

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Neera Tanden's past clashes with left over Israel shape her tenure as domestic policy advisor; 'Jewish culture, cuisine, peoplehood': Inside Lehrhaus, Boston's new 'tavern and house of learning'; Barbara Leaf downplays reports of imminent Saudi-Israeli normalization; North Carolina Democrats prepare for heated platform fight over Israel; Activists, researchers sound alarm as Israel's opioid use reaches critical level, surpassing U.S.; Israeli filmmaker takes a plunge into the 'toxic family pool'; Israel's new English news channel seeks to capture young generation on social media; and Former top AIPAC official Elias Saratovsky tapped to lead Birthright Foundation, succeeding Tapoohi.

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Neera Tanden's past clashes with left over Israel shape her tenure as domestic policy advisor

The longtime Democratic Party insider is taking over for Susan Rice days after the release of the national strategy to counter antisemitism

By Gabby Deutch

The day after the Biden administration released its long-awaited national strategy to counter antisemitism last week, the plan's architect — Domestic Policy Council Director Susan Rice — departed the White House.

The implementation of the strategy will now fall to Rice's replacement, Neera Tanden, a longtime Democratic operative who is succeeding Rice as President Joe Biden's top domestic policy advisor.

"If people are thinking they're going to phone it in now that the strategy is out, that

is not going to happen on her watch," said Jarrod Bernstein, who served as the White House liaison to the Jewish community during the Obama administration. "She's a policy person. She's also a details person. So if agencies have specific commitments and specific projects that they are responsible for, they're going to be responsible for them, and she's going to check." (Bernstein also serves as a co-host of *Jewish Insider's* "Limited Liability Podcast.")

In a May statement announcing Tanden's appointment, Biden praised her "25 years of

experience in public policy" and called her "a key architect of the Affordable Care Act." Early in his presidency, Biden had tapped Tanden to lead the Office of Management and Budget, but she withdrew her name from consideration amid concerns she did not have the votes for the Senate-confirmed position. She has spent the last two years as a senior advisor and White House staff secretary.

A White House spokesperson told *JI* on Wednesday that Tanden "will take a lead role in implementing" the antisemitism

strategy, and that she “looks forward to vigorously and expeditiously implementing the strategy through an ongoing interagency process.”

Tanden, 52, has been a top Democratic party operative since the Clinton administration. During the 2016 presidential campaign, while she served as the president of the influential liberal think tank Center for American Progress (CAP), Tanden became a fierce defender of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton — and a lightning rod for criticism from far-left supporters of Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), whose campaign she opposed. A prolific tweeter, Tanden has also garnered widespread opposition from Republicans, who attacked her during her OMB nomination process for a history of tweeting scathing insults at Republicans.

“She is a pragmatic progressive, right next to Hillary [Clinton], in terms of if your goal — if your definition of progressive is someone who believes that government should work to make lives better, now and in the future, how do we best get that done?” said Ann Lewis, who served as White House communications director under former President Bill Clinton and is now the co-chair of Democratic Majority for Israel.

Tanden engendered some enemies on the left, who still have vivid memories of the 2016 campaign. *The Intercept* wrote in April that Tanden “would bring an unusual amount of intra-party polarization, to put it gently, to a role that requires broad coalition building.”

“Joe Biden is a mainstream centrist Democrat, and so his staff is going to reflect that,” said Bernstein. “If you were looking for something other than that, there are going to be moments where that difference annoys you.”

When asked about Tanden’s conflicts with some segments of the Democratic Party, former Obama administration deputy press secretary Eric Schultz said he trusts Biden’s choices: “The president has confidence in her, and that’s all the rest of us need to know,” Schultz said.

At CAP, Tanden also presided over an early intra-Democratic Party feud around Israel, when pro-Israel advocates put pressure on the organization after one of its staffers had tweeted using language viewed by many in the Jewish community to be

antisemitic.

“It was one of the first instances in which a mainstream Democratic institution was really infected with this sort of super anti-Zionist, really hostile, pretty nasty stuff,” said Josh Block, the former CEO of The Israel Project and a former AIPAC spokesperson, who had urged people in his network to publicly go after CAP during the 2012 incident. The staffer soon left CAP.

“When this was called to her attention, she fixed it, sort of firmly, quietly, and moved CAP back to where it should be, which is really one of the leading places in which Democrats in and out of office can talk about good policy and how to make it happen,” said Lewis, who has been close to Tanden since they worked together on Hillary Clinton’s 2000 Senate campaign.

Tanden ultimately came out on the side of Israel’s backers in the Democratic Party, earning her praise from pro-Israel stalwarts. On Wednesday, AIPAC CEO Howard Kohr told *JI* that “the pro-Israel community and Jewish leaders enjoyed a very positive working relationship with Neera during her career in Washington.”

In 2015, CAP again sparked controversy among some on the left when the think tank hosted a conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The event was eight months after several Democrats boycotted Netanyahu’s address to Congress, when he had been invited by Republican leaders who had not informed President Barack Obama, and many in the party were still furious at the Israeli leader for circumventing the president. Several former CAP staffers criticized the move, with one saying it was a ploy for Netanyahu to gain “progressive validation.” (Netanyahu was also criticized by some on the right for speaking at the left-wing organization.)

“By moderating a conversation with Prime Minister Netanyahu in 2015, she affirmed that we can and should have constructive conversations with our allies, perhaps especially when we don’t agree with them,” said Rachel Rosen, who worked at CAP for five years under Tanden and who is now the communications director at Democratic Majority For Israel. “She made sure CAP was the place to advance big policy ideas, allowing for respectful disagreements, and made clear there was no

place for antisemitism at CAP or within the Democratic Party.”

Now that the antisemitism strategy has been released, it’s not clear what’s next for the White House efforts to fight antisemitism. The plan included more than 100 policy actions that executive agencies pledged to take within the year but did not lay out how they would see those priorities through.

“If [Tanden] is responsible for the implementation of that plan, I think we can count on her to be a good ally,” said Block. ♦

‘Jewish culture, cuisine, peoplehood’: Inside Lehrhaus, Boston’s new ‘tavern and house of learning’

The kosher restaurant, bar and beit midrash has found a loyal clientele within the Boston Jewish community — and reached well beyond it

By Gabby Deutch

It was two nights before Passover, and at a new restaurant in Somerville, Mass., Jews of all stripes enjoyed *chometz*-filled dishes and local beers that they were about to give up for eight days.

In the next room, sitting around a communal table, “The Office” star B.J. Novak, his brother Lev and their father William told old-school Jewish jokes. Among the intimate crowd of roughly 20 people, someone who was not Jewish raised his hand and thanked the presenters for helping him understand what makes Jewish humor...Jewish.

On display that night at Lehrhaus, a restaurant and bar that bills itself as a “Jewish tavern and house of learning,” was a joyful vision of what it means to have a space that is both distinctly, vibrantly Jewish and also open, and inviting, to people of all faiths and backgrounds.

Lehrhaus had only opened its doors less than a month before, a long-delayed and welcome arrival in this neighborhood, adjacent to Cambridge, that is full of intellectuals, students, professionals and young people seeking meaning — and good food. Lehrhaus pledged to offer both.

“There are plenty of places to go to do Jewish things in Boston, but no place is as easy, tasty and fun,” said Molly Kazan, a 20-something Cambridge resident who works at a Jewish nonprofit in the Boston area. “Stepping into Lehrhaus is stepping into Jewish culture, cuisine and peoplehood all wrapped into a new Somerville bar.”

Since announcing their plans last summer, Lehrhaus founders Rabbi Charlie Schwartz and Josh Foer had sparked a wave of interest across Boston and throughout the Jewish world among people excited by the

prospect of a kosher restaurant that takes an inventive approach to craft cocktails, food and Jewish learning.

Following the restaurant’s soft-opening in March, Lehrhaus quickly attracted another clientele: Boston foodies. Lehrhaus has landed on both *Eater* and *Thrillist*’s lists of the hottest new restaurants in Boston, and a recent feature-length profile in *The Boston Globe* cemented Lehrhaus as a rising star on the Boston culinary scene.

“Most kosher restaurants don’t appeal to people outside of kosher dining. This place does. Most restaurants don’t have a distinctive Jewish identity outside of kashrut,” Schwartz told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview at Lehrhaus. “What we’re actually doing here is defining Jewish food.”

Nearly everything at Lehrhaus has a story.

There’s the local beer, all from breweries located within 30 miles that welcomed for the first time kashrut supervisors to certify that their beers could be served in a kosher establishment. There’s the amaro, which is a key ingredient in one of Lehrhaus’ cocktails, sourced from a Seattle woman-owned distillery that agreed to become almost entirely kosher for the sake of serving this establishment 3,000 miles away.

Lehrhaus’ food and drink menu is meant to look like a page of Talmud, with the core text — the menu — at the center of the page. It is surrounded on all sides by commentaries, which in this case means historical and religious explanations of the cuisine on offer.

Consider the explanation for the “Tree of Knowledge,” a fruit-forward non-alcoholic cocktail: “There are many thoughts as to what the fruit was that Adam

and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge. The prominence of the apple in Western European depictions is likely due to either a mis-translation or pun as the words for ‘evil’ and ‘apple’ in Latin are very similar. Many say the fruit was likely a pomegranate, fig, etrog or even grapes.” The drink has fig, pomegranate, lemon and pineapple — but no apple juice.

The food menu features familiar dishes such as fish and chips (tied to Sephardic Jews who fled to England during the Inquisition) and more inventive ones like the “Seder salad,” whose ingredients include a haroset crouton. (Lehrhaus recently landed on *Boston Magazine*’s list of the best fish and chips in Boston.)

“Most kosher restaurants don’t want you to think that this is a Jewish space. It just happens to be kosher, like, ‘Oh, I didn’t even notice that it was kosher,’ is the goal,” Schwartz said. “Here, this is a distinctly Jewish space and a vibrant Jewish space.”

Because Lehrhaus is both kosher and, improbably, cool, it attracts a mix of Jews ranging from the unaffiliated to the observant, and everyone in between.

“In our first week of opening, we were trending both on local queer listservs and Orthodox listservs,” said Schwartz. “To have that intersection of people being like, ‘Oh, this too, is mine, and I grab onto it,’ that’s great.”

Lining the walls are more than 3,000 books, ranging from volumes of Talmud to Judy Blume novels to treatises on Zionism. In a *beit midrash*, or Jewish library and study room, Lehrhaus offers classes on topics ranging from Judeo-Arabic literature to Jewish history in the Roman era, and discussions of Jewish text. Last week

Lehrhaus hosted more than 70 people for a conversation about Jewish art with the comic and playwright Alex Edelman, a Boston native.

"There's a really big chasm in the Jewish community in America right now, I think, between curiosity for Jewish learning, ideas and content, especially when it's really good, and at the same time, skepticism about stepping foot inside Jewish institutions," said Yehuda Kurtzer, president of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America.

Kurtzer recently came from New York to deliver a class on the history of the original Lehrhaus, a Jewish salon established in Germany in 1920 by the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. At the modern Lehrhaus, the barrier to entry to Jewish learning is low — so low that if you aren't interested in what you're learning, you can duck out of the *beit midrash* and grab a drink at the bar.

"I think that they're onto something in terms of thinking differently about how we see space in the Jewish community, in terms of understanding the whole self of Jews," Kurtzer added. "They're building a different business model for Jewish engagement."

The classes are for the most part meant to be small, with attendees sitting around a big table and both learning from a teacher and discussing the topic with each other. The initial strategy for the classes they offer is "to go broad and see what works," said Schwartz. The approach is rooted in pluralism; Lehrhaus has partnered with the Hartman Institute; Hebrew College, a nondenominational rabbinical school; and Hadar, an egalitarian yeshiva. Down the line, Lehrhaus hopes to offer one-on-one sessions for people interested in studying with a learning guide.

How many of Lehrhaus' devoted culinary fans will stick around for the learning opportunities? That remains an open question.

"Lehrhaus as a restaurant is awesome. Two thumbs-up. Lehrhaus as a Jewish learning space, I haven't really tried it yet," said Kazan, who noted that text study is not her preferred method of connection to Judaism. "I'm not sure that is going to be the thing that keeps me coming back." In the two months since it opened, she estimates she has been to Lehrhaus six times.

William Novak, the Newton-based editor

of *The Big Book of Jewish Humor* and one of the speakers at last month's conversation with his sons B.J. and Lev, said the news of Lehrhaus' opening had not made it to his group of friends — several decades older than the target demographic he noticed at the restaurant — until the *Globe* article started spreading in his minyan WhatsApp group last week.

"I live in the suburbs among people in their 70s," Novak said. Still, he added, he had experience with creative Jewish programs like the *Havurah* movement of the 1970s. "I'm not unaware of innovative programs, but I've never seen or even heard of anything like this. I was so impressed."

Innovation remains a chief concern of Lehrhaus' founders, who suggest that future offerings might include prepaid Shabbat dinners (the restaurant is currently closed on Friday and Saturday), opening late on Saturday after Shabbat ends and Sunday brunch inspired by Sephardic and Mizrahi cultures. ("The immediate vicinity is kind of a brunch desert," Schwartz observed.)

The Boston area — and Cambridge and Somerville in particular — may be the ideal incubator for a place like Lehrhaus, as a community with a thriving young Jewish population that, on this side of the Charles River, lacks many nearby Jewish institutions. But its founders insist that it isn't the only place that would benefit from a Lehrhaus, nor is it the only one that would be hospitable to such an institution.

"This could be something that changes the math and landscape of a community and the institutions that are meant to be serving the Jews of that community," said Kurtzer, who added that Lehrhaus' founders have described it to him like this: "A Jewish community should have a synagogue, a JCC, a mikvah and a Lehrhaus, or a tavern."

Schwartz and Foer aren't shy about saying that they want to see other Lehrhauses outside of Boston, although Schwartz was coy about what the next location might be.

"What are the criteria that make this work right now?" he asked. "It's a fairly large Jewish community with not a tremendous amount of communal infrastructure, a large number of young Jews, a high level of churn in population." It would also need to be in a place where Lehrhaus could raise enough

money to get started, because the institution is a nonprofit.

Kurtzer thinks it's an easy pitch to philanthropists: "You're not donating money to a restaurant," he said. "You're donating money to a young adult Jewish engagement project that has a revenue stream."

If you build it, the saying goes, they will come. ♦

Barbara Leaf downplays reports of imminent Saudi-Israeli normalization

‘There’s a lot of misreporting and a lot of hyperventilation in the press, a lot of excitable rumint, I would say, in the press, especially in the Israeli press,’ the top Mideast diplomat said

By Marc Rod

Barbara Leaf, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, downplayed recent reports indicating that Israel and Saudi Arabia are close to reaching a normalization agreement.

“There’s a lot of misreporting and a lot of hyperventilation in the press, a lot of excitable rumint, I would say, in the press, especially in the Israeli press. They’re just electric with the idea that Saudi Arabia might take that step,” Leaf told a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Wednesday.

Saudi-Israeli normalization “is an end goal for us” and “it’s fair to say the crown prince [of Saudi Arabia] has been very candid... that that is very much on his mind,” Leaf added, referring to Saudi Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman.

Leaf noted that “we also see plenty of space to get things done” in expanding connections between the two nations short of full normalization. *Axios* reported last month that the Biden administration is seeking full normalization by the end of the year.

Leaf had been questioned on the subject by Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT), the chair of the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Central Asia subcommittee, who has also been one of the most vocal critics of Saudi Arabia in Congress because of its human rights record and has sought on multiple occasions to cut off U.S. weapons sales to Riyadh.

Murphy called a potential normalization agreement “a pivotal and immensely positive development” and said the U.S. “should be actively engaged in trying to help make that happen.” But he sought assurances that security guarantees to Saudi Arabia — which the kingdom has

reportedly demanded — would require Senate ratification.

Leaf responded that “we’re very mindful of the right and left limits of what becomes a treaty versus something else.”

Several of Murphy’s Democratic colleagues in the House had expressed concerns to *Jewish Insider* last week about potential arms sales to and expanded nuclear cooperation with Saudi Arabia, some of the kingdom’s other reported demands.

Earlier in the hearing, Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) pressed Leaf on why the administration’s 2024 budget request did not include more specific funding requests related to expanding the Abraham Accords.

Leaf responded that many of the projects that have come out of the Accords do not require direct U.S. funding, but noted that the administration has also requested \$90 million for a Middle East and North Africa Opportunity Fund, which she said could be tapped for seed money for Accords-related projects.

“We have a lot... going on in the diplomatic space that isn’t yet visible, frankly,” she added.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), a critic of Israeli policy, raised a recent *Washington Post* report on “extrajudicial killings” by Israeli agents during a March raid in Jenin in the West Bank. Van Hollen alluded to the prospect of restricting U.S. aid to Israel, asking whether the unit involved in the incident had been investigated for under the Leahy Law, which bars aid to foreign security force units involved in gross violations of human rights. Leaf said she did not have that information offhand. Van Hollen requested a full list of all Israeli units

investigated under the Leahy Law.

He also threatened to “use whatever powers I have here in ways that I’ve never done before” if he was not given access to a new U.S. report on the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by the end of the week. Van Hollen has been seeking access to that report for some time and said that he had “ran out of patience” and was “at the end of my rope.” Leaf apologized and said that the report would be provided “shortly.”

On Lebanon, which is in the midst of an ongoing political and economic crisis, Leaf said that the U.S. is evaluating potential sanctions on members of the current Lebanese government, as well as working with regional and European partners to “push the Lebanese parliament to do its job.”

Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) told Leaf that he’s “really worried” about the expansions in Latin America of Hezbollah, whose “level of activity in the Americas is picking up.”

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) accused the administration of violating “the spirit, if not the letter, of the Taylor Force Act” by providing humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. He also questioned Leaf on why the administration had waived visa restrictions on Palestine Liberation Organization officials to allow them to visit the U.S. for meetings with State Department officials.

“We brought the delegation here to the United States to have discussions that would go to a number of interests that we have — go to Israel’s security, frankly,” Leaf responded.

Leaf reiterated previous public comments by administration officials downplaying the significance of a recent

normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, facilitated by China.

She emphasized that the deal was a “detente,” not “a big rapprochement or a full normalization”; that it was “was not brokered by the Chinese — they hosted it, the Iranians and the Saudis did all of the agreements and the discussions themselves”; that “it did not entirely surprise us”; and that it does not “alter our own very robust engagement with... the Saudis.”

She also said that the deal puts “the Chinese... on the hook to help police Iranian

actions,” and that Saudi Arabia is “very clear-eyed about the prospects for getting a sudden change in Iranian behavior.”

Leaf was more positive about talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, which she said are in their “endgame” and may potentially soon move to an international U.N.-mediated forum.

Murphy and Cardin raised questions about the U.S.’ military aid to Egypt, given ongoing concerns about human rights and corruption in the country. Murphy questioned whether the U.S. should “take

a fresh look” at this aid. Cardin asked why the administration had not included human rights conditions — which Congress has approved in recent years — in its budget proposal for aid to Egypt, a decision Cardin said had put Congress “in a difficult position.”

“We do each have our separate roles,” Leaf responded. “The work that Congress does in this space sends a powerful signal to the Egyptian government... Generally speaking, across the board, we seek assistance that is unconditioned, that we can use flexibly.” ♦

MAY 31, 2023

North Carolina Democrats prepare for heated platform fight over Israel

Rep. Kathy Manning says the proposed resolutions may be ‘exacerbating antisemitism’

By Matthew Kassel

The North Carolina Democratic Party is currently weighing a series of contentious new platform resolutions that could escalate internal divisions over Israel just as party members are seeking to unify ahead of a pivotal election cycle, if approved in the coming weeks.

The proposed resolutions, which have not yet been finalized, are largely included in a detailed platform section on international relations that focuses almost exclusively on Israel and Middle East policy, according to a recent draft reviewed by *Jewish Insider*.

Among other measures that are likely to draw scrutiny, the resolutions advocate for remaining neutral “on whether the best solution to” the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “is the so-called ‘two-state solution’ or ‘one-state solution.’” That position, if upheld, would put the state party at odds with the national Democratic platform, which

supports “a negotiated two-state solution that ensures Israel’s future as a Jewish and democratic state.”

In a section “recognizing anti-Palestinian bigotry,” a separate resolution endorses the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees to Israel, all but rejecting its existence as a Jewish state. The draft also calls for the commemoration of May 15 as Nakba Day, the Arabic term for “catastrophe” used to denote the Palestinian exodus that coincided with the foundation of Israel.

The state party’s Resolutions and Platform Committee, which convened on Saturday, is expected to take up the Israel-related measures during a follow-up meeting scheduled for June 10.

But Jewish leaders in North Carolina are already speaking out. “I have deep concerns about these one-sided, inaccurate and divisive resolutions,” Rep. Kathy Manning (D-NC), a pro-Israel stalwart,

said in a statement to *JI* on Tuesday. “At a time of rising antisemitism, a problem so immense that it necessitated the release of the first-ever national strategy to counter antisemitism, advancing resolutions that may exacerbate antisemitism and hate is the last thing that should be done.”

The Democratic Party “has long supported a two-state solution and strengthening of our strategic relationship with our democratic ally Israel,” Manning said. “The 2024 election will be critical to determining the future of our state and our nation. Instead of driving a wedge between our party, it’s time we come together with renewed focus on our shared values and work to retain control of the White House, win back the House of Representatives, flip the state legislature and elect a Democrat as governor of North Carolina.”

North Carolina Democrats are preparing for a difficult election cycle as they seek to

defend the governorship and prepare for a redistricting process that could endanger several of its Democratic representatives in Congress.

The Republican Party recently won veto-proof supermajorities in both chambers of the state legislature after a Democratic lawmaker defected to the GOP last month — putting increased “pressure on Democrats to get unified,” said a Jewish party leader in North Carolina who views the resolutions as an unnecessary distraction. “Anything that gets in the way of that is to be avoided.”

Ryan Jenkins, the president of the state party’s affiliated Progressive Caucus, said he agreed with that sentiment, even as he has been involved in promoting the resolutions behind the scenes.

Jenkins, who has worked to revise some of the resolutions in recent weeks, said the proposals were originally written by members of the Progressive Caucus but do not represent the group’s official platform. “Some of them were written very deliberately to insult people,” he suggested. “That’s my reading of it.”

For instance, one resolution that has since been amended praised a group of rabbis in North Carolina “for standing up for human rights,” according to Jenkins. The names were excised after one rabbi expressed alarm that he had been included and asked to be removed from the draft. “There is no need to deliberately antagonize people,” Jenkins told JI on Tuesday. “We’re going to do that enough anyway. It’s a hot-button issue.”

The draft now says it “wishes to commend” unnamed “Jewish American leaders in North Carolina and beyond for taking steps to hold the current right-wing government of the State of Israel accountable for its policies.”

Another resolution, which has been scrapped, called on party members to “reject contributions” from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, incorrectly referring to the bipartisan lobbying group as the “America Israel Public Action Committee,” according to an earlier draft obtained by JI. The resolution argued that AIPAC has “become actively hostile to the democratic process in the United States and abroad,” citing its alleged “support for the right-wing ruling coalition in Israel and their

attempts to destroy any judicial oversight of or restraint on their power.”

An updated resolution now says that the North Carolina Democratic Party “ought to divorce itself from groups” supporting “right-wing extremism,” while requesting that members “carefully consider the sources of all donations.” The subtext, however, will no doubt be clear to party insiders in North Carolina.

Last cycle, AIPAC’s affiliated super PAC spent heavily in two Democratic primaries for open House seats in North Carolina, backing one candidate, Valerie Foushee, whose top rival had faced scrutiny for antisemitic rhetoric against Israel. The Progressive Caucus revoked its support for Foushee, who ultimately won the seat, amid AIPAC’s involvement.

In a statement to JI, Marshall Wittmann, a spokesperson for AIPAC, defended the group’s approach. “We are proud of our involvement in the democratic process to elect Democrats and Republicans who will strengthen our alliance with the Jewish state,” he said on Tuesday. “It is both consistent with our democratic values and American national security interests to maintain a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.”

Nazim Uddin, the director of internal communications for the Progressive Caucus who is among the most outspoken critics of Israel in North Carolina’s Democratic Party, said he had helped craft the resolutions and was amenable to removing the reference to AIPAC. “I think we’re following a democratic process within the party and we’re trying to address concerns that were raised,” he told JI. “I would like to see stronger language, but if that’s what it takes to pass, I’m completely fine with it.”

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a source of ongoing tension among North Carolina Democrats. Last June, for example, the state party adopted a series of controversial resolutions at its annual convention in Durham, accusing Israel of “apartheid” and calling for “targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes” on unnamed Israelis who had committed alleged human rights violations against Palestinians.

The resolutions were condemned by Jewish leaders in North Carolina, who said the new party platform had unfairly

targeted Israel.

Earlier this year, a group of party activists formed a Jewish Democratic Caucus to counter such efforts. Prospective members are required to pledge their commitment to the national Democratic Party platform on the Middle East, among other things. The caucus, which is now lobbying to become formally affiliated with the state Democratic Party, declined to comment on the resolutions.

It remains to be seen if the state party, which recently elected a new chair, will move forward with the full list of resolutions or if it will take a selective approach. The draft, as written on Tuesday, also says it is “committed to a peaceful resolution of the current conflict between the State of Israel and Palestine” and includes a pledge to “issue a public statement condemning the recent rise in antisemitic violence and harassment targeting Jewish Americans.”

“Fundamentally I don’t know what’s going to happen,” Jenkins told JI.

The party’s state executive committee is scheduled to meet on June 24 to begin the process of finalizing its new platform, which will be formally approved next year. The North Carolina Democratic Party did not respond to a request for comment. ♦

Activists, researchers sound alarm as Israel's opioid use reaches critical level, surpassing U.S.

Nonprofits working to get government to make it more difficult for doctors to prescribe powerful opiates as Israeli consumption levels surpass U.S.

By Judith Sudilovsky

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

For Eviatar Samoolsky, founder and director of the Israeli nonprofit Lealtar: The Narcotic Patient Support and Assistance Foundation, combating opioid addiction, which recently reached epidemic proportions in Israel, is a personal issue. Since he recovered from his 13-year dependency on opioids following a 1997 work accident that left him in a wheelchair, Samoolsky has been on a crusade not for better treatment for patients who have become dependent on the drugs, but to have better and tighter protocols for prescribing them to prevent the addiction in the first place.

Samoolsky does not mince his words when it comes to the direct correlation he sees between opioid prescriptions and opioid addiction: Simply put, he said, people prescribed opioids for pain management end up becoming “junkies.” While chemically related, some opioids, like fentanyl, are 50-100 times more potent than heroin and morphine and create a dependency that is a physical-chemical reaction to the drug, rather than a psychological addiction, said Samoolsky. He said this is why he believes the many rehabilitation facilities treating drug addiction in Israel that don't focus on the physical aspect of the dependency are not the answer for opioid dependency.

“My main work is to prevent people [with chronic pain] from taking opioids in the first place; to show them the real picture. Because, you know, the devil never shows his real face because if he does nobody would go with him. So the best way [for companies] to push opioids is to play the angel, smuggling “heroin forte” into people's minds, using the high level of

trust in medicine and in doctors to simply smuggle in the strongest heroin,” Samoolsky told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “The problem is that the real money [for pharmaceutical companies] is in chronic pain treatment, not in emergency treatment.”

Though it is not a regular feature on the nightly news in Israel, opioid addiction has rapidly become a major issue in the country. Last month, a study by the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel determined that the country had earned the ignoble superlative of having the highest level of per capita opioid consumption in the world in 2020 (the last year for which global data are available), surpassing the United States.

The study's authors—Nadav Davidovitch, director of the Ben-Gurion University School of Public Health, Dr. Yannai Kranzler and Oren Miron—urged Israel to take immediate action to reduce unnecessary opioid prescriptions and excessive consumption of narcotics for pain management.

Until 2011 Israel had a relatively low rate of consumption of prescription opioids, said Davidovitch, due to its low use of strong opioids such as oxycodone and fentanyl, relying instead more on opioid alternatives or weaker opioids such as propoxyphene and codeine. But in 2011 Israel banned the use of propoxyphene because of a rare cardiological side effect and three years later also placed limits on the use of codeine.

Since 2014 the strong use of opioids began, especially with a sharp increase in the use of fentanyl, according to the study. The Taub Center researchers found that fentanyl consumption per capita—measured in “morphine milligram equivalent”—more than doubled from 2014 to 2018.

Since then, the situation has only worsened, the researchers said, with fentanyl consumption continuing to increase.

While Samoolsky and other activists say that far more work must be done, they have had some successes in changing the government's opioid policies.

On Jan. 12, six months after a Supreme Court hearing of a petition submitted by Physicians for Human Rights Israel and Lealtar, the Israeli Ministry of Health agreed to change labels on opioid packaging to warn that their use always leads to physical dependence, replacing the current label which states opioids “can” lead to dependency. The new labels have yet to be put on the packaging as the decision works its way through the system.

PHRI and Lealtar maintain that the current warning labels on the drugs are insufficient and inaccurate, and should be in larger print and use more exact language for the warning. The ministry had previously focused their prevention efforts — which Hadas Ziv, PHRI policy and ethics director, deems “lacking and insufficient in themselves” — on practices among physicians and in the healthcare system rather than raising awareness among patients, noted PHRI. The ministry also argued that changing the labeling would discourage patients who do need the opioids, and that the packaging was too small for a bigger warning.

The turning point at the August hearing came when the ministry's addictions department head, Dr. Paula Roshka, testified that opioids use will always lead to physical dependence, said Ziv.

The new policy follows a long battle to hold the Health Ministry and opioid manufacturers responsible, noted Ziv.

“We thought, OK, because [the Ministry of Health] moves slowly and is part of the administration, and is influenced by pharmaceutical companies, we would

appeal to the patients' right to know. We decided to start with a really small step like changing the package label warning and not to allow blurring of the reality behind a warning stating that in some cases opioid use can cause dependency," said Ziv.

The Ministry of Health did not reply to a request to interview Roshka, but as early as 2018, in an interview with Israel's Kann news broadcaster, Roshka warned there was a need to stop the misuse of opioids in Israel so "it does not become an epidemic." At that time there were about 60 deaths from opioid overdose in Israel she said, but added that the decentralized reporting by health funds made it difficult to collate data. (The rarity of autopsies in Israel also make such data hard to come by.) She noted the ministry had begun to disseminate information about opioid use to physicians.

The decades-long opioid epidemic in the U.S. — caused by increased opioid consumption during the 2000s and which has seen 80,000 deaths just in 2021 — should serve as a warning for Israel, the authors of the Taub report said.

"In our study we saw a rise in the use of opioids in Israel over the last two decades — especially in the last decade when pharmaceutical companies started to bring opioids to Israel and patients started to demand them more because they became more aware of them," Davidovitch told eJP. "We are getting signs from the field that there is a problem while many within the (health system in Israel) are in a state of denial or do not understand the magnitude of the problem."

Chronic pain management is a serious issue, he said, but many people are not receiving proper treatment and there are long waiting periods for management clinics. Whereas before the issue of pain was not taken seriously by health professionals, the pendulum has now moved to the other extreme where opioid drugs are prescribed too freely by doctors, Davidovitch added.

Though they identified misuse and overuse in all socioeconomic levels of society, there is a higher risk among lower socioeconomic groups that are less aware of the risks, said Davidovitch.

"Especially physicians not specialized in pain management such as orthopedic surgeons started giving these painkillers without a deep understanding of the

dangers involved. We see more young patients without cancer taking these drugs in recent years," Davidovitch said. "We know this is the tip of the iceberg because [this data] is just from prescribed drugs. We know for sure there is a black market and that drug addicts replace their supply, understanding that they can take fentanyl, which is 'legally' available, instead of heroin."

Better regulation of opioid use by health funds for pain management through electronic medical records already in use is critical for primary prevention so people do not get into the situation of dependency in the first place, he said.

A national program including issuing of a yearly report needs to also be created to deal with the growing crisis, he said. In 2019, the director general of the Health Ministry established an expert committee to advise on policies to reduce prescription opioid use and misuse. However, with the onset of COVID-19 pandemic soon after the committee was created, and with the political instability that the country has seen in recent years — resulting in Israel having had five health ministers in the past four years — the committee has had little opportunity to convene.

Samolsky is a member of the committee, representing the public. His work with Lealtar, which is done in partnership with his girlfriend, Ayala Bat Shaul, includes speaking one-on-one with people with Opioid Dependency Disorder as well as lectures at medical schools.

"It is very different when a doctor talks to a narcotic patient and when I talk to a narcotic patient. I talk 'narcotic,'" said Samolsky. "I have been working with patients voluntarily for the 13 years since Lealtar exists, and I haven't taken a penny. My knowledge is not for sale and people's problems are not for making money."

He supports Lealtar's work through some speaking engagements, which he would like to expand to the USA, sales of a Hebrew-language book he co-produced with Bat Shaul called "Pain Game," and a play written by Bat Shaul portraying Samolsky's struggle and rehabilitation from opioid dependency. She is also currently working on a movie about his work as well.

"It is very important to say loud and clear that because of the [physical] mechanism of narcotics in the body, the people who take

narcotics for pain very quickly become dependent and...become 1000 times (worse off) than the objective reason that they were taking it in the first place," said Samolsky.

Ziv said the current situation in Israel is similar to what the situation was like in the U.S. before Americans recognized that a crisis was underway. While PHRI accepts the usage of opioids in cases of oncological or acute pain, the drugs should be prescribed for a short time and by following proscribed procedures, and not used in pain management at all. Misuse of opioids in chronic pain management can cause terrible damage to the patient and their use should be avoided completely, PHRI maintains.

Their campaign to change the label warning was made possible due to their close collaboration with Lealtar, medical community colleagues who supported the appeal and researchers who collected data and drafted a new report exposing Israel's dangerously unprepared health care system currently available only in Hebrew, PHRI says.

Journalist Daniel Dolev, who has been reporting on the opioid crisis in Israel for two years for the nonprofit online news organization *Shomrim*, and has produced several in-depth investigative reports about the issue. He feels that with all the other things happening in the country, misuse and overuse of opioids in pain management just does not seem to be very urgent to the government.

"All the time the opioid issue is getting pushed back and meanwhile you see the number of heavy users of opioids increasing. In Israel the situation reached this level really just because of bad behavior. Someone who is supposed to have taken action is not acting," he said. "There are some drug rehab centers but not one that focuses on opioid use, probably because they don't realize they have to focus on that."

Though when the expert committee does meet and Samolsky continues to put the urgency of the issue front and center, the other committee members don't always want to hear what he has to say, said Dolev.

"He comes from another world," said Dolev. "He speaks differently than the doctors sitting around the table because they have time and he doesn't have time." ♦

Israeli filmmaker takes a plunge into the ‘toxic family pool’

While Shai Gal’s documentary ‘End of Season Love’ has a distinct Israeli flavor, it is also a universal story about life, love and the sadness of losing that love

By Ruth Marks Eglash

There are not too many people who talk openly about the flaws in their parents’ relationship, and there are even fewer who would actually go out and capture that dysfunction on film to share with the world.

Yet that is exactly what Israeli filmmaker Shai Gal, a well-known journalist and soon-to-be reality TV star himself, has done in his recently debuted documentary, “End of Love Season,” an intimate look at the breakdown of his parents’ marriage after four children and more than five decades together.

“It’s funny because a lot of people are telling me that I’m brave,” Gal, who has spent years as a TV journalist working for top Israeli news shows such as “Uvda” (Fact), and Channel 12 News, told *Jewish Insider*. “Of course, it’s risky when it comes to family stories, but at a certain point, I just looked at this great story happening in my house and thought, how can I not tell it?”

Gal’s very personal “toxic dive into the family pool,” as he calls it, begins in 2017 when his parents, Geula and Arik, then in their 70s, declared they could no longer live together. From behind the camera, their filmmaker son captures the grumpy break-up, including most poignantly the construction of a physical wall dividing his childhood home into two separate abodes. He then works expertly back through the years, using family photos, video footage and revealing interviews with his parents and two of his three siblings to investigate what went wrong and why his parents had not reached this conclusion sooner.

While “End of Love Season,” which premiered last week at the annual DocAviv Film Festival in Tel Aviv, has a distinctly Israeli flavor to it – both Geula and Arik were raised on *kibbutzim* during the heyday of the communal lifestyle – in many ways, it is

also a universal story about life, love and the sadness of staying together out of misguided hopes or fears.

“The story of a couple deciding to break up at the age of 75 and 77 and building a wall – that’s, of course, universal,” Gal, who this week made his debut on the Israeli version of “Dancing with the Stars,” told *JL*. “But what I was trying to ask is how our parents’ relationship and their love life influence us... I think it’s something I was trying to understand for myself too.”

“I also think it’s a film about missing out,” added the father of three, who said he is happily married. “It’s a story about missing a great opportunity to live a happier life, a better life.”

The hour-long film is a roller coaster of emotions. There are funny moments as the couple separates and they must decide whether they will both have access to the washer and dryer, whether Arik will still drive Geula to her various appointments and who will keep the new television set. There are also more tender moments when the two remember how they first met, as well as some deeply sad revelations, including a damning admission from Arik that he never once kissed his wife or from Geula, a professional marriage therapist, lamenting that she was unable to fix her own unhappy relationship.

“It was complicated, for sure,” admitted Gal, who appears on screen in the documentary too. “I’ve been doing journalism and making films for 20 years, but when you turn the camera on your parents, meaning onto yourself, you have to understand the full circle of it.”

Gal, who won an Israeli Academy Award for his previous film, “The Jewish Underground,” and whose next documentary about NASA will be aired on

Netflix in July, said the decision to tell his parents’ story didn’t come quickly.

“I remember the day my mother called and said she finally decided that she was leaving my father,” noted Gal. “None of us, myself and my siblings, were sad about it. We were just surprised that it was only happening at the age of 75.”

When they came up with the idea of dividing the house into two, Gal confessed to *JL* that he was complicit in “the crime.”

“Yeah, I brought in the contractor,” he laughed. “I kind of liked the idea. I mean, I thought, what else could they do? Sell the house? Pack up everything? That would be a nightmare.”

It was at that point he took out his camera and started filming.

“I didn’t know why I was doing it, whether it was just for family memories or whatever,” Gal described, adding that the next stage was realizing that his father was an amazing character. “He’s like an old-fashioned Hollywood star, like really funny and not even aware of it. That was maybe two years ago, and I thought to myself, ‘Hey, there’s a great story happening inside my family.’”

Still unsure what he would do with the footage, Gal continued filming what was unfolding between his parents and particularly what was happening inside his childhood home.

“I saw what came out after they started living with the wall and decided that I needed to dig in deeper, so I started interviewing them and documenting the family life – it got to the point that at every family gathering, I was there filming, and people just got used to it,” he said. “Then I thought to myself, listen, I’ve covered wars, I’ve covered everything that’s going on here, terrorism, whatever, but I never really

handled love and you know, that's a big theme, it's about time I do something about love."

"The fact that it was personal, I think helped me in a way," observed Gal. "It helped that the camera was my shield when it came to talking to my parents about it and, on the other hand, my parents could not bullshit me like other people do. They could not say, 'hey, we didn't fight,' because I was there, I grew up there. I mean, my mom's current living room was my bedroom. So, it was a great starting point."

And getting his parents to agree to expose their failed marriage in such a public way, Gal said, was not too much of a challenge.

"As soon as I decided it was going to be a movie, I told them that it would be about their failed love life," he recalled, describing how he explained to them that what he was doing was out of love and an attempt to understand what really went wrong.

"It's a question I ask myself too," said Gal. "So many people around me now, in their 40s and 50s, are getting divorced and

I'm always asking them: when did the alarm bells start ringing, when did you become aware?"

Another reason Gal believes his parents agreed to go on camera was because throughout the filmmaking process, they got to spend a significant amount of time with their youngest son.

"I don't think that we sit with our parents enough and actually talk to them, dip into their world and really listen to them," he observed. "You know, they are in their 80s now and if I don't do it now, it will never happen."

Gal said that about a month before the film debuted at DocAviv, he invited his parents over and the three of them watched the film together for the first time.

"I sat there with them, and it was tense," admitted the filmmaker. "When you talk about the difference between making a journalistic film and making a film about your family, well, that was the point I really felt it."

"When you put out a big journalism story that might impact the public view or offend

someone you don't care, you are making your mark, but here, it was different – I was giving my interpretation to their love life and it was not an easy moment," he added.

After four sold-out screenings at DocAviv, Gal said he is hoping "End of Love Season" will be picked up by the global film festival circuit.

"The plan now is to cross the ocean," he said. "One of the things I'm most proud of is that I think I've changed the perspective of my stories. I come from a very solid journalistic world of always getting an exclusive or getting the exclusive interview, but what has happened to me in the past few years is that I've realized I'm a lot more into trying to tell a very strong emotional story."

"If you manage to tell a very strong emotional story, and I don't care which emotion it is – love, hate, cry, envy, whatever – if you make the audience feel something, then I think that's what filmmaking is all about," he said. ♦

MAY 31, 2023

Israel's new English news channel seeks to capture young generation on social media

Israel is the startup nation, but on the issue of public diplomacy it is failing again and again, Moshe Klughaft and Miri Michaeli, co-founders of ACT News, tells Jewish Insider

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Moshe Klughaft is a strategic communications advisor known to millions of Israelis as a political commentator on the country's most-watched news show. He has also worked behind the scenes in the political world for years, counting among his clients Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, and a host of other leaders from Germany to Romania

to Austria.

Miri Michaeli has been in the news business for 17 years, working as a foreign correspondent for an array of Israeli news channels and interviewing such global leaders as former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Germany's former Chancellor Angela Merkel and Hollywood stars including Meryl Streep, Woody Allen and Helen Mirren.

Now the two, who have grown increasingly frustrated with the way Israel is depicted in both mainstream media and online worldwide, believe they have enough collective experience and the know-how to change the narrative surrounding the Jewish state: a fresh media concept designed to bypass cable news networks like CNN and conquer powerful opinion-shaping social media platforms such as TikTok.

In less than one month, they say, their collection of short and snappy video clips, which are broadcasting under the brand ACT News – an acronym for Action, Consciousness, Truth – already have a growing following. And their news items aren't necessarily only about Israel, Klughaft and Michaeli emphasize.

"We're not trying to hide the fact that we are Israeli," Michaeli, who is the main face of the broadcasts, told *Jewish Insider*. "Anyone can Google us and see who we are, but we are just not putting that front and center."

"Our content is not *hasbara*," she emphasized, using the Hebrew term that means public diplomacy. "Before anything else, we are a news channel and we will report on everything – if a Hollywood star comes here, or if an Israeli delegation goes to Turkey to help with the earthquake, of course, we will report on it but, for example, one of the most popular items we did so far was about Elon Musk."

Klughaft breaks in, explaining that "a good campaign strategy is when you don't even know that there is a campaign going on."

While both recognize that there are already multiple initiatives both in Israel and abroad that aim to boost the Israeli narrative, the two insist that ACT News offers something new that has never been attempted before – social media news that tells the truth about Israel.

"We are the startup nation but, on this issue, we are just failing over and over," commented Klughaft, who has managed several campaigns dealing with Israeli advocacy and the fight against antisemitism.

"The war is no longer being fought in military terms," he continued. "It has moved to our heads and people here do not understand that. The government does not seem to realize that explaining things correctly can save more lives than the Iron Dome or military jets."

More than six months after taking power, the government has yet to appoint a head of public diplomacy, and the Prime Minister's Office still has no international press spokesperson. Klughaft pointed out that international media outreach, or explaining Israel's positions or actions, is just not a priority for the government, regardless of who is in power.

"It does not matter which government is in power, they believe that ideas and innovation will come from the private sector," Klughaft noted, recalling how several years ago he was approached by one of the government offices to prepare an international English-language campaign.

"The project was approved, I got paid. But right before it went live, they decided to pull it, preferring to run a Hebrew campaign instead explaining to Israelis that they were doing work abroad," Klughaft explained.

With ACT News, Michaeli said the goal is firmly to reach people beyond Israel's borders, especially those who know nothing about the country or its conflict with the Palestinians and do not already have an agenda or a firm opinion on the matter.

"We already know that we can't change the minds of those who are actively anti-Israel or antisemitic," said Michaeli, who speaks fluent English with a twangy American accent. "We are looking to reach the mainstream – the average European or the average American."

"Those who do not even know how to find Israel on a map," added Klughaft. "We want to share with them positive news about Israel, about its innovation, its technology, its culture."

Both Klughaft and Michaeli emphasized that ACT is not competing against existing large news networks but aiming for those who primarily utilize social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and others to broadcast their content.

"That is where the world is headed, the younger generation gets its news from social media platforms," observed Klughaft. "They no longer watch CNN, the television set in their parents' home is outdated. But the screen they have in their hand is much more powerful."

"We want to become a source of news on the internet, a source for young people, that will bring the truth about Israel. That is central to our agenda," stated Michaeli. "We are the only channel that films our broadcast vertically in advance, especially for social media."

Highlighting reports of skyrocketing antisemitism in the U.S. and Europe, with many incidents directly related to events in Israel, Klughaft said the project would also

give those who want to help Israel but don't have the "tools to do so."

The two have already secured seed funding of some \$7.5 million – though they are keeping the name of the investor under wraps – and they are planning to visit the U.S. next month in search of additional funding.

In the meantime, they have big plans.

Among the projects the two are planning for ACT News is the creation of a network of "reporters" worldwide, fans of the channel who will report on location in real time, and in some cases ordinary people using their phones to document newsy events happening near them.

The duo also plan to incorporate some advanced Israeli technology, including Artificial Intelligence, into their programs, though they would not share details on the specifics.

Initially, Klughaft and Michaeli said they had been talking about a slow rollout of the new channel, but a flare-up in violence over Passover that included rockets being fired into Israel from Lebanon and from Gaza, as well as the horrific terrorist attack that killed an Israeli woman and two of her daughters, prompted them into action.

"We both observe the holiday and were on vacation with our families," recalled Michaeli. "I was in Safed and Moshe was in Jerusalem, but when the rockets started falling, we both left what we were doing and met up."

"We sat together all night," Moshe continued. "Then we decided to go to the studio at 3 a.m. to make our first video. We had no idea if it would catch [on], but we pulled in users on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok."

Thanks to Klughaft and Michaeli's celebrity status in Israel, and their place among the country's political elite, the video caught the attention of Netanyahu, who shared it on his social media networks with his millions of followers. Other Israeli political leaders, including Bennett and former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, as well as Israeli movers and shakers, also shared the clip.

"That was our first broadcast, everyone watched it," said Klughaft.

And Michaeli remains hopeful, even though she is aware that similar ventures

have failed in the past, that ACT News will succeed.

"I believe that this will change the way the media operates here and in the world,"

said Michaeli, adding that giving up on explaining Israel to the world just wasn't an option.

"In two years from now, when we are

successful, ACT News will only help the country," said Klughaft confidently. ♦

JUNE 1, 2023

Former top AIPAC official Elias Saratovsky tapped to lead Birthright Foundation, succeeding Tapoohi

Saratovsky, who went on one of Birthright's first trips, enters role as organization looks for new funders amid budget cuts

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Elias Saratovsky, a former top AIPAC official, has been named the next CEO of the Birthright Foundation, succeeding Israel "Izzy" Tapoohi, who has served in the role for the past six years, the organization announced on Thursday.

Saratovsky will enter the position in a complicated time for the organization, as one of its major funders – the Adelson Family Foundation – recently announced that it was scaling back its donations significantly and as the Israeli government has also yet to extend its contract with Birthright Israel. Earlier this month, Birthright Israel announced a 40% reduction in the number of North American participants on its trips due to budget cuts.

One of Saratovsky's main focuses will be building up its bench of donors to make up for the loss of Adelson funding. "We believe Birthright Israel is an endeavor that the whole Jewish community benefits from and everyone needs to contribute to its success," Tapoohi told eJP late last year. "We were always aware that there was a plan to decrease what the Adelsons could give us."

In a statement congratulating

Saratovsky, Dr. Miriam Adelson alluded to this need to bring more rank-and-file donors on board.

"Birthright Israel is the largest-scale educational project in Jewish history and has transformed hundreds of thousands of lives, including Elias'," Adelson said. "I look forward to working with Elias to grow the support from the greater Jewish community so that we can continue to transform the lives of as many Jewish young adults as possible."

Saratovsky, who worked for AIPAC for 21 years, is an alumnus of Birthright Israel's first round of trips in the winter of 1999–2000. In a statement, Saratovsky credited this trip with launching his career as a Jewish professional.

"As a first-generation American with parents from the former Soviet Union and grandparents who survived the Holocaust, my formal connection to Judaism was limited. However, my passion for the State of Israel was always strong," Saratovsky said. "That trip shaped my identity and helped me realize that Israel is a central part of our history and our collective Jewish consciousness. I now have the honor to ensure that future generations develop their own Jewish identity and build a lifelong,

personal connection with the State of Israel."

Saratovsky most recently served as AIPAC's national director of regional affairs and before that served as the organization's Southwest regional director, among other roles. He will formally enter his new position at the Birthright Foundation in September. Tapoohi will retire at the end of the year, the organization said.

"It's incredible to have as our new president/CEO an alumnus from the very first year of Birthright trips," said Charles Bronfman, a co-founder of Birthright Israel. "Elias brings both the skills necessary for this role and a real understanding of the magic of this program. I have total confidence that under his leadership Birthright Israel Foundation will achieve new heights." ♦