

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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DECEMBER 8, 2022

National strategy and campus antisemitism feature at White House roundtable

Jewish leaders gathered with senior administration officials yesterday to discuss methods for tackling antisemitism

By Marc Rod

A first-of-its-kind White House summit on antisemitism highlighted a growing push inside the organized Jewish community for a national strategy to combat antisemitism — alongside long-standing concerns like antisemitism on campus — according to Jewish community leaders who attended the meeting.

Senior White House and Biden administration officials, led by the Jewish second gentleman, Doug Emhoff, convened a roundtable Wednesday with leaders from 14 Jewish community groups, where each offered suggestions on strategies, policies and programs for combating antisemitism.

According to those present, a push for a formalized interagency strategy to

combat antisemitism domestically — also highlighted in a congressional letter this week — came up frequently in remarks from Jewish community representatives. And in interviews with *Jewish Insider* following the meeting, nearly every one of the attendees expressed support for such a move.

“We think tying all these efforts together, both from security- and non-security agencies, to develop a comprehensive strategy that doesn’t just securitize the issue of antisemitism, but also allows for innovation, new data sets and an opportunity to combat it and all its forms,” George Selim, the Anti-Defamation League’s senior vice president for national affairs, explained. “We think that’s where the future lies on this issue.”

American Jewish Committee CEO Ted Deutch noted that assembling a national strategy for combating antisemitism would likely mean that “we won’t have to keep going back with specific asks.”

“Everything that we’ve talked about from security, to education, to the need to combat Holocaust denial, to working together against white supremacy and working with other coalition groups — all of that will be part of a plan,” Deutch explained. “That’s why it makes so much sense for us to work together to craft that plan so that we can spend time actually implementing it.”

Antisemitism on campuses was also a significant focus among speakers. Among the attendees was Julia Jassey, the CEO of Jewish on Campus, who is also a student at

the University of Chicago.

“Students are the ones on the ground experiencing it,” Jassey emphasized to JI. “As a college student, as a 21-year-old woman, having the opportunity to have my voice valued by the administration is very, very impactful, and I think something that wasn’t just moving to me but affected a lot of young Jews in the community.”

Adam Lehman, CEO of Hillel International, added that he’s hoping that the administration will pursue codifying guidance that antisemitism is a form of prohibited discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Elana Broitman, senior vice president for public affairs at the Jewish Federations of North America said she also addressed the spread of antisemitism from college campuses into high schools and middle schools, as well as the encroachment of antisemitism into the corporate world.

Several speakers emphasized the importance of giving local law enforcement the necessary resources to respond to antisemitic incidents. Rabbi Jonah Pesner, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, noted to JI that local law enforcement respond to most incidents of antisemitism and argued that they must be included in any national strategy.

Orthodox Union Advocacy Center Executive Director Nathan Diamant told JI he pitched a plan to designate portions of Justice Department grants to local police forces specifically to provide security at synagogues and other vulnerable houses of worship. Secure Community Network CEO Michael Masters suggested making funding available for or contingent upon training local law enforcement and prosecutors on tackling hate crimes.

Multiple leaders said they also re-emphasized the need to increase funding to the Nonprofit Security Grant program as Congress finalizes its 2023 spending legislation.

Rabbi Abba Cohen, vice president for government affairs of Agudath Israel of America, said he highlighted the threats targeting the Orthodox community specifically — including discriminatory zoning laws, as well as attacks targeting identifiable Jews.

“Orthodox and other identifiable Jews

— men, women and children — just walking down the street and being assaulted, chased, kicked, and verbally abused,” Cohen said. “These incidents don’t make headlines but nonetheless instill 24/7 fear just to go outside.”

“Antisemitism didn’t start yesterday and it’s not going to end this afternoon,” Rabbi Levi Shemtov, executive vice president of the American Friends of Lubavitch, said. “But this afternoon, something did happen, which is going to send a strong signal that an effort is being created to confront and mitigate this wildly spreading disaster.”

William Daroff, CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and others noted to JI that the Jewish community largely spoke in with one voice at the session.

“There was really no disagreement of note,” Daroff recounted, “but an incredible amount of agreement about the need to address antisemitism by the federal government, as well as thanks for the Biden administration for bringing us together.”

Sheila Katz, CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women, told JI that many of the Jewish community speakers also emphasized how antisemitism has been a personal concern for many of them, with some speakers offering “painful” stories about their own experiences, making the discussion feel “much more personal” than many White House policy events.

“To hear somebody talking about, if they’re Orthodox, that their kids are feeling unsafe walking where they’re going [with visible Jewish symbols], to hear people questioning whether they should be going to synagogue, to hear from the college student that people sometimes are thinking [that] they should hide their Jewishness — these kinds of themes of personal stories for ourselves, for our organizations, for our family, and loved ones, came up almost in everyone’s remarks,” Katz said.

Officials did not offer significant feedback or hint at specific next steps during the meeting, but administration officials said after the roundtable that they saw it as a first step in a broader process.

“We are all very focused on this, from Capitol Hill over here to the White House,” Deputy White House Press Secretary Emilie Simmons told JI. “And I think you can expect

us to continue working together, keeping our folks at the table to figure out what can be done.”

Deputy Special Envoy Aaron Keyak emphasized to reporters in a phone interview following the roundtable that the administration plans to “work together based off of the recommendations... and figure out what’s the best path forward.”

“As far as the specifics, the first step in this process is convening the meeting,” Keyak continued. “And then we’ll take a look at the various ideas, consult individually, one on one with some of the leaders, consult with our counterparts in government and decide the best way to move forward.”

The meeting, according to attendees, went half an hour beyond its allotted hour, and those in the room praised the White House team for their attentiveness — multiple attendees praised senior officials for taking what appeared to be extensive notes.

Attendees offered high praise for Emhoff, who has become a leading voice in the White House’s efforts to combat antisemitism and support the Jewish community.

“We’re all in pain right now,” Emhoff said in opening remarks. “Our community is in pain. It hurts. It hurts me to see what we’re going through right now. What all people are going through right now. Antisemitism is dangerous. We cannot normalize this. We all have an obligation to condemn these vile acts. We must all — all of us — cannot stay silent.”

Amy Spitalnick, executive director of Integrity First for America, said Emhoff’s embrace of his Jewish identity was “deeply important to me.” “That sort of visibility, and more broadly, the administration’s willingness to use its bully pulpit to take on this threat at this crucial moment is key,” she continued.

Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, the CEO of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, said it appeared each of the administration representatives who spoke at the meeting “really felt [this issue] personally” and that “this was not just an issue of policy” to them.

While the meeting came on the heels of rapper Kanye West’s public embrace of Nazism and other antisemitic tirades, Keyak emphasized to reporters that the roundtable was not convened in response

to any particular incident or incidents. He described the event as a follow-on to the White House's broad-based United We Stand summit on hate and extremism earlier this year.

The administration was represented by

Emhoff, Keyak, Director of the Domestic Policy Council Susan Rice, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism Amb. Deborah Lipstadt, Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement Keisha Lance Bottoms, White House Jewish liaison

Shelley Greenspan, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Melissa Rogers and Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Josh Geltzer. ♦

DECEMBER 8, 2022

The Pennsylvania Democrat hoping to succeed Summer Lee in the Statehouse

Bhavini Patel, whose short-lived campaign for an open House seat drew interest from Pittsburgh Jewish leaders, now appears more bullish about her prospects

By Matthew Kassel

Bhavini Patel, whose short-lived campaign for an open House seat in Pittsburgh drew interest from local Jewish leaders, is setting her sights on the state legislature, as a new vacancy sets the stage for a special election that could determine the balance of power in Pennsylvania's lower chamber.

The Democratic councilwoman from Edgewood recently announced her bid to succeed outgoing state Rep. Summer Lee, a progressive stalwart who is ascending to federal office this January, following a high-profile campaign that faced opposition from pro-Israel groups. For her part, Patel, 29, had briefly sought the nomination in Pennsylvania's redrawn 12th Congressional District, but she dropped out of the primary after just a couple of months, citing a lack of momentum.

This time around, however, Patel suggested that she is more bullish about her prospects, as the local elected official gears up for a competitive election that is likely to accelerate in the coming weeks.

Honing her message from the congressional race, Patel — a Pennsylvania

native raised by a single mother who immigrated from India — emphasized that her “personal life story” is reflective of the voters she hopes to represent in the state's 34th District, which encompasses some parts of Pittsburgh and its surrounding suburbs in Allegheny County.

“My mom eventually became a small business owner, and I grew up working in food trucks,” Patel explained in an interview on Wednesday. “Seeing how a single parent can become independent through small businesses and raise a family, those are the experiences, I think, that a lot of the people in the 34th are experiencing, and being able to speak to those challenges is critically important.”

In contrast with Lee, who officially resigned from her statehouse position on Wednesday, Patel stressed a relatively moderate approach to governance, including a commitment to boosting “small business development” as well as promoting law enforcement, among other practically oriented agenda items. “I think it's absolutely important that we support our police officers,” she said, “and make

sure that we're building up our community relations.”

Still, Patel resisted ideological labels. “I'm a young woman of color, so inherently I've experienced a lot of the challenges of this district, and my job is to take those experiences and take those stories to Harrisburg and work with anybody and everybody who's willing to support a bold vision for change,” she said, referring to the state capital. “That's where I stand on the spectrum, and that's my mission if I get elected to serve the district.”

The special election, tentatively scheduled for Feb. 7, is among a trio of upcoming races in traditionally blue districts that are likely to decide whether Democrats will take the majority in Pennsylvania's House of Representatives for the first time in more than a decade. The party now holds a razor-thin two-seat deficit, owing to a pair of new vacancies as well as the recent death of a Democratic state lawmaker. Republicans, consequently, maintain a slight if only temporary advantage heading into the new term.

Patel is one of at least four Democratic

contenders who are currently jockeying for the chance to replace Lee, including attorney Abigail Salisbury, environmental activist NaTisha Washington and school board member Ashley Comans.

In lieu of a traditional primary, the Allegheny County Democratic Committee will choose one candidate in a vote that has yet to be scheduled, with at least two months remaining until the special election. The Democratic nominee is favored to prevail because the district is overwhelmingly blue.

It remains to be seen if committee members are leaning toward one particular candidate. “The way that I’ve been approaching it is obviously just having one-on-one conversations with anybody and everybody who’s willing to talk within the committee and even beyond that,” Patel said of her approach to the nomination process. “I’m making the case for why I would be best suited to serve the district.”

Steve Irwin, a Jewish Democrat who narrowly lost to Lee in a hotly contested primary battle last spring, said Patel “has worked hard to develop relationships with the Democratic committee” as she makes her bid for higher office. “I think Bhavini is a very strong candidate,” he suggested, adding that she has “a real mastery of policy” and is “very personable.”

“I didn’t know Bhavini before the congressional campaign, and I thought she made a realistic and selfless decision to exit when she did,” Irwin told JI. “We’ve become friends through that shared experience, and she would make a very effective member of the Pennsylvania House.”

Jeffrey Letwin, a Jewish community activist in Pittsburgh, echoed that

assessment. He said he was impressed with Patel’s abbreviated campaign for federal office earlier this year and now believes she will be a “very formidable and credible candidate” for the statehouse seat. “I’ve kept in touch with her,” he said in a recent interview with JI. “I think she’s got a future.”

In addition to her role on the Edgewood Borough Council, Patel — an Oxford graduate and former tech entrepreneur — has served as a community outreach manager for Allegheny County’s executive since June.

Lou Weiss, a pro-Israel activist in Pittsburgh who is registered as a Democrat but usually backs Republicans, indicated that he was willing to make an exception for Patel’s campaign. “She is charismatic, level-headed and smart,” he told JI. “While I’m generally on Team Red, she is a Democrat I could proudly support.”

In conversation with JI, Patel expressed opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel, which is among the few issues related to Middle East policy that lawmakers address in the state legislature. “I think that implementing economic sanctions on an economic ally and a national security ally,” Patel said, “is not the correct approach.”

The U.S. and Israel “have always had a strong partnership, and I think that’s reflected in the local community in Squirrel Hill but also throughout the 34th District,” Patel told JI, referring to the heavily Jewish Pittsburgh neighborhood. “I think it’s absolutely imperative to engage the Jewish community and to show solidarity,” she elaborated, “especially when our Jewish communities are faced with antisemitism

and unacceptable comments.”

“As an Indian-American woman, for me, it’s absolutely imperative to be able to build cross-cultural connections and show solidarity so that our Jewish community knows and realizes that they’re welcome here,” Patel said. “It’s that diversity and that acceptance that makes us thrive and build toward success.”

Before the midterms concluded last month, Patel had been tentatively eyed by some pro-Israel advocates in Pittsburgh as a potential challenger to Lee next cycle, according to a person familiar with the matter. During the House race, Lee had drawn fierce resistance from pro-Israel groups, notably including a super PAC affiliated with the lobbying group AIPAC, over her critical approach to U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Now that the special election is underway, however, such strategizing appears to have dissipated — and Patel herself did not directly address whether she hopes to seek federal office again. “I’m focused on the HD-34 race,” she said matter-of-factly.

“This area is my home, and I care about it deeply,” she told JI. “I’m excited to be able to talk about these issues, because, again, I’ve lived them. My family has experienced these issues, my neighbors have experienced these issues, and I think that I’m positioned to be able to be a strong advocate for the region.” ♦

Jared Moskowitz eyes Foreign Affairs, Judiciary committees

The incoming lawmaker lamented the lack of interaction between Democrats and Republicans during freshman orientation for House members

By Marc Rod

Rep.-elect Jared Moskowitz (D-FL), who recently won election to replace former Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL) in Congress, told *Jewish Insider* in a sit-down interview last week that he's aiming to fill Deutch's seats on both the House Foreign Affairs and Judiciary Committees.

Moskowitz, a former Florida Emergency Management Director and member of the Florida House, has pledged to follow closely in his predecessor's footsteps as a vocal supporter of the U.S.-Israel relationship. He said he's hoping to join the Foreign Affairs committee to carry on that support for Israel.

"We have one of the highest Jewish populations of any district in the country," Moskowitz said. "Ted Deutch [and his predecessor] Robert Wexler had a great record on Israel. I look forward to continuing having that special relationship. And so I want to be on that committee to continue their great work."

For the moment, Moskowitz said he's withholding judgment on Israel's emerging governing coalition, which appears set to include several far-right members in influential positions.

"We know who the players are in the makeup and we know some of the previous history there. Let's see how it all shakes out before we start passing judgment," Moskowitz said. "We'll have to work through those issues. We shouldn't be interfering in domestic politics."

On the Judiciary Committee, Moskowitz hopes to help the Biden administration push back against "the ridiculous investigations" that Republicans, who will control the House in the next Congress, have pledged to launch, and "fight for democracy and separate fact from fiction."

"We heard a lot in the election about

inflation and gas prices and the cost of Thanksgiving. Well, none of the solutions to that are in Hunter Biden's laptop," Moskowitz quipped.

He also said he planned to advocate for further gun violence prevention efforts. Moskowitz's district includes Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the site of one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history.

He noted, however, that his ability to secure the coveted committee assignments will be impacted by the ultimate balance of power, which will decide how many seats are available for Democrats. Two races have yet to be called.

The congressman-elect, who was in Washington for new-member orientation, said that the official training sessions were "great," but lamented that social activities for new members were divided between parties.

"There is almost no ability at this point to have a bipartisan social event," Moskowitz said. "As soon as you get up there, that division is kind of built into the system."

"The division is intentional," he continued. "It's something that — at least what I've been told — is it's been like that now for almost 20 years. The idea is if you don't get to know the other side, you don't get to know what they did for a profession, or that they have families and kids and you don't get to socialize with them, it's much easier to demonize the other side, call them enemies."

As he settles into his office in January, Moskowitz said he'll prioritize meeting his fellow members "because to get anything done here, you have to build a coalition — if that's people on your side or across the aisle."

Moskowitz won his election by less than five percentage points, losing the Palm Beach

County portion of the district, including Boca Raton, while Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis carried the district as a whole — a symptom of the punishing cycle for Democrats this year in Florida, where DeSantis' popularity helped to boost down-ballot Republicans. The heavily Jewish district had, historically, been a Democratic stronghold.

Republicans, Moskowitz warned, "could have" picked up the seat "if Democrats had a different candidate."

He said he had won "because I have shown over the last several years that I'm willing to work with anyone to get things accomplished."

He also noted that, working as DeSantis' emergency management director, he had seen Florida voters' enthusiasm for DeSantis' pandemic-era policies, which included keeping schools and businesses open.

"I tried to tell a lot of my Democratic colleagues who are fighting against opening schools and opening businesses two years later, that that was going to be something that he'd be rewarded for," Moskowitz said. "And that's why he got a big [independent] vote."

Moskowitz added that Democrats need to "rebuild" in Florida, working on voter registration, figuring out how to improve turnout and optimizing their messaging.

"The Democrats' entire campaign was just anti-DeSantis... We didn't give voters in Florida, in my opinion, issues to vote for," he continued. "You hear about that nationally, Republicans were just anti-Biden... And that's one of the reasons why they lost nationally. For some reason, we had that same similar strategy that we were just anti the governor, we thought that somehow would carry us over." ♦

At J Street confab, attendees grapple with what it means to be ‘pro-Israel’

Praise for the Jewish state was sparse at the gathering amid concerns about Israel’s new government

By Gabby Deutch

For three days, the lobby of Washington’s Omni Shoreham Hotel, just above the bucolic woods of Rock Creek Park, was the place to be for American Jews who are not pleased with the status quo regarding Israel. It was J Street’s first in-person national conference since before the COVID-19 pandemic, and after Monday night’s gala dinner, activists and policymakers hobnobbed with tuxedo-clad members of Congress who had come straight from the evening’s other big Washington event, the White House congressional holiday party.

But the excited “great-to-see-you” exclamations and the warm hugs belied an undercurrent of distress among the roughly 2,000 J Street supporters who showed up to the conference. The organization recently added “pro-democracy” to its tagline, alongside “pro-Israel” and “pro-peace,” and concern for the state of democracy in the United States and Israel set the tone of the event.

Speakers argued that the U.S. had dodged a brush with autocracy in the November midterm elections when Democrats exceeded expectations and, in key positions in several battleground states, defeated Republicans who denied the results of the 2020 election. For now, presenters and activists said, democracy was winning in America.

That contrasted with J Street’s attitude toward recent developments in Israel, which many speakers characterized as a democracy on the brink.

“We support Israel because we cherish its declaration of independence and all of the goals that it aspires [to]. But I cannot support [Israeli Prime Minister-designate Benjamin] Netanyahu’s efforts to undermine the very aspirations of the democratic state

of Israel by marginalizing, annexing and compromising the rights of Arab Israeli citizens,” Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT), who was elected in November to the U.S. Senate, said at a Monday afternoon plenary session.

Other congressional speakers at the conference included Reps. Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), Sean Casten (D-IL), Madeleine Dean (D-PA), Gerry Connolly (D-VA) and Jennifer Wexton (D-VA). Reps.-elect Greg Casar (D-TX), Sydney Kamlager (D-CA) and Becca Balint (D-VT) sent remarks over video. Several senior Democrats, including House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC), House Intelligence Committee Chair Adam Schiff (D-CA) and House Judiciary Committee Chair Jerry Nadler (D-NY), stopped by the gala.

Speeches and panel discussions reflected J Street’s leftward shift in recent years, from its founding as a movement focused specifically on advocating for a two-state solution to an organization now deeply entrenched in America’s progressive movement, with far broader concerns beyond the Middle East.

At the gala, J Street awarded its Tzedek V’Shalom (Justice and Peace) award to Amy Spitalnick, executive director of Integrity First for America, the organization that supported the civil lawsuit on behalf of victims of the Charlottesville Unite the Right rally; American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and former NARAL Pro-Choice America President Ilyse Hogue.

None of the women work on Israel-related issues in a professional capacity, and each brought other progressive issues from their work into speeches that touched on abortion, transgender issues, education and unions. Their remarks mirrored a more domestic policy-focused approach from

J Street overall, and a move away from attempts at previous conferences to answer big questions about the future of American foreign policy.

Rep. Jamie Raskin’s (D-MD) opening keynote speech on Saturday night exemplified the shift: He issued an impassioned message about the importance of democracy, with only a brief discussion of issues related to Israel.

Since its founding 15 years ago, the organization has faced criticism from more mainstream pro-Israel organizations like AIPAC. During the conference, AIPAC tweeted several times: “J Street is many things, but it’s not pro-Israel.” AIPAC also criticized J Street president Jeremy Ben-Ami for failing to offer any praise of Israel in his opening night speech to the conference.

The two groups publicly sparred throughout this year’s midterm elections, with J Street attacking AIPAC’s support for Republicans and AIPAC lambasting J Street for endorsing some candidates on the far-left who have flirted with support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement and who frequently condemn Israel.

Meanwhile, some former J Street allies on the activist left have since turned against the group, arguing that the organization’s support for a Jewish state and its opposition to BDS mean it is out of step with their movement. (J Street, which organizationally does not support BDS, has advocated against legislation that condemns it.)

At a Sunday afternoon session about J Street’s role in the progressive movement, a senior staffer at Justice Democrats — the left-wing PAC best known for helping launch Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s (D-NY) political career, and for supporting other “Squad” members including Reps.

Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN) — said that many progressives would like to give J Street the cold shoulder.

“I think a lot of folks will be — could be — upset that Justice Democrats is in a space with J Street, because in our world and on the left, in more movement spaces, for a lot of folks, that is an uncomfortable place to be,” Justice Democrats Political Director Amira Hassan said.

On Tuesday, J Street members went to Capitol Hill for lobbying meetings with members of Congress. One of the priorities, according to a fact sheet given to activists, was educating members and their staff about the new Israeli government, which is set to comprise ministers well to the right of Netanyahu.

“We’ll be providing a briefing on these new members and understanding why it is

that they’re out of sync with our values and our priorities,” Ben-Ami told reporters on Sunday.

On stage and in private conversations, J Street supporters attempted to reckon with a Jewish state that they felt had abandoned some democratic norms — they pointed, for instance, to laws being discussed in Israel that would make changes to the country’s judiciary — and voted in politicians, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, whose value systems do not align with those of liberal American Jews. Activists questioned what it means to be “pro-Israel” when they disagreed with many of Israel’s actions.

“We are seeing politicians here and there in certain ways weaponize the hope that we all have for this country in an attempt to undermine the values that all of us in

this room hold so dear,” Spitalnick said on Monday night.

Another key lobbying goal for J Street was urging members of Congress to consider placing restrictions on U.S. military assistance to Israel. But Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), a lead sponsor of a congressional bill that would place regulations on U.S. aid to Israel, received strong applause when she was introduced on Monday night, although J Street did not ask its supporters to lobby for her bill (or for any specific legislation).

In a Sunday keynote address, Secretary of State Tony Blinken spoke about the strong bond between the U.S. and Israel, and touted Washington’s \$3.3 billion in annual military assistance to Israel. He received no applause when he called that security assistance “sacrosanct.”

Marc Rod contributed reporting. ♦

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A small rabbinical school that caters to Deaf students is growing, with help from a Jewish co-working space

The seminary’s new home will be SketchPad, a coworking space for small Jewish organizations on Chicago’s North Side.

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

At a time when large rabbinical schools in the United States are seeing declining enrollment and closing down properties, one small school in the Chicago area is bucking the trend.

Hebrew Seminary — a pluralist, egalitarian rabbinical school whose classes are fully accessible to Deaf as well as hearing students — is growing. Founded in 1992,

the school has a \$270,000 budget and has ordained only 15 rabbis during its first three decades.

But it now has nine students across its five-year program and is moving into a larger space. A chunk of its students and alumni are Deaf; all students must master American Sign Language as part of their coursework, which can be taken remotely. School tradition dictates that all ordained graduates give a speech in ASL. In addition to courses on the Bible, rabbinics, philosophy,

liturgy and more, the school offers classes on Jewish responsa related to the Deaf community, the Talmud’s discussions of Deafness and the mental health of Deaf people.

In January, the seminary will move from its home of more than 30 years — Skokie, Ill.’s Congregation Bene Shalom, a Reform synagogue where the school’s founder, Rabbi Douglas Goldhamer, who died earlier this year, had a pulpit. The synagogue also houses the Hebrew Association of the Deaf

and Hearing.

The seminary's new home will be SketchPad, a coworking space for small Jewish organizations on Chicago's North Side. Rabbi Jonah Rank, Hebrew Seminary's new rosh yeshiva, or head, said that the school aims to be inclusive of groups beyond the Deaf community.

"[It's] a natural extension that we recognize in ourselves and that others recognize in us that we truly do care about Jews from all walks of life, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, hearing status, race, ethnicity, physical ability, anything of the sort," Rank, who is not himself Deaf, and who will be leading the school remotely from his home in Massachusetts with occasional visits to Chicago, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "We see ourselves as keeping our doors very wide open."

SketchPad was founded in 2017, and most of its member organizations are local offices of national initiatives, like the learning organization Limmud, the LGBTQ group Keshet, the service organization Repair the World and more. A few are locally based initiatives, like the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, the Jewish Initiative for Animals, Kahal and local consulting firm Tiny Windows, a digital communications consultancy that works mainly with Jewish nonprofit leaders.

Beyond the community of organizations, SketchPad offers Jewishly themed office perks. Membership includes use of a meeting room that doubles as a *beit midrash*, or house of Jewish study. Offices and conference rooms bear names like "*Tachlis*" (roughly translated as "bottom

line," for three people to work at a table) and "*Minyan*" (a conference room fit for a ten-person quorum).

While the shared office amenities are a feature that member organizations will benefit from, said Susan Morrow, SketchPad's board chair, "it's really about the collaboration and community."

Morrow is excited by the arrival of the Hebrew Seminary, because it expands the space's impact to be more inclusive of the Deaf community. And like Hebrew Seminary, her organization is also growing.

The space SketchPad used before the pandemic was full, and when Chicago went into lockdown, Morrow decided to close down and signed the lease on a roughly 10,000-square-foot space down the block, three times the size of the original location, she told eJP. SketchPad moved into the new quarters in 2021. The organization has an annual budget of \$375,000.

"We had so many other organizations that wanted to be part of us, and we had no room," she said. "We are starting now, again, to be able to build our culture of community."

Gathering these initiatives under one roof allows for cross-pollination of ideas in the communal kitchen and other shared spaces, which can lead to community and collaboration, Morrow added.

"I have a lot of future dreams for what SketchPad will continue to grow and be," she said, including a vision of the coworking space "in a big building with a shared kosher kitchen and all those kinds of things that continue to add to our community and benefit the smaller organizations."

The organizations sometimes collaborate on events, and another way

SketchPad is helping its tenants is through philanthropy.

This past Giving Tuesday, SketchPad asked supporters to make a donation of \$36, half of which could be designated to go to the member organization of the donor's choice. SketchPad also recently received a grant from Upstart's Collaboratory to bolster the mission of No Shame on U, a member of the space that seeks to eliminate stigma surrounding mental health challenges.

Wendy Singer, No Shame on U's director of programming, said that the project will also "help the mission of Sketchpad, which is to create a space where not only are we coworking, but we're building each other up and helping each other and supporting each other."

Morrow, who said she has been "philanthropically driven my entire life," said she loves "giving other organizations an opportunity to learn to do things a little differently, to help them grow and give them opportunities they would not otherwise have without being in a shared space."

Morrow said that there are one or two offices left unoccupied, and permanent desks and hot desks are available; once a month they do a free co-work day, when anyone can use the shared space and be part of SketchPad for the day, including a happy hour at the end to encourage people to join. Rank is excited for Hebrew Seminary to take part in those opportunities.

"We're going to be down the hall from a whole variety of different members of the Jewish community," he said. "And it's not only symbolic, but it's very physical, that we are declaring that we are here and we're part of a larger community." ♦

A Jewish-funded mobile clinic in Ukraine will focus on women's health

The clinic is launching amid increasing reports of sexual violence by Russian troops.

By Lev Gringauz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In the middle of the summer, Brian Abrahams, CEO of American Friends of Sheba Medical Center, received a call from the large Tel Aviv-area hospital with an unexpected request: Could he wire \$60,000 to a company in Ohio to buy a trailer?

"Sheba Medical Center is an Israeli government-affiliated hospital, they can't simply be wiring money out of the country, especially for something that's not budgeted," Abrahams told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "So, [we] bought this trailer."

Over the next several months, the trailer was shipped to Hamburg, Germany, where it was outfitted with ultrasound machines and stocked with medical supplies as part of the hospital's latest venture in Ukraine: A mobile clinic to treat STDs and provide reproductive health services for women and children across the country.

The clinic is being organized with Corridor, an Israel nonprofit providing aid to Ukraine, and Kvitna, a Ukrainian reproductive health fund. It will include two examination rooms in the space of a small mobile home, and its Ukrainian staff comprising an OB/GYN, a psychologist and a nurse will be able to treat roughly 20 patients a day, and will offer telehealth appointments with Sheba doctors in Israel.

The clinic will also provide abortions — an operation that an increasing number of Ukrainians need, according to the clinic's founders. Early on in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "there appeared women and girls who, after the bomb shelters and bombings... were in a terrible state," said Uriel Shtern, the founder of Kvitna, "with a variety of reproductive health issues brought out by the war, as well as rape."

The reported prevalence of rape by

Russian soldiers — targeting Ukrainian boys as well — makes hosting a mental health professional in the clinic a key part of the initiative for Sheba. Survivors may not be ready to talk about their experience out of a sense of shame, let alone explain their needs to a doctor, said Yoel Har-Even, head of Sheba Global, the international arm of the hospital, which has provided medical aid and training to Ukrainians since the start of Russia's invasion.

"If you get given good care for the physical issues, but you're not taking care of the mental issues, there won't be any success getting those kids back to society and back to a normal life," Har-Even told *eJP*. "Therefore, for us, it's very important that the physical treatment will be surrounded by a mental treatment as well."

Iulia Mandel, a former press secretary for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, wrote in the *Washington Post* in July that reports from human rights groups and the United Nations, plus a "growing body of anecdotal evidence," suggested that sexual violence had become a significant problem during the war.

"The fraught nature of these atrocities, which are historically underreported, means that it will be a long time before the full scale of the problem is clear," Mandel wrote. "Collecting reliable data is extremely hard. In Ukrainian society, and especially in rural areas, sexual crimes are so stigmatized that victims fear being judged. It is usually the victim's relatives and friends who seek help on the victim's behalf."

The mobile clinic emerged as an idea in the spring in conversations between Corridor and Kvitna, which were already collaborating on evacuating Ukrainians and organizing humanitarian and medical aid to Ukraine. But it took a chance meeting in Poland, at the Krakow airport in late

April, to bring Sheba into the project, which lacked medical expertise and, perhaps most crucially, funding.

Har-Even was on his way back to Israel after working on Sheba's temporary field hospital in Ukraine when Oran Singer, co-founder of Corridor, introduced himself. "I got a call and spoke Hebrew. [Singer] heard that I'm speaking Hebrew, and we started to talk to each other and ask each other, 'What are you doing here?'" Har-Even recalled. "I told him my story. He told me his story. The rest is history."

Unlike Sheba's field hospital — funded by the Israeli government along with the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee — the mobile clinic isn't getting Israeli government support. One year's operation, between the cost of supplies, fuel, and doctors' pay, is expected to cost upwards of \$500,000. For now, the hospital is fronting the operating costs of the mobile clinic and hoping to make them up through philanthropy.

"We've been tasked with raising" the funding, said Abrahams, of the American Friends of Sheba, which will reimburse the hospital for the clinic's expenses. For the moment, Abrahams thinks a targeted campaign to a handful of major donors will both keep fundraising costs down and be able to cover the costs of the initiative.

"There's some very successful Ukrainian-American, Ukrainian-Jewish-American philanthropists," he said, adding that he's had "some initial conversations with a few" of them.

Meanwhile, the clinic is about to begin operating. In mid-November, the trailer was shipped to the Polish-Ukrainian border, where the organizers have been waiting to finalize operating permits with the Ukrainian government. Har-Even expects

the last of the bureaucratic hurdles to be cleared and for the clinic to be treating patients this month.

The clinic will start working in western Ukraine and, over time, will make its way to the eastern part of the country, where residents of areas recently freed from Russian control have a greater need for treatment. The initiative will fill a crucial hole in the Ukrainian health care system as many doctors have either fled the war or been killed, while hospitals have been bombed by Russian forces, Shtern said.

“Even if the war ends tomorrow, the health care system won’t get back up on its feet,” he said. “In all the liberated territories, there’s nothing, the hospitals are destroyed.”

Sheba will also be training Ukrainian doctors in the areas in which the clinic works, so when it leaves they can follow up with patients and continue treatment. Har-Even hopes that the mobile clinic can be scaled up soon, with several clinics deployed

across Ukraine. But in the long-term, once a cease-fire or end to the war is reached, he plans for Sheba to build permanent shelters to help treat Ukrainians and care for them – especially children.

“We are talking about hundreds, if not thousands of kids now wandering all over Ukraine...some of them lost their parents, so there is no one to take care of them,” he said. The mobile clinic is a temporary solution, and “those kids need to have a place to put their head with a warm pillow and soup at the end of the day, which we cannot deliver right now due to the situation.”

While motivated first and foremost by the humanitarian need in Ukraine, for Har-Even the mobile clinic is also a deeply personal project inspired by his Jewish heritage.

Har-Even’s late grandmother was a Holocaust survivor from Ukraine, and when he left for Ukraine in the spring to organize Sheba’s field hospital, his mother tried to

stop him by invoking the family’s traumatic past there. Har-Even told her it was precisely because of that history that he needed to help Ukrainians.

“The Jewish people are commanded to remember and not forget,” he said. “Revenge is a part of Judaism. But also, forgiveness is part of Judaism... I want to show the world that the Jewish people are different: When someone is asking [us] for support and help, [we] are not doing calculations about what happened in the past. Although we know exactly what happened.”

Kvitna’s Shtern is grateful for the support the clinic has gained, and sees the project as an example of how Jews around the world continue to prioritize aid to Ukraine. “They didn’t close their eyes at such a tragedy,” he said. “Israelis and Americans are showing an example to everyone else, you can’t stay silent.” ♦

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PJ Library launches fellowship for artists in bid to attract adolescent readers

“Graphic novels are our middle-grade subscribers’ favorite genre,” said Catriella Freedman, the director of PJ Library’s Author Stewardship program.

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

PJ Library, with its monthly shipments of free children’s books, has become a household name for Jewish parents across the country. But there’s one demographic the initiative wants to zero in on expanding: middle schoolers. And it’s doing so not by recruiting more readers, but by finding illustrators and graphic novelists

who will draw them in.

The program will launch a new fellowship at the end of next year called the PJ Library Illustrator and Visual Storyteller Fellowship. The cohort of fellows – both established and up-and-coming Jewish illustrators – will meet online and in person, spread over six months, with five-day stays in Israel and Vermont.

“Graphic novels are our middle-grade subscribers’ favorite genre,” Catriella

Freedman, the director of PJ Library’s Author Stewardship program, told eJewishPhilanthropy. “If we don’t start building our relationships with illustrators and author-illustrators and creatives in general, we’re going to lose out.”

PJ Library, which has a budget of \$36 million, sends out more than 148 distinct titles every year to its more than 670,000 subscribers throughout the world who are raising Jewish families, whether they are

affiliated with the Jewish community or not; the nonprofit is principally funded by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

The core PJ program targets children ages 6 months to 8 years old, while PJ Our Way is aimed at kids ages 9 to 12, allowing them to pick their own books from a curated selection. The program's graphic novel offerings to adolescents include illustrated holiday guides as well as activities and the PJ Library *Haggadah*. "One of the things that we realized early on is that graphic novels, and different ways of telling a story, are the key to getting more and more kids engaged in our content," Freedman said.

The fellowship will have a 14-artist cohort that will meet through virtual sessions spread over six months, aimed at building community and inspiring and educating about how to move projects forward, led by illustrators, agents, art directors and researchers. The program is bookended by stays at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem in November 2023, and the Center for Cartoon Studies in Vermont in June 2024.

The program has received nearly 100 applications so far, ahead of a Dec. 8 deadline. Freedman said that PJ Library cast as wide a net as possible, using vague terminology in its application so applicants could choose their own definition of illustrator. "Bottom line, our aim is to have more illustrators who can illustrate Jewish picture books," she said. "But we also expand that to include comics-slash-graphic novels. We also expand that to include other ways that people can show creativity that can help us tell stories. So if it's creativity having to do with puzzles, or creativity around the *Haggadah*, we're also looking at that. And maybe it's someone who has no illustration background themselves, but can describe illustration well enough that they could partner with an illustrator to create a story. We really want to see what kind of applications we get."

Freedman said she hopes to have an equal number of illustrators and creators from America, Europe and Israel, adding that the organization has also received applications from Nigeria and countries in South America. Fellows will not receive a stipend, but travel and accommodations will be fully covered.

The goal is to have "all of our books start showing more of a reflection of different styles and different ways of conveying Jewish ideas and Jewish stories...In America, it's very Ashkenormative," she said, using a term connoting that Jewish culture can often be filtered through an Ashkenazi, Eastern European lens. "But we've been told by every author we bring to Israel that the moment they step out of Ben Gurion Airport, they were floored by the variety of Jews walking around" from countries around the world. She added, "There's nothing like being able to then show them the roots of those communities because so many of them ended up building homes in Israel."

The idea for the current fellowship was sparked at the 2018 Tent — Jewish Children's Literature program, a weeklong event put on at the Yiddish Book Center for children's writers and illustrators, sponsored by PJ Library. James Sturm, the author/illustrator of the award-winning 2001 graphic novel *The Golem's Mighty Swing* and the co-founder of the Center for Cartoon Studies, led a workshop at the program. The center, located in White River Junction, Vt., is an institute for studying the creation of comic books, and offers a Master of Fine Arts degree and one- and two-year certificate programs in "the creation and dissemination of comics, graphic novels and other manifestations of the visual narrative," according to its website. The center is well-regarded, and graduates have worked at companies such as Disney, Brook/Macmillan, Scholastic, DC Comics, Penguin and Simon & Schuster, winning industry awards. "[PJ Library staff] met James there and were really impressed," Freedman said. "That's when we first hatched the plan."

Since then, the Center for Cartoon Studies and PJ Library have frequently teamed up, including hosting a 2019 in-person retreat and a virtual retreat the following year, where smaller cohorts were given time away from their day-to-day work to focus on their own craft and learn from book agents, scholars and publishers. "This time we are broadening our view and casting a more international net, especially through the partnership with the National Library of Israel," Freedman said. "We've been able to appreciate the incredible illustration coming

out of Israel, so we wanted to have some way of really building on that."

During their time at the National Library of Israel, which is located at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, fellows will explore different collections, including more than 4 million books and other historical archives, recordings, manuscripts and maps, some dating back to the Middle Ages. The idea is that their time spent learning will inform and inspire them, Shuvi Hoffman, the global Jewish education manager for the National Library of Israel told eJP. "For us, this is the epitome of what we would like to do. Here are people who are coming to draw from the well of knowledge that we hold, and they're going to pull out the treasures that they find valuable, and they're going to transform them into something that will resonate with so many others."

Throughout Jewish history, "illustration was always a big part of transferring text," Hoffman said, from illustrated *Megillot* to *Haggadot*. "The illustration is often a text in and of itself. And it's a way for certain people to connect, especially for younger kids who might not be proficient readers yet. It really gives them another angle. And another way to access the story is by looking at the illustrations." She said illustration and comics can help kids learn emotional intelligence and empathy by connecting the emotions on characters' faces and their mannerisms to how they feel.

The five days spent at the Center for Cartoon Studies will be a residency, with each creator bringing their own style and goals for what they hope to achieve. "Trying to make a great book is like trying to capture lightning in a bottle," Sturm told eJP. "It's beyond how talented you are and how thoughtful you are." It takes time and hard work, and he wants fellows to enjoy the process. "These are people who are accomplished artists and writers," he added. "I don't have to create a whole curriculum, but what I want to do is to create enough structure to help them to be as productive [as they can be]... They already have a vision. They already have a focus. They already have a project. My job is to fan those flames and not create impediments or things they have to do or things that aren't relevant."

Sturm plans on traveling to Israel with the fellows, getting to know each of the

artists so he can support their individual needs during their residency, whether that be by pulling from the center's library of handmade books and zines, their original art or calling on help from the wealth of cartoonists connected with the school; they include including Jason Lutes, the creator of *Berlin*, which, through the perspective of

everyday people, tells the story of the fall of the Weimar Republic, and Robin Smith, the illustrator on DC Comics' *Nubia: Real One*, the coming-of-age story of Wonder Woman's twin sister.

Sturm sees himself as part of a long line of Jewish comic book creators. "We're the people of the book," he said. "So now we're

the people of the comic book... There's such a history of Jews in comics. It's hard to imagine the history of American comics without the contributions of Harvey Kurtzman, Will Eisner, [Jack] Kirby, Stan Lee, on and on and on. If it wasn't for that history, I wouldn't be having a cartoon school or sitting here talking to you, that's for sure." ♦