

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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NOVEMBER 4, 2022

Former Y.U. hoops star Cruising into history

Ryan Turell, set to make his NBA G League debut with the Motor City Cruise, embraces his status as a role model

By David Getter

Having just come from practice last Friday, Ryan Turell sat down for an interview over Zoom wearing a white, Motor City Cruise T-shirt emblazoned with a blue Nike swoosh. It was hard to tell that the former Yeshiva University basketball star was in the process of making history — late last month he became the first Orthodox Jewish player ever drafted to the NBA's developmental league, the G League, when the Cruise, the Detroit Pistons affiliate, tapped him with the 27th pick.

But the high-scoring 6-foot-7 shooting guard with his signature blonde curls who led the Maccabees to a historic 50-game winning streak during his tenure at Y.U. knows he's not just any old G League player, at least not in the Jewish community. Turell maintains a strong sense of Jewish pride and says he understands the importance of being a role model to young Jewish athletes struggling to balance their religious convictions and career aspirations.

"I have a platform right now to help inspire Jewish youth and people all over the place that because of their beliefs or religion feel that it's impossible to achieve their goals or dreams," Turell, last year's Division III player of the year, told *Jewish Insider* ahead of the season opener.

To the outside eye, the Cruise's selection of a Division III player from tiny Yeshiva University may have come as a surprise. For those who have known Turell, however, it was a foregone conclusion. In a video feature on Ryan by the sports media site Overtime that aired more than nine months ago, a friend of Turell's named Isaac Cohen predicted that Turell would be drafted with the 27th overall pick. On Sunday, Oct. 22, Turell was in fact selected with the 27th pick of the first round of the G League draft. G League players are often signed by their team's NBA affiliates or other teams to fill the roster spots of injured players or as a result of their excellent performance.

The unique challenges involved in navigating life in professional basketball as an Orthodox Jew are not lost on Turell, and he credits the Cruise organization for making the transition as smooth as possible. Turell had nothing but praise for his new team, saying, "The Cruise have been really professional and super accommodating, making sure I've got kosher food and helping me out and making sure I'm comfortable in the situation." He plans to stay close to the arena at which the team is scheduled to play on Friday nights and Saturdays so that he can walk to any games or practices that are scheduled during Shabbat.

Detroit is a different setting than Washington Heights, and Turell has made the social shift: Whereas he was previously learning, working and playing alongside Jewish peers, he is now in a professional locker room in which he is the first Orthodox Jew that many of his teammates have encountered.

"I've been answering questions every day," he said. "My teammates have been super into it and super curious and respectfully asking me questions. They're like hoping they don't offend me by it, and I'm like, 'Guys, I'm always ears for questions.' They've been very supportive of it and very welcoming." In addition to finding a new community of teammates and coaches in Detroit, Turell still keeps a foot in Washington Heights, his home for the last four years, talking with YU coach Elliot Steinmetz on a weekly basis and keeping up

to date on the latest developments with the Maccabees.

Turell's journey to pro ball echoes that of another Maccabee star from two generations ago, Dave Kufeld. The 6-foot-8 All-American center for Y.U. was drafted in the 10th round by the Portland Trail Blazers, becoming what is believed to be the first Orthodox player to be drafted by an American pro team, though he ultimately didn't make the team.

Turell, who suffered a foot injury and didn't play in the NBA's Summer League, is

set to make his debut tonight as the Cruise take on the Cleveland Charge in the opener of the first part of the G League season.

And if any Jewish kids dreaming big hoop dreams are in attendance in Cleveland that night, and if they're doubting those aspirations, Turell has a message for them: "I hope to get that out of their head and show them that it doesn't matter where you come from, that it doesn't matter what you believe in, that you can succeed as long as you put in the work." ♦

NOVEMBER 2, 2022

Russian-Israeli race car driver makes F1 debut

The 23-year-old team Ferrari rookie drove under an Israeli license during a Texas practice session

By **Tori Bergel**

Robert Schwartzman has been fascinated by speed since the first time he jumped behind the wheel of a kart at age 4. Born in Israel but raised in Russia, Schwartzman has excelled through the ranks of Formula racing, collecting wins and earning titles as he raced his way toward the big leagues of Formula One.

That dream became reality on Oct. 21, when the 23-year-old made his F1 debut during the first practice session of the 2022 United States Grand Prix at Texas' Circuit of The Americas in Austin.

A test driver for team Ferrari, Schwartzman beat out three other debuting rookies — Alex Palou for McLaren, Theo Pourchaire for Alfa Romeo and Logan Sargeant, who is an American, for Williams

— finishing 16th out of 20, ahead of Palou's 17th, Pourchaire's 18th, and Sargeant's 19th.

"It was awesome to be honest," Schwartzman said in a post-race interview, "it was awesome and hard. Obviously, I haven't driven the car in a while. This year, most of my work was on the sim [simulator], which, obviously, you know, your body forgets all the feelings [of real racing], so driving the real car, getting the real bumps, the G-forces, was something very, very new."

While practice sessions don't count within the weekend's scoring, they're an integral part of typical F1 grand prix, giving drivers and their teams a chance to familiarize themselves with each circuit's terrain, test out their cars' abilities and new modifications and get a preview of what the

standings may look like during an actual race, according to *Bleacher Report*.

Each F1 team is allowed two competing drivers on their rosters, though they may also keep additional reserve and test drivers like Schwartzman. New 2022 regulations require each team to swap in a rookie for two FP1 sessions throughout the season, according to the official Formula One website — in order to qualify, the drivers must not have completed two grand prix.

"It's just generally good experience. Unfortunately, it was very short, I only had six push laps, but still every lap counts, and it's very important for me to get the experience," Schwartzman added.

The race also marked a change in Schwartzman's operating status. The dual

citizen, who had been competing under a Russian racing license until this year, switched to an Israeli license, which he will use from now on. The change was due to a new rule issued by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile — the governing body of F1 racing — in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, stating that Russian drivers must “run under a neutral flag” in order to compete.

F1 cars can reach speeds of over 220 mph, way faster than the Fords and Chevys in NASCAR. To compete, F1 racers need a special “superlicence” issued by the FIA, which they can only get by satisfying a series of requirements and paying a hefty fee.

Shwartzman's career started out like many others, with years of karting competitions — the younger cousin of Formula racing, where many F1 drivers get their start — throughout his childhood until 2014, when he switched to single-seater Formula racing in F4.

Just as many professional athletes in the United States start out in the minor leagues, the European-dominated sport has its own feeder series. Drivers graduate from a number of junior series, each growing in its level of intensity, before reaching F1 — also like with American sports, drivers can be tapped for the big leagues at any point or stay their whole career in a lower tier.

Some of Shwartzman's pre-F1 accolades

include: the FIA Formula 3 Championship title in 2019, fourth place at the 2020 FIA Formula 2 Championship and second place at the F2 championship in 2021. He's also been a part of the Ferrari Driver Academy since 2017.

Despite not adding another first-place finish to his collection, Shwartzman already has hope for his next race.

“We have another [practice session] coming in Abu Dhabi where I feel more confident because I already know the track, and I think also by having a few laps on the car, I would really, really know what to expect,” Shwartzman said. “I'm really looking forward for that FP, and let's see what's gonna happen.” ♦

NOVEMBER 2, 2022

An MTG ally takes on a moderate Jewish Democrat in FL-13

Conservative activist Anna Paulina Luna has made election integrity central to her bid to represent Florida's 13th District. Her Democratic opponent says election deniers on Jan. 6 prompted him to run

By Gabby Deutch

In the final days before Florida's August primary election, conservative media personality and congressional candidate Anna Paulina Luna hosted a free, open-to-the-public event with Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), who flew to Pinellas County, on Florida's west coast, to meet and energize voters.

The firebrand first-term congresswoman has faced condemnation from across the political spectrum for a series of remarks viewed as offensive by a wide swath of

Jewish community leaders.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday, Luna, who is running to represent Florida's 13th District, stood by Greene and argued that her past comments may have been taken out of context, and that her support for Israel suggests she is not antisemitic.

“MTG did endorse me, and I was raised as a Messianic Jew by my father,” said Luna, who added that she identifies as a Christian. “I am also a small fraction Ashkenazi. If she

were antisemitic, why did she endorse me?”

Luna argued that she would not associate with someone who is antisemitic. “I in no way, shape or form would ever put myself in a position where I'm hanging out with someone like that, and so I just don't see that Marjorie Taylor Greene is that person,” said Luna, who is 33. “If I see it happening on the right, I'm the first person to condemn it and say, like, ‘Hey, that's not cool. I don't align with that.’”

Luna's embrace of Greene and of

conspiracy theories about 2020 election fraud set up a sharp contrast with her Democratic opponent, Eric Lynn, a pro-choice former Obama administration official who is Jewish. Luna first ran for the seat in 2020 and lost to then-incumbent Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL), who vacated the seat this year to run for governor.

Following redistricting, the St. Petersburg-centered district became significantly more favorable to Republicans. But a late October poll shows that Luna is running neck-and-neck with Lynn, a national security professional who served in the Department of Defense in former President Barack Obama's administration. Luna has stuck to her hard-right messaging from the primary, while Lynn has tried to tack to the center to win over undecided voters.

Former President Donald Trump is Luna's most prominent backer. She has also been named to the National Republican Congressional Committee's list of "young guns" and endorsed by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Despite Luna's ties to Greene, pro-Israel groups in the center and on the right have avoided getting involved, although the pro-Israel community in St. Petersburg, where the district is centered, appears split on the race. A PAC affiliated with the Republican Jewish Coalition, which has tried to unseat Greene, did not endorse Luna. The group's executive director did not respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

Some AIPAC activists in the district recently held a fundraiser for Luna, although the pro-Israel organization's political action committee has not endorsed either candidate in the race. "The pro-Israel community has been involved in both sides in this race," said a person with knowledge of the race. Democratic Majority for Israel PAC endorsed Lynn, as did the Jewish Democratic Council of America.

As a senior advisor at the Defense Department, Lynn, who is 42, worked closely on the development of Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system, and he pledged to support U.S. assistance for Israel while in Congress at a time when far-left opponents of Israel have gained a foothold in the Democratic Party.

"I will not be shy about my views or my

criticism of those that oppose support for Israel," Lynn told JI on Monday. "Should there be antisemitism within the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, then I will speak out against it. It is something that must be addressed, must have a light shone on it. And we must continue to stand up against all forms of hate, including antisemitism."

Luna also pledged to support the U.S.-Israel relationship as a member of Congress. "We as a country need to ensure that our allies, especially those in the Middle East sector, are basically well-equipped to do what they need to do in an effort to make sure that there's a mutually beneficial and national security relationship," she said. "The Israeli intelligence community is unparalleled. I think that right now, with what we're facing with China, Iran and Russia, maintaining that symbiotic relationship, I think, is very important, and so I do support Israel."

When asked how she would combat antisemitism as a member of Congress, Luna, an Air Force veteran, said there needs to be "cultural education" to combat what she described as the media's double standards. "There's a big problem with our media, and then also the double standards that exist from political ideologies," she said.

In a tweet last year, Luna claimed the Food and Drug Administration hoped to compile a "Nazi Germany registry" of "unvaccinated Americans."

"I'm extremely, extremely distrusting of any database and/or process that forces individuals to bow and cower to, I think, the gross overreach of the federal government. And so I think that that analogy is something that should be taken seriously and looked at from a historical perspective," she explained.

Greene has made similar comments. In March 2021, Greene compared House of Representatives mask rules to the Holocaust, which House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) called "appalling" at the time.

Earlier this year, Greene spoke at the America First Political Action Conference, which was organized by Nick Fuentes, a white nationalist and Holocaust denier. She also faced censure in the House of Representatives for tweeting a doctored image that presented President Joe Biden with a Hitler mustache. Luna declined to

comment on either incident.

"I will not be addressing speculative comments from various outlets, but I find it bizarre that I'm being asked about MTG and not Ilhan Omar's direct tweet, 'all about the Benjamins,'" Luna said, referring to a 2019 tweet in which Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) suggested that U.S. support for Israel is "all about the Benjamins."

Greene has a history of sharing conspiracy theories on social media, including in one 2018 Facebook post in which she suggested that the Rothschild family controlled lasers in space that caused destructive wildfires in California—a theory believed to be rooted in antisemitic notions about the Rothschilds, who historically were a prominent banking family.

Luna pointed to Greene's later comments that she didn't know about the Rothschilds' connection to Judaism. "I actually haven't heard her make antisemitic comments. I can also tell you that from what I have gathered, and from what I've seen, some of her statements may have been taken out of context," said Luna. "I do know that from a policy perspective, that she is a very big supporter of Israel."

Claims of antisemitism have gone both ways in the Florida campaign. Some of Luna's campaign signs were vandalized, with Hitler mustaches drawn on a photo of her and Trump. She suggested, without evidence, that Lynn's campaign was behind the graffiti. "I've already condemned antisemitism, but here are his supporters doing this," said Luna. A spokesperson for Lynn condemned the vandalism in a statement to Tampa's Spectrum News in October.

Lynn has criticized Luna for speaking at a July conference hosted by the conservative youth organization Turning Point USA in Tampa, where a group of neo-Nazi demonstrators waved Nazi flags outside the gathering.

"Turning Point does not support Nazis," said Luna, who previously worked for the organization. But she questioned whether "it's possible" that the people holding Nazi flags were opponents of Turning Point USA. "When I see that, and I see people that have their faces covered, and then they just up and disappear, and then all of a sudden, it's like people are trying to blanket label it

'conservatives.' I just, I always question it."

Luna's top priority is achieving American energy independence, she explained, which she hopes to achieve by renewing construction on the Keystone XL pipeline and by pulling the U.S. out of the Paris Climate Accords. But her first move in Congress would be authoring legislation "that protects congressional candidates from all parties from being discriminated against on social media platforms," she said. Luna has complained that it took a long time for her campaign account to be verified on Twitter, and she has railed against perceived discrimination against conservatives on popular social media accounts.

Lynn, for his part, is attempting to win over voters outside his political party. "The reason why Republicans and independents are voting for me in this race is because they know that I'm the common-sense candidate in the middle," he said. He has highlighted economic issues, including his support for social security and Medicare, at times breaking with his own party.

"I did come out and state my opposition to hiring the 87,000 new IRS agents," Lynn said, referring to Republican assertions that the \$80 billion in additional funding Democrats authorized for the IRS will lead to the hiring for tens of thousands of auditors.

"A priority for me as well is protecting a woman's freedom to make her own

healthcare decisions with her doctor," said Lynn, who pointed out that Luna does not believe in exceptions for rape, incest or to protect the life of the mother. "We need to do the humane thing and allow the mother to make that choice for herself with her doctor."

Luna's opposition to abortion has been a central point in her campaign and her political advocacy, beginning with her story that her father asked her mother to have an abortion — but she didn't, and, instead, Luna was born. "A lot of people will say they're pro-life, but then they're for exceptions," Luna said in a video recorded at the Conservative Political Action Coalition conference in March. But, she added, her husband was conceived when his mother was raped. "People don't get to decide who gets to live and who gets to decide."

She would not say whether she supports a bill, introduced in the Senate by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), that would ban abortion nationally after 15 weeks of pregnancy. "I'm not even going to entertain that idea. It's up to the states to decide," she said. "I don't even think that I'm going to have to vote on that."

Luna has stated that she believes the 2020 election was rigged, and that without fraud, Trump would have been reelected. Lynn, meanwhile, says that watching efforts "to upend the peaceful transfer of power" on Jan. 6 drove him to run for Congress. (He briefly ran for the seat in 2016 in a

primary against Crist.) He recalls watching members of Congress being evacuated to the same place members were sent on Sept. 11, 2001, when Lynn worked for then-Rep. Peter Deutsch (D-FL). "This time, it wasn't because foreign terrorists were attacking our nation. It was because U.S. citizens were violently attacking police and the United States Capitol and attempting to violently overthrow a free and fair election," Lynn explained.

Since the August primary, Luna has attempted to tone down her rhetoric when speaking about 2020. She declined to say whether she would have joined Republican members of Congress who, on Jan. 6, 2021, voted not to certify the results of the 2020 election.

"I don't like speculating on things that have been done in the past," she said. When asked what she thought of the Republicans who did object to certifying the results, she offered praise: "I think that any Republican that stood on the grounds of wanting to ensure that this election was done correctly did the right thing," Luna stated.

Similarly, when asked whether Biden is the lawfully elected president, she demurred. "Had it not been for COVID-19, President Trump would be sitting in the White House," said Luna. She later changed her position: "I think Trump is the rightful winner of that election." ♦

Elaine Luria's tightrope walk down the center path

*Voters like the member of Congress from Norfolk.
Is that enough for her to get reelected?*

By Gabby Deutch

When Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA) made her opening statement during this summer's Jan. 6 committee hearings, she seemed respectful, demure and soft-spoken, even as she twisted the knife. It was all very "Virginia," so to speak: polite and deferential while getting directly to the point, which in this case was that former President Donald Trump acted selfishly and to the detriment of the safety of Americans by refusing to sufficiently respond to the Jan. 6 Capitol riot.

"Objectively, Elaine Luria is a nice person. She's not a flawed person. She's a Navy vet," said Bruce Meyer, who has lived in Virginia Beach since he was 13 and has been involved in local Republican politics almost as long.

In an election year that looks increasingly difficult for Democrats, nice might not be enough to win Luria a third term in the state's 2nd Congressional District, which she flipped from red to blue in 2018.

"My Republican friends like her. I just don't know that they're gonna vote for her," said Art Sandler, an AIPAC activist in Norfolk.

The race is one of the most closely watched campaigns in the nation; a recent poll found Luria and her opponent, fellow Navy veteran and Republican state Sen. Jen Kiggans, tied. Republicans need to win only five seats to return the House of Representatives to GOP control, and they view this district in southeastern Virginia as a prime pickup opportunity. Partisans and activists from across the ideological spectrum have spent millions of dollars on advertisements in the final weeks of the campaign.

"It really is a flip of a coin," Ben Melusky, an assistant professor of political science at

Virginia's Old Dominion University, said of the election.

Luria, who is Jewish, has cultivated an image of herself as a political moderate willing to occasionally break with Democratic Party leadership in Washington. But she faces a tough test in Kiggans, who is also running toward the center in a campaign focused on economic issues.

In conversations with *Jewish Insider*, Jewish voters in the district and nearby Norfolk — a Democratic stronghold that was removed from the district during redistricting, making the seat lean more Republican — shared their perspectives on the race. While they tended to agree on Luria's likeability, Jewish Republicans argue that voting with Democrats means Luria will not be a check on the party in power.

"She's certainly not a far-left extremist," Ian Cummings, a Republican activist in Norfolk, said of Luria. "But I certainly believe that she is a regular party-line Democrat, fairly, you know, borderline liberal."

Luria is viewed as a staunch pro-Israel advocate, and AIPAC has strongly encouraged its members to support her. Sandler supported the Republican incumbent in 2018 — the pro-Israel lobby encourages members to support "friendly incumbents" who are pro-Israel — but is now a vocal Luria fan.

"We need moderate Democrats to be supportive of Israel. We need Democrats like Elaine who stand up to the far left of the Democratic Party, which Elaine does regularly," said Sandler.

Adam Goldberg, a Navy veteran who ran as an independent for Norfolk Commissioner of the Revenue, the city's top tax official, last year, told *JI* that Luria's Democratic affiliation, at a time when a

handful of progressive Democrats have loudly attacked Israel in Congress, is disqualifying for him.

"For me, especially as an American Jew, I just cannot support a party that will accept that sort of bigotry. They just can't do it anymore. She's a nice lady, but she represents a party that does not like us," said Goldberg.

Kiggans, a nurse practitioner and former Navy helicopter pilot, was elected to the Virginia Senate in 2019 on a night that was otherwise a huge success for Democrats across Virginia. She defeated her Democratic opponent by just 500 votes.

She decided to run for state Senate at the urging of the Republican Professionals Network, a local networking group of which Kiggans was a member. Meyer, the Norfolk Republican activist, started the group more than two decades ago, and when the 2019 state Senate race came around, he began to identify potential candidates.

"I went around to our board and our group, I said, 'Well, who do we know that's a veteran, a mom, a professional — I listed a bunch of things, thinking, 'Hey, if I get one or two, great,'" Meyer recalled. He and his wife Connie met with Kiggans after multiple people suggested she'd be a good fit. "She's sitting on the couch, she's like, 'I've gotta do something.'" She had harbored a desire to run for office, Meyer said, but she hadn't planned to until they reached out.

The mid-October poll that found Luria and Kiggans tied showed that the economy/inflation are the top issues for voters in the district, followed by abortion and threats to democracy. Luria, who serves on the House committee to investigate the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, has sought to highlight Kiggans' hesitancy to discuss where she stands on

matters related to the 2020 election.

One of Luria's closing ads calls Kiggans an "election denier," and features a clip of Kiggans walking away when a reporter asked her whether President Joe Biden was "fairly elected." In June, when Kiggans was asked a similar question, she did not comment on the election: "I'll just say this, Joe Biden lives in the White House and I wish he didn't," she told a local news station.

But Luria's service on the Jan. 6 committee, which has been criticized by most congressional Republicans, is politically precarious. "I think that this work is important and necessary and much more important than whether I get elected again or not in the next election," she told *JI* in July 2021. (Neither Luria nor Kiggans' campaigns responded to interview requests for this story.)

"I'm a Republican, and I'm glad that she spoke up. I'm proud of some of those others

— Cheneys and Kinzingers of the world who are able to stiffen their backbone and say what needs to be said," said Jeff Brooke, referring to Reps. Liz Cheney (R-WY) and Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), two Republicans who have been critical of former President Donald Trump's false claims about election fraud in the 2020 election. Brooke no longer lives in Luria's district after redistricting. "I hope that their kind won't be swept out of Congress, but I don't know, it doesn't look good."

Jody Wagner, a former Virginia state treasurer and a small business owner in Virginia Beach, supports Luria's work on Jan. 6, but doesn't think it has much purchase with undecided voters.

"Unless you're a lawyer, which I am, or a historian maybe, the whole rule of law and peaceful transfer of power, you probably aren't that into it," said Wagner, a Democrat. She's more hopeful that Kiggans' position

on abortion, "which has been a little murky," will sway voters to back Luria, who is pro-choice and criticized the Supreme Court decision that overturned the constitutional right to abortion. Kiggans, who has called herself "100%, unapologetically pro-life, has avoided saying whether she would vote for a national ban on abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, but a campaign spokesperson said she supports "protecting babies from 15 weeks on."

Meyer, the Virginia Beach Republican, thinks Kiggans has put the election issue to bed with her comments about Biden being president. "She basically says, Look, I've already addressed that, you know, I want to focus on the economy and move on.' She doesn't want to have it be a distraction," he said. "At the end of the day, it comes down to, 'Can I afford to put gas in my tank? Can I afford to put food on the table?'" ♦

NOVEMBER 3, 2022

What does the botched Ukraine letter mean for congressional progressives' foreign policy agenda?

The fiasco could make congressional progressives skittish about involvement in foreign policy and damage their credibility

By Marc Rod

The House Congressional Progressive Caucus's retracted letter last week urging direct talks with Russia over its invasion of Ukraine rapidly turned into a public embarrassment, with Democrats across the spectrum — including some of the letter's most prominent signatories —

distancing themselves from the letter or disavowing it entirely. But the impact of the incident could prove more far-reaching for House progressives.

The fallout could, at least in the short term, prove to both dissuade some progressives from advocacy on foreign

policy issues, as well as make others in the party less eager to engage with progressives on foreign policy, some analysts and former Democratic staffers told *Jewish Insider*.

"This ill-conceived, poorly researched, fundamentally misguided letter has done tremendous damage to the credibility of

the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and the willingness of its members to engage in anything dealing with national security and foreign policy,” said Joe Cirincione, the former president of the Ploughshares Fund, a former vice president of the Center for American Progress and a former senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “This letter had exactly the opposite impact from what they wanted, which was to get progressive members engaged in foreign policy.”

Joel Rubin, a former deputy assistant secretary of state who led Jewish outreach for Sen. Bernie Sanders’ (I-VT) 2020 presidential campaign, noted that “progressives have not historically made foreign policy their highest priority,” and said they now run the risk of rolling that involvement back further.

“I think it’s going to make them very hesitant to speak up, even though we really do need that voice in the mix,” Rubin continued.

One former Democratic congressional staffer, who requested anonymity to speak candidly about members of Congress, predicted that the incident could have broader ripple effects on foreign policy well beyond the Progressive Caucus, emphasizing that they expect Democratic lawmakers and staff to apply a “stricter level of scrutiny” across the board on foreign policy issues especially.

“Every member of staff is going to be wary the next time a letter like this comes along, you’re going to look at it much more closely. Your instinct right now is going to be — you’re almost going to have to prove that it’s worth doing,” the ex-staffer said. “I think the personal dynamics are such that other Hill staff people in other offices are going to look with high skepticism on anything coming from the same sources. They will sign on eventually, but it’s going to be a harder lift.”

But a second former Democratic congressional staffer was more skeptical that these events would have much impact on the signatories’ thinking.

“The progressives who’ve signed that letter come from very safe districts and are pretty consistent on the foreign policy issues on which they engage,” they said. “I don’t believe they will be disabused from further

engagement because of this mishap... It’s a small and marginalized group that is not particularly sensitive to the broader caucus or foreign policy implications of Democrats looking weak on foreign policy.”

They did, however, anticipate that it might make others outside of the 30 who signed the letter more hesitant to join with members of that group.

“It will make people think twice about signing these kinds of letters, or at least make them think about the downside of something that looks pretty anodyne... after names 1-30, it will make names 30 to 100 think twice,” they explained.

Peter Juul, an editor and columnist for *The Liberal Patriot* with a background in foreign policy and national security, agreed that the fallout will likely be more limited to the group of signatories.

“They’ll probably think twice before they sign onto something like that again... The embarrassment is probably not something they’re going to forget very soon,” he said. “It might induce a little more caution on behalf of some of these members to think twice about reading the fine print... on some of these letters and trusting certain people to handle them properly.”

“More broadly,” he continued, “the pretty quick reaction is a good sign” for party leadership and the party as a whole.

Juul added, however, that the “core faction” of signatories who are traditionally outspoken on foreign policy positions at odds with the majority of the party on foreign policy are less likely to be deterred by the incident and “are going to do what they’re going to do.”

Many of the most prominent signatories to the letter have also been outspoken advocates for nuclear negotiations with Iran and critics of Israeli government policy, as has the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, which was reportedly the major outside backer of the letter. The Quincy Institute broadly advocates for “restraint” and a less-militarized foreign policy.

The first former staffer predicted that the fallout from the letter will make lawmakers wary about going “beyond what is an existing Democratic consensus — going beyond where people are already comfortable.” Public support for Israel, for example, which remains widely popular in

the caucus and among voters, will likely not be impacted, they explained.

“But going beyond that existing consensus, I think, just got a lot harder, especially from the left,” they said.

The incident might also make the letter’s signatories more hesitant to speak out publicly.

“Elected members are not going to change their positions because of this, but I can see a well-grounded reluctance to engage publicly,” they said.

The second staffer disagreed. “[The signatories] are the same people that are not going to be disabused from speaking out on Israel and Iran issues again — for them they see it as a matter of principle,” they said.

Juul said that he does not expect Progressive Caucus members to change their positions on issues like Iran in the wake of the letter.

Rubin predicted that progressives will have to tread carefully in how they approach and frame national security initiatives going forward.

“The way that it’s perceived publicly is going to have to be done incredibly carefully, more thoughtfully, more rigorous, it’s going to have to have more validation from outside,” he explained. “What they’re running the risk of right now is returning to a pre-Iraq War phase of minimal impact on national security... It’s up to the progressives on foreign policy to make the case more effectively and in a more professional manner.”

“We can’t have this kind of stuff anymore and expect you to have people listen to us, quite frankly,” Rubin continued.

“Who in their right mind is going to trust the Congressional Progressive Caucus to issue a letter on national security again?” Cirincione said. “I don’t know how long that’s going to last. And I hope after the election there will be some recalibration of this, but it looks bad.”

The fallout, he added, has been a particular blow to Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), chair of the CPC, and the staff involved with the effort.

“The fury inside the Democratic Party went from top to bottom; it’s spanned from Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi to [Rep.] Ilhan Omar,” he said.

The Hill reported last week that the

fallout would likely make Jayapal's path to a position in Democratic House leadership next year — which she has been eyeing — more challenging. Jayapal has generally aligned with the far-left flank of the party on issues related to Israel policy, and, earlier this year, floated a policy of barring candidates from receiving Progressive Caucus endorsements if they accept support from Democratic Majority for Israel.

Juul agreed that, given that “Jayapal appears to have been the prime mover and was definitely the public face, I think that some people might hold that against her” in her campaign for leadership. However, Juul said that how much the letter affects her leadership ambitions could depend on how large the Democratic Caucus is next year, and how much sway the progressives have.

But the second former staffer said that, while the events “[put] a dagger in Jayapal's leadership ambitions among members who weren't going to support it anyway,” they

might have a lesser impact on her existing supporters.

Cirincione laid particular blame for last week's events on the staffers who pushed the letter, whom he said “should be” fired.

“You can't let the members off the hook here, they failed in their own responsibility,” he said. “But in some ways, they trusted the staff. I mean, that's what members do.”

The situation could also make the outside groups that promoted the letter, like the Quincy Institute, “persona non grata on Capitol Hill indefinitely,” according to Cirincione. He was a fellow at the Quincy Institute, but resigned in protest of its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

“The voices that pushed through this letter put these members in a very bad position,” Rubin said. “Sort of snowed them, to be honest.”

The first former staffer agreed that Quincy will “pay a heavy price in terms of both their credibility on the issue and also

their political set's sensibility.”

Rubin noted that progressive Middle East foreign policy groups were generally uninvolved with the effort, and do not seem to have been directly impacted by the blowback.

He said that this incident, in combination with ongoing events like the war in Ukraine and the women's rights protests in Iran, could provoke a “pivotal rethink in the progressive foreign policy community about what comes next,” describing the letter as “a symptom of a broader problem.”

“They're going to have to start redefining what it means to be progressive in foreign policy,” he explained. “And in many ways, you saw the struggle through this letter. The struggle of the anti-interventionist, isolationist, libertarian wing of the progressive side versus the human rights and engagement, and pro-diplomacy side, sort of fighting it out.” ♦

NOVEMBER 3, 2022

Why environmental groups support the Israel-Lebanon gas deal

While they oppose fossil fuels, the groups see natural gas as a lesser evil and hope the agreement will lead to more progress.

By Melanie Lidman

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

When Israel and Lebanon reached a historic agreement regarding their maritime border last week to open up drilling in two natural gas fields in the Mediterranean that were previously in disputed territory, the deal had unexpected

supporters: two Israeli environmental groups.

In most places around the world, environmental activists are usually quick to condemn any new maritime gas announcements. But Israeli environmental groups that prioritize two of the agreements' areas of focus, maritime issues and regional cooperation, applauded the deal, focusing

on the opportunities that the agreement could inspire in other long-running conflicts in the region.

“We want our electricity to come from renewable sources, but right now we're in a time of transition,” explained Youval Arbel, the deputy director of Zalul, a nonprofit environmental group focused on seas and streams. “When you see what's going

on [economically] in Lebanon, you can understand the importance of what it would mean for them if they discover gas.”

The deal demarcates a maritime border between the two states, which have historically been enemies and have fought several wars. Each country will have exclusive oil and gas exploration on its side of the border, and will split profits from a field that sits astride the line. It was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid last week, though Benjamin Netanyahu, the likely next prime minister, has said he opposes the agreement — leaving its fate uncertain.

Arbel said he is not worried that Netanyahu’s likely victory in this week’s elections will imperil the deal, since Netanyahu could have delayed the signing of the deal while part of the parliamentary opposition, and chose not to. But he is worried a Netanyahu government could spell problems for other environmental issues.

Zalul, which has an annual budget of around \$1 million, does research and advocacy focusing on Israel’s streams and seas, so it’s intimately familiar with the danger of pollution in both streams and coastlines. The organization is not opposed to drilling for natural gas in deep sea fields that have already been discovered, such as Israel’s Leviathan or Tamar fields, or the explorations that will take place in Qana and Karish fields, which were at the center of last week’s deal — but does not want the drilling to go further than that.

“We don’t need to open new gas fields beyond what’s already been developed,” Arbel said. He called on European countries, the main importers of gas from the region, to stick to their renewable energy goals for 2030, and not proceed with plans to lay a gas pipeline from Europe to the eastern Mediterranean.

For EcoPeace Middle East, an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian environmental group that works on cross-border initiatives, the deal is “a paradigm shift of diplomacy” that could usher in a new strategy for peace agreements in the region. Gidon Bromberg, the group’s Israeli co-director, told eJP, even though he said, “We understand that we need to stop burning fossil fuel, full stop.”

Previously, he said, there was an

expectation that negotiations would solve all the problems all at once, achieving full recognition and peace, which was the format of Israel’s peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt in the 20th century, and is the principle that guided the Abraham Accords, the recent Israeli normalization deals with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan.

“However, it’s not the only model, and what the Lebanon-Israel agreement on the maritime border shows us is that two countries that don’t have a peace treaty, that haven’t been able to agree on all the issues that divide them, were still willing to agree on one particular issue of mutual concern they recognized was so important to both of them,” Bromberg said. “Even though a full [peace] agreement was not reached, perhaps this agreement on one issue will help build confidence and trust, will help reality on the ground, and in the future could lead to an expansion of issues to reach a full agreement.”

The single-issue approach could provide a good framework for solving some of the “lower hanging fruit” in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, Bromberg believes. The last serious negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were nearly a decade ago, and ended without an agreement. The fundamental tensions surrounding major issues like the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements and permanent borders haven’t meaningfully changed.

But Bromberg noted that one major issue between Israelis and Palestinians is very different in 2022 than it was in 1993, when Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Oslo Accords: water.

Back in 1993, water was a “zero-sum game,” Bromberg said. There was a limited amount of natural water from local mountain and coastal aquifers. Any agreement that increased water allotment to the Palestinians or Jordanians would mean a decrease in the water available to Israel. But with Israeli innovations in water recycling and desalination, there’s no longer a ceiling on the total amount of water. Israel recycles more than 90% of wastewater for its agriculture and industry, and more than 70% of domestic drinking water is desalinated.

“The rationale of why water was hard

to solve no longer exists,” said Bromberg. And the issue of water access has become more critical, as the region has experienced 15 years of drought over the past 20 years, meaning the underground aquifers are not replenished. “There’s an urgency in water unlike any other issue that’s due to climate change,” said Bromberg.

Although Arbel supports the agreement with Lebanon, he still has concerns — namely, that Israel is unprepared to deal with the pollution from a possible spill due to an accident or terrorism.

“If we get a huge spill in the sea, the spill will propagate and drift into the coast, and whatever this oil meets, it will kill,” he said.

Two years ago, many sea animals died, and beaches along Israel’s entire coastline were shuttered, after approximately 1,000 tons of tar washed ashore. The Nature and Parks Authority called the spill “one of the most serious ecological disasters” in Israeli history. Thousands of volunteers rushed to help clean up, and some were hospitalized from breathing toxic fumes during the cleanup. Tar continued to wash ashore months afterward.

There is less concern about damage from the drilling and exploration itself, Arbel said, because there are international standards for marine drilling that minimize impact on the marine environment by treating and cleaning the by-products that are created during the drilling process.

“If there’s a terror attack or an accident, they can easily spill as much again,” said Arbel. The more drilling that happens, the higher the probability of an accident, and any spill could easily drift to Israel’s shore.

In 2008, the cabinet of then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert proposed a National Plan for Preparedness and Response to Marine Oil Pollution Incidents, but the plan was never funded or legislated into law. Last year, Israel’s Environmental Protection Ministry put forward a new draft bill to address the risk of oil spills.

Today, Israel has just two boats equipped to deal with oil spills — one in the Red Sea, and one in the Mediterranean Sea. Arbel estimates that implementing the preparedness plan would cost around \$28 million.

Both Israel and Lebanon ratified the European Union’s Barcelona Convention for

the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean in 1995. Israel has more robust marine protection agreements with Jordan, Egypt and Cyprus to deal with possible spills, which includes sharing rescue resources and information to track a spill. That level of cooperation is needed with Lebanon as well, said Arbel.

One thing Bromberg has learned about cooperation between uneasy neighbors is the importance of patience. EcoPeace is the only environmental organization working on trilateral issues in Israel, Jordan

and the Palestinian territories, he said, and it gets a third of its funding each from private donations, foundations and foreign government grants. Its annual budget is between \$2 million and \$4 million.

“Cross-border cooperation is not a one-year issue,” he said. Much of the group’s major funding is allocated in five-year cycles, a pace Bromberg said is essential for helping his group plan major cross-border initiatives, like their Good Water Neighbors project linking Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian mayors of towns along the Jordan River.

Bromberg said the Lebanon agreement provides an example of the importance of creative leadership and identifying issues that are clearly a win-win for both sides. It’s also an opportunity for countries suffering from the effects of climate change to work together to find a solution that will be mutually beneficial.

“Cooperation to meet that climate challenge brings resilience,” he said. “This is the type of leadership we now need to see among Israelis and Palestinians.” ♦

NOVEMBER 1, 2022

Overworked, underpaid and loving it: What this year’s Leading Edge survey shows about the Jewish nonprofit sector

The survey found that employees largely believe in the mission of their organization and understand how they contribute to it.

By Ben Sales

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Jewish nonprofit employees feel they make too little money. They say their organizations need more people to do the needed work. And they believe in the work and want to keep doing it.

Those are a few of the key takeaways from Leading Edge’s annual survey of more than 12,000 employees at 257 Jewish nonprofits, which was published today. The survey found that employees largely believe in the missions of their organizations and

understand how they contribute to those goals. Most of them want to keep working at Jewish nonprofits for at least two years. More than two-thirds — 69% — would call their organization a “great place to work.”

But at the same time, that number is 14 percentage points lower than the average across companies in the United States, and is five percentage points lower than last year. One-third of employees surveyed have been with their organization for less than two years, and nearly a third plan to leave their organizations within two years. Jews of color feel less of a sense of belonging than

those who identify as white. For 80% of employees, this is their first time working at a Jewish nonprofit.

“We have people who are incredibly proud, incredibly committed to the Jewish people, making the world a better place; they’ve also made a decision like, ‘You know what? I want to work on something that’s meaningful, that has purpose. I’m not as profit-driven as a for-profit thing,’” Gali Cooks, the president and CEO of Leading Edge, told eJewishPhilanthropy. “Where we get mucked up is how we actually create the institutions and the different systems,

practices, policies that enable people to actually do their work.”

Leading Edge has run the survey for six years, and aims to evaluate and improve the quality and culture of Jewish nonprofits. Cooks said that her biggest takeaway from the report this year is how much turnover there’s been since the start of the pandemic. And while only 16% of employees are fully working from home, less than half are in the office every day.

But Cooks said a high rate of turnover, especially for lower-level positions, isn’t necessarily a bad thing, and can provide organizations with a “fresh pitching arm.”

“There’s tremendous opportunity with having a good entry-level workforce,” Cooks said. “We want everyone to have their first job in the Jewish community be an incredibly positive one... There’s constant dynamism to this, and I don’t think success, honestly, is everybody staying at their organization for years and years and years and years.”

One area where there’s room for improvement, Cooks said, concerns having a diverse group of employees feel a sense of belonging at their workplace. While 77% of those surveyed overall said they felt like they belonged at their organization, the numbers are lower for Black Jews as well as Jews with disabilities and LGBTQ Jews.

While 85% of white Jews feel they belong, the same is true of 73% of Black Jews, the lowest result for any group of Jews as defined by race. Jews with disabilities also feel less supported and included, across

several survey questions, than their peers without disabilities.

“What keeps people wanting to stay in and do their best work?” Cooks said. “Well, the question around belonging is a key driver of both. “The question of, ‘I feel I belong at my organization’ ...it also connotes psychological safety.”

Some of the lowest scores on the survey related to salary. Only 42% of respondents believe their salary is fair relative to similar roles at their organization, identical to the 2021 figure and 17 percentage points below the U.S. average. And 58% believe their benefits meet their needs. Cooks said greater transparency and clarity around how salaries are determined could go a long way to making employees more satisfied with their pay. Only 39% of respondents understand how salaries and raises are determined at their organization.

In addition, only 38% of respondents said, “There are enough people to do the work we need to do.”

“Anything around capacity is always the lowest-scoring question,” Cooks said. “Two-way communication is something that’s standing in [organizations’] way of being a great place to work. That also is communication and transparency around salary. So I may not be able to give you the kind of salary that you want but I will be able to give you a sense of, this is how it was computed, this is how it compares to benchmarks.”

Given rising levels of antisemitism,

the survey asked for the first time about physical safety. The survey found that 84% of employees who work outside the home have a physical safety plan at their workplace, and 72% feel prepared to act if faced with a physical security threat.

But the survey found that feelings of preparedness are lower at organizations with 10 employees or fewer. Among employees at social justice or advocacy organizations, a majority do not feel prepared to act when faced with an attack.

“Many Jewish organizations do have a plan,” Cooks said. “Employees do feel like, ‘You know what? I know what to do, I know where to go, my leaders have thought through this, they’ve communicated that to me.’ That’s really, really good. At the same time, there is a sliver of employees who are in organizations that haven’t thought that through.”

One fundamental takeaway, Cooks said, is that nearly half of respondents want to stay in the Jewish nonprofit sector five or more years, while fewer than a quarter want to leave after two years or less. The fact that many are switching between organizations, she said, is proof that there’s a rich array of Jewish nonprofits offering employees meaningful work.

“There’s no more [career] ladder, there’s now a lattice,” she said. “What they’re saying is, also, I see an entire ecosystem of organizations. And that’s amazing... We actually have so many opportunities.” ♦