

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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FEBRUARY 28, 2023

Torres, Lawler push for a U.S. Abraham Accords ambassador

New bipartisan legislation would create an ambassador-rank special envoy to strengthen and expand the Abraham Accords

By Marc Rod

Reps. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) and Mike Lawler (R-NY) are pushing for the creation of a dedicated ambassador post at the State Department focused on advancing the Abraham Accords.

The two House lawmakers are set to introduce a bill today that would create an ambassador-rank special envoy for the Abraham Accords, who would be tasked with leading and coordinating the State Department's efforts to strengthen and expand the Arab-Israeli normalization agreements. The ambassador would report directly to the secretary of state, conduct talks with potential Abraham Accords signatories and work with nongovernmental organizations.

"The Abraham Accords have given birth

to a new Middle East whose unfolding we're witnessing in real time," Torres told *Jewish Insider* in an interview. "The Abraham Accords cannot be allowed to atrophy from bureaucratic neglect, there should and must be a clear delineation of power within the federal government. The Abraham Accords are so monumental that it merits a special envoy of its own."

"It's not about politics, it's about bureaucracy," he continued. "Regardless of the administration, without a single point person, there is often a bureaucratic muddle in which many people have power but no one has responsibility... It's motivated by a concern about the nature of federal bureaucracy."

Lawler described the proposed special

envoy as "an important measure to not only help oversee the Abraham Accords in the region but hopefully help grow it and provide more stability."

"Having someone who is specifically focused on the Abraham Accords will help ensure the long-term strength of these agreements," he continued, noting the "robust portfolio" that U.S. ambassadors in the region already handle. "It's important to really maximize what we're trying to accomplish here, and I think giving special attention to it is a good thing."

The legislation directs that the special envoy, who would be subject to Senate confirmation, should have high-level diplomatic experience and be knowledgeable about the Islamic and

Jewish worlds, economics, security and human rights. The nominee may also come from within the State Department's civil service ranks.

Lawler noted that special envoys have been appointed to help oversee other international agreements in the past, pointing specifically to the special envoy for Northern Ireland, who helped negotiate the Good Friday Agreement. That position,

which has been in existence since 1995, is not subject to Senate confirmation.

Lawler said that making the position ambassador-rank and Senate-confirmed gives it more "credence and credibility" and puts "more weight behind the work that they're doing."

Torres mentioned specifically that the envoy could work on bringing the "holy grail" — Saudi Arabia — into the normalization

agreements, in addition to other countries like Indonesia. He also highlighted that the Abraham Accords serve as an important counterweight in the Middle East to China's rising global power.

Lawler, a new member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said he plans to work with Rep. Mike McCaul (R-TX), the committee's chair, to ensure that the legislation can be passed. ♦

MARCH 1, 2023

Following U.S. citizen's killing in West Bank, Cotton plans to reintroduce Taylor Force Act follow-up

Sen. Lindsey Graham, a lead sponsor of the Taylor Force Act, said 'nobody suggests to me [it] is inadequate to the task'

By Marc Rod

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) plans to reintroduce legislation next Tuesday cracking down further on Palestinian Authority payments to the families of terrorists, Cotton spokesperson James Arnold told *Jewish Insider* yesterday. The move follows the killing of American-Israeli citizen Elan Ganeles in a terrorist attack in the West Bank on Monday.

Cotton's bill, the Taylor Force Martyr Payment Prevention Act, takes aim at foreign banks involved with the PA's so-called "martyr payments" by restricting banks that facilitate such payments or provide services to Hamas from doing business in the U.S. or with U.S. dollars. The bill's title references Taylor Force, a U.S. army veteran killed by a Palestinian in 2016. A previous Taylor Force Act, passed in 2018, largely cut off aid to the PA as long as it continues the payments.

The Cotton bill was first introduced in 2021, garnering 17 Republican co-sponsors in the Senate. A companion bill in the House by Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO) picked up 20

Republican and two Democratic sponsors. It's unclear that the bill would see a different fate in the Democratic-controlled Senate this year. Lamborn did not respond to a request for comment.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the lead Senate sponsor of the original Taylor Force Act, told *JI* that he believes the original act is largely working as intended, and that he is not currently focused on further legislation relating to the martyr payments.

"I think it's actually working," Graham said of the original bill. "Nobody suggests to me the Taylor Force Act is inadequate to the task."

Graham was an original co-sponsor of Cotton's bill in 2021. He told *JI* his attention is currently focused on establishing a joint U.S.-Israel mutual defense agreement with an eye toward the threat from Iran.

Ganeles grew up in West Hartford, Conn., and lived in Israel for several years before returning to the U.S. to attend Columbia University.

"My thoughts are with Elan Ganeles' family and friends as they grieve this devastating loss. Any life lost to violence is a senseless tragedy, but especially when it's a young person who had his whole life ahead of him," Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) told *JI* in a statement. "I offer my deepest condolences to all who knew Elan and to the entire Jewish community in West Hartford."

Murphy also leads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Near East subcommittee.

Rep. John Larson (D-CT), who represents West Hartford, said in a statement, "My heart and prayers go out to Elan's family and friends as they mourn this tragedy... Elan was an accomplished young man and was active growing up in our West Hartford community. May his memory be a blessing to all who knew him." ♦

Israel's new diaspora affairs minister readies for battle against BDS movement

In an interview with Jewish Insider, Amichai Chikli says U.S. Jews have the right to criticize Israel, but ultimately have no say in its internal affairs

By Ruth Marks Eglash

In early February, days after a Palestinian terrorist opened fire in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Neve Yaakov, killing seven Israeli Jews, Israel's newly appointed Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli ordered his staff to put together a primer showing how Palestinian schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip celebrated the attack.

The four-page report, which was filled with images of Palestinian schoolchildren from Hebron in the West Bank to Rafah in the Gaza Strip proudly displaying photographs of the assailant in celebratory ceremonies, was sent out to a long list of foreign ambassadors and dignitaries based in Israel with the aim of highlighting how the Palestinian leadership encourages the murder of innocent Jews.

"They need to be named and shamed," Chikli told *Jewish Insider* in a wide-ranging interview last week. "The Palestinians are the ones who need to be banned, they are the ones who need to be divested from, they are the ones who need to be delegitimized – it's ridiculous that we need to even explain this."

Tackling the worldwide Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) efforts against Israel was added to the Diaspora Affairs Ministry's portfolio when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set up his new government two months ago, and Chikli, who also serves as minister of social equality in that government, said he is determined to flip the approach in an attempt to defeat what he calls the most "antisemitic movement on the face of earth."

"The goal is to move to their side of the playing field, to stop being defensive and to go on the offensive," he told *JI*. "It is the Palestinian Authority that must be

delegitimized, they are the ones who need to be banned."

Chikli, 41, first made national headlines in 2021 as a firebrand instigator in the then-incoming government of former Prime Ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid. Newly elected to the Knesset as part of Bennett's right-wing Yamina Party, Chikli declared that he would not support the new coalition, which was made up of a broad range of political parties, including, for the first time, an Arab faction, because he said the move contradicted campaign promises. His constant opposition to multiple policies and proposals over the first year, was what, in part, led to the government's eventual downfall.

Ousted from Bennett's party and initially banned from running for a Knesset seat in the last election, Chikli sought refuge in Netanyahu's Likud party. His resistance had gained him admiration in right-wing circles, and Netanyahu eventually rewarded him by appointing him to head the ministry that engages and liaises with the Diaspora, despite Chikli's having expressed hardline views against Reform Judaism in the past and also having made clear his support for controversial and sensitive reforms to the Law of Return – the immigration legislation that grants anyone with a single Jewish grandparent the right to seek Israeli citizenship.

Chikli's past criticism of Reform Jews in Israel for "going back to their roots in Germany of anti-Zionism and anti-nationalism" – as expressed in a *Jerusalem Post* interview last year – appears to have softened slightly. During his short time in office, he has met with a wide array of Jewish American community leaders, including the head of the Reform movement in the U.S.,

Rabbi Rick Jacobs.

"I have invested dozens of hours listening to their voices," Chikli told *JI*, listing the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis, as well as leaders of community organizations such as the Orthodox Union, Agudath Israel, the Jewish Federations of North America, and many more, that he has already met with.

"And it's not just me, they've also met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they've met with the prime minister, they're meeting leaders from the opposition," he continued. "They're raising their voice in many forms, and they're making their impact and that's perfectly OK, but they're not going to have a vote in the Knesset, and we all know it."

On Saturday night, Jacobs became the first Diaspora Jewish leader to address Israel's anti-government, anti-judicial reform protesters in Tel Aviv, saying that Diaspora Jews "are with you to fight the threats to Israel's democracy." His comments followed a similar sentiment expressed last week in an open letter sent to the Israeli government by the JFNA, which also expressed concern that the government's plans might harm Israeli democracy.

"Criticism is OK," Chikli said. "I don't think that these letters are negative. We are reading them all and listening to the voices, but in the end, unlike the grandchild clause in the Law of Return, it is eventually an inner political debate."

Chikli, however, was not so generous with his patience in his response to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides, who said in a recent interview that the Biden administration had been urging Netanyahu to "pump the brakes" on efforts to reform the judiciary.

"The ambassador is not the federation,

that is diplomacy,” explained the minister, who publicly chided Nides in a national radio interview last week.

“The ambassador speaking to the prime minister of the State of Israel as if he was speaking to his child is a problematic statement,” said Chikli. “We’re not the children of Tom Nides – he should be more respectful; this is a political debate between the coalition and the opposition, it is an inner issue. I did not hear Nides criticizing Sweden, Norway, France or the UAE about their inner political issues.”

Chikli continued: “We have mutual security challenges, we have mutual foreign affairs challenges, we share mutual values and indeed the U.S. is extremely important, but it does not mean there are no red lines in the interference of the ambassador.” Nides’ office turned down JI’s request for a comment.

The minister stands firm on the need to reform Israel’s judicial system, pointing out that “the Supreme Court in Israel is the most elitist, unequal institute and system of the State of Israel.”

“We’re going to change it, and that is for the best,” he stated. “We will have more people from Masorti backgrounds, from Eastern backgrounds and from the Arab, religious and maybe even the Haredi community; it won’t be the closed social club or family, as [former President of the Israeli Supreme Court] Aharon Barak claimed it to be of white secular leftists or Ashkenazi secular leftists.”

The widespread public protests against the reform, which have seen tens of thousands of Israelis take to the streets over the past month and a half, said Chikli, were the response of a “frustrated elite” who had

failed to cross the threshold in the election and not out of worry that the government is attempting to assert its control over an independent branch of the government.

Chikli accused former Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, former ministers Yair Golan and Moshe “Bogie” Ya’alon, and Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai, some of the high-profile figures who have spoken out against the reform proposals, of looking for ways to return to power. He said their protests were dangerously inciting against the government.

“There is a huge difference between saying that we need to go to a civil revolt or to a war and asking the government – the coalition and the opposition – to sit and talk and to make sure that we keep an independent judiciary,” Chikli explained.

On issues such as ensuring there is a place for non-Orthodox and pluralistic prayers at the Western Wall and plans to change key sections of the Law of Return, which would make it harder for some Jews to move to Israel, Chikli acknowledged that it could spark tension with the Diaspora, but waved off claims that the changes would severely harm those relations.

“At the Kotel, I don’t see any change in the status quo; for better or for worse, the situation is just going to stay the way it is,” he insisted.

“Shas tried to bring a change but they were pushed back pretty fast by the coalition,” Chikli continued, referring to a recent rejected proposal by the ultra-religious Sephardi party to create legislation that would prosecute women for dressing immodestly at the holy site.

Regarding the tightening of immigration laws, which will put into sharp focus the

question of who is considered to be Jewish, Chikli insisted that changes are needed.

Revealing to JI that he is in the process of establishing a special committee – together with Minister of Immigrant Absorption Ofir Sofer and President Isaac Herzog – to explore the matter, he said there needed to be a process with more “effective checks and balances to make sure that we are implementing the law with its intention and [that] we’re not opening the gates for an uncontrolled immigration process.”

“Around 40% of immigrants are going back to their countries after two years, and a large number of the people that are coming are not affiliated to Judaism; they are not coming because of Zionist motives, or a motivation to be part of the Jewish people,” said Chikli, sharing statistics that only around 28% of those who made *aliyah* from the former Soviet Union in 2020 were Jewish.

“There’s only one reason why we have the Law of Return,” Chikli concluded. “That is to take care of the Jewish people and to make sure that every Jew has a safe haven in the State of Israel.”

Addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations’ meeting in Jerusalem on Thursday, Jewish Agency for Israel Chairman Maj. Gen. (res.) Doron Almog cautioned against eliminating the clause, however, warning that “it will create a rift among the Jewish people – both in Israel and among world Jewry.”

“It stigmatizes sectors of the Israeli population who contribute to the state and are an integral part of it,” he said. “This change would also detach millions of Jews around the world from Israel.” ♦

After visiting Israel, Welch says Netanyahu 'oblivious' to threat in West Bank

Sen. Peter Welch expressed concerns that the Israeli PM underestimates the threat that the situation in the Palestinian territories poses to maintaining the Jewish and democratic identity of Israel

By Matthew Kassel

Sen. Peter Welch (D-VT), who recently returned from a high-level delegation to Israel and the West Bank, said he is “extremely worried” about mounting political tensions and escalating violence in the region, raising concerns that such developments could imperil the prospect of a two-state solution.

“I’m not optimistic right now,” he explained in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday. “My goal is to be supportive of the peacemakers on both sides, and, I think, if there’s going to be a Jewish democratic state, a two-state solution is the best way to ensure that.”

The first-term senator arrived in Jerusalem late last week at a particularly volatile moment for the Jewish state. In recent days, mass protests against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government, which is now advancing a controversial overhaul of the judicial system, have coincided with a wave of Palestinian attacks against Israelis and settler-led attacks targeting Palestinians in the West Bank.

“You’ve got almost 700,000 settlers in the West Bank, and the more settlers you have, then the less likelihood that you can have a viable, independent Palestinian state,” Welch argued, echoing sentiments he expressed on social media before the trip. “You have the Israeli government, basically the day we arrived, approving more settlements and legalizing what had been previously totally illegal outpost settlements. That’s just a cocktail for conflict.”

Welch, 75, visited Israel with a group of veteran Democratic lawmakers helmed by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), making only his second trip abroad

as a long-serving member of the upper chamber. “It was very important for him, on behalf of all of us, to convey to the Israeli leadership that the U.S.-Israel relationship is of paramount importance to us,” Welch said of Schumer, a leading pro-Israel voice in the Senate. “He expressed that at every stop.”

Schumer has refrained from commenting publicly on Israel’s rightward turn, even as a growing number of Democratic leaders have expressed reservations.

Speaking at Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem on Friday, Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in Washington, vowed that “as long as Hashem breathes air into my lungs, the United States Senate will stand behind Israel with our fullest support.”

Welch, a former longtime congressman who won election to the Senate in November, would not discuss if his private conversations with Schumer and other members of the delegation had touched on more sensitive subjects being debated in Israel’s Knesset.

“We’re all huge supporters of the Democratic nature of the Jewish state, and we’re having our own battles here about judicial reforms,” Welch said, adding: “I know that we all hope it works out. The independent judiciary is a very important element of a democratic form of government.”

The delegation, which made additional stops in Germany, India and Pakistan, also included Sens. Gary Peters (D-MI), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Jack Reed (D-RI), Mark Warner (D-VA) and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

In the Middle East last week, the lawmakers held meetings in Jerusalem and Ramallah with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Netanyahu, among others government officials.

Their discussions with Netanyahu, in particular, were focused primarily on bolstering ties between the U.S. and Israel, expanding the Abraham Accords, assisting Ukraine and countering Iran, a key priority for the Israeli leader, according to Welch. “We listened carefully to Prime Minister Netanyahu,” he told *JL*. “He reiterated his focus on Iran as a real threat and a potential nuclear threat. It’s of grave concern to him.”

“Netanyahu was against the Iran nuclear deal, and Sen. Schumer voted against it,” Welch, who voted in favor of the agreement in 2015, noted. “I was very much for it. I found it somewhat ironic because I think that if we were still in that nuclear deal, Iran would be a long way from the development of a nuclear weapon. They’re very much closer now.”

The prime minister, he recalled, “quite rightly expressed his concern about that, and his absolute conviction that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon,” a sentiment Welch said he also shares.

Still, another area of conversation was, in Welch’s telling, less productive. “My view is that Netanyahu is, rightly, concerned about the Iran nuclear threat, but oblivious to the threat in the West Bank and failure to have any commitment to the two-state solution,” he argued. “The information we’d been briefed on from several of the people we met,” he recalled, “was that the situation in the West Bank is volatile and is as dangerous as they’ve ever seen it.”

That assessment “was confirmed” shortly after the meeting with Netanyahu, he observed, following a weekend uptick in violence that left three Israelis dead and a Palestinian dead, and dozens of Palestinian homes destroyed. “I’m speaking on my own behalf here,” Welch said, “but I am very concerned that the prime minister, I think, underestimates how dangerous that is to the success of maintaining that Jewish and democratic identity that is so important to Israel.”

Welch raised those concerns directly with Netanyahu last week, he said. “I don’t think he gets it,” he speculated. “My view is that he has no commitment at all to the two-state solution and is hell-bent on an annexation policy, and that is in conflict with U.S. policy.”

“If you’re going to have any opportunity to get to a two-state solution, every time you have a new settlement and you have more settler violence and Palestinian violence, it undercuts the potential,” Welch added. “You’ve got a demographic situation there, where if you want to maintain the Israeli identity as a Jewish state and as a democratic state, then at what point does that come into conflict?”

He declined to reveal what, if anything, Netanyahu said in response to his arguments.

“There’s no mystery there,” he said. “He’s focused on the Iran threat and disregarding the internal threat — and I’m concerned about that.”

Welch, who had previously met with Netanyahu while serving in the House,

has long been sharply critical of the prime minister and his policies. He once claimed, for instance, that “no single individual has done more to harm the vitally important U.S.-Israeli relationship than Netanyahu.”

But he said it would be inaccurate to characterize their relationship as contentious. “I have a difference of opinion,” he noted, reiterating his belief that Netanyahu’s hard-right coalition “has no interest in” pursuing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

In a brief statement released after the meeting on Friday, the prime minister’s office wrote that Netanyahu had “stressed the importance of the bipartisan ties between Israel and the U.S.,” while discussing “the struggle against Iran” and “possibilities for expanding” the Abraham Accords.

Like most Democrats in the House and Senate, Welch is supportive of the Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and a handful of Arab nations a few years ago. “That’s really good in terms of Israel and the Arab states having relationships,” he said.

But he clarified that such diplomacy, while “constructive,” is largely unrelated to what he characterized as a more urgent project: building a two-state framework. The accords, he said, are “independent of the issue of the West Bank and a Palestinian state.”

Not that he is particularly hopeful, at the moment, about the possibility of negotiations, citing shortcomings on both sides of the conflict. “There’s got to be

some new thinking and a new approach on the Palestinian side,” he said, criticizing what he called “very weak leadership” and postponed elections. “But the reality of the power dynamic is Israel’s in charge, and there’s a level of desperation in the West Bank.”

“The contest is not ideological,” he said. “It’s elemental — about can you stay in your home or not.”

Before entering the Senate in January, Welch, who had served as Vermont’s lone congressman since 2007, was relatively outspoken on Israeli and Palestinian issues.

The senator has addressed J Street conferences, most recently in December, and was an original cosponsor of the Two-State Solution Act, a bill introduced by former Rep. Andy Levin (D-MI) that would have blocked Israel from using American aid to expand settlements in the West Bank. He also supported proposed legislation from Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) that would place restrictions on U.S. aid to Israel, among other things.

Welch, who replaced former longtime Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), recognizes that he is now in command of “a bigger platform” in the upper chamber, even if his Middle East policy outlook has remained constant. “My point of view is the same,” he said, “and I’ll continue to be active.” ♦

Saudis aim to show cultural change with Warhol exhibition at desert arts site

Display of iconic '60s artist's works brings celebrities to glittering premiere amid criticism that his gay life is unexplored

By Rebecca Anne Proctor

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

In a white-cubed gallery space, like one that could be found in New York or London, a multitude of metallic balloons float like pillows in space while visitors come to play joyfully with the installation: Andy Warhol's 1966 work "Silver Clouds." It would have been a spectacle common in any major world capital with a bustling contemporary art scene had it not been for the fact that the gallery was stationed in the mirror-clad Maraya Concert Hall in AlUla, Saudi Arabia's ancient desert region here, and that this was Andy Warhol's first-ever show in the kingdom.

The reveling spectators, a mix of international visitors mingling with local Saudi men and women in traditional dress, revealed a fascinating scene — one largely unthinkable prior to around 2016. That was when Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman unveiled Vision 2030, his grand reform agenda to wean his country off a reliance on oil through investment in creative entrepreneurship, innovation, tourism and implementing wide sweeping social change.

Warhol's balloon shine with glamor akin to that of the Maraya Concert Hall, which earned a Guinness World Record in 2020 as the largest mirrored building in the world; the concert hall is a standout feature of the area, about 700 kilometers (435 miles) north of Jeddah, which until around 2020 was barely visited by either locals or foreigners, as it vies to become a global art hub for art and culture.

The playful balloons are part of the exhibition "FAME: Andy Warhol in AlUla," which is part of the second edition of the AlUla Arts Festival (Feb. 16-28). The

Warhol show, which runs through May 16, offers a unique look at the renowned 21st-century American Pop artist known as a great disruptor for his spirited works that seamlessly appear to defy categorization, freely occupying both artistic, documentary and commercial artistic genres yet belonging to neither. They are on view alongside Warhol's notorious portraits of Muhammad Ali, Salvador Dali, Bob Dylan, Dolly Parton and Elizabeth Taylor, among others.

"I thought it would be quite intoxicating to stage a Warhol exhibition in AlUla due to the combination of extraordinary natural wonders combined with the growth of the contemporary art scene here," said Patrick Moore, director of The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, who curated the exhibition. Moore said the show was conceived after he was invited to AlUla on a trip in 2021. "There is a certain sameness to everything at times in the art world, and I thought it would be interesting to do something here in this place that is so physically dramatic and beautiful," he told *The Circuit*. "I was quite taken with Maraya, which seemed to be the perfect metaphor for Warhol — this giant mirrored building that reflects whatever it is surrounded by."

Inside the Maraya Concert Hall in a series of makeshift white gallery spaces hang 70 iconic works by the artist who is considered to be one, if not the, defining artist of the 21st century. The show looks at Warhol's legacy through works that focus particularly on his obsession with fame, stardom and celebrity through images of some of the most famous names of the times, coupled with shots of more anonymous personages who also serve as counterculture icons themselves through their rendering by Warhol. For example, the first room presents the artist's series of

"screen tests," or filmed black-and-white portraits, of visitors to Warhol's infamous New York City studio known as The Factory. There's a film of Lou Reed, a founding member of The Velvet Underground rock band slowly drinking a glass of Coca-Cola while wearing thick-rimmed black glasses as if he had no cares in the world. There are also shots of actress Mary Woronov, who studied at Cornell University before appearing in her first Warhol film, "Hedy," in 1985. She later became a performer in Warhol's live multimedia show the "Exploding Plastic Inevitable," which also featured the Velvet Underground. She was also featured in Warhol's 1966 film "The Chelsea Girls."

Despite the fanfare and the large group of international VIP guests and press — many journeying to AlUla for the first time, political and social tensions around staging the exhibition in Saudi Arabia still permeated the ambiance. Before the show's opening, Western media pointed out that Warhol was overtly gay and how Saudi Arabia still carries harsh sentences — including the death penalty — for homosexuality.

Yet Moore, like his Saudi counterparts at the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) who staged the show, urged visitors to focus on Warhol as the artist and not on his personal life. The show, Moore stressed to *The Circuit*, is not about his sexuality; it is about his fascination with fame and celebrity that so defined his work throughout his life. "Not every exhibition of Warhol needs to focus on the fact that he was a gay artist," Moore added. Instead, the works in the show were carefully tailored to the audience that would view them in AlUla: there are no controversial works in the show. In many ways the exhibition is a strong yet concise introduction to Warhol's most iconic works

for a public that perhaps is not as familiar with the artist's legacy.

In many ways, this is the mission now of RCU for the growth of the art scene in AlUla: to make it as focused on local Saudi and regional art as it is international contemporary artists.

The show is part of the second edition of the AlUla Arts Festival, which comprises exhibitions of local and regional art throughout AlUla, including the second showing of the AlUla Artist Residency, which stages specially commissioned works by six international artists, largely from the Middle East, within a lush tranquil oasis.

There's also the Madrasat Addeera, a former girls' school in AlUla that is now offering 70 local Saudi women free education in local artists in crafts through the Prince's Foundation School of Traditional Arts.

"It's not about buying a souvenir from AlUla: we are trying to foster a creative economy through the encouragement of a local artistic community," Nora Aldabal, arts and creative planning director for the Royal Commission of AlUla, told *The Circuit*. "After four years we are seeing the increase in quality of works created at [Madrasat Addeera]. These pieces are serving to build the economy through the preservation and

growth of our local crafts."

In tandem with fostering local talent, like with the Warhol show, RCU is trying to appeal to the international world in a bid to become a global arts hub where artists and creatives can come to be inspired and create work in AlUla that stems from a particular dialogue with the local landscape. Aldabal confirmed that RCU would also soon be establishing a contemporary art museum focusing on the intersection between regional and international art. As she put it: "We want to serve as a window for Saudi to the world, and a window for the world into Saudi Arabia." ♦

FEBRUARY 28, 2023

Dictionary.com changes antisemitism spelling away from 'anti-Semitism'

The online reference service waded into a national debate about the evolving nature of language with its decision to alter the spelling, but not definition, about antisemitism

By Gabby Deutch

Amid an ongoing national conversation about the evolving nature of language, one of the biggest online dictionaries is changing its official spelling of the word used to describe what it defines as "discrimination against or prejudice or hostility toward Jews."

Dictionary.com is replacing "anti-Semitism" — written with a hyphen and a capital-S — with "antisemitism," the website's senior director of editorial, John Kelly, told Jewish Insider on Monday. The term's definition will not change.

"As a dictionary, we take pains to document and describe the language that's being used," Kelly said. "How a word is present in a dictionary has real effects on real people in the real world. The effects can be social, it can be psychological, it can be

personal."

The move comes nearly two years after *The Associated Press* similarly changed the spelling in its widely used style guide. It also reflects an ongoing push by many American Jewish organizations to spell "antisemitism" without the capital S. The linguistic debate kicked off in earnest in 2015, when the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance published a memo arguing for the updated spelling. Using the capital S, the memo said, "allows for the possibility of something called 'Semitism.'"

The Anti-Defamation League suggests that "there is no such thing as a Semitic peoplehood," only Semitic languages, including Arabic and Amharic — and notes that it is possible to speak a Semitic language and still be prejudiced against

Jews. Since the term was popularized in the late 19th century by a German journalist who espoused conspiracy theories about Jewish people, it has "referred to prejudice against Jews alone," and not against any other "Semitic" entity, IHRA writes.

"It's quite important to note that 'antisemitic' as we use it in our general culture isn't noting a prejudice against, say, somebody who speaks Aramaic. It is noting a very particular prejudice, which is discrimination against or prejudice or hostility towards Jews in particular," said Kelly. "The capital S spelling in Semitic is, by a number of groups, interpreted as reinforcing some outdated pseudo-science of race that has kind of applied to Jewish people."

Supporters of the change argue that it

serves an educational purpose, of clarifying what, exactly, antisemitism is — and what it is not. But others in the Jewish community fear that it offers what looks like an easy way out while doing little to actually combat antisemitism. Deborah Lipstadt, a Holocaust historian and the State Department's special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, argued for the updated spelling in her 2018 book, *Antisemitism: Here and Now*.

"It's understandable that those looking for a win against a seemingly intractable prejudice such as anti-Semitism would gravitate toward this issue. But the time and energy spent on this subject would be much better spent on combatting anti-Semites and educating allies," journalist Yair Rosenberg wrote in *The Atlantic* in 2021.

Dictionary.com is making the change now due to the growing number of recent antisemitic incidents in the U.S., Kelly

explained. "The reason that this particular time became increasingly urgent was because of the fact that the term was getting used via reporting on antisemitic incidents," he added.

Unlike *The Associated Press* or *The New York Times*, which also now uses the spelling "antisemitism," Dictionary.com is a reference tool. For hundreds of years, dictionaries were massive physical books that, once they were in a bookshelf in someone's home, could not be edited.

But dictionaries now are also online, and they are crucial arbiters of trendlines and changing fads — and how language should keep up with them, or how it should resist modern changes.

"We call our approach in dictionary making, and in linguistics more generally, descriptive-ism," said Kelley. "It's really important to be a descriptive dictionary to

reflect language as people are using it."

The decision by Dictionary.com follows a years-long evolution of the English language that sped up following the 2020 racial justice protests in the U.S. Dictionary.com, like many other reference sites and media outlets, updated its official entry for the word "black" — used as a racial category — to be spelled "Black," with a capital B. Other changes have reflected the linguistic styles of other marginalized communities like Native Americans and LGBTQ people.

"These words that truly touch people at their core, it's absolutely critical that we, as a dictionary, get it right," said Kelley, and that Dictionary.com take note of "groups who have been oppressed, who have been left out, who haven't been given a voice in the same way — to make sure that we listen to them as a stakeholder into how we define a term, down to the spelling." ♦

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Atra — formerly the Center for Rabbinic Innovation — seeks to support rabbis in a changing world

Atra is also trying to understand where the gaps are in training, especially for more experienced rabbis who are not recent seminary graduates

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

While some rabbis are still associated with the traditional pulpit leadership model, serving in established synagogues or at educational institutions, today's spiritual leaders serve various roles within their communities, across denominations and contexts. From fiery sermonizers to innovative educators, from community advisors to emergent community founders, the changing

appearance of the rabbinate creates a need for Jewish spiritual leaders to receive additional investment and training — to meet contemporary communal needs and build a stronger national network of rabbis.

Launched more than six years ago as the Center for Rabbinic Innovation — a small, incubated program in the Office of Innovation, which is fiscally sponsored by Hillel International — Atra, as the organization is now known, trains and supports rabbinic leaders from all backgrounds to adapt their practice for the

real world, to help them grow professionally and propel their leadership. During the pandemic, the organization also received a Jewish Community Response and Impact Fund grant to support the Rabbinic (re) Design Lab, which empowered clergy to imagine and pilot new approaches to engaging communities during the High Holy Days.

Atra's new name invokes the Aramaic phrase "*mara d'atra*," meaning the teacher or rabbi who serves a particular place, a hat tip to the modern ubiquity of places where

rabbis can be found. Over the next three years, the organization expects to expand its outreach to rabbis and other Jewish spiritual leaders, as well as bring 45 organizational partners into the emerging conversation about what makes a rabbi, Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein, Atra's executive director, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

The organization's strategic plan (available online here) calls for program expansion, establishing a field of rabbinic training, new research and a stronger national network among rabbis, and is supported by recent grants from Crown Family Philanthropies and the Jim Joseph Foundation. Those new grants, along with other donor contributions, total more than \$2 million toward the organization's \$6 million strategic plan.

"We believe that rabbis are a key gateway, models and change agents for Jewish identity, meaning, ethics and practice for the Jewish people," said Barry Finestone, president and CEO of the Jim Joseph Foundation. "There's a demonstrated need for more skilled rabbis as leaders in the North American Jewish community. Rabbinic training as a field has been under-resourced. Importantly, Atra has developed practical and effective ways to provide relevant, needed training for rabbinic leaders serving in the field across the denominational spectrum and in a range of settings."

Atra has a current budget of \$2.5 million, with four full-time and two part-time staff members. By 2025, the organization expects to launch as an independent 501(c)(3) and to expand to six full-time with a director of faculty and research faculty. The leadership has chosen not to invest in physical offices for the time being, instead renting program spaces as needed. Epstein said that the leadership is lining up strategic advisors and funders to help them grow.

"We know that rabbis engage people in all kinds of settings throughout people's life stages and inflection points," Finestone explained. "We need Jewish leaders who are equipped to transform the future of North American Judaism in the 21st century through learning and other experiences that have meaning and resonance in people's lives."

The Jim Joseph Foundation also funded Atra to conduct a study on the relationship

between rabbis and Jewish Americans from the ages of 18-44. "Since rabbis engage young Jews in so many settings, it's important to understand what factors make those interactions and experiences most meaningful and relevant in young people's lives," said Finestone regarding the study, which will be released in mid-March. Atra commissioned the research and managed the project; the foundation did not provide input on the questions.

One of Atra's first tasks is to establish metrics around "excellence," Epstein told eJP. "There really has been very little research on what a rabbi is, what a rabbi does and what it looks like when a rabbi is good at what they do. We don't even have metrics for saying what makes us good rabbi. And if we're going to help ensure that rabbis are excellent, we need to know what that means."

The study being released in March is the first one in at least 30 years, Epstein noted, and anticipates that such research will happen every few years moving forward. The research should also "inform a conversation not just for us, but for everyone who's trying to ensure that there's excellence in rabbinic leadership," she explained.

With different seminaries preparing rabbis differently for their work, Atra is also trying to understand where the gaps are in training, especially for more experienced rabbis who went to seminaries somewhere between one and four decades ago. These gaps might include updating their social media or technology fluency, improving their management or communication skills, and using community organizing principles to activate their communities, Epstein and Ariel Moritz, the director of program operations at Atra, told eJP.

"We know that the locus of authority has changed and people are often looking at influencers, not at authority. So how do rabbis learn how to communicate as skilled, knowledgeable, effective leaders with a group of people who are not necessarily listening to a sermon. They want to have a reciprocal relationship with their rabbi," Epstein said. "The rabbi needs to learn where that person is."

While some rabbis may be starting a new community to fill a demographic or cultural gap in the community, they may

not have training on management or how to create a startup, Moritz said. "So they find themselves wearing a whole bunch of hats and will often turn to us to figure out how to do that work."

The grant will enable Atra to expand its programs such as its rabbinic entrepreneur fellowship, Troubleshooting the Chagim and the Rabbinic (re)Design Lab. While many Jewish organizations have adopted the Design Thinking approach to idea and program development, Atra uses the Lean Startup method. In addition to being less time-consuming than Design Thinking, Lean Startup includes identifying a problem or challenge and then developing a minimum viable product (MVP) to test. In the case of rabbinic training, Epstein said, "You have an idea, you have an audience that you know exists that you are talking and listening to, you have a question and an idea for what might serve them. You test it with a small test, and then you learn and then you iterate."

CRI had been serving mostly early-career rabbis, as well as mid-career rabbis seeking to expand their skill sets prior to the pandemic. But after 2020, synagogues and rabbis "could not pretend that they knew how to deal with the changed reality," said Epstein. "Everybody already needed new skills. We recognized that we had tools that we had been teaching that would be really useful." The large grant from JCRIF helped them to launch new programs in response to what the movements' rabbinic organizations told CRI their rabbis needed. While some CRI cohorts were by denomination — the Reform Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly, for example — most of the participants wanted programs that are pluralistic, as most CRI programs are.

Atra is now moving into a regional strategy, building cohorts in specific cities to be announced at a later date. Epstein expects at least one city to launch in the next year, and notes that even if all rabbis want to learn new skills, Atra programs differ between cities, "because every city or region's Jewish community, and current communal infrastructure is a little bit different...When we look at a region [we ask] what is the Jewish need here, how might we work with these rabbis to address that

need,” she said. “We’re trying to go slowly enough to actually build what’s necessary.”

Part of that process is strengthening the network — establishing partnerships and collaborations with other organizations, such as the Jewish Education Project and the Association for Reform Jewish Educators — and developing critical infrastructure toward greater independence in 2025.

“I also think it’s really exciting how many people are investing in rabbinic leadership and how many philanthropies and Jewish foundations are renewing their look at rabbinic leadership,” Epstein said. She added that The Aviv Foundation, Maimonides Fund, Charles & Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, Natan and UJA-Federation of New York are among the grantmakers that have started funding the field.

Over the next few months, Atra will

release the report from its research study and launch a new website in April to grow its network and make its programs and resources more accessible. In the interim the strategic plan is available and the organization is actively recruiting for its programs.

Another part of Atra’s job is to help rabbis figure out the best model for sustainability, both of the larger Jewish community and also on the practical level, determining revenue structure, considering whether or not to have membership dues. Jewish philanthropy will continue to generate some of the support for Atra. “We want to be excellent stewards of *tzedakah*,” Epstein said, adding that the organization plans to grow its infrastructure thoughtfully and methodically. “We believe that, as we do that well, people will know that if they want to

invest in excellent rabbinic leadership, we’ll be able to use their *tzedakah* to make that happen.”

The organization is also looking at different fee-for-service opportunities, especially since most rabbis don’t really have large amounts of money designated for their own career development and training. It also has a small pilot program to connect excellent innovative rabbis with philanthropists who want to invest in their projects. Along with this comes helping rabbis to understand how to measure their work’s impact, ask for financial support and report to donors on their investment.

“Rabbis need a lot of help and support,” Epstein said. “We need their careers to be sustainable, we need them to be excellent for a long time.” ♦

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From Cleveland to Jerusalem, tech startup drives auto sales

AutoLeadStar’s Aharon Horwitz managed to raise \$40 million in November while cash-starved peers were laying off employees and shutting down

By Brian Blum

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

Aharon Horwitz, an immigrant to Israel from Cleveland, thought he had a terrific startup idea that would give small and medium-sized businesses the types of data tools used by global operations like Pizza Hut to track customers and build sales.

The Jerusalem-based company, dubbed 40Nuggets, had moderate success with clients ranging from Israeli homebuilders to newsletter publishers, but Horwitz ultimately burned through his cash reserves. After a venture capital investor advised

Horwitz to pivot back to the U.S. and focus on car dealerships, the business soon took off. Israel was far from his target market.

Rebranding the company as AutoLeadStar with the mission to “upend digital marketing” in the car industry, Horwitz has since raised \$57 million and racked up close to 1,000 dealers in cities across the country from Manchester, N.H., to Tacoma, Wash. He has doubled revenue for each of the last three years.

“No one wanted to talk to a company overseas,” Horwitz, 43, told *The Circuit*. “I got on a plane, flew to Cleveland, where I used family connections to get introductions. I

essentially started volunteering. It was like I was interning at these car dealerships.”

AutoLeadStar is an example of the thousands of Israeli companies with dual identities, which opt to incorporate in the U.S., spreading their sales teams from coast to coast. The company’s R&D core, meanwhile, is concentrated near Horwitz’s home in Jerusalem and filled with software engineers and data scientists.

Horwitz’s business is making money and attracting investment at a time that others in the industry are struggling. The online automotive retailer Carvana, for example, saw its valuation plunge 98% in

the last 18 months. One of its competitors in the U.S. market, Jerusalem-based Vroom, was trading at \$1 a share in recent trading, a far cry from \$65 in 2020.

AutoLeadStar, on the other hand, managed to raise \$40 million as recently as November, at a time when investment has been drying up for startups both in Israel and the U.S., forcing many companies to lay off employees and others to shut down entirely. AutoLeadStar's most recent funding round was led by Riverwood Capital with investment from PICO Venture Partners, Aleph and Target Global.

Horwitz never planned to get into the car business – he studied political science at Columbia University – and knew little about it when his key investor, PICO CEO Elie Wurtman, suggested in 2015 that his customer engagement software could fill a gap in the \$1.5 trillion auto industry. The systems developed originally by 40Nuggets were able to help smaller car dealers compete with the majors in compiling torrents of customer data, massaging it through artificial intelligence and automation tools, and generating the leads that produce repeat sales – now and years in the future.

"It became quickly apparent that what we were developing was exactly what they were looking for," Horwitz said in an interview at his office in Jerusalem's Talpiot neighborhood, which is filled with repair shops and auto parts stores alongside higher-end shopping malls. Over time, he said, he "fell in love with the industry and with the potential there."

Car dealers have enormous amounts of so-called opt-in data that they are often not equipped to fully exploit. A typical customer-relationship management system might have 50,000 contacts in it and is chock full of buyers who completed a purchase. AutoLeadStar enables the dealer the ability to say, "Hey, you were looking at this car eight years ago. Now we have a new model. Are you interested?" Horwitz said.

When he moved to Israel in 2006, Horwitz's passion was social entrepreneurship. He and some friends founded the nonprofit organization PresenTense, which provides education and work opportunities to poor and marginalized populations in Israel, with a special focus on the country's Arab citizens.

Gradually, Horwitz's interest shifted to business and the devastating impact that big retailers can have on urban centers. "You pop a Walmart down and all the downtowns within 200 miles die," he said. "We thought, 'Why don't we build some weapons to arm the small- and medium-sized businesses?'"

It's not that these companies, known as SMBs, didn't have computer tools. The problem, Horwitz said, is that the main software products such as Salesforce and HubSpot were growing in complexity as they sought to address larger, more lucrative markets.

"The SMBs wind up getting smoked by the big companies who know how to use these tools far better," Horwitz said. "A local pizza shop just can't keep up with what Pizza Hut can do."

Once Horwitz set his sights on cars, everything he learned before about using customer data fell into place. Crisscrossing North America, his team pitched AutoLeadStar's software as a one-stop shop for car dealers to integrate their sales records and contact files with business functions such as social media marketing, email campaigns and website optimization.

"Aharon's expertise is infectious," said Derek DeBoer, owner of TC Chevy in Ashland, Ore. "It's hard to leave a meeting with him without being really excited about technology and your business."

Horwitz's enthusiastic approach to business extends to setting an example for his staff in maintaining a healthy work-family balance. When they're hired, AutoLeadStar employees learn from a daily post on the company calendar not to disturb the boss between 6 and 7 p.m. because he's home with his two young kids for "bath time." Many leave the office in the afternoon to pick up their children from school and continue working remotely from home.

Given AutoLeadStar's ability to raise money when others are cutting back, Horwitz said he's planning to hire more developers, build greater expertise in data science and boost training for the U.S. sales team as the systems become more sophisticated. The company also plans to continue its practice of releasing a new product or feature every quarter.

"We want to double down on our tech," Horwitz said. ♦