the things that I ran into while dealing with his illness is something that could help so many other people. And so that’s my focus — making sure that no family ever goes through some

of the things that I went through.”

Garrett said in a recent virtual event that she had also suffered from a blood clot and pneumonia, but put off care until the situation became critical because she lacked health insurance.

She cited a series of concerns about Tlaib, including her decision to switch districts, her support for defunding the police and shuttering federal prisons and her vote against the bipartisan infrastructure package.

“We have major flooding issues. In my own house, it cost me \$52,000 because of a flood that I had, so I need to make sure that that doesn’t happen to anyone else,” Garrett said of the infrastructure vote. “That’s no time to play politics.”

Garrett framed herself as a dealmaker, noting that her current position is nonpartisan. “When it comes to our city, I know how to negotiate with my peers,” she said. “Though we might have two different outlooks on life, we can negotiate for the good of our constituents.”

The Lathrup mayor will not only have to defeat Tlaib in this August’s primary election, but also Detroit City Clerk Janice Winfrey, who entered the race in February, and former state Rep. Shanelle Jackson, who announced her candidacy earlier this year but did not officially enter the race until March. Winfrey has been endorsed by Pro-Israel America.

Garrett argued that she’s a stronger candidate than Winfrey because she is “doing the job, maybe at a smaller level, but I am fighting for infrastructure... making sure our police department is being reformed... and also the fact of trying to get small businesses to develop in Lathrup Village.” The village, which has a population of about 4,000, is in Oakland County, northwest of

Detroit.

She also noted that she collects no government salary in her current role. “It’s not something that I’m doing just for a job or just for a title.”

Garrett said she’s been involved in communities around the district “regardless of if it’s an election year or not. It’s something that I’m just passionate about, helping people and showing up... to all of our local meetings, to our district meetings. And I can say that it’s been very few times that I’ve seen anybody else that’s running come to these types of meetings.”

The Lathrup mayor is currently playing catch-up in the fundraising race — Tlaib had \$1.6 million on hand at the end of the first quarter and Winfrey had \$221,000. Jackson has not yet reported fundraising totals. Garrett did not specify how much she had raised at the time she spoke to JI, but said she has a “plan in place” to get “exactly the amount that we need to win” before June 30, the next campaign finance filing deadline. Garrett began airing two television ads last Monday highlighting her career and policy priorities.

Adrian Hemond, a Michigan political consultant, told JI that Garrett has strong name recognition in “large parts of this district” but emphasized that her finances set her behind Tlaib and Winfrey, especially with absentee ballots for the primary race set to go out soon.

Hemond speculated that Garrett and Winfrey also risk splitting some support from Black voters in Detroit and the Jewish community, groups that have not traditionally supported Tlaib. There is a sizable Jewish community in Southfield, which is included in the new district.

“In order to knock [Tlaib] off, there’s a path to do that,” Hemond said. “But that

involves a single candidate being able to unify those two disparate parts of a potential winning coalition. To the extent that they're competing over the same voters, that's not helpful to either one of them and trying to knock off Congresswoman Tlaib."

To win, Garrett will likely have to make "serious inroads in Detroit and consolidate support in Southern Oakland County, where she's from," but if Winfrey locks down the Detroit vote, "that may or may not be enough to get her over the hump, but it would certainly freeze Garrett out," Hemond continued.

Some pro-Israel donors affiliated with AIPAC organized a fundraiser for Winfrey before Garrett announced her campaign.

Garrett told JI she's currently "learning a lot about" Israel issues. She supports security assistance to Israel and a two-state solution, and said that she found opposition to supplemental funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system "disturbing," given the system's life-saving potential. Tlaib was one of nine House members who voted against the funding.

She said that she supports security assistance to Israel and a two-state solution, and said that she found opposition to supplemental funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system "disturbing," given the system's lifesaving potential. Tlaib was one of nine House members who voted against the funding.

She said she'd also seek to bridge the divide between the Jewish and Arab, Iranian and Chaldean communities in her district to "have some type of reconciliation if possible," "talk through the differences," and "correct misinformation" about Israel.

She provided greater specificity on her approach to Middle East policy, which she described as shaped by current geopolitical realities as well as "a historical and spiritual perspective," in a detailed position paper provided to JI following her interview.

"Israel is our longest term and most trusted partner in the Middle East, sharing the best American aspirations and values. As the only full democracy in the region, Israel is a genuinely multicultural society that serves as a beacon for what can exist in the region," the paper reads. "Ensuring that our ally remains safe and thrives makes American support for Israel's security good

American policy."

Garrett denounced attempts to "impose [Palestinian] statehood" through international organizations and also condemns "rejectionist international movements" such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement and the targeting of Israel at the United Nations and the International Criminal Court as "not constructive.

Garrett argued that the Palestinians must take the first step toward a two-state solution by "returning genuinely to the negotiating table" and ending support for terrorism, including the Palestinian Authority's payments to the families of terrorists. She also urged Israel to "demonstrate its commitment" by halting new settlement construction and ending discussions of unilateral annexation.

During her interview with JI, Garrett said she was not familiar enough with the specifics of Iran policy to "feel comfortable" expressing a definitive position, but anticipated that she would support President Joe Biden's efforts to re-enter the 2015 nuclear deal. She revised that stance in her position paper.

In the paper, the congressional hopeful wrote that she supports a diplomatic agreement with Iran as "critical to immediate and lasting security" but outlined a series of conditions she wants to see added to a renewed nuclear agreement: it must also have a duration of at least 25 years and include "enforceable restrictions" on nuclear weapons technology and ballistic missiles, an end to Iranian support for terrorist proxies, a Sunni Arab signatory state and a recognition of "shared human rights" and Israeli sovereignty.

Garrett praised the peace agreements, including the Abraham Accords, between Israel and Arab states, but called for them to be expanded to include military and security partnerships, as well as Shia Muslim states.

To protect Jews in the United States from rising rates of antisemitic hate crimes, Garrett told JI that she supports "harsher penalties" for antisemitic incidents as well as improved education. The reason "most of the people that are racist or discriminate against people is because they don't know any better," she said.

"I truly feel very passionate about

speaking out against it and having consequences to people that do have antisemitic type of undertones," she added.

Garrett said she's long held an affinity for the Jewish community, having grown up in Southfield in a "predominantly Jewish" neighborhood, celebrating Jewish holidays and learning about Jewish customs from community members. The Black and Jewish communities, she added, "have similar backgrounds."

She also said that she's personally been the victim of racist harassment, including vandalism at her house and receiving offensive messages online.

Bruce Cantor, Lathrup's mayor pro tem, who is Jewish, told JI that Garrett "treats everybody the same. She's very great at fostering diversity." He added the village does not have a large, organized Jewish community, but "she's got many friends that I can think of in the city, who are people who are active in the city, who are Jewish. She works well with everybody."

He also described Garrett as a "very knowledgeable" about city government and a "very good person to learn from."

"I think she would be great in Congress and just taking everything that she's learned at the local level and taking it to a more national level," Cantor said. "I think she'd be really good." ♦

Delia Ramirez hopes Springfield will be her springboard to Congress

The state representative is locked in a heated race with Chicago Alderman Gilbert Villegas

By Gabby Deutch

As the Latino population of Chicago continues to grow, two Latino Democrats, representing opposing poles of the party, are facing off in a new congressional district. And warring pro-Israel factions are staking their claims in the race.

Chicago Alderman Gilbert Villegas is a former union leader who is running on a moderate plank and emphasizing support for law enforcement. State Rep. Delia Ramirez, the assistant majority leader in the Statehouse, is campaigning as a progressive with the backing of national figures including Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and organizations such as Emily's List, the Working Families Party and the Congressional Progressive Caucus PAC. The 3rd District, which is centered around the city's Southwest Side, was created as a "Latino-influenced" open seat in the 2020 redistricting cycle.

Democratic Majority for Israel (DMFI) endorsed Villegas in the race, and J Street recently got behind Ramirez. But unlike in some of last week's high-profile primaries, where significant capital was spent on Democratic candidates, the groups have had minimal financial involvement in Illinois' new 3rd Congressional District. And AIPAC's new PAC — which has publicly sparred with J Street on social media about other races in which they've gone head-to-head — has not gotten behind a candidate in this race.

Ramirez outlined her views on Israel in an email to *Jewish Insider*. "I recognize the strong bond between the U.S. and Israel and believe their relationship should remain strong," she said. Ramirez, who declined an interview, does not appear to have commented publicly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the past.

Ramirez said she supports continued

U.S. military aid to Israel and said she "would have supported" legislation passed by the House last year authorizing \$1 billion in supplemental assistance to Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system.

J Street has supported legislation that would put restrictions on U.S. security assistance to Israel, although Ramirez did not say if she believes restrictions or limitations should be placed on U.S. aid to Israel. The restrictions are meant to keep Israel from unilaterally annexing parts of the West Bank.

Laura Birnbaum, J Street's national political director, said J Street leaders spoke about the issue with Ramirez. "I think that she understands the moral imperative behind it, for us to make sure that our security assistance is only being used for legitimate security needs," said Birnbaum.

Villegas, a Marine Corps veteran, has adopted a more traditional approach to the U.S.-Israel relationship. "When you have an ally, you have to support and work with that ally. You cannot attack it [and be] half-hearted. You have to be all in and support the only democracy in the region," he told *J* in February.

The best outcome for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a "permanent two-state solution that allows Israeli and Palestinians to live in peace and security in viable and prosperous states which respect the democratic, civil, and economic rights of all peoples," Ramirez wrote to *J*. "I support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security. I believe that this can only be fully realized as part of a two-state solution based on the borders before June 4, 1967, along with mutually agreed-upon land swaps."

Ramirez did not respond to a question asking her opinion on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

She pledged to fight antisemitism if she is elected to Congress.

"I am deeply concerned about the rising acts of antisemitism in the United States and around the world and I recognize the importance of Israel as a homeland and refuge for the Jewish people," Ramirez wrote. "I will oppose all forms of antisemitism and Islamophobia and will support legislation to secure the rights of Jews and Muslims to live without fear of violence and discrimination."

Ramirez also expressed support for U.S. efforts to reenter the Iran nuclear deal, officially referred to as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, despite stalled negotiations in Vienna. "I support President Biden's efforts to reenter the JCPOA. I am committed to curbing Iran's nuclear activities and other threatening behavior," she told *J*.

Villegas leads Ramirez in fundraising, having brought in \$395,000 from January through March, compared to \$303,000 for Ramirez in that period. A third candidate, Iymen Chehade, raised just \$48,000 in the first quarter. Chehade, who previously served as a foreign policy advisor on the campaign of Rep. Marie Newman (D-IL), is at the center of a congressional ethics investigation centered on the Illinois congresswoman. A report published in January by the Office of Congressional Ethics found that Newman had promised to employ Chehade based upon an agreement that he not challenge her in her 2020 congressional campaign.

Experts and sources close to both the Villegas and Ramirez campaigns agree that the race is far from settled, and both candidates have a shot at victory. The only polling in the race, conducted in March by a group that has endorsed Ramirez, showed her leading with 19% of the vote, compared

to 11% for Villegas. That poll found that two-thirds of voters were undecided.

"It'll be interesting to see what the voter turnout is. This is a new district, so they're not used to being in this," said Dick Simpson, a professor of political science at the University of Illinois Chicago and a former Chicago alderman. "It comes down to who's working the precincts, how many voters they're contacting and the media that you're able to buy in this last month, or six weeks from now."

In years past, Illinois congressional primaries have taken place in March, but this year the election was pushed back to June 28 to allow time for the redistricting process. The new date combined with the entirely new district means campaigns

must spend their time educating voters about their candidates. The winner of the primary in the heavily Democratic district is expected to win the general election in November.

Ramirez, a nonprofit executive and housing advocate, was elected to the Statehouse in 2018 and has become a progressive leader in the body. An early ally of hers — and her most prominent local endorsement — is Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia (D-IL), who represents an adjacent Chicago-area district and was one of eight Democrats to vote against approving supplemental funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system last year.

"She's fought hard in Springfield to secure critical resources to address housing

insecurity, health care expansion, immigrant protections and greater transparency in our educational institutions," Garcia, a staunch progressive, said of Ramirez in February. (Illinois' first-ever Latino congressman, former Rep. Luis Gutierrez, endorsed Villegas this week, citing his opposition to defunding the police.)

"The fact that Chuy Garcia endorses Ramirez ... doesn't mean that [she] shared Chuy Garcia's views on Israel. He's got a very broad agenda," Steve Sheffey, a prominent Democratic pro-Israel activist in Chicago, told JI. "When it comes to Israel, you shouldn't assume that his positions are going to be [her] positions, because obviously, on the Iron Dome supplemental, they certainly aren't." ♦

MAY 23, 2022

Socialist staffer on Jamaal Bowman's team details congressman's efforts to placate DSA

Amid pressure from Democratic Socialists, Bowman senior aide looks to reassure group that the N.Y. lawmaker is in its corner

By Matthew Kassel

Since he assumed office last year, Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) has frequently found himself at odds with a high-profile far-left ally — the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) — over differing approaches to Israel.

While Bowman has said he opposes the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel, for instance, the DSA supports the campaign, which has long been central to its foreign policy messaging. More recently, the freshman congressman has seen pushback from the DSA for voting to approve supplemental funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system and for visiting Israel in late 2021 on a trip sponsored by J Street.

In December, the DSA announced it would not re-endorse Bowman in the 2022 midterms, citing disagreements over his trip to Israel as well as his Iron Dome vote. The decision followed calls from some in the organization to expel him.

While the details of such tensions have

been largely unreported, a letter written by a Bowman staffer and posted to a private DSA message board outlines the extent to which the congressman's office has, even amid fierce opposition, worked behind the scenes to reassure DSA leadership that Bowman remains broadly aligned with the group's approach to Middle East policy.

The letter — recently obtained by *Jewish Insider* — was written by Rajiv Sicora, a senior policy adviser in Bowman's legislative office who describes himself as "a longtime socialist and one of several DSA members on the team."

"I support BDS, and have nothing but respect and solidarity for the many people who are trying in good faith to prioritize Palestine solidarity work in DSA," Sicora, who focuses on climate and energy policy, wrote. "I'm posting here from a place of distress about the organizational crisis we find ourselves in. I want to offer some crucial context, clear up some profound misunderstandings, and offer a plea for

deescalation."

The letter was published in mid-March, according to a source familiar with the DSA message board. It came shortly after the DSA's National Political Committee had disbanded its BDS and Palestine Solidarity working group, following tensions with Bowman that had also exposed divisions within the DSA itself.

"Nobody is under any obligation to like Bowman, and certainly not to re-endorse him," Sicora explained in the letter. "But please understand that throughout this process, you've been repeatedly lied to by certain leaders of the anti-Bowman camp."

Sicora did not respond to a request for comment.

In a statement to JI, Bowman said, "This staffer is speaking in their personal capacity and they do not handle foreign affairs. All foreign affairs are handled by the Chief of Staff."

Bowman, a high-profile Squad member and former Bronx principal, isn't the only

DSA-backed House candidate this cycle who has butted heads with the grassroots advocacy group. In February, JI published a letter from Greg Casar, a Democratic candidate in Texas's 35th Congressional District, in which he expressed opposition to BDS and said he supports military aid to Israel.

The DSA's Austin chapter subsequently announced it would "no longer be working on" Casar's congressional campaign and that Casar was himself pulling his request for an endorsement.

Bowman, 46, appears to have taken a more conciliatory route, notwithstanding calls for his expulsion that had left him "blindsided" and "understandably pissed," according to Sicora's letter. "Nevertheless, Bowman immediately entered into a discussion with" the DSA's BDS working group "about how to deescalate and find a way forward," Sicora wrote, noting that Bowman had been presented with a series of "demands" in order to patch things over after his Israel trip.

"The first step was de-cosponsoring the normalization bill," Sicora wrote, referring to Bowman's decision to withdraw his support for the Israel Relations Normalization Act. Bowman announced in February that he would vote against the bipartisan legislation aimed at strengthening and expanding the Abraham Accords, which established diplomatic relations between Israel and a number of Arab nations.

The Bronx congressman explained in a letter to constituents at the time that while he had initially viewed the bill "as an opportunity to make progress toward justice and healing in the Middle East," he had changed his mind after the J Street trip last November and now believes the Abraham Accords have, among other things, "unhelpfully" alienated the Palestinians.

Bowman did not mention any pressure from the DSA in his own letter, which angered Jewish voters in his current district, who make up a key constituency.

The DSA's working group had praised Bowman's decision to vote against the bill, but still criticized the timing of his reversal, which took place shortly after the heavily Jewish Bronx neighborhood of Riverdale had been removed from his district. In a social media post, the working group,

whose Twitter account is now suspended, suggested that Bowman had "only finally" removed his name from the bill after his new "district borders" excluded "an area with a heavy Zionist constituency."

But Sicora rejected such insinuations. "At no point did anyone on our team say that this would be contingent on the outcome of redistricting — that's another lie you've been told," he wrote. "This needed to be done in close collaboration with many different people and groups. We needed time to prepare and articulate a clearly laid out rationale, and again, we followed through."

Sicora said that Bowman had also followed through on his "commitment" to opposing the bill when he voted against one portion of a recent appropriations package that had included the legislation.

Bowman defended the vote in a press release in March, even as he recognized that there had been "elements of the defense spending section that, if voted on separately," he "would have supported," including Iron Dome funding. "However, the defense and incarceration package is bloated with substantial increases to our military spending, and even more funding for prisons and immigration and customs enforcement."

In his letter, Sicora suggested that such language had been strategic. "As for the press release mentioning that he wanted to vote yes on Iron Dome...we had already voted yes on that bill and taken the hit," he wrote. "Do I really have to explain what the function of such a press release might be in the middle of a tough primary in a district like ours? Notice how we went about the normalization de-sponsorship — by taking a beat to lay the groundwork in our district and tell our own story rather than letting our opponents define it."

"I can promise that you will continue seeing results, although it's going to be a process," Sicora added. "I can assure you that the next time we have something like a standalone Iron Dome vote, you will see Rep. Bowman vote no."

"We're making mistakes, and the risks of cooptation are real with any elected official," he said, "but we can work on these problems together."

Last week, Bowman signed on to a resolution that calls for the U.S. to

formally recognize the "Nakba" — the term Palestinians use to denote the mass Palestinian exodus that coincided with the foundation of Israel — and endorses the Palestinian right of return to Israel.

Despite recent pushback from the DSA over Bowman's approach to Israel, Sicora suggested that such tensions ultimately stemmed from a lack of communication going back to his initial bid for Congress, when the DSA endorsed his campaign despite obvious differences over the BDS movement.

Bowman had expressed his support for conditioning aid to Israel but publicly opposed BDS, noting in an interview with JI that he was not in favor of "singling out Israel."

"Bowman was very clear in his campaign last cycle that he did not support BDS, and that he would adopt a Bernie-esque orientation to Israel," Sicora said, a reference to Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT). "Given this, it's obviously debatable whether DSA should have endorsed him in the first place. But DSA did endorse. And I don't see anyone in the anti-Bowman camp taking any responsibility for that on behalf of DSA."

The congressman "had every reason to expect that he could diverge from the org on Israel and still work productively with it," Sicora wrote, noting that Bowman had "nevertheless established the closest relationship — by far — that any Squad member has yet had with the org."

"There was a real possibility of collaboration and co-governance," Sicora said. "He often elevated DSA to the media despite political conditions in the district. He's put real political muscle behind DSA priorities in New York State. And he has repeatedly expressed a desire and commitment to help the org expand in working class communities of color, which we had started to do with the GND for Public Schools campaign before all of this blew up."

Sicora was referring to a \$1.4 trillion education package, billed as a "Green New Deal for Public Schools," that Bowman introduced to the House last summer. "In several ways, that campaign was more about building long-term power for DSA than advancing our bill," Sicora said, "although it was on track to do both effectively."

"I strongly disagreed with Bowman's Iron

Dome vote and trip to Israel,” Sicora wrote. “But our door was always open to discuss these matters with anyone. We have always wanted to work and organize with partners to overcome our political challenges on this, we want to be pushed, and we started that process right away – just not with DSA, because they never sought out that kind of relationship on Palestine organizing.”

More recently, other DSA members “have been supremely confident in passing off their incorrect assumptions as fact,” Sicora charged, “and in failing to ask basic questions about what the political realities and constraints might be.”

Those constraints, Sicora argued, include holding the congressional seat formerly occupied by longtime Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), a pro-Israel stalwart who had chaired the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and facing a well-funded primary challenger who has actively opposed DSA policies while casting himself as a supporter of Israel.

Vedat Gashi, a Westchester County legislator, recently confirmed that he would remain in the race following a final round of redistricting that has pushed the primary back to August. He is Bowman’s only challenger.

“The politically convenient thing would be for Bowman to walk away from DSA,” Sicora wrote. “He hasn’t, despite considerable political pressure.”

Instead, Bowman remains “committed to working” with the DSA’s National Political Committee on Middle East foreign policy issues now that the BDS working group has been dissolved. “I realize some of you won’t take my word for it. That’s fine. Wait and see. Or better yet, reach out for a meeting and I will take it,” Sicora wrote. “But I beg you: please, do not keep looking for every little fucking reason to attack Jamaal Bowman and stir up conflict related to Jamaal Bowman. Again, you don’t have to like him. But he is a working-class Black socialist who represents both the Bronx and wealthy areas of Westchester, and will grow the reach of the socialist movement with or without DSA.”

“He is not a supporter of Israeli apartheid,” Sicora added. “He’s going to keep saying cringe stuff from time to time, and he’s going to keep saying nice things

about Biden and other members of the Dem establishment. Sometimes that stuff is heartfelt, sometimes it’s strategic. Very little of it is worth a second thought or even a sliver of energy from a socialist organization that, in my estimation, needs to have its shit together to make it possible for humanity to even survive.”

Sicora noted that some opponents have claimed that “Bowman’s actions have damaged DSA’s credibility with Palestinian activists,” a charge he rejected only haltingly. “To be perfectly honest, I’m very skeptical that is true; you should be able to at least point to the overwhelming force of the reaction against him. I may be wrong about that, and I’m open to hearing more. What I do not accept, and what all members should reject out of basic comradeship, is the idea that Bowman and even his DSA supporters are morally bankrupt opportunists who are responsible for doing material harm to Palestinians.”

“The Iron Dome vote and Israel trip, though absolutely worthy of condemnation, were fundamentally symbolic actions that did not come remotely close to changing near-term outcomes — and to be clear, symbolic actions are often very important, I’m not denying that,” Sicora said. “These were mistakes that can and will be balanced with our positive contributions to the Palestinian struggle.” ♦

Read the full letter below. The copy of the letter obtained by Jewish Insider had, in several spots, formatting that obscured some of the letter’s contents. Those passages will be noted in the letter.

Hey comrades,

I work for Jamaal Bowman as a member of his legislative team in DC. I’m a longtime socialist and one of several DSA members on the team; I focus on climate and energy policy and was lead staffer on the GND for Public Schools bill. Needless to say, I’m speaking here in my personal capacity as a DSA member. (Let me say it again with the clauses reversed: I am speaking as a DSA member in my personal capacity.) I support BDS, and have nothing but respect and solidarity for the many people who are trying in good faith to prioritize Palestine

solidarity work in DSA. I’m posting here from a place of distress about the organizational crisis we find ourselves in. I want to offer some crucial context, clear up some profound misunderstandings, and offer a plea for deescalation.

Nobody is under any obligation to like Bowman, and certainly not to re-endorse him. But please understand that throughout this process, you’ve been repeatedly lied to by certain leaders of the anti-Bowman camp. I won’t speculate on their motives. Other participants have been supremely confident in passing off their incorrect assumptions as fact, and in failing to ask basic questions about what the political realities and constraints might be. Elliot Engel’s former seat is not an easy place to be pro-Palestinian, and we’re in the middle of a tough primary, which we could lose to a challenger who is running on an overtly anti-DSA and anti-Palestinian platform. The politically convenient thing would be for Bowman to walk away from DSA. He hasn’t, despite considerable political pressure.

I’ll start from the beginning. The first falsehood is that BDS WG tried in good faith to engage with us over a period of months. That simply did not happen.

Backing up even further: Bowman was very clear in his campaign last cycle that he did not support BDS, and that he would adopt a Bernie-esque orientation to Israel. Given this, it’s obviously debatable whether DSA should have endorsed him in the first place. But DSA did endorse. And I don’t see anyone in the anti-Bowman camp taking any responsibility for that on behalf of DSA. I’ve rarely seen constructive discussion about how DSA could relate strategically and carefully to Bowman and the rest of the Squad (none of whom are genuine cadre candidates or have high levels of accountability to DSA, but all of whom have massive and barely tapped potential to grow the org during this phase).

For better or worse, in light of the circumstances of his endorsement, Bowman had every reason to expect that he could diverge from the org on Israel and still work productively with it. Despite DSA not having much of a presence in his district, and not playing much of a role in getting him elected, we nevertheless established the closest relationship – by far – that any

Squad member has yet had with the org. There was a real possibility of collaboration and co-governance. He often elevated DSA to the media despite political conditions in the district. He's put real political muscle behind DSA priorities in New York State. And he has repeatedly expressed a desire and commitment to help the org expand in working class communities of color, which we had started to do with the GND for Public Schools campaign before all of this blew up. In several ways, that campaign was more about building long-term power for DSA than advancing our bill, although it was on track to do both effectively.

I strongly disagreed with Bowman's Iron Dome vote and trip to Israel. But our door was always open to discuss these matters with anyone. We have always wanted to work and organize with partners to overcome our political challenges on this, we want to be pushed, and we started that process right away – just not with DSA, because they never sought out that kind of relationship on Palestine organizing. Before the calls for expulsion started and quickly escalated, we had one single, amicable meeting with BDS WG reps. Their main ask was to change and soften how he talked about his opposition to BDS. By all accounts, he followed through right away. And before the uproar started, that was basically the only substantial exchange.

So Bowman was blindsided by the expulsion campaign, and understandably pissed given everything I've just outlined. The calls to expel handed a potent tool to establishment Dems who want to portray the org as racist, and Bowman heard a lot of that personally. (The contrast with Bernie's treatment by the org is very real, and the fact that Bernie is not a member is patently not a satisfying answer.) Nevertheless, Bowman immediately entered into a discussion with BDS WG about how to deescalate and find a way forward. He shared how the trip had strengthened his resolve to do more to fight for Palestine, and we offered to meet as many of BDS WG's demands as possible – despite the fact that they'd gone from 0 to 10 out of nowhere, and didn't even try to build a real relationship with us (again, the door was always open). He's never criticized or done anything to undermine DSA in response, beyond pointing out that Twitter

hate isn't helpful.

There were so many ways we could have figured this out constructively – including a planned and managed parting of the ways between Bowman and DSA. But the WG again chose a maximalist position. They gave us an ultimatum that every single demand had to be agreed to in a matter of weeks (after previously conveying there was room to have differences), and at least twice during the back and forth, they changed and added to their demands at the last minute. There is no way we could do everything they were asking without laying some organizing and political groundwork, and the WG knew that.

[Text obscured by formatting] to was a demand to immediately cut ties with J Street and back out of an event within 48 hours – an example of a last-minute demand that was not brought up at the initial meeting with Bowman. Regarding every other ask, we were clear that we wanted to work with DSA to make it happen (some, but not all, were things we wanted to do anyway). We made it clear that we would need some time and organizing help. The WG chose to reject the offer and continue on the warpath against us – but we remained, and still remain, committed to working through the same demands with NPC, and to bringing more of you into the process. I hate that we haven't been able to be more transparent about the details, but there are good reasons for this that you should be able to infer.

The first step was de-cosponsoring the normalization bill. At no point did anyone on our team say that this would be contingent on the outcome of redistricting – that's another lie you've been told. This needed to be done in close collaboration with many different people and groups. We needed time to prepare and articulate a clearly laid out rationale, and again, we followed through.

Finally, on the recent Appropriations vote: that package did contain the Israel normalization bill folded in, so Bowman did keep his commitment to voting against it. As for the press release mentioning that he wanted to vote yes on Iron Dome...we had already voted yes on that bill and taken the hit. Do I really have to explain what the function of such a press release might be in the middle of a tough primary in a district

like ours? Notice how we went about the normalization de- sponsorship – by taking a beat to lay the groundwork in our district and tell our own story rather than letting our opponents define it. I can promise that you will continue seeing results, although it's going to be a process. I can assure you that the next time we have something like a standalone Iron Dome vote, you will see Rep. Bowman vote no.

So yes, the infamous thread was full of lies. I realize some of you won't take my word for it. That's fine. Wait and see. Or better yet, reach out for a meeting and I will take it.

But I beg you: please, do not keep looking for every little fucking reason to attack Jamaal Bowman and stir up conflict related to Jamaal Bowman. Again, you don't have to like him. But he is a working-class Black socialist who represents both the Bronx and wealthy areas of Westchester, and will grow the reach of the socialist movement with or without DSA. He's a deeply moral person and a visionary thinker who, as you all know at this point, also has a problem with red lines – he wants to work with as many people as possible, he's impatient to get things done, he wants to make progress on incremental stuff at the same time as we organize for transformative change. He is not a supporter of Israeli apartheid. He's going to keep saying cringe stuff from time to time, and he's going to keep saying nice things about Biden and other members of the Dem establishment. Sometimes that stuff is heartfelt, sometimes it's strategic. Very little of it is worth a second thought or even a sliver of energy from a socialist organization that, in my estimation, needs to have its shit together to make it possible for humanity to even survive.

Congress is an insane and endlessly difficult place to try to do anything worthwhile, and in addition to the many challenges associated with being a Squad member, Bowman faces constant hostility from the Westchester Dem establishment for being a socialist. As I mentioned earlier, it's the basis of his main primary challenge. Nevertheless, he regularly makes the case for socialism to all kinds of people in our (again, relatively moderate) district. He is also extremely motivated to put real, sustained political weight behind campaigns for radical change. We're making mistakes, and

the risks of cooptation are real with any elected official, but we can work on these problems together.

[Text obscured by formatting] DSA has to re-endorse him; we stopped expecting that long ago. But we don't have to continue this destructive obsession that risks tearing DSA apart, and is not helping Palestine. I'm pretty confident that even when we have genuine cadre electeds at the national level, who have better relationships of accountability with DSA – a day that I eagerly await, and that development will only have a positive impact on the Squad – we will continue to encounter some of these same problems. We have to figure out how to deal with them without resorting to the abusive tactics that have come to the forefront here.

Some claim Bowman's actions have damaged DSA's credibility with Palestinian activists. To be perfectly honest, I'm very skeptical that is true; you should be able to at least point to the overwhelming force of the reaction against him. I may be wrong about that, and I'm open to hearing more. What I do not accept, and what all members should reject out of basic comradeship, is the idea that Bowman and even his DSA supporters are morally bankrupt opportunists who are responsible for doing material harm to Palestinians. It would make just as much sense for me to say that anti-Bowman activists, by making it impossible for the GND for Public Schools campaign to continue, are responsible for depriving working-class Black and brown children of desperately needed investments to protect their health. Because we did come damn close to winning tens of billions of dollars in school infrastructure investment (in Build Back Better) that would have saved lives. But I would never make that accusation, because it would be fucking ridiculous. The Iron Dome vote and Israel trip, though absolutely worthy of condemnation, were fundamentally symbolic actions that did not come remotely close to changing near-term outcomes – and to be clear, symbolic actions are often very important, I'm not denying that. These were mistakes that can and will be balanced with our positive contributions to the Palestinian struggle.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can prioritize Palestine in DSA, and we can debate and develop alternatives to

electoralism, without tearing down the work of other comrades who are putting blood, sweat, and tears into projects that happen to involve electoral politics. And certainly vice versa. Some comrades are trying to use distortion, extreme moralism that is disconnected from any materialist analysis, and an unholy alliance with Twitter's algorithm to convince you that it's impossible to move Bowman when the process has barely begun, or even that it's impossible to win meaningful reforms in the context of the climate crisis and rising fascism. We are not yet a powerful enough left for these conflicts and disagreements to have real stakes beyond their ability to divide and marginalize us. People can have different roles to play right now.

Our opponents are of course happy to see this infighting, at a time when the Palestinian struggle is growing stronger. What is DSA's contribution? It can't be about attacking Jamaal Bowman and making life hell for the NPC.

Whatever you think of this, please don't leak it. And I'm happy to talk more with anyone.

In solidarity,

Rajiv Sicora