

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

*The Londoner putting a twist on the traditional Shabbat dinner; What's at stake in Israel's next election; For many Pennsylvania Jewish Republicans, yes to Oz and no to Mastriano; In Georgia, Raphael Warnock makes the case for a Senate full term; In Conor Lamb's Western Pennsylvania district, it's anyone's race; Here are the lessons Jewish security officials learned during the first High Holiday season since the Colleyville attack; and Israeli startup funding cut in half amid global slowdown.*

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## The Londoner putting a twist on the traditional Shabbat dinner

*The carefully curated new initiative to bring young London Jews together isn't a religious event, charity benefit or singles mixer*

By Jenni Frazer

It's probably safe to say that no Friday night Shabbat dinner invitation ever landed quite like Londoner Dalia Lister's: You're not coming here to sit in a corner of the room with your friends, the invite warned, adding, if you're not going to participate, you're not welcome in the community.

The fledgling — and carefully curated — community that Lister is trying to build for young Jewish professionals in London launched in early September with “Not Your Mum’s Friday Night Dinner.” It’s not a religious event, or a charity event, or a singles mixer. “I didn’t want it to be just another social event,” Lister, 24 and the chief of staff at a tech startup, told *Jewish Insider*. “I wanted it to be for people who really wanted to come and mingle, who wanted to meet other people. Particularly now, post-COVID, when everything has been online.”

Lister is a graduate of Imperial College, London, where she studied engineering.

At 15 she began working as an intern for the owners of the educational technology startup company UpTime, where she is now chief of staff.

During her adolescence, she told *JI*, she was never allowed to go to parties with her non-Jewish school friends on Friday nights. But once out in the world of work, she discovered different options: “religious events, in synagogues, which I do go to, and charity events.

“But some people don’t feel comfortable in a shul, or perhaps haven’t grown up going to shul,” Lister added. “On the other hand, there are charity events, that I’ve also gone to, and they’re also great, and I support many of them and am an ambassador for a couple of them. But again, they don’t attract everyone. And then there are singles events, but there isn’t actually anything for connecting people, whether you are single or not.”

Lister now lives in central London and

is a member of nearby Mortimer House, a members’ club that houses a co-working space, bars and a restaurant, a small workout gym and private rooms for hire for meetings. She began discussing her idea of a Jewish young professionals event with Mortimer House staff in August — and it was suggested that it should be held at the club.

In 2022 London, even a social event needs meticulous planning; and so Lister, true to her business instincts, drew up a business plan. “It was to be a young persons’ dinner for connecting people, but a traditional Friday night format. I said it wasn’t to be religiously affiliated or charity affiliated. I wanted to bring together young people around London aged between 23-35, motivated, engaged people.”

She posted a piece on her private Instagram account about the planning for “Not Your Mum’s” — “and I had 25 messages in 10 minutes from people asking where

they could sign up.” Sensing that she was on to something, Lister opened an online waitlist — “and in two weeks 170 people had signed.”

Using a work marketing technique where “member begets member,” Lister then picked different “ambassadors,” either in different age ranges or in different groupings, such as global professionals working in London, and people in different professions — “tech, finance, the arts, journalism.” She asked them to help her by posting on their own social media and talking to their contacts. “Everyone wanted to be involved.”

For Mortimer House, Lister says, the appeal was in attracting a new and slightly younger demographic to the club. She began making flyers and also some online pages to describe what she was doing.

The first “Not Your Mum” event included some ground rules. “I said it wasn’t cool to be cliquey, and that if you don’t mingle, you won’t be invited back,” Lister explained. “I was taking a stance — saying to people, you’re not coming here to sit in a corner of the room with your friends. If you’re not going to participate, you’re not welcome in the community.” This appears to have acted as somewhat of a wake-up call, telling potential participants that this was going to be a different kind of event from “something that their mother had pushed them to attend, saying, ‘Go to this, maybe you’ll meet your husband or wife.’”

She also required people to say who had referred them, meaning she could track how people were hearing about the event. “At the end of the day, it is a Jewish event, so it had to be a safe environment. But it was also good to know how the wait list had grown.”

As word spread, it became apparent that there were whole untapped numbers of young professionals in London — because Lister herself, familiar with the London Jewish social scene, did not know half of the names on the list.

On Sept. 9, “Not Your Mum’s Friday Night Dinner” took place for the first time at Mortimer House. Seventy people sat down for a traditional Shabbat dinner. “People came after work, and had drinks; then we sat down, there was kiddush, and because it was the day after the Queen died, we also had the prayer for the Royal Family [usually said in U.K. synagogues on Shabbat], with

the first mention of King Charles.”

There were flowers on the tables, and lists of ice-breaking “conversation starters” — jokey ideas to get the talk flowing, such as asking people how they signed off emails, or what were their “red lines” [for ending a conversation or a relationship]. And Lister also produced a “founder’s note,” welcoming guests — who had each paid £55 (\$62) for the evening — and setting out some of her thoughts about the event.

It was nearly midnight by the time the last person left Mortimer House. “People loved it. It was very, very, mingly” — aided by Lister’s ambassadors, who spent time introducing people to each other over the course of the evening. “Someone said it was the best Jewish event they’d ever been to, which is a massive compliment — and you do like to get customer satisfaction.”

Ben, a longtime friend of Lister, was among those who helped her organize the event. A 26-year-old working in venture capital, he thought the intention was to hold an event “not associated with any charity, synagogue or rabbi, but that it should be a stand-alone, unique Friday night.”

It wasn’t like a regular singles event, he says, more networking for young professionals — and even some people who attended in couples. “It was refreshing, because it was very different. There was no agenda, it was free-flowing, and attracted a very good audience. I only knew about six or seven people there. I think there was an appetite for seeing people in the aftermath of COVID.”

Another friend of Lister, Claudia, is 24 and a journalist. She thought the idea was “really exciting; there is definitely a gap in the market for something like this. The focus was very much on making friends — I went with my boyfriend and we met lots of new people. It was also really nice to go to a Jewish event which wasn’t super-religious.”

Nothing could have been more tailor-made for Olivia, 27, who is French-American — her father lives in Singapore and her mother in Paris — because she had landed a new job just four weeks earlier, as head of creative promotions at Lister’s company. “I arrived in London and met Dalia,” she told *JL*. “When we realized we were both Jewish, she told me about the Friday night event. It was the first time I had ever been to anything

like that on my own, and I felt very much at ease. People were very friendly, keen to meet and talk.”

The well-established French community in London lacks a strong Jewish presence, so Olivia was more than happy to go to Lister’s event. “I wanted to meet new people in London with similar values and who had had a similar upbringing. I felt very comfortable and I’d happily do it again. I’m now in touch with people who were there. I’d never have thought of going to a Jewish event alone but it was a great and warm atmosphere, I really enjoyed it. I think actually it was a reflection of Dalia’s personality — she is very warm and welcoming, and the event mirrored that.”

Now Lister is considering how to follow up. She’s decided to run “Not Your Mum’s Friday Night Dinner” four times a year, continuing with sponsorship from drinks companies and Mortimer House itself. She’s also found interest from non-Jewish people — not least, she says, because people want to network and don’t go to pubs anymore to do that. “It’s also about creating a comfortable environment,” she says.

She’s already planning a Halloween event for 150 people, both Jews and non-Jews, for Oct. 29 (“Not Your Neighbourhood Trick or Treat”), which has attracted several commercial sponsors, and says the format has the potential to move to other venues.

“In tech, we have this concept of ‘test and learn.’ So for the ‘Not Your’ events, I’m learning all the time what works and what doesn’t. And all the skills I’m using now, I’ve learned at work.”

Lister grew up attending secular schools. The experience, she says, has made her fiercely committed to her Judaism, but also open to the cultural opportunities in the wider community. But she has always appreciated the breathing space that Shabbat gives, and going back to “people that you love” on a Friday night.

Ironically, Lister did actually get advice from her own mother before the Sept. 9 event. “Just make it a really good event,” Lister’s mother told her. “Just make it something that people will really want to come to.”

Who was it said, if you will it, it’s no dream? Lister seems to have listened to her mother. ♦

# What's at stake in Israel's next election

*The central issue of this election is the same one that has dominated campaigns in consecutive cycles: Benjamin Netanyahu*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

With less than 14 days until Israelis return to the polls for a fifth general election in as many years, signs that the country is in the midst of another political race are hard to find.

Some blame public apathy toward the November 1 election on the lazy days of summer vacation, followed by nearly a month of Jewish holidays. Others say Israelis are fed up with an unstable political system that has been in crisis for four years. Whatever the reason, this election appears unlikely to bring about any dramatic changes.

Yet political analysts who are closely watching the race say that it might be the most decisive election the country has faced so far, with matters such as the rule of law and political identity at stake.

*Jewish Insider* discussed the upcoming vote with three political observers – Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, Aviv Bushinsky, a political commentator and a former chief of staff to former Prime Minister and current Opposition Leader Benjamin Netanyahu, and Jonathan Rynhold, head of the political studies department at Israel's Bar Ilan University – to ask why the country is embroiled in this never-ending cycle of elections, what is this election about and what it will take for Netanyahu to return to power?

Polls published this week gave Netanyahu's Likud around 30 seats out of the 120 in Israel's Knesset. The right-wing bloc that backs him, however, appears to fall short of the requisite 61 seats needed to form a government.

Yesh Atid, the party of Prime Minister Yair Lapid, who took over as caretaker leader in July, polled at 25 seats. That gives the current government bloc – the anti-Netanyahu bloc – 57 seats, with the outsider

Arab party, Hadash/Ta'al, hovering at the electoral threshold with the minimum of four seats.

A report published this week by Israeli daily *Haaretz* noted that campaigns for the election, which was called in June, have been slow to kick off. With two weeks until Israelis cast their ballots, the competing political parties have spent only about 30 percent of their campaign budgets, with most focusing their efforts on a push during the final week. Netanyahu is reportedly placing emphasis on mobilizing older members of his party, with Likud supporters engaging in door-to-door canvassing. Lapid, meanwhile, is treading a fine line between poaching voters from potential coalition partners to the left of the political spectrum and ensuring high voter turnout across the board, with a particular focus on Arab voters.

Following are a series of brief interviews with Israel's top political analysts. Their answers have been edited for clarity and brevity:

## Why is Israel holding its fifth election in four years?

**Plesner:** It's a reflection of the deep divide over the Netanyahu question, and of the deeper, structural weaknesses of our electoral and constitutional system. Basically, there's an immediate conflict/dispute around Netanyahu and his role in Israeli public life. He has the strongest positive support and the strongest negative rejection. At the same time, it has brought to the surface the fact that our electoral system has inherent weaknesses. It's particularly easy to disperse the Israeli Knesset, compared to other parliamentary democracies, and the constitutional arrangements in Israel are not well secured or etched in stone, therefore, in times of

crisis, like now, there's a temptation to try to undermine those constitutional arrangements.

**Bushinsky:** The easy answer is Benjamin Netanyahu. The second answer is that there is a shift in Israeli society that politicians either don't recognize or don't want to accept. The shift is that the majority of Israelis have shifted towards the right, yet the parties are still stagnant or decadent and refuse to accept it.

**Rynhold:** Israel is having another election because the political system, the Knesset, is divided sharply between two blocs – those that support Benjamin Netanyahu and those that oppose him. These blocks are evenly divided. It's complicated, however, because there are many different parties that make up the bloc against Netanyahu and there are many major issues on which they disagree, making it difficult for them to form a stable government. Equally, until now, within the right-wing parties, there were people who agreed with Netanyahu on questions of policy but felt he was unsuitable to be prime minister because he is in the middle of a corruption court case.

## What is the theme of this election? What's at stake?

**Plesner:** If you ask the majority of Israelis what they would want [the election] to be about, they would say the economy or cost of living, safety and the threat of terrorism. But this is not what's at stake in this election. This is an extremely consequential election, perhaps even the most consequential election in the country's history because the fundamental constitutional arrangements that have characterized Israeli democracy

since its foundation are at risk from radical initiatives to reform or change them.

**Bushinsky:** It's still the same question as five elections ago: Netanyahu. Lapid says he's even willing to go to a sixth election, as long as Netanyahu does not return to power. If Netanyahu gets more than 59 seats, then he'll be the one who will form the government. However, I have a theory that if Netanyahu's bloc gets less than 59 or his party receives less than 32 mandates, then someone will get rid of him.

**Rynhold:** The key issue is Netanyahu. This is an issue because those who do not want him to be prime minister feel that the rule of law in Israel is at stake. They feel this because they've come to believe that Netanyahu is willing to stop at nothing in order to avoid going to prison and that he is willing to corrupt the legal system to do that.

**What needs to happen for Netanyahu, and his bloc, to return to power?**

**Plesner:** If I had to single out one factor that will have the most significant impact on the outcome of the election and on Netanyahu's probability of returning to power, it would be the level of participation by the Arab minority. Until recently, predictions were that their participation will be even lower than the 40 or so percent of the previous election. Now there are reports of it changing, but it's too early to tell whether those reports are genuine.

**Bushinsky:** It's dependent on how many people eventually will go to the ballot. In the last elections we had 64.7% of voters, which is pretty high in any Western democratic country, but for Netanyahu to be elected, it might not be enough. This is why he's focusing on bringing the 200,000 right-wing supporters to the ballots. However, I can't see why this time they'll come because I don't see any big change.

**Rynhold:** First of all, there are voters who could theoretically vote for the parties in either bloc. They are primarily center-right voters, so they could vote for [Defense Minister Benny] Gantz because there are former members of the Likud in his party. Or they could remain with Netanyahu, but they have a problem with him because of his corruption cases and they have a problem with voting for anything other than a right-wing party.

The second problem is turnout. Turnout affects the Israeli election, particularly Arab turnout. The turnout is important because it can affect whether parties cross the electoral threshold of 3.25%. In other words, you can get around close to 200,000 votes, if there's a high turnout and still not crossed the threshold. So parties like the Arab parties, which have now split, are in danger of not crossing the threshold and if they don't, then their votes will be redistributed and that will almost certainly help Netanyahu.

**What factors could help Lapid stay in power?**

**Plesner:** First of all, since Israel's electoral system doesn't necessarily produce a decisive outcome, because Lapid is the default prime minister, if no other government is formed then he will remain prime minister. This is probably the most natural path for him to continue in that position. Secondly, if Netanyahu does not achieve a majority of 61 Knesset seats for his bloc, this might open up alternative options for Lapid.

**Bushinsky:** I don't see any scenario whereby Lapid will stay prime minister and I think he knows that because you can see how he is running his campaign. His campaign is not to fight for the bloc, for the anti-Netanyahu bloc, he is fighting to get as many voters for his party as he can to be the second largest party. There is one thing that could happen, though most people disagree with me, and that is Netanyahu and Lapid striking a [power-sharing] deal after the elections.

**Rynhold:** Arab turnout is the most important thing for Lapid too. If no one can form a government, then he remains prime minister until there is another election, which means all he needs to do is make sure that Netanyahu doesn't get 61 seats. Therefore, he needs a good turnout from the Arab sector. ♦

# For many Pennsylvania Jewish Republicans, yes to Oz and no to Mastriano

*Some Jewish voters in the state are expressing reluctance to vote for the GOP gubernatorial nominee, citing his associations with far-right figures and comparisons to the Holocaust*

By Gabby Deutch

As one of the country's deepest purple states, every vote counts in Pennsylvania, and candidates know it. Joe Biden beat Donald Trump by just over 1 percentage point in 2020, and four years earlier, Trump bested Hillary Clinton by less than a point.

And in a state with the nation's fifth-largest Jewish population — a total that represents 3% of the state's electorate — every Jewish vote counts too. In two key races in the state — an open Senate seat and the battle for the governor's mansion — Jewish Republicans are straddling party lines, their loyalties tested. They appear to be unifying around Dr. Mehmet Oz, the prominent talk show host and the party's Senate nominee. But they also appear to be leaving gubernatorial nominee Doug Mastriano behind, several Jewish Pennsylvanians told *Jewish Insider*.

"I think that Mastriano's support in the Jewish Republican community isn't zero, but it's about as low as it — it's pretty low," said Jon Tucker, a Pittsburgh orthopedic surgeon who switched his party registration from Democrat to Republican in 2015. "Of all the people that I know, I mean, I probably only know one person who's gonna vote for Mastriano, but he's also an election denier and conspiracy theorist."

Tucker, who went to medical school with Oz, was touching on some of the many controversies that have embroiled Mastriano's campaign. The Pennsylvania state senator has come under fire for his presence at the Capitol grounds on Jan. 6, 2021, his support for election fraud conspiracies and his association with Andrew Torba, the founder of Gab, a social-

media platform preferred by antisemites. Tucker called Mastriano's association with Gab "a window into how he thinks, which is very rigidly right-wing, with not just Christian overtones, but religion before government and that's antithetical to everything this country's about."

Mastriano's critics have called him a "Christian nationalist," a term he has not personally used. But he does speak often about Christianity and what he views as its important place in America, and the role of God in national affairs. At his campaign launch event last year, Mastriano appeared with a pastor dressed in a Jewish prayer shawl who blew the shofar. He also has a yearslong history of invoking the Holocaust when talking about his political opponents and policies with which he disagrees.

"No Jew can pull the lever for Doug Mastriano. I don't know how any Jew could look themselves in the mirror and think that that's a good vote," said Steve Rosenberg, a self-described conservative who until recently was an executive at the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia.

Mastriano is competing against Josh Shapiro, the state's Democratic attorney general, who has made his Jewish identity central to his campaign and is banking on the support of Republicans to defeat his GOP opponent. In recent weeks, he has rolled out endorsements from prominent Pennsylvania Republicans, including former U.S. Reps. Charlie Dent and Jim Greenwood, and from unions such as the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police, which usually supports Republicans. (It also endorsed Oz.) Shapiro's supporters like to point out that he earned more votes in the state in 2020 than

Biden did.

"I think you're going to have Republicans voting for [Shapiro] because they can't bring themselves to vote for Mastriano," said Jill Zipin, the co-founder of a group called Democratic Jewish Outreach Pennsylvania that is campaigning for Shapiro and John Fetterman, the state's Democratic lieutenant governor who is challenging Oz. Roughly 70% of U.S. Jews support the Democratic Party, polling has consistently shown.

"I think among some Republicans who find Mastriano repugnant, the same Republicans don't attach that same level of repugnance to Oz. They just view him more as, like, a Toomey, if you want to call it, Republican," said Zipin, referring to Sen. Pat Toomey, the state's Republican senator who is not seeking reelection this year and whose views skew more moderate than Mastriano's.

Public-opinion polling in Pennsylvania shows Oz performing better than Mastriano, although both candidates are currently polling below their Democratic counterparts. According to *FiveThirtyEight's* average of recent polls, Shapiro holds a 10-point lead over Mastriano. In the Senate race, Fetterman holds a six-point lead over Oz, but the margin between the two has narrowed in recent weeks. Both Oz and Mastriano have been endorsed by Trump.

Oz has "done two things" since the state's May primary to shore up support, said Berwood Yost, director of the Center for Opinion Research at Franklin & Marshall College, which has conducted polling in both races. "One is consolidated Republican support. Our last poll showed far more Republicans supporting him now than did



in August.” The other, Yost added, is that Oz has “also made an effort to moderate his stance.”

In September, Oz said he would have voted to certify Pennsylvania’s electors in 2020, and that while he is “strongly pro-life,” he would support abortion in cases of rape, incest or to protect the life of the mother. Mastriano said in 2019 that he supported a so-called “heartbeat bill” that would ban abortion after a fetus’s heartbeat was detected, as early as six weeks, with no exceptions. When asked whether women who obtained an abortion at 10 weeks should be charged with murder, he said yes.

“Abortion is required [in Judaism] if it’s a threat to the life of a mother. It’s required. So a Jewish person that takes Jewish law seriously, *halacha* seriously, you really can’t vote for him. Jews believe all kinds of things on abortion, but certainly he’s well beyond the pale,” said Lou Weiss, a pro-Israel activist in Pittsburgh who usually votes Republican. This year he has a Josh Shapiro sign on his lawn. “I consider myself a conservative and a Republican, but there’s no way I can vote for [Mastriano]. I mean, just really off the charts, with the kind of stuff he’s saying.”

The Republican Jewish Coalition has declined to endorse Mastriano, and in July, the group’s executive director, Matt Brooks, said Mastriano’s campaign “unfortunately seems intent on sending a message of exclusion. Jewish voters expect candidates to condemn antisemitism whether it comes from the far left or the far right — and to shun those who espouse it.”

“There will be A LOT of Shapiro/Oz ticket splitting votes,” Brooks tweeted last month. The RJC has gone all-in for Oz; in August, the group hosted an event in which Oz appeared next to Trump-appointed U.S. ambassador to Israel David Friedman. Earlier this week, the organization’s affiliated super PAC announced a \$1.5 million television ad buy that will target Black voters in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia with an anti-Fetterman message. The advertisements target Fetterman for a 2013 incident — for which he received significant criticism from Democrats in the Senate primary — in which he pulled out a shotgun to stop and detain an unarmed Black jogger. Fetterman was the mayor of Braddock, Pa., outside of Pittsburgh, at the time.

Fetterman has struggled in recent months since suffering a stroke in May, just before the general election campaign kicked off.

In July, he addressed Democratic Jewish Outreach in Pennsylvania, and attendees “could see the effects of the stroke,” said Zipin. She saw him speak again about a week ago. “He was much better than he was in July. He was able to use humor effectively, he was able to make his points effectively,” noted Zipin, who said he seems to be at “95%.”

Yost, the pollster, observed that Fetterman “just hasn’t been able to spend time doing rallies and meetings and all the kinds of things that he was doing before the stroke,” but suggested that his slowed-down campaigning has likely not led to Fetterman losing support. “Most of the changes that we’ve seen in the race since August hasn’t been Fetterman losing support. It’s been Oz accumulating support among Republicans,” Yost added.

“Fetterman at this point is going to need Josh Shapiro to have enough of a margin over Mastriano that he can pull Fetterman over the finish line,” said Larry Ceisler, a Philadelphia Democrat who runs a public affairs firm.

For Jewish voters, Shapiro is a familiar figure, even to Republicans. Jeff Bartos, a prominent Pennsylvania Republican, is co-chairing Oz’s Senate campaign, but his wife Sheryl recently hosted a fundraiser for Shapiro. The Shapiros’ children and the Bartoses’ children both attend or have attended Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy in Bryn Mawr, Pa., where Shapiro also went as a child (when it was called Akiba Hebrew Academy) — a school that Mastriano recently attacked as “one of the most privileged schools in the nation.” Mastriano characterized Shapiro sending his children there as an example of “him having disdain for people like us.”

The comment prompted CNN anchor Jake Tapper, also an Akiba graduate, to criticize Mastriano. “I don’t think I have ever heard Mr. Mastriano describe any other Pennsylvania parochial schools in that way, elite, exclusive, privileged, full of disdain for fellow Americans. Philadelphia has a ton of fancy prep schools, but Akiba Hebrew Academy was not one of them,” said Tapper.

“I don’t vote for a candidate because they are a Jew or not a Jew,” said Rosenberg, the former Philadelphia Federation professional. “I got to know Josh at my time at the Jewish Federation, and Josh is going to be there for the Jewish community. He’s going to be there for the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.” ♦

# In Georgia, Raphael Warnock makes the case for a Senate full term

*Supporters of the Democrat, who came under criticism during the 2020 campaign for his comments about Israel, point to his voting record on Israel issues since taking office*

By Matthew Kassel

On a recent evening in early October, Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) took the stage at a Jewish campaign event in suburban Atlanta to celebrate the recent conclusion of Rosh Hashanah. “It’s great to be among friends,” he said warmly, addressing a packed room of more than 200 enthusiastic supporters. “I need us to do it one more time.”

Dressed in a crisp blue suit, the 53-year-old senator, who built long-standing relationships with Jewish community members while leading Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta — where he continues to preach every Sunday — was clearly at ease as he exhorted attendees to help him return to Washington in January for his first full six-year term.

“Because you sent me to the Senate, we were able to get great things done for our state and for our families,” Warnock said of his efforts to boost infrastructure spending and combat climate change, while invoking the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* — repairing the world. “That is the sensibility and conviction,” he averred, “that I bring to my job every single day.”

Left unaddressed, meanwhile, was his approach to Israel, which he has otherwise frequently sought to highlight as an elected official. Rather than an avoidance of what had once been a somewhat uncomfortable issue, however, the omission, intentional or not, suggested that Warnock is confident his Jewish supporters are largely comfortable with his Middle East policy positions, a subject of intense scrutiny during his first bid for public office nearly two years ago. In the final months of a closely watched race, the reverend had endured a barrage of Republican attacks stemming in part from

past statements in which he had harshly criticized the Israeli government.

Even if the hits were predictable at the time, Warnock’s comments had also risked alienating Jewish Democrats whose backing would prove meaningful in his bid to become Georgia’s first Black senator. Eager to quell potential concerns, he quickly wrote an opinion piece clarifying his support for Israel, released a Middle East policy paper touting a number of mainstream positions and spoke at a widely viewed forum hosted by the Jewish Democratic Council of America. “Israel’s right to exist as a state in security is incontestable,” he said last December, echoing Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., a former co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist. “That will be reflected in my work in the Senate.”

This cycle, Warnock argues that he has fulfilled that promise, as he prepares to go up against Herschel Walker, the scandal-plagued Republican Senate nominee, in a bitterly contested matchup that could ultimately decide partisan control of the upper chamber.

“I’m a strong ally of Israel, and I’ve built relationships in the Jewish community that have nothing to do with politics,” Warnock said in a phone interview with *Jewish Insider*, just minutes before his appearance at the recent Jewish community event, which was co-organized by the JDCA as well as a handful of local advocacy groups. “They are built on my lifelong career and service in mainly building coalitions to do good work together on a whole range of issues, from criminal justice reform to voting rights to a livable wage. I think, in the midst of doing that work, you build good, meaningful relationships that are much deeper than

politics.”

In the Senate, “that provides the foundation for the work that I do,” Warnock said. “I have been in constant contact with Jewish organizations like AIPAC, like J Street,” he added, “and those conversations have been important for informing my perspective, hearing various perspectives and trying to get the policy right on a whole range of issues.”

Michael Rosenzweig, the JDCA’s vice chair for management and operations in Atlanta, said Warnock has proven to be “a very safe bet when it comes to Israel,” even as he acknowledged fielding several phone calls last cycle from national pro-Israel advocates who had initially expressed reservations over his approach to Middle East policy. By then, however, Rosenzweig had already conferred with the reverend and helped craft his position paper. “I was happy to vouch for him,” he told *JJ*.

While in office, the senator has often been out front on Middle East issues, Rosenzweig said, approvingly citing, by way of example, Warnock’s response to escalating violence between Israel and Hamas in Gaza last May, just over four months into his tenure. In his remarks, the reverend had expressed support for “Israel’s right to defend its innocent citizens,” while also recognizing “the deep, legitimate pain and suffering” of the Palestinians. “The fact that he was early in that statement,” Rosenzweig recalled, “was very important for the Jewish community here in Atlanta.”

“Now that he’s been in the Senate, he’s got a genuine voting record,” Steve Oppenheimer, a pro-Israel activist in Atlanta who has conferred with Warnock multiple times, told *JJ*. Among other things, he commended

Warnock as an original cosponsor of the Israel Relations Normalization Act, which seeks to bolster the Abraham Accords, while praising his involvement with legislation to prevent Iran from acquiring combat drones. “He absolutely gets the uniqueness of Israel, the security requirements of Israel and the importance of the U.S-Israel strategic relationship,” Oppenheimer averred. “He really gets how the issues are tied together.”

With just under a month remaining until the November election, Warnock has largely avoided charges of anti-Israel sentiment of the like that dogged his previous campaign. The would-be senator had, among other things, faced criticism for a 2018 sermon in which he accused Israel of shooting non-violent Palestinian protesters “like birds of prey” and for signing a letter comparing Israeli control of the West Bank to “the military occupation of Namibia by apartheid South Africa.”

“That’s sort of a non-issue this time, it seems,” Jeanney Kutner, a Jewish community activist in Atlanta who sits on J Street’s local steering committee, observed in a phone interview with JI last week. “I think Warnock has only picked up good vibes.”

Of course, that hasn’t kept Walker from occasionally seeking to denounce Warnock’s approach to Israel, albeit rather vaguely. “Raphael Warnock has done more for our enemies than he has done for our strong allies like Israel,” he charged in one August tweet, after speaking at a local event in Sandy Springs, Ga., hosted by the Republican Jewish Coalition, which has endorsed his campaign.

For his part, Walker, a 60-year-old former football star, had initially struggled to relate to Jewish voters during the primary, when he first appeared at an RJC event billed as a “job interview” for Georgia’s Republican Senate candidates.

Walker, a devout Christian, appeared out of touch with audience members as he frequently alluded to his faith in Jesus, which was off-putting to attendees, according to Marci McCarthy, who chairs the Dekalb County Republican Party and was present at the forum. “He referenced a lot of his life experiences and his insights back to Jesus Christ, and I think he came in third because he didn’t connect with the

people there on a pro-Israel message, a pro-Jewish message, overall,” she said. “They were somewhat turned off.”

“Nobody’s chastising being religious,” McCarthy, who is herself Jewish, clarified in a recent interview with JI. “It’s just the terminology of what you use repeatedly to a roomful of Jews.”

By the time of the August meeting months later, however, Walker had noticeably sharpened his message, McCarthy confirmed. “It was a 180,” she said of his comments, which touched on school choice, rising crime rates and Israel, among other issues. “He really didn’t do that whole Jesus thing,” she explained. “There was a moment of it here and there, but nothing on the level of the whole mantra that was there a few months back. He respected people there and that they were also in a religion that is remarkably similar but still different. There was a very respectful tone, and I appreciated that greatly.”

Walker’s campaign did not respond to requests for comment.

In conversation with JI, Warnock declined to contrast his approach to Middle East policy with Walker, whose campaign has yet to promote his positions publicly. “I’m not going to try to speak for him,” Warnock said. “I can only speak for myself.”

On Sunday night, Warnock denounced his Republican opponent for refusing to attend Georgia’s second televised Senate debate. “This race is about who’s ready to represent the people of Georgia in the U.S. Senate,” Warnock said, breaking from the usually restrained tone he has cultivated on the stump. “And by not showing up tonight for the job interview, by giving nonsensical answers about his history of violence, Herschel Walker shows he’s not ready.”

In a recent statement to JI, Halie Soifer, the chief executive of the JDCA, argued that Warnock “aligns with the views of the overwhelming majority of American Jews, while Herschel Walker’s views are antithetical to Jewish values.”

“Sen. Warnock has nurtured the long-standing tradition of Black-Jewish partnership in Georgia and in the Senate,” she said. “He is a stalwart supporter of the U.S.-Israel relationship, opposed to all forms of extremism, and an unwavering defender of democracy and reproductive rights. By

contrast, Herschel Walker denies the truth about the 2020 election and climate change, and hypocritically wants to deny access to abortion to the half the population.”

While the race has become saturated with intensely personal negative advertising, Walker has often found himself navigating more treacherous political terrain, most notably over an ex-girlfriend’s recent claim that he once paid for her abortion. Walker, who has called for a complete ban on abortion with no exceptions for rape or incest, has denied the allegation, even as he has acknowledged writing the check that paid for the procedure.

The first-time candidate has otherwise stirred controversy among Jewish voters for attracting supporters who have espoused antisemitic rhetoric. In March, for instance, Walker’s campaign announced that he had pulled out of a planned appearance at a rally organized by freshman Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), who had recently spoken at a white nationalist conference hosted by a prominent Holocaust denier.

Last October, Walker canceled a fundraiser in Texas over criticism that an organizer had used Nazi imagery — syringes in the shape of a swastika — to oppose COVID-19 vaccination mandates. “Herschel is a strong friend of Israel and the Jewish community and opposes hatred and bigotry of all forms,” a Walker campaign spokesperson said at the time. “Despite the fact that the apparent intent behind the graphic was to condemn government vaccine mandates, the symbol used is very offensive and does not reflect the values of Herschel Walker or his campaign.”

His campaign has also run ads on Gab, a far-right social media platform widely regarded as a haven for antisemites, according to an investigation by *Media Matters*, the liberal watchdog publication.

Speaking with JI, meanwhile, Warnock emphasized that “we have to be unequivocal” in “using our voice to stand against” rising incidents of antisemitism.

“It’s not difficult to do, especially when you recognize that antisemitism and racism really come from the same root,” said Warnock, who is a member of the Senate’s recently formed Black-Jewish caucus. “They are one cloth, and I think Dr. King put it best when he said whatever ‘affects one



directly affects all indirectly.' We are 'tied in a single garment of destiny.' I believe that at my core, and it's the reason why I've been very intentional about building coalitions of conscience, not only between the Black and Jewish community but with members also of the Muslim community and people across racial lines."

Warnock developed a close relationship with Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Georgia's first Jewish senator, when they campaigned together last cycle during the high-profile runoff elections that helped deliver the Democratic majority he is now defending. "He and I were elected together," Warnock said. "We work very closely together in the Senate, which is the exception and not the rule. I think, even when senators are of the same party, they don't necessarily coordinate their efforts and work together in the way that Jon Ossoff and I do, and I think, in the end, it's been a great benefit to the people of Georgia."

The senator said he was proud to support "Georgia's own" Deborah Lipstadt, the renowned Holocaust historian and Emory University professor who now serves as the Biden administration's special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism. "It's important that someone of her background coming from Georgia is in that position," he argued. "We have to be vigilant."

"This kind of uptick is deeply concerning," he added. "We have to build the kinds of coalitions that are very clear that this is intolerable and, ultimately, we have to build a country and a world that embraces all of us."

Warnock explained that he has "long had strong relationships with members of the Jewish community," referring in particular to his close connection with Peter Berg, senior rabbi of The Temple, a Reform synagogue in Atlanta, with whom he has collaborated on issues including gun violence and combating antisemitism. "We make it a point," Warnock quipped, "of getting into what John Lewis called 'good trouble' together."

While Berg declined a request for comment because he does not typically weigh in on political races, during the last election he was among a group of rabbis who signed on to a Nov. 2020 letter defending Warnock's "strong support for Israel and his

partnership with the Jewish people."

The statement was not "an endorsement of a particular candidate, but a rejection of false and divisive slander entering our community," the signatories wrote, alluding to mounting Republican attacks from his Republican rival, former Sen. Kelly Loeffler (R-GA), whose campaign had unleashed a series of scathing ads condemning Warnock as hostile to Israel. In a rare but equally withering attack ad released after the letter was shared publicly, Christians United for Israel's political arm had also charged that Warnock was "lying about the Jewish state" while "preaching a gospel of hate."

Warnock forcefully denied the allegations, accusing his opponents of "trying to use Israel as yet another wedge issue," after the past statements had resurfaced in the lead-up to the special runoff election in Jan. 2021 to serve out the remainder of the late Sen. Johnny Isakson's (R-GA) term.

In public comments at the time, Warnock had stressed that he "was speaking to the issue of activists and human rights and the ability of people to be heard" when he denounced Israel's military actions in his 2018 sermon. The reverend said he had since developed "an increasing recognition of Hamas and the danger that they pose to the Israeli people." Warnock also clarified that he does "not believe Israel is an apartheid state, as some have suggested," referring to the statement he had signed, in 2019, after touring Israel and the West Bank with a delegation of Black and South African Christian clergy members.

While Warnock has since softened his rhetoric on issues relating to Israel, he has still maintained that "being a true friend also means being a truth-teller who does not shy away from hard conversations," as he wrote in his position paper last cycle. "I am a true friend to Israel, which is why I know how important it is to express my strong reservations and concerns over settlement expansion and creeping annexation that ultimately impede our hopes for peace."

During his time in office, Warnock has occasionally made efforts to hold Israel to account. In May, he was among a group of 20 Senate Democrats who joined a letter urging the Biden administration to engage in preventing the evictions of

1,000 Palestinians in the Masafer Yatta region of the West Bank. The following month, he signed on to a separate letter calling for "direct U.S. involvement" in an independent investigation of the May killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

Meanwhile, Warnock has upheld his support for continued security assistance to Israel while condemning what he has described as the "antisemitic overtones" of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions moment. In March, he joined a bipartisan letter to Secretary of State Tony Blinken requesting that the U.S. push the United Nations Human Rights Council to end its "discriminatory and unwarranted" permanent Commission of Inquiry on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Even as he has held a slight lead over Walker in recent publicly available polling, the race remains difficult to predict. Early voting began on Monday.

The senator has notched endorsements from a range of national Israel advocacy groups, including JDCA, J Street and Democratic Majority for Israel, all of which backed his last campaign. Rachel Rosen, a spokesperson for DMFI's political action committee, said the group will "be phone banking to help" Warnock in his bid for reelection but declined to reveal further potential involvement. "The rest we aren't sharing until we do it," she told JI via email.

On Wednesday evening, JDCA's political arm is holding a phone and text bank to support Warnock with assistance from Ossoff, who defeated former Sen. David Perdue (R-GA) in 2021. The group is targeting 86,000 Jewish voters in Georgia, the majority of whom live in the Atlanta metropolitan area, according to Soifer.

Somewhat conspicuously, Warnock did not gain backing from AIPAC's newly launched PAC, which is otherwise supporting a number of Senate incumbents from both parties this cycle. Marshall Wittmann, a spokesperson for AIPAC, said the group "won't have comment" when reached by JI.

Despite the apparent snub, Warnock has nevertheless often aligned with the bipartisan lobbying group, according to Alan Levow, an AIPAC board member in Atlanta who also serves as vice president of

the American Israel Education Foundation. “I have had a very positive relationship with Senator Warnock and his staff who have been attentive and responsive on our issues,” he said in a text exchange with JI last week.

“Warnock’s public record says a great deal about his concern about our issues and his support,” Levow added, noting that his statements and votes indicate that he is in favor of the memorandum of understanding guaranteeing U.S. aid to Israel and that he is against BDS.

Levow also emphasized that Warnock

“has supported additional monies toward Israel’s missile defense and, recently and importantly, endorsed our position against the U.N. Human Rights Council that has set up a unique and odious commission to investigate Israel based on an open-ended agenda.”

Levow declined to address specific questions because, he said, “I believe my relationship and my discussions with Sen. Warnock should remain strictly private between us.”

For his part, Warnock was somewhat more forthcoming as he sought to explain

the broader lessons he has drawn from ongoing discussions with Jewish leaders during his time in office.

“What I’ve learned in the conversations that I’ve had with activists, with students, with faith leaders, is that the Jewish community, like all communities, is not a monolith, and there’s a range of perspectives on a whole range of issues, and I think it’s important to recognize the nuances,” Warnock told JI. “I think that, too, is important for informing one’s perspective on how best to come combat antisemitism and to be a good ally.” ♦

OCTOBER 13, 2022

## In Conor Lamb’s Western Pennsylvania district, it’s anyone’s race

*Democrat Chris Deluzio faces Republican Jeremy Shaffer in the critical swing district*

By Marc Rod

In 2018, the political world was riveted to Western Pennsylvania as voters elected a moderate Democrat, Rep. Conor Lamb, in a special election upset in what was once a reliably Republican area. Now, national attention has returned as the contest to decide who will replace the retiring Lamb in this critical swing district — which pits a Democrat with strong union ties against a centrist Republican who decries the political pull toward the “extremes” — comes down to the wire.

In Pennsylvania’s 17th Congressional District, which runs from the outskirts of Pittsburgh to the state’s western border, Democratic Navy veteran and cyber- and election-security expert Chris Deluzio faces Jeremy Shaffer, a Republican local official and software engineer. The district is rated as a toss-up by the *Cook Political Report*

and has become a magnet for attention and spending from both sides of the aisle, as well as a barometer for working-class voters.

In an industrial area of the state, Deluzio — a Bernie Sanders delegate at the 2020 Democratic National Convention — is playing up his support for unionized labor, which has boosted his campaign, and domestic manufacturing. Union labor comprised 13.5% of the Pennsylvania workforce in 2020.

“I want to see us, as a region, as a country, bring our supply chains back home and start making more stuff here with strong union jobs. We’ve all seen the cost of all this outsourcing and bad trade deals; we’re feeling it when we buy anything, whether it’s housing, groceries, you name it,” Deluzio said in an interview with *Jewish Insider*. “So I think we’ve got to do more to get our

supply chains back here, but also take on the price-gouging corporations that are doing it and heavily consolidated industries.”

Shaffer, meanwhile, repeatedly emphasized his centrist positioning in written responses to JI, saying he would “always put our country first over my party” and said he’d work across the aisle to implement term limits, end gerrymandering and implement campaign finance reform.

“As an engineer, small business owner, and former Ross [Township] Commissioner I have a strong record as a bipartisan problem-solver that works with both sides to deliver common-sense solutions and real reforms,” Shaffer wrote. “We need to stop gravitating toward extremes and work together as a country to provide opportunities, defend our freedoms, drive down inflation and protect our country in

a very dangerous world... You won't see me on heated cable talk shows arguing either extreme."

Deluzio links his candidacy to his professional and military background. "I believe deeply in public service," Deluzio said. "My background and my life has been spent in uniform as an officer serving abroad, fighting as a lawyer for our democracy, working to form a union and those experiences and those values are central to me and who I am."

Deluzio's other priorities include protecting voting and abortion rights. He offered praise for the Biden administration and the Democratic-led Congress, saying one would "be hard-pressed to find a more productive session." He did express concerns, however, about discussions over rolling back tariffs on China.

Shaffer said he plans to join the bipartisan Problem Solvers caucus if elected, with an eye toward "stabiliz[ing]" the federal budget, reducing the national debt and reining in inflation.

"As a small business owner and engineer I will apply my expertise to help deliver a national energy approach that drives down costs and helps the environment and also infrastructure policy that gives us roads, bridges, ports, sewers, water systems, locks and dams that are second to none in the world," Shaffer said.

Shaffer personally opposes abortion except in cases of rape, incest and threats to the life of the mother, but indicated to JI he would not support abortion bans or restrictions at the federal level. That's a shift from a previous statement of support for Congress to impose further limits on abortions.

"When Roe was overturned it returned the power to the states, where it belongs. Regardless of my own personal opinion, I believe abortion is an issue that should be legislated on the state level, not the national level," he told JI.

If he had been in office, Shaffer would have voted to certify the 2020 presidential election results, and believes that President Joe Biden was legitimately elected, a spokesperson told JI.

As of the end of July, Deluzio had raised \$911,000 to Shaffer's \$429,330. In addition to that, Shaffer has loaned \$1 million to his

campaign. Shaffer closed out the last quarter with \$937,000 on hand. Deluzio, by contrast, had \$348,000 on hand. The race has also become a magnet for outside spending: Outside groups linked to House Democrats have spent \$2.4 million in the district and the Republican Congressional Leadership Fund has spent \$2.2 million.

Despite his past support for Sanders, Deluzio, who served in Iraq, takes a more conventional approach to Middle East policy issues than the progressive firebrand senator. His time in the Navy, he said, demonstrated "the limits of American power, but also how often we are the indispensable power abroad to maintain and ensure security and peace and stability."

"The Middle East is a good example of this," Deluzio, who has been endorsed by the Jewish Democratic Council of America, J Street and Democratic Jewish Outreach Pennsylvania, continued. "I saw both at sea and on the ground in Iraq the destabilizing influence of Iran and what a threat they are to regional and... global security... I'm very aware of problems [the Iranian] regime can cause and the importance of having a strong policy that recognizes that."

He argued that his experience in foreign policy and national security makes him a more qualified candidate than Shaffer.

The Democrat was reluctant to "prejudge" the current nuclear negotiations with Iran, but said the U.S. should learn from "what went right or didn't" in the original deal. "If it's stronger — and good oversight out of the Congress is a piece of this — I think that's smart," he explained. He said he was supportive of the original 2015 nuclear agreement.

Shaffer, who has the backing of the Republican Jewish Coalition, told JI he favors continuing a campaign of sanctions, political pressure and "strategic actions when necessary" to counter Iran, in collaboration with U.S. allies.

"I believe that both parties in Congress can work together to develop a strong unified approach to counter Iran," he added.

Shaffer called Israel the U.S.'s "closest ally in the fight against terrorism and oppression in the Middle East," as well as a "great partner" in scientific and educational fields, describing his support for the Jewish state as "deep and uncompromising."

"Our friendship with Israel has its roots in our shared tenacious self-determination and commitment to free societies that honor peace and individual rights," Shaffer said. "Our two countries enjoy a relationship unlike any other in the world, and that relationship must be encouraged and protected."

He said he is supportive of U.S. efforts to broker peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, describing the Palestinians and countries hostile to Israel globally as roadblocks to that peace.

"Before a two-state solution can even be considered, Palestinians and their government need to admit that Israel has a right to exist," he said. Shaffer did not specify if he personally supports a two-state solution as an ultimate goal. "The United States can use our influence with our allies and others in the world to ensure that a fair solution is achieved and stable peace [is] ensured."

Deluzio likewise said he believes the U.S.-Israel alliance is "imperative" for "regional security and our values abroad."

"I'm someone who strives for and firmly believes that we ultimately have to have a two-state solution to lead to lasting peace," Deluzio said. "The necessary condition there is security, and I think the United States is an indispensable party through our security assistance and our ability to support and push the negotiations in good faith."

He described the Abraham Accords as a "framework for peace regionally," adding, "We do a great justice to these negotiations longer term to support [the normalization agreements]."

The 17th District borders Pittsburgh, the site of the mass shooting in 2018 at the Tree of Life Synagogue. Shaffer said he and his wife joined a vigil following the attack, and pledged to "join with people in both parties to also help fight and be a voice against antisemitism and hate crimes of all types" in office.

He added that it is "critical we call out radical leaders here in the U.S. like Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN) for their dangerous, antisemitic rhetoric," which he said is "encouraging harm and violence."

Shaffer said he sees antisemitism as a problem across the political spectrum, but particularly on the left within the Boycott,

Divestment and Sanctions movement and on college campuses. “I will call out and fight against antisemitism wherever I see it, whether on the right or on the left,” Shaffer continued. “If anyone in my party supports antisemitic views I would not tolerate it.”

Deluzio also reflected on the legacy of the Tree of Life attack.

“I think it says a lot that our community rallied around the victims of the Jewish community in Western Pennsylvania, that we very much believe in this idea of being stronger than hate,” he said.

He specifically called out far-right elements, including Pennsylvania GOP gubernatorial nominee Doug Mastriano, for propagating antisemitic conspiracy

theories. As a lawmaker, “you have to do the leadership, the soft power of confronting hate where it exists and calling out this kind of ideology,” Deluzio said, adding that he would support gun control measures as another step against extremist attacks.

He said he did not see antisemitism as an issue on the left “here on the ground and in Western Pennsylvania,” but said he opposes the BDS movement. “I don’t care what side it’s coming from. If it’s there, we should be calling it out and standing together,” Deluzio said.

With less than a month until Election Day, the race could tip in either direction, according to political consultant Ari Mittleman, a former staffer for Sen. Bob

Casey (D-PA) and host of the “Pennsylvania Kitchen Table Politics” podcast. An internal poll from Deluzio’s campaign released last week showed him six points ahead of Shaffer, 49% to 43%. That’s an improvement for Deluzio from a previous internal poll in July that had him in a statistical tie with one point ahead of Shaffer, in a statistical tie. Internal polls tend to favor the candidate who commissioned the survey. Whatever the result, the race is likely to be critical to the ultimate control of the House next year, as well being a potential signal for the future of some of the most critical voting blocs nationwide. ♦

OCTOBER 18, 2022

## Here are the lessons Jewish security officials learned during the first High Holiday season since the Colleyville attack

*Officials said lingering pandemic-inspired measures have, in some ways, made it harder to keep worshippers safe.*

By Ben Sales

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

**A**head of every major Jewish holiday, the leading Jewish security agencies drive home the same message: Have a plan. Make sure you understand your building. Secure entrances and exits. Be in touch with law enforcement.

Now, nearly four years after the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, community security officials believe that the message is beginning to stick at synagogues across the country. But they also told *eJewishPhilanthropy* that lingering pandemic-inspired measures have, in some ways, made it harder to keep worshippers safe.

“Outdoor services are maybe here to stay, with or without COVID, and that’s something that’s definitely new in terms of security,” Evan Bernstein, CEO of the Community Security Service (CSS), which trains volunteers to act as a security presence at synagogues, told eJP. “From a logistical standpoint, you’re dealing with something that’s not a hardened building. A parking lot or a tent was maybe not thought of originally from a security standpoint.”

The Secure Community Network, which coordinates security nationally for Jewish institutions, published a two-page rundown ahead of the High Holidays on the “Top Ten Security Considerations for Outdoor Services.” In addition to the measures SCN recommends for any large event, the

document instructs synagogues to develop a traffic control plan and secure the perimeter of the outdoor event.

“It’s going to mean more people, it’s going to mean controlling access and how we’re letting people in, making sure that if we have to maybe shut down roads, sidewalks, that we have to be more cognizant of that,” Bradley Orsini, SCN’s senior national security advisor, told eJP. “Whoever we’re letting into our inner perimeter, they should [belong] there.”

Orsini said long-running staffing shortages at police departments across the country have also made it harder for synagogues to coordinate their security policy with local precincts that may already be stretched thin. SCN, which has been led



by former law enforcement officials since its creation in 2004, has long recommended coordination with local police as a centerpiece of synagogue security.

“A lot of synagogues had trouble hiring off-duty or on duty police officers because of the [rise in] demand, and because we’ve seen an uptick in shortages in local police departments across the country,” Orsini said. “I think we [had to] increase our preparedness even earlier this year based on all those factors.”

Alongside those challenges, security officials and experts say, security has remained top-of-mind for a growing number of American Jews following the string of attacks on synagogues and other Jewish institutions that began in Pittsburgh in 2018 and included a hostage situation at Temple Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas, in January. There have also been rashes of street attacks on Orthodox Jews in New York City.

Following the Colleyville attack, Jewish organizations lobbied for an increase in federal funds to secure places of worship,

and \$250 million was allocated to that end in 2022, up from \$180 million last year. Security organizations have also partnered with each other. SCN, CSS and the Anti-Defamation League all have bilateral partnerships to share information and coordinate with each other. CSS has seen a growth of more than 10% in the number of synagogues and volunteers it works with since 2021. The number of synagogues now stands at approximately 200.

“Reality took over,” Carly Maisel, a board member of CSS and the Community Security Initiative in New York, told eJP. “The American Jewish experience has changed, and the American Jewish community is trying to catch up to that change. We have now made a mindset shift.”

Maisel hopes that ordinary congregants will take increasing responsibility for their congregations’ security, rather than solely relying on an armed presence at the door.

“Everybody in the community has to feel security is partly their problem, because if you don’t call out the suspicious person,

if you don’t notice your unlocked door, if you don’t notice that your cameras aren’t working, it doesn’t matter if there’s an armed guard on the front door,” she said. “That should be the last line of defense, not the first line.”

Providing ordinary congregants with security knowledge and giving them a sense of responsibility is the *raison d’être* of Bernstein’s group, CSS. But at a more fundamental level — noting that some synagogues have continued to hold virtual services — Bernstein hopes those who can safely return to services in-person without risks to their health continue to do so, even if gathering in large numbers could pose a greater security risk than High Holidays on Zoom.

“There are definite, definitive threats... but Judaism is about being in synagogue with other congregants,” he said. “It’s been that way for over 1,000 years. [Security] can’t be at the expense of traditional shul Judaism. People who are losing that are losing a big portion of what Judaism is.” ♦

OCTOBER 18, 2022

## Israeli startup funding cut in half amid global slowdown

*Venture capital investment shrinks in third quarter, forcing layoffs among other cost cuts after years of liberal spending*

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

*The article first appeared in The Circuit.*

Funding for Israeli startups slid further from last year’s record heights as sinking technology stocks, rising interest rates and renewed geopolitical conflict chill enthusiasm for investment.

The torrent of cash once lavished on Israel’s emerging tech companies fell to \$2.8 billion in the third quarter, a 56% drop from the same period in 2021, and a 36% decline

from the previous quarter, according to a report by the Herzliya-based Viola Ventures. The slowdown was especially pronounced in so-called mega deals, valued at more than \$100 million, which fell 69% from last year’s third quarter, Viola’s analysts said in the Oct. 12 report, “Public Market Volatility – Reflected in the Israeli Tech Ecosystem.”

While the findings were discouraging, they mirror the decline in startup funding for U.S. and Canadian companies, which

fell 53% in the third quarter to about \$40 billion from the same period a year ago, and 37% from the second quarter of 2022, according to Crunchbase. The drop must also be viewed in the context of 2021’s record fundraising and an overall upward trend over recent years, the Viola report said.

“Prophecy is for fools, but we do believe that technology will continue to be a massive driver for global transformation, and VCs will continue to invest in disruptive

companies,” Tomer Meridor, a member of Viola’s investment team who wrote the report with colleague Rotem Shacham, told *The Circuit*.

New York’s tech-heavy Nasdaq stock market, where Israeli companies represent the second largest number of foreign members after China, reflects the darkening sentiment. The Nasdaq Composite Index has fallen 33% since the end of last year, and Nice Systems, one of the biggest Israeli companies trading on the exchange, is down 30%. The Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate by three-quarters of a percentage point in September to a range of 3% to 3.25%, bringing borrowing costs to their highest point since 2008. Concern about the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its impact on energy prices has also led investors to reduce risk.

Israeli startups, in turn, have been laying off employees and cutting back on other expenses. Otonomo Technologies, which collects data from network-connected cars,

dismissed dozens of its employees after losing 95% of its value on the Nasdaq. Digital advertising platform Taboola, whose shares have fallen 78%, and website maker Wix, down 54%, both reportedly laid off more than 100 employees each.

Setting a record in 2021, Israeli startups raised \$25.6 billion and 23 Israel companies held IPOs in the U.S., according to the IVC-Meitar Israeli Tech Review.

“The ongoing economic volatility across the globe is impacting the global public and private markets, and Israel is no different,” said Meridor. “2021 was an outlier in terms of fundraising pace and valuations, and [we’re] actually seeing back-to-normal levels in the short-mid-term.”

Among the ways Israeli companies have sought to contend with the decline in U.S. investment has been to find new partners in the Gulf Arab states that signed the Abraham Accords in 2020, normalizing ties with the Jewish state. Israel and the United Arab Emirates signed a free trade agreement

in May that is expected to increase trade between the two countries to \$10 billion within five years. OurCrowd, Israel’s most active venture capital platform, was licensed last year to operate as a fund manager in the Abu Dhabi Global Market.

Affinity Partners, a private equity firm founded by Jared Kushner, the former White House adviser, plans to invest millions of dollars in Israeli startups from the \$2 billion it raised from Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in May. Saudi Arabia’s Mithaq Capital has become the largest investor in Otonomo, amassing a 20% stake as the company’s stock sank.

“We believe this is the time for companies to make bold considerations,” Meridor said, recommending that startups “focus on long-term value creation rather than short-term fixes, diversify revenue streams, hone in on long-term sustainable aligned business models and seek accretive M&A [mergers and acquisitions].” ♦