

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Shelley Zalis, mainstay of the elite conference circuit, pitches gender equity to the Davos set; Ayelet Shaked's toughest task yet: Explaining Israeli politics to American Jews; L.A. school board member Nick Melvoin to run for Adam Schiff's seat; Andrew Weinstein pushes back against antisemitism from inside the U.N.; The director of Hillel in Ukraine on how students are faring nearly a year into Russia's invasion; Larry Hogan stops by a Jewish deli in Florida; Ariel Levy reveals new details about Philip Roth stage adaptation with John Turturro; and Missing pieces to cultural puzzles appear in UAE-Israel library ties.

FEBRUARY 10, 2023

Shelley Zalis, mainstay of the elite conference circuit, pitches gender equity to the Davos set

The L.A.-based entrepreneur is a regular attendee at every A-list conference, urging Fortune 500 CEOs to close the 'gender gap'

By Gabby Deutch

In a two-story glass house set against the snow-capped peaks of the Swiss Alps, Shelley Zalis preached the gospel of gender equity.

The elite audience in Zalis' Equality Lounge make up the boardrooms and C-suite offices of Fortune 500 companies. Everyone there was an attendee at last month's World Economic Forum, the exclusive annual gathering in Davos where admission alone costs tens of thousands of dollars.

It was a fitting setting: Her audience would have to break through plenty of glass — ceilings, walls, floors — to achieve the kind of gender parity Zalis believes in. In her perfect world, women don't just make as much as their male counterparts, or get promoted at the same rates. In Zalis' vision,

women also feel respected and represented and, most importantly, they get the support they need to take care of their families and get back to work.

"We are losing our best leaders to caregiving," Zalis told *Jewish Insider* in a phone interview from her Los Angeles office, 6,000 miles from Davos. Flying around the world to elite gatherings and hobnobbing with CEOs, giving them a gentle nudge to address their own shortcomings on gender issues, is what Zalis is now best known for.

Last month, she was at Davos in Switzerland and the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, and in the fall she set up an Equality Lounge at COP27, the global climate conference, in Egypt. Her next two stops are Cannes Lions, the international

creativity festival, in France and SXSW in Austin. As reliably as one can expect to overpay for food at these gatherings, one can expect to see the blonde, impeccably dressed Zalis and her Equality Lounges. She started going to many of the world's A-list confabs 10 years ago, and soon after that, in 2015, she launched the Female Quotient, a company that provides research and consulting services to major corporations on gender issues. She is both a thorn in the side of the executives she schmoozes with, and a partner; the Davos Equality Lounge was a \$2 million undertaking that was sponsored by, among others, Meta, Citi and Deloitte.

"It's a safe space to have conscious conversations all around closing the gender gap," she said. It's a big undertaking: The

World Economic Forum recently released a report saying that it would take 132 years to close the gender gap. In a TIME Magazine op-ed, Zalis argued that CEOs should commit to a “moonshot mindset,” much like President John F. Kennedy in the space race.

Before her second career as a “chief troublemaker” — her self-proclaimed title — Zalis was an entrepreneur in the field of market research, helping spur the transition to the online surveys that now populate the internet. Starting her own business was something she did out of practicality. It was not due to any overt sexism, Zalis said, but rather an understanding that she would not be able to balance motherhood and work if she stayed at a large company.

“I just knew that being an employee in a big company, starting a family and working in a job, that was going to be a problem for me. Because I knew I wasn’t going to be able to work long hours,” Zalis, who is 60, explained. “I didn’t feel like it was discrimination or anything like that. I just thought, you know, how am I going to be the primary caregiver and stay late and travel and be a nice Jewish mom? None of my friends were working.”

Women have been wondering, in op-ed pages and books and conversations with friends and at new mom groups, whether they can “have it all,” as the saying goes.

More than three decades since Zalis first pondered those questions when she was a young working mom, the caregiving problem has improved some, but not enough. “I don’t even remember taking maternity leave,” Zalis said.

The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act requires public employers and companies with more than 50 workers to allow employees to take 12 weeks of leave to care for a newborn or a sick family member, although FMLA does not require that the companies pay employees during their leave. Now, at least, paid maternity leave is the norm at large corporations. Many offer paternity leave, too, but “it’s elective,” she noted. “Men don’t take it. They feel it shows a sign of weakness.” The U.S. is the only Western nation that does not mandate paid parental leave, and 2021 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that less than a quarter (23%) of U.S. workers have access to paid parental leave.

But in the U.S., where there is no national parental leave policy and the companies that do offer it often place limits on the amount of time taken, women still face the same questions — who will take care of their kids when they go back to work after three months? The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the problem, making parents drop everything at the last minute when their child has to stay home from school after potential exposure to the virus.

“Caregiving is so expensive. It’s unaffordable. So women are just opting out, because it costs more for a nanny than their paychecks,” explained Zalis. Her solution was splitting parenting responsibilities equally with her husband, a surgeon. “I also didn’t bake the cookies,” she said with a laugh. “I would buy them and make them look pretty on the plate.”

Zalis also always had Shabbat dinners at home with her family. “[Judaism] is core to the essence — family is the most important piece of who we are,” she said. “I come from a very Jewish family.” Her philanthropic priorities include AIPAC, the Jewish federation and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

As she advanced in her career, Zalis began to notice that there weren’t a lot of women in her meetings, or at the conferences she attended. She had seen women be overly competitive with each other, thinking — not incorrectly — that there wouldn’t be room for more than one woman at the top. One year, ahead of CES in Las Vegas, Zalis invited a group of women to go with her to the massive electronics showcase and walk through the convention center together.

“I never experienced that before, and it was such a remarkable thing for me. I felt so safe and secure,” she said. “There was such a scarcity of jobs at the top, everyone was [usually] digging at each other and pushing each other down.” That conference was where the Equality Lounge’s earlier iteration, the Girls Lounge, was born. (The name was meant to be a response to boys’ clubs — what she viewed as an institution to disrupt.)

The Girls Lounge started as a space for women to gather at these conferences, to network and talk and gossip away from the male-dominated crowds. Four years later, it evolved into the Equality Lounge,

described as “a place for conscious leaders.” Men were invited in. She has now connected with many thousands of the world’s most powerful people to spread her message, but Zalis acknowledges that things have gotten worse for women since the pandemic.

So with sponsorships from major corporations that she knows need to change, how does Zalis ensure that their CEOs are committed to the cause and not just paying lip service by putting their names on her splashy branding?

“It’s all about measurement and accountability,” Zalis said — and money. “A lot of the work that’s been done so far, most CEOs just hand off diversity to their DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] groups. And diversity groups have no accountability, no budget. And that’s been the problem. We’re going backwards.”

Zalis, perky and indefatigable, is a true believer in her cause and her method. When asked whether she finds the nonstop travel to nearly every marquis conference around the globe exhausting, she smiled.

“When you have this purpose, this passion, you’re unstoppable,” she said. Zalis is now a grandmother, and she still gathers with her kids most Friday nights for Shabbat dinner in L.A.

She has it all. Can other women? ♦

Ayelet Shaked's toughest task yet: Explaining Israeli politics to American Jews

As she begins a new position in the business world, the former justice and interior minister said she plans to 'conquer America' as she works to strengthen ties between Israel and the Diaspora at a fraught moment in the relationship

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Ayelet Shaked was once the darling of Israel's right-wing, secular political camp. Rising to power alongside former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and serving first as minister of justice and, more recently, as minister of interior, the 46-year-old was a high-profile – and sometimes controversial – member of the country's governments for the last seven years.

Now Shaked, who failed to make it into the Knesset following November's national election, is putting her skill set to good use: explaining the chaotic and often theatrical world of Israeli politics to Diaspora Jews.

"Basically, I have been explaining that most of what is being said about matters of religion and state is just politicians looking to create headlines," Shaked told *Jewish Insider*, referring to sentiments expressed by some members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government that Israel needs to tighten Jewish immigration laws and reverse decisions to recognize the Reform movement's conversions to Judaism.

Speaking from Boca Raton, Fla., where she was wrapping up a series of lectures to organizations including the Jewish National Fund and the Jewish Federation of Montreal, Shaked said she did not believe the government would really make any big changes in these areas, though contentious plans to overhaul the legal system would likely go ahead.

"I know all those who are in the government," she told *JJ*. "I worked with all of them, and I know what they really think. I do believe there will be changes to the justice system but not in the relationship between religion and state or anything that will impact Israel-Diaspora ties."

Shaked has been a staple of the Israeli political scene for more than 10 years, working first as director of Netanyahu's office before entering politics and becoming a member of Knesset for the right-wing, largely religious, Jewish Home party in 2013. Following the election in 2015, Netanyahu appointed her as justice minister, a position she held until after new elections took place in 2019. In 2021, Shaked joined the government of Bennett and former Prime Minister Yair Lapid – a broad coalition that included some far-left political parties – as interior minister. It was a decision, some analysts have suggested, that contributed to her losing support among right-wing voters and causing her not to be reelected last November.

Now, post-politics, Shaked, is gearing up to work in the business world – she was recently appointed as chairwoman of Kardan Real Estate, one of the largest such companies in Israel – and, she told *JJ*, she also has high hopes of "conquering America, talking to American Jewish communities and explaining Israel, as a way to strengthen the relationship between Israel and the United States."

"When I was a minister, I also tried to strengthen the Israel-Diaspora relationship, but I did not have as much time to focus on it," Shaked admitted. "Now I am delighted to work to strengthen ties; this is something that is very important to me."

Heading back to Israel after her trip to the U.S., Shaked said her next stop is Australia to engage with the Jewish community down under and explain the complex political outlook in Israel.

"It is true that some Israelis do not know or understand how important the

relationship is between Israel and the Jews in the Diaspora," the former minister said. "They do not realize how important Israel is for Jews in Diaspora or how important Jews in the Diaspora are to Israel."

"I always say that the Jewish community in America is a type of protective shield for Israel," Shaked continued. "I've seen this at conferences such as AIPAC and feel that a strong and vibrant Jewish community in America only helps to protect Israel's interests."

"The relationship between Israel and U.S. is an alliance that rises above political interests," she explained. "It does not really matter who is in the White House or who is the prime minister of Israel, the relationship between Israel and the U.S. is deeper than one government or another, and the fact there is a strong Jewish community in the U.S. undoubtedly stabilizes and strengthens that relationship."

Shaked said she recognized there is a lack of awareness in Israel about the diversity of Jewish communities around the world but pointed out that politicians must strive to educate themselves about the importance of Israel-Diaspora ties.

Among the points she said she raised during her recent series of presentations in the U.S. was a realization she reached not long after the war started in Ukraine nearly a year ago. As interior minister, Shaked was required to make quick and tough decisions regarding allowing Ukrainian refugees – Jewish and non-Jewish – into Israel. She faced criticism for attempting to cap the number of Ukrainian refugees at 5,000, a decision that was eventually rejected by Israel's High Court.

"I had no end of conversations with the

Ukrainian ambassador in Israel – he was always pushing for Israel to take in more non-Jews, saying that the conditions for refugees in Israel were the best,” recalled Shaked. “It was then I realized something amazing; during the Second World War, the Jews had nowhere to go, but now, they are the most privileged. They have a place to go that will give them citizenship, a passport, social welfare and everything.”

“That is the important role Israel must play now – ensuring that every Jew always has a place where they can go,” she added.

Recognizing concerns raised by Jews in the Diaspora over some of the proposed reforms of the new government, Shaked is

also quick to point out, however, “They don’t live in Israel and therefore can’t decide what happens there. Our main responsibility is to receive them and make them feel that they are an important part of us.”

“I think it’s OK for Jews in the Diaspora to criticize Israel, but they must always remember that in the end, Israel has its own unique character and we decide its fate,” she said.

On the matter of proposed judicial reform by Israel’s current Minister of Justice Yariv Levin, Shaked said that she spent a great deal of time explaining to the groups she met in the U.S. how Israel’s legal system differs from America’s, especially the

process of selecting judges.

“I believe these reforms will happen, but it will be an agreement between the sides,” said Shaked, adding, “even if we change the process of how judges are selected, it is not the end of democracy in Israel. Israel has a very strong democracy and there is no need to panic.”

Shaked did, however, recognize that there is a growing dissonance between certain sectors of Israeli society over this issue and said, “I just hope that, at the end of the day, the government also works to unite the nation.” ♦

JANUARY 31, 2023

L.A. school board member Nick Melvoin to run for Adam Schiff’s seat

Schiff, who announced he is running for Senate, has represented the district for more than two decades

By Gabby Deutch

Rep. Adam Schiff’s (D-CA) announcement last Thursday that he will seek the Senate seat currently held by Democrat Dianne Feinstein sets off a race in the state’s 30th Congressional District, where L.A. Unified School District board member Nick Melvoin filed papers to run earlier this month.

“My main calling is, how do I amplify my impact for the communities that I fought really my whole adult life for, in a larger setting?” Melvoin, a Democrat, told Jewish Insider in a recent interview. A Los Angeles native, Melvoin taught middle school through Teach for America before going to law school and mounting a successful bid for a seat on the school board in a 2017 upset. Melvoin, a charter school advocate, defeated an incumbent in a race with heavy outside spending.

The seat hasn’t been open for more

than two decades; Schiff was first elected in 2000. The former California state senator garnered national attention in 2019 as one of the House Democrats responsible for managing the first impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump.

“We’re seeing what’s happening in Washington, both with the changing of the guard on the Democratic side with a new leader, but also the craziness that we saw [last week],” Melvoin, 37, said, referring to the 15 rounds of voting that it took to elect a House speaker. “I do think there’s a need for new voices, younger voices, people who can work across lines of difference and not be burdened by the politics of yesterday.”

One reason he’s entering the race is in response to the recent “rise in antisemitism, pro-BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions] on university campuses, the ethnic studies curriculum that we’ve been

fighting in L.A., as a progressive and a strong Zionist,” said Melvoin, who is Jewish. “In Congress, I don’t see as many of those candidates, especially in the Democratic Party, as I would like.”

Melvoin was referring to a lengthy statewide debate over a proposed model ethnic studies curriculum, early iterations of which praised the BDS movement and did not educate about antisemitism. Similar debates have played out in LAUSD, the nation’s second-largest school district.

“I also think not unlike what’s happening in America in the last few years, we have a government in Israel that I think a lot of us, particularly those on the Democratic side and slightly more progressive side, are not particularly fond of, but making sure that that doesn’t undermine [Israel’s] bipartisan support is really important,” said Melvoin. “There are other issues, education actually

used to be one of them, that I think used to have a bipartisan consensus. And now our polarization has made it very entrenched.”

The race in the 30th District, which stretches from West Hollywood to Pasadena, has already drawn significant interest.

Nine candidates have filed paperwork to run, including actor Ben Savage, who mounted an unsuccessful bid for the West Hollywood City Council last year, State Del. Laura Friedman and entrepreneur Josh Bocanegra.

In California’s so-called “jungle primaries,” the top two vote-getters advance to the general election potentially setting up two Democrats to face off in November. ♦

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

Andrew Weinstein pushes back against antisemitism from inside the U.N.

A public delegate at the General Assembly, he helped craft today’s high-profile forum on global antisemitism in Turtle Bay

By Matthew Kassel

When Andrew Weinstein was appointed to represent the Biden administration as one of three public delegates at the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly last September, the Jewish Democrat from South Florida, who has long been politically active, knew exactly how he wanted to approach his yearlong stint with the federal government.

“Sadly, we’ve seen this incredible rise in antisemitism both domestically and globally,” he said in a recent interview with Jewish Insider. “I felt like this was an opportunity for me to use this position and this platform to push back on that, to identify where it exists in the U.N. system and to help promote the Biden administration policy of combating antisemitism.”

Over the past five months or so, Weinstein, 53, has frequently demonstrated his commitment to addressing such issues, particularly while navigating instances where denunciations of Israel from U.N. member states, hardly uncommon at the organization, have derived from what he perceives as antisemitic bias.

On Thursday afternoon, U.S. government officials, Jewish community leaders and representatives of several countries were

set to convene at the U.N. headquarters to hash out potential strategies for combating antisemitism at the global level, at a high-profile event conceived by Weinstein.

Led by Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., the gathering will open with remarks from Doug Emhoff, the Jewish second gentleman who recently concluded a five-day tour through Poland and Germany to observe International Holocaust Remembrance Day, followed by a panel discussion moderated by Sarah Hurwitz, an author and speechwriter.

The three panelists will include Melissa Fleming, the U.N. undersecretary-general for global communications; Deborah Lipstadt, the U.S. special envoy for monitoring and combating antisemitism; and Ted Deutch, a former Democratic congressman who now serves as chief executive of the American Jewish Committee.

While the meeting isn’t the first to tackle antisemitism at the U.N., Weinstein, who initially proposed the idea last year amid a sharp uptick in anti-Jewish sentiment, believes it is a unique opportunity to spotlight a worrying trend in partnership with a “diverse, cross-regional” group of participating member states, including Argentina, Canada, Israel, Morocco and the

United Kingdom.

“The fact that it’s being done at the United Nations, which is probably the most significant global forum to have this conversation, will hopefully resonate around the world,” he told JI.

In a statement to JI, Thomas-Greenfield said Weinstein “played a crucial role in getting this important event organized,” adding that she is “proud to have partnered with” Emhoff as well as U.N. colleagues “for this discussion focused on practical solutions to stop the global rise of antisemitism.”

“The horrible truth is, all around the world, antisemitism is threatening the safety, security and sense of belonging Jewish people deserve,” Thomas-Greenfield said in the statement. “This hate is being stoked not only by extremist groups, but also by mainstream political leaders, popular celebrities and people in positions of power. It’s being furthered both online and in-person, directly and indirectly, covertly and out in the open. We need to stand up to this threat, and stand up for Jewish people everywhere.”

For his part, Weinstein, who also serves on the advocacy and engagement committee of the Anti-Defamation League, expressed optimism that the discussion could at

least tentatively lead to a plan of action for addressing anti-Jewish bigotry rather than simply lingering on the phenomenon itself, as other panels have done.

"I myself have been to a number of events that do a very good job of identifying the rise of antisemitism but don't necessarily talk about effective strategies that have been utilized," he said. The discussion, which will be live-streamed, is designed to encourage participants to arrive at "some ideas and plans" and "to continue U.S. leadership in countering antisemitism," he explained.

The Biden administration has taken a proactive approach in addressing concerns from the Jewish community, recently forming a new interagency task force to develop a national strategy for combating antisemitism, which Weinstein approvingly described as "a remarkable step."

Weinstein, a lawyer and Democratic fundraiser who lives in Parkland, Fla., has for years maintained close ties to President Joe Biden, and he drew on his connections in the White House to formalize the U.N. event, which has been in the works since last fall.

"Back in October, I was, like most of us, extremely troubled and upset about the precipitous rise in antisemitic violence and harassment and other incidents — and was looking for a way to work within the framework of my role to do something," he told JI. "I came up with the concept of hosting an event at the United Nations."

The original plan, he said, included Thomas-Greenfield, Lipstadt and others, but as he engaged in conversations with White House officials, they came to a collective decision that Emhoff's participation "would be really significant," as the second gentleman has increasingly devoted himself to highlighting antisemitism in the U.S. and abroad.

According to prepared remarks shared by Emhoff's office in advance of the event, the second gentleman will speak to his own experience as the first Jewish spouse of a president or vice president, while calling on participants to "build coalitions to tackle this epidemic of hate."

"This moment requires bold collective action and urgency, not just concepts," Emhoff is expected to say.

Weinstein declined to preview any

solutions the panelists may agree to promote before they have gotten the chance to speak. But he said attendees can expect the discussion to cover, among other things, examples in which anti-Israel sentiment can intersect with antisemitism.

In his role as a public delegate, Weinstein has on occasion felt compelled to speak up on such issues in prepared remarks to U.N. committees and on social media, even as he made sure to emphasize that he is always careful "to differentiate criticism of Israeli policies and practices and that which is rooted in antisemitic behavior and attitudes."

Some instances, however, he views as clear-cut, including a controversial report from the U.N. Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry investigating Israel, which he called "extraordinarily problematic."

He has been especially critical of the council's special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, who in past social media comments claimed that the U.S. is "subjugated by the Jewish lobby" and compared Israelis to Nazis, among other statements uncovered by the Times of Israel in December.

"I think it is important for the U.S. to call out those comments," Weinstein said. "When she then renders an opinion, you have to wonder about the bias and motivation of the opinion that comes from someone who has made some statements which are unquestionably antisemitic."

Albanese has denied accusations that her comments were antisemitic, saying that "some of the words" she used were "unintendedly offensive."

During his time at the U.N., Weinstein has also encouraged member states to adopt the working definition of antisemitism promoted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which the Biden administration has embraced, while condemning resolutions that he has accused of revealing "a profound anti-Israel bias."

"I felt a great responsibility in delivering those remarks as a stated position of the United States," he said broadly, "especially given the way that things often play out here at the U.N."

Before he was nominated by the Biden

administration to serve at the U.N., Weinstein had been a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and sat on former President Barack Obama's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. In 2015, he worked with the White House to promote the Iran nuclear deal among Jewish groups.

His past experience in the realms of foreign policy, cultural diplomacy and historical commemoration, he maintained, have served him well as a public delegate, a position he will hold until the current session of the General Assembly concludes in September.

Though his portfolio is not exclusively limited to antisemitism and Israel, Weinstein — who has also worked on issues related to food insecurity, among other things — has remained principally dedicated to raising awareness of a global increase in threats to the Jewish community.

The forum, he stressed, is just one component of such advocacy, albeit his most significant project to date.

"We're all quite upset about the fact that it's necessary but heartened by the response that the leadership in the White House and the importance that the White House has placed on this," he said. "It makes me optimistic that we will continue to keep this focus going forward." ♦

The director of Hillel in Ukraine on how students are faring nearly a year into Russia's invasion

Akselrud said the past year has seen the students step into local leadership roles

By Ben Sales

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Next week, Hillel in Central Asia and Southeastern Europe, known as Hillel CASE, will hold a professional development conference for members of its staff. Unlike conferences before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the gathering will not be held in that country, where most of the Hillel region's participants are located, but in Chisinau, the capital city of neighboring Moldova. Another difference from past conferences: This one will include mental health professionals who will assist attendees in coping with wartime trauma.

"I invited psychologists to work with the professional staff because for them, [working] every day under rocket attack is unbelievable," Iosif "Osik" Akselrud, the regional director of Hillel CASE, told *eJewishPhilanthropy* in a video interview Thursday.

But while Akselrud is caring for the well-being of his staff, he said he isn't hearing pleas for additional support from Hillel's target demographic: the approximately 3,000 students at five Hillel centers across Ukraine. Instead, he said, the past year has seen the students step into local leadership roles as they and their neighbors approach a year of living under Russian attack.

"They don't ask," Akselrud said. "They felt their responsibilities. They felt that now, more than ever, they are responsible for elders, for kids, for community."

He added, "During the war, the number of students who participated in Hillel's activities didn't decrease. I couldn't understand this phenomenon. You know what? I realized why. During this dramatic time, they need to be in their familiar

surroundings... Even if they have no events during one day [or] two days, they come to Hillel to spend time together, to drink tea or coffee, to talk and to spend time with their friends."

When Akselrud last spoke to *eJP*, just two weeks after Russia's invasion on Feb. 24, 2022, the situation for Ukrainians across the country, including Jewish students, appeared more dire and less certain. Millions of Ukrainians fled their homes. Much of the country, including Kyiv, was under attack, and the only functioning Ukrainian Hillel center was in the western city of Lviv. Days earlier, a Russian attack had destroyed the Hillel building in Kharkiv. And days after the interview, Serafim Sabaranskiy, a Jewish student in Kharkiv, was killed in battle.

Now, Hillel is again active in five cities across Ukraine, including Kharkiv, where the organization has rented a new space. Akselrud says most of the students active in Ukraine's Hillels are still in the country (partly because young men are prohibited from leaving). Some of those who have stayed are volunteering in territorial defense units, he said. Sabaranskiy remains the only known Hillel student casualty.

And Hillel students outside of Ukraine are contributing as well. He said a group of Hillel students in Chisinau volunteered to help refugees, ferrying them to doctors' appointments, delivering food and helping them through the immigration process. Within Ukraine, he said, Hillel students have delivered some 25,000 food packages to those in need.

"During the last 10 months, Hillels in Ukraine, a little bit, changed the main direction of their activities," said Akselrud, who is now living with his family in Israel, in the coastal city of Netanya. "Number one

is volunteering... and number two is, they are now much more involved in community life. If before, they arranged different celebrations, events, holiday celebrations for Hillel students, now they do this for the whole community."

Funding Hillel's activity in Ukraine has remained a challenge, Akselrud said, because the organization lost out on some \$325,000 in support that it was expecting from the Genesis Philanthropy Group, a Jewish charity founded by billionaires from the former Soviet Union. Three co-founders of Genesis resigned from its board last March after being placed under sanctions for their ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The organization has also lost out on other funding sources, and is contending with significant inflation in Ukraine. Hillel CASE's annual budget before the invasion was roughly \$1 million. Now it stands at around \$800,000, with hundreds of thousands yet to be raised. Akselrud said Hillel International, along with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Schusterman Family Philanthropies, have stepped in to keep the operation afloat.

But one of the brightest spots of the past year, for Akselrud, remains the young people Hillel serves.

"Hillel students are getting much stronger," he said. "Unfortunately this happened because of the war. But they're getting much stronger." ♦

FEBRUARY 8, 2023

Larry Hogan stops by a Jewish deli in Florida

The former Maryland governor is considering a bid for president in 2024

By Gabby Deutch

Former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan met with Jewish community leaders at a Miami-area deli on Tuesday during a swing through Florida to raise money ahead of a possible 2024 presidential run. Earlier in the day, he had breakfast with former Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT).

“Our allies, including Israel, need a strong and united America leading the world,” Hogan, a Republican, tweeted after the event, which took place at Mo’s Bagels & Deli in heavily Jewish Aventura, north of Miami. Attendees at the event included Aventura Mayor Howard Weinberg and other local officials and Jewish leaders. Weinberg, a Democrat, told *Jewish Insider* that Hogan “comes off as genuine and thoughtful” but said he “doubt[s] Governor Hogan would do well in a Republican primary.”

“He talked about his strong support for Israel and standing [against] the BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions] movement,” David Weinman, executive director of An America United, an advocacy organization affiliated with Hogan, told JI. Hogan addressed the Republican Jewish Coalition’s November conference in Las Vegas.

Weinberg said that Hogan coming to Aventura to discuss antisemitism “shows a care and concern that matches his track record.”

Hogan said last week that he was giving “very serious consideration” to running for president in 2024. The two-term Maryland governor, whose term ended in January, is a prominent critic of former President Donald Trump, and, during his time in Annapolis,

maintained high approval ratings in the heavily Democratic state.

Weinman said Hogan was in Florida for two days to meet with donors. “He’s talking to people across the country and getting their sense of where the country is, where the Republican Party is and how he can make the most impact,” Weinman said.

Adding a subtle dig at Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is also widely expected to run in 2024, Weinman said, “Governor DeSantis is quite popular here among Republicans, but I think people appreciate the unique story of success in a blue state and leadership skills that [Hogan] brings to the table.”

At Mo’s, Hogan ordered “a delicious corned beef sandwich,” according to Weinman. ♦

FEBRUARY 7, 2023

Ariel Levy reveals new details about Philip Roth stage adaptation with John Turturro

A new stage adaptation of one of Roth’s most acclaimed novels, Sabbath’s Theater, will make its U.S. debut at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark

By Matthew Kassel

The novels of Philip Roth, the protean Jewish author who died in 2018 at the age of 85, have spawned so many

mediocre film adaptations that a frustrated critic once called for a moratorium on using the author’s notoriously unforgiving oeuvre

as a source to make movies.

While episodic television has perhaps been recognized as a more obliging

medium for interpreting Roth, his sexually transgressive and psychologically febrile works have, it seems, rarely if ever been tested in a major theatrical production.

Next month, however, a scene from a new stage adaptation of one of Roth's most acclaimed novels, *Sabbath's Theater*, will be presented at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, the city where he grew up and which informed much of his literary output.

The performance, announced earlier this month, is scheduled for a one-time showing that will coincide with Roth's 90th birthday on March 19, as part of a broader, weekend-long celebration of the writer's legacy called "Roth Unbound."

Billed in promotion materials as a "sneak preview," the play as a whole remains "a work in progress" and is still "very much at the beginning stages," the author and journalist Ariel Levy, who adapted Roth's novel with the actor John Turturro, told *Jewish Insider* in an email exchange on Monday where she revealed new details about the production.

The creative pairing may seem unusual to those familiar with Levy, a Jewish staff writer for *The New Yorker* whose 2005 nonfiction debut, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, was followed by a best-selling memoir, *The Rules Do Not Apply*, in 2017. Her magazine reporting has often focused on gender politics and other feminist issues that sit uneasily beside Roth's corpus, which has been accused of depicting women in an uncharitable light.

But Levy, 48, said that she and Turturro, who initiated the project, "were both fixated on the same elements of the novel," pointing "above all else" to what she described as "the love story between" Mickey Sabbath, the titular protagonist, and Drenka Balich, his Croatian paramour. Her death from ovarian cancer leaves Sabbath, a lustful sexagenarian ex-puppeteer, "grief-stricken and desperate," as one reviewer observed when the novel, which won the National Book Award for fiction, was first released in 1995.

So desperate, it seems, that Sabbath feels compelled to masturbate on Drenka's grave — a throwback to the wildly libidinous exertions in *Portnoy's Complaint*, which put Roth on the map nearly 30 years before

Sabbath's Theater.

The journalist Charles McGrath wrote in 2018 that Sabbath "is in many ways Portnoy grown old but still in the grip of lust and longing, raging against the indignity of old age and yet saved from suicidal impulses by the realization that there are too many people he loves to hate."

Meanwhile, the actor John Lithgow claimed Sabbath as one of his favorite fictional protagonists, "a fantastic hero, antihero and even villain, all rolled into one," he said in a 2019 interview with *The New York Times*. "Mickey is outrageous, transgressive and wildly theatrical. Now there's a role I'd love to play, though I'm probably too tall."

Turturro, who will play Sabbath in an undisclosed scene at the Newark performance, appears to have claimed him first. The 65-year-old actor and occasional director knew Roth personally and had spoken with him about "working together on something over the years," according to Levy.

"After Roth's death, John obtained the rights to *Sabbath's Theater* and was looking for someone to collaborate with him on a stage adaptation," she explained to *JL*, "but he wasn't looking for a playwright — he wanted to work with someone who brought an outsider's perspective."

Levy recalled that she was initially introduced to Turturro, who could not be reached for comment, when he asked one of her colleagues at *The New Yorker*, the theater critic Hilton Als, "for a suggestion." The prospective collaborators "hit it off immediately," Levy said, working on the adaptation "for about two years" in mostly virtual writing sessions "over the pandemic."

The process of "trying to condense Roth's sprawling, brilliant novel into a play," Levy quipped, was "sort of like cooking one of the world's great soups down to a bouillon cube."

For his part, Turturro has described the colorful source material as "a raging, splendidly funny and profound journey on loss," according to a press release. "Mickey Sabbath is a life force in its purest form."

Levy and Turturro will discuss the process of adapting the novel for the stage in more detail at the event next month.

Turturro isn't new to working with

parts of the Roth canon. Three years ago, he played a morally bankrupt rabbi in David Simon's HBO adaptation of *The Plot Against America*, based on Roth's 2004 counterfactual novel.

Though the new play remains unfinished, Levy said she and Turturro had recently taken it to the National Theatre in London for a workshop, where Marisa Tomei played Drenka "and all the other female roles," and Jo Bonney directed.

Levy, who called the workshop "fantastic," clarified that Tomei "won't be there" for the Newark production next month, which will also include a performance from Jason Kravits.

The full play, according to a spokesperson for the Newark celebration, will have its official premiere in a couple of years. ♦

Missing pieces to cultural puzzles appear in UAE-Israel library ties

Rare artifacts in Jerusalem of Abu Dhabi's founding father, Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa, provide clues for Emirati researchers at National Library

By Jenni Frazer

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

Nearly 120 years ago, Hermann Burchardt, a German Jewish explorer, was traveling in the Middle East, talking to Arab leaders and taking photographs.

Among the iconic pictures was what is thought to be the first image of the founding father of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, known as Zayed the First. He was the great-great-grandfather of the current president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Although the pictures Burchardt took in Abu Dhabi became famous in the region and reproduced many times, his personal impressions of the people and places he photographed remained a mystery. He and his fellow travelers were murdered in Yemen in 1909 and his journals were assumed to have been lost.

Eventually, via the estate of Eugen Mittwoch, a German scholar of Islamic and Judaic studies, Burchardt's missing diary — and hundreds of pages of correspondence, notes and official documents, together with numerous photos — all found their way to the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem.

It was this material that delighted Hamad Al-Mutairi, director of the Archives Department of the Emirates National Library and Archives (NLA), based in Abu Dhabi, when he and other colleagues visited Israel last summer. For Al-Mutairi, seeing the Burchardt collection in Jerusalem was thrilling, and filled in the blanks for his researchers. "We were able to see details about the kind of food he ate, and the type of traditional hospitality given to him at that

time as a traveler in the region."

The Emirati visit — and a memorandum of understanding between the two libraries — is a direct and tangible result of the Abraham Accords, signed initially between Israel and three partners — the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco — in 2020.

Libraries and their scholars have an open-handed approach to their research. In general, the libraries are inclined to share as has been the case with Burchardt's collection, in the early stages of collaboration between Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi. The Burchardt material is essential to drawing a fuller picture of the first years of the individual emirates that now make up the UAE. The Israelis have provided Abu Dhabi with digital copies of Burchardt's diary and the accompanying papers, which will become part of the NLA collection.

"We didn't stop there," said Al-Mutairi. "We're now trying to find the right time to put together some sort of exhibition about Burchardt, charting his journeys across the region. It might be online or it might be physical." The formal agreement between the two libraries will ensure that the material will marry the holdings that each has; and in the meantime, experts from the two institutions will work together to enrich and expand background information and metadata related to the archive's contents, including translations, greatly increasing its value to scholars across the globe as a rare reflection of Gulf history.

It's difficult to know what expectations each library had of the other, before the Abraham Accords enabled them to work together. But today, what they are both keenest on is developing cooperation, based on their separate expertise.

The UAE has built up an enviable body of material based on oral history, while the Israeli library has tended to focus more on physical collections — its Islam and Middle East collection, for example, includes priceless documents and manuscripts not even found in much of the Arab world.

Samuel Thrope, curator of the Islam and Middle East collection in Jerusalem, said he has been talking with colleagues at the NLA about oral history connected to a project on Clinton Bailey, an American-Israeli researcher who spent 50 years documenting Bedouin culture and society.

The Bailey recordings — all 350 hours of them — are "super-interesting," said Thrope, and chronicle Bedouin life in the Negev and Sinai between the late 1960s and 2009. They have all been cataloged and digitized — and now we are in the process of transcribing them."

Bailey was in the desert region in 1967 to conduct a series of now legendary interviews with Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion's kibbutz, Sde Boker, was surrounded by Bedouin tribes and the curious Bailey, when not talking to the retired politician, began talking to the local Bedouin.

"He talked to them about their daily lives," said Thrope, "about literature, poetry — there were reciters of poetry, people who had memorized different poems. But the conversations also touched on different topics, of society, law, the oral culture that Bedouin had been expanding and observing for many generations. It's an amazing primary resource."

But the team learned that a history heavily reliant on oral traditions had its downsides. "Because Bedouin life has

changed so much in the past 50 years, even recordings from 20 or 30 years ago — and certainly recordings from 50 years ago — are almost unintelligible. I'm just learning this now as we work with the transcribers, who are themselves young Bedouin living in the south, often in places where the recordings were made. They tell me that almost every sentence has a word that they just don't know — because the [present-day] Bedouin don't use it any more."

The challenge, said Thrope, "of dealing with a language that even native speakers can't understand" led his team to ask for help from UAE colleagues. "They have produced a series of books in Arabic, called *Their Memory, Our History*, based on their work. The written history of the UAE is fairly limited, but the oral history is a hugely important part of the national memory. It's great to have been able to turn to them, they have been incredibly helpful."

For Al-Mutairi, the opportunity to work with the Jerusalem team on this oral history project allowed the Abu Dhabi library to demonstrate what it had learned about oral history. The Emiratis realized, he said, that the Jerusalem transcribers were dealing "with Arabic, but in a different dialect than we use in this region." They sat with their Jerusalem counterparts and told them how they dealt with oral history: "There are some requirements to be identified. For example, the speaker or the storyteller, the location of the interview, some keywords which might be useful later on for the retrieval of the information. And the last part is how to publish the material."

Al-Mutairi said that various Bedouin tribes had very specific terminology "when dealing with camels, or food, or tools for day-to-day activities." Some of these words have gone into a glossary in the NLA for use with their oral history material — and now it's hoped that such a glossary will be made available to Jerusalem.

If the NLA is the senior partner in the oral history project, it's the other way around when it comes to written material, manuscripts and artworks. As Al-Mutairi explains: "We used to be the National Archives only and recently we became the National Library and Archives. Now, we are concentrating on manuscripts and other such material and it's something new

to us. We are sure we will have so much collaboration in that area."

The Emiratis are expanding what they do, figuring out their acquisition strategy and putting new buildings up for the library work. In that regard they've been holding small online workshops with the NLI — itself moving into a grand new building later this year — about how to make the buildings user-friendly.

Separate from the NLA in the capital city of Abu Dhabi, one of the most distinctive new buildings in the UAE is the new Mohammed bin Rashid Library in Dubai, which opened in June and was designed to look like an open book.

The Abraham Accords, said Al-Mutairi, "have opened the door for collaboration and exchange of knowledge between two very experienced teams." But the Emiratis did not confine their outreach just to the NLI in Jerusalem. They also signed a memorandum of understanding with Haifa University and to date have held two physical and three online workshops with the Haifa academics. They are discussing the possibility of joint research projects between the two institutions, about the topography and geography of the region.

Al-Mutairi was particularly impressed, during his visit to Haifa, to see that the university students "were working in our platform, Arabian Gulf Digital Archives, or AGDA, and they had created a tool and enhanced it. I was really surprised and really happy; I told them that we need to present this to any international event relating to archives." In fact, an opportunity is coming up soon, when in October 2023 Abu Dhabi hosts the International Archives Congress, which is expected to attract around 5,000 delegates.

Meanwhile there continues to be a flow of visitors between the two countries. Last month, said Al-Mutairi, a delegation of Israelis taking part in a technology conference in Abu Dhabi made a side visit to the NLA. "It's said that the new oil is data — and we have the data," he said with a laugh. "The Israelis wanted to know what technology we were using" — specifically, what steps the Emiratis were taking to make the data they are presently collecting, future-proof.

The NLA is exploring new ways of

data preservation, updating continuously, conscious that they may run out of physical storage room. One such system is called "PIQL film," which could allow material to be kept for 2,000 years. The possibilities are being shared with the Israelis.

Both Al-Mutairi and Thrope are clearly excited by the opportunities presented in sharing ideas. "To have the wall break down between our collection and the Arab world through the auspices of the UAE — that's just great. I would love people from all over the region to benefit from the collections we have, to use them, to study them," Thrope said. "Having this relationship with Abu Dhabi and Dubai just makes that possible." ♦