

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Inside Israel's Cinderella story at the youth World Cup; Phoenix congressional candidate Raquel Terán faces scrutiny for voting record on antisemitism; Rhode Island Democrat looks to parlay high-profile connections towards a seat in Congress; Chuck Todd prepares for his next act; Lawmakers pushing ahead on Abraham Accords naval cooperation bill despite U.S.-UAE friction; New super PAC prepares to defend Jewish councilwoman in competitive Queens race; The Washington doctors helping women navigate breast cancer; UAE restaurants to offer bottled water drawn from the air; and New mural celebrating city's Jewish community unveiled in Los Angeles.

JUNE 8, 2023

Inside Israel's Cinderella story at the youth World Cup

Israel's soccer team hasn't been to a FIFA World Cup in more than half a century. Now, they're in the youth semifinals after defeating powerhouse Brazil

By Gabby Deutch

For decades, Israelis have loved the “beautiful game,” a term for soccer popularized by Brazilian footballer Pelé. But soccer has not always loved them back.

That's starting to change.

Before last month, the country's national team only had one FIFA World Cup appearance, in 1970. Over the course of three games, Israel's team scored just one goal and did not advance out of the group stage.

Fast-forward more than half a century, and Israel's youth soccer league is on a Cinderella run in the FIFA under-20 World Cup, the most important global sporting event for young soccer players. On Thursday, Israel is set to play Uruguay in the tournament's semifinals after defeating Brazil 3-2 in a major upset last weekend that delighted Israelis and Jews worldwide and shocked soccer fans at the stadium in

Argentina and beyond.

“It's the biggest thing in Israeli sports in the last 30 years at least,” said Eitan Dotan, the spokesperson for Israel's team. “Israel is a football country. Football is the biggest sport in Israel. Unfortunately, we don't have lots of success in football.”

Everything about Israel's run has been improbable, starting with the fact that the country's players were almost not allowed to participate. The tournament was supposed to be hosted in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, a country that most Israelis are unable to visit without a particular type of visa. But in March, FIFA, world soccer's governing body, stripped Indonesia of its hosting duties after prominent government officials in the country said they would refuse to host the Israeli team.

That two of Israel's three goals against

Brazil were scored by Arab Israelis seemed almost like a taunt to Indonesia. *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman described it this week as “Israel's emerging blended society ... on full display.” Yet Dotan pointed out that the diversity is “not something new” for Israeli sports teams.

“If the relationship in the country between Jews and Arabs will be like the national teams of Israel, we will be in a good situation,” Dotan told *Jewish Insider* in a phone call on a bus ride after practice on Tuesday.

And now Israel has made it past the first two rounds of the tournament, defeating Uzbekistan before knocking off one of the biggest names in soccer. The overtime victory against Brazil was an exciting moment, but it came as something of a surprise for those who care about Israel but don't know much about the country's soccer

program.

Close watchers of Israeli soccer say the team has been carefully building to this moment for years.

"It's probably surprising to the global Jewish community to see it, especially because Brazil is such a big soccer power name. But if you've watched the youth teams of Israel, they've done exceedingly well across the board," said Barry Waranch, a coach of the under-18 U.S. soccer team at last year's Maccabiah Games in Israel. His American team made it to the finals against Israel.

"I like to tell people, We didn't lose. We got beat," Waranch said of the team's 3-0 loss to Israel. "Whoever's pulling the strings for the youth teams, they're doing a great job, because the success rate is just pretty remarkable."

Leo Krupnik, a Ukraine-born retired athlete who now lives in California and used to play for several Israeli teams, said "the culture of coaching has changed in Israel."

"My generation grew up with, like, someone's father or whatnot coaching us," he said. But some high-level European coaches who have since come to Israel's top soccer teams — such as Jordi Cruyff, a Dutch-Spanish coach now at the legendary FC Barcelona who spent six years with

Maccabi Tel Aviv — have instituted programs that, Krupnik said, trickled down to youth players.

"This is finally the fruit that they planted," said Krupnik.

Israel finished second in last year's under-19 EURO tournament, ultimately losing to England. That's when it first began to look like Israel's youth soccer program might be going somewhere. And even though Israel hasn't yet proven itself in the bigger competitions, like the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, the country's success in these tournaments for the youth leagues could be a harbinger of things to come.

"These Junior World Cups, certainly within the soccer community, I think are really big events," said Marshall Einhorn, CEO of Maccabi USA, which oversees Jewish sporting events in the U.S. "It's similar to college basketball, or the college sports scene here where you can see the potential and the future of the sport playing at a younger level."

It's also a different success story from other sporting events that Israel has performed in, like this year's World Baseball Classic. Many of the players on that team were American Jews, like San Francisco Giants outfielder Joc Pederson and Jacob Steinmetz, a pitcher who plays for the

Arizona Diamondbacks and in 2021 became the first practicing Orthodox Jew to be drafted into Major League Baseball.

For Israel to defeat Brazil with a roster of American players would surely have also been a point of pride. "To do so in any manner would be enough," said Einhorn. But Israel is doing it "with a team that represents a cross section of Israeli society."

"How amazing is it," he added, "to see that cross-section of Israeli society come together in the name of sport?"

Israeli athletes are no strangers to hostility in global sporting events. In 2021, an Algerian judo athlete withdrew from the Tokyo Olympics to avoid facing an Israeli competitor. And during last year's World Cup in Qatar, Israeli journalists faced taunts and shouts from anti-Israel fans. Pro-Palestinian sentiment at the World Cup was prominent last year, with many supporters of Morocco — which ended the tournament in fourth place — carrying Palestinian flags. Israel's team, meanwhile, did not even qualify.

Now, Israel has a chance to make a name for itself in global soccer.

"The mission of the business that we're in is to generate Jewish pride through sports," said Einhorn. "This is generating a great deal of excitement and pride." ♦

JUNE 7, 2023

Phoenix congressional candidate Raquel Terán faces scrutiny for voting record on antisemitism

Terán was one of nine Democratic state senators who voted against a bill requiring Arizona's Department of Public Safety to collect information on criminal offenses motivated by antisemitism

By Matthew Kassel

A leading candidate for a coveted open House seat in Phoenix is facing increased scrutiny from Jewish community leaders for her recent opposition to an antisemitism reporting bill that was overwhelmingly approved by Arizona's state legislature last year.

Raquel Terán, a progressive activist and former state lawmaker running to succeed outgoing Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), was among nine Democratic state senators who voted against legislation requiring that Arizona's Department of Public Safety collect information on criminal offenses

motivated by antisemitism. The bill, signed into law last April, embraces the working definition of antisemitism promoted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which identifies some criticism of Israel as antisemitic.

Terán, who led the state Democratic

Party before launching her House campaign two months ago, has not publicly explained her decision to oppose the legislation, even as she had previously voted in favor of a similar bill that ultimately stalled in the upper chamber. Now that she is seeking higher office amid a sharp uptick in antisemitic incidents — which the Biden administration is seeking to address at the federal level — some Jewish activists in Arizona are voicing skepticism of Terán's broader commitment to the Jewish community's ongoing concerns.

"I do not consider her a friend to the Jewish community and have never heard her stand up for our community," state Rep. Alma Hernandez, a Jewish Democrat in Tucson who served with Terán in the state legislature, told *Jewish Insider* in a bluntly worded assessment on Monday. "When she had the opportunity to vote with our community to protect Arizona Jews from being targeted, she voted against it."

Because of the vote and other concerns, Hernandez, who initially introduced legislation to track antisemitic incidents in 2020, said she "will not be supporting" Terán's campaign or requesting help from Jewish or pro-Israel advocacy groups on her behalf. "I am always bothered by individuals who actually never did anything for the community and then run for Congress and want our support," she told JI.

A Jewish leader in Phoenix, who knows Terán personally, was more forgiving, even if he argued that her record in both chambers of the state legislature had raised questions over her approach to Israel, which she has not addressed publicly. "That's what worries me," he told JI this week. "I don't want another member of the Squad."

The Jewish community leader, who requested anonymity to speak candidly, said he had heard that Terán voted against the antisemitism bill in solidarity with state Rep. Athena Salman, an outspoken critic of Israel who had opposed Hernandez's bill, which faced resistance from progressive groups for promoting the IHRA definition. Salman, who is of Palestinian descent, is "very tight" with Terán, he said.

"One of the big questions about Raquel's background," said the Jewish leader, is whether she will align with the far left or if she will instead "lean toward moderation,"

including on Middle East policy and antisemitism. "Is she going to be somebody who sides with" Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), an Arizona Democrat who has opposed funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system, "or is she going to be someone who is at least open to listening?"

In a statement to JI, Terán, who entered the state legislature in 2019, said she is opposed to antisemitism but did not explain her rationale for the vote. "Antisemitism is wrong and has no place in our country or anywhere in the world, and we must work together to combat it while promoting democracy and human rights," she said in the statement, which was shared by a spokesperson on Tuesday.

The spokesperson said Terán's campaign did not have time to broadly address her approach to Israel before this article was published.

Earlier this week, Terán, who is in her mid-40s, received a major endorsement from moderate Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ), a pro-Israel stalwart who has built close relationships with Jewish community leaders in Arizona. In a statement, he said that Terán had been "an integral part of" his reelection campaign and praised her dedication to protecting "fair wages for Arizona workers and abortion rights," among other things. "It's that can-do spirit we need more of in Washington."

The endorsement raised some eyebrows among Jewish leaders in Arizona, some of whom are pulling for other candidates with more moderate records. Hernandez, for her part, seemed unconvinced that Kelly's nod was a possible sign that Terán could be seeking to widen her coalition in a crowded race. "Raquel is not an ally or a supporter of Israel or the Jewish community unless something has drastically changed since I've known her," she claimed.

Many Jewish voters surveyed by JI this week said they were unfamiliar with Terán's engagement on community issues. "Unfortunately I've never seen her at an event with the Jewish community," said one Jewish activist in Phoenix.

But some Jewish leaders said they are willing to take a wait-and-see approach at this early stage. Erika Neuberg, a Jewish community leader and pro-Israel activist in Arizona, said she is optimistic that Terán

will be open to engaging proactively on Israel. "I'm confident that over time she'll meet with the pro-Israel community and learn about our deep, shared interests," Neuberg told JI on Tuesday. "We look forward to getting to know her."

Democratic Majority for Israel, which frequently targets progressive primary candidates for straying from the Democratic mainstream on Middle East policy, hasn't yet been in touch with Terán, according to a source familiar with the group's outreach. The progressive advocacy group J Street didn't respond to a request for comment about its engagement.

Terán is among five Democratic candidates now vying to replace Gallego in Arizona's 3rd Congressional District, which is safely blue. The five-term congressman, a vocal supporter of Israel who has been outspoken against rising antisemitism, announced he would run for Senate in January, paving the way for a hotly contested succession battle in Phoenix and its surrounding suburbs.

The rest of the field includes Ylenia Aguilar, who sits on the board of the Central Arizona Water Conservation District; Yassamin Ansari, the vice mayor of Phoenix; Héctor Jaramillo, a Glendale school board member; and Laura Pastor, a Phoenix city councilwoman whose late father, Ed Pastor, was a former long-serving congressman in Phoenix. Their records on Jewish and pro-Israel issues also remain largely unknown to voters.

While Terán is widely viewed as the progressive favorite, experts say the race remains in flux as the primary is more than a year away. Thomas J. Volgy, a professor of political science at the University of Arizona, said in an email to JI that Terán and Pastor "may be the frontrunners, but it is virtually impossible to tell at this moment." ♦

Rhode Island Democrat looks to parlay high-profile connections towards a seat in Congress

Former White House staffer Gabe Amo has been described as one to watch in the special election to replace David Cicilline. But he's just one of 15 candidates

By Gabby Deutch

When seven-term Rep. David Cicilline (D-RI) announced that he was retiring from Congress in the middle of his term — he formally stepped down last week to run the Rhode Island Foundation — politicians and activists from across his heavily blue district pounced.

A special election for an open congressional district in an odd year means local elected officials can run for Congress while holding onto their current positions — a once-in-a-generation political opportunity. And more than a dozen Democratic politicians from the Ocean State have jumped at the chance to try to rally voters ahead of the September primary.

“There’s just a tremendous amount of pent-up political ambition in the state,” said Adam Myers, an associate professor of political science at Providence College. “A lot of state legislators and other officeholders have reasoned that there’s really no harm in throwing one’s hat in the race.”

Of the 15 declared candidates in the race, seven currently hold office in Rhode Island, and three others have run for office in the past. But one of the newcomers to watch, according to political insiders in Rhode Island, is Gabe Amo, a first-time candidate who resigned from a position in the Biden White House to return to his home state and run for Congress.

“There’s not a constituency [for Amo],” said David Paleologos, director of the Suffolk University Political Research Center, who noted that Amo lacks a base of voters who would recognize his name from prior elections. But, he added, “working in the White House has its benefits, and if those benefits are, ‘Well, I have White House power contacts, and I can raise a ton of money,’ well, that’s one way to separate yourself from the

others.”

This week, former Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot hosted Amo for a fundraiser in Chicago, a notable show of support in a race where there have been few national and even local endorsements.

Other potential frontrunners for the 1st Congressional District seat include Lt. Gov. Sabina Mato and former state Rep. Aaron Regunberg, a progressive who is running with the backing of the Rhode Island Working Families Party and Our Revolution.

Amo, 35, grew up in working-class Pawtucket and has worked in politics — both in Rhode Island and Washington — his whole career. The son of Ghanaian and Liberian immigrants, he traces his passion for civics to helping his mother study for her citizenship test when he was a child. From there, it was a relatively straight line from high school student government to campaign staffer, and now from White House aide to congressional candidate.

“That’s all been part of my commitment to helping people,” Amo told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. “Politics and government are an opportunity to help people at their core.”

Before he went to college, Amo worked on now-Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse’s (D-RI) first Senate campaign in 2006. In the years since, he earned the Truman and Marshall Scholarships, and he cycled between other state positions — such as working for now-Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo when she was governor — and gigs in the White House. Most recently, he worked with U.S. mayors as the White House deputy director of intergovernmental affairs.

Amo’s pitch to voters leans heavily on his ties to the Biden administration. In part, he is arguing that President Joe Biden has good

ideas and a strong track record — and that Amo was a part of that success in his role as a special assistant to the president, and that he knows how to bring similar successes to Rhode Island.

“When I look at President Biden’s approach to politics, I look at someone who leads with compassion, but ultimately wants effectiveness and wants people of this country to know that we’ve worked as hard as we can to solve actual problems,” said Amo, who then rattled off a list of Biden administration policies: the American Rescue Plan, the Inflation Reduction Act and others.

“I want to use that experience that I’ve had, both at the state level and at the White House, to be an effective congressperson for the people of Rhode Island from day one,” he continued.

This is Amo’s message on foreign policy, too: Look to the Biden White House and let the administration take the lead.

“We should speak with one voice and support the president and the administration as they lead our engagement in the region,” Amo said, when asked what role he thinks Congress should play with respect to the U.S.-Israel relationship. “I think that it’s especially important, especially as we see tensions rising, that we, as Americans, in our actions in the region come through with a united voice.”

The tensions, he said, include “rocket attacks” and “general instability” in the Middle East.

“I think that we have a role in this country to play, but certainly, as I look at Congress, I am deferential to the administration’s leadership,” Amo added.

He declined to elaborate on how Congress should approach Israel, but

when asked whether he would support U.S. military assistance to Israel, Amo said yes. He also said he is “not supportive” of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel. Amo traveled to Israel several years ago on a Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies-sponsored trip for alumni of several national scholarships, such as the Truman and Marshall.

“It was an incredibly moving experience, and I look forward to going back,” said Amo. “The one thing that was particularly notable was just the context of safety being in the backdrop,” which he said “colors some of my thinking about the region as a whole.”

His two major national security priorities are promoting democracy worldwide — here, he pointed to the Summit for Democracy that the Biden administration

hosted in 2022 and 2023 — and countering domestic violent extremism at home in the U.S.

“We’ve seen continued attacks on people, whether it’s the rise in antisemitism, to growing white supremacy, to anti-LGBT attacks. All of those pose significant risks to our country,” Amo said.

One way Congress can counter antisemitism is to play “the role of advocate, and communicate out the fact that the country cannot stand for antisemitism broadly,” Amo said, adding that he “would look forward to leading with that as a member of Congress.” Before last fall’s White House-hosted United Against Hate summit, Amo worked with more than 150 mayors on a pledge to combat hate and extremism.

Amo’s biggest day-one priority is to work on measures that will help prevent gun

violence, which he described as “continuing the legacy of David Cicilline.”

Paleologos, the Suffolk University pollster, said he expects all the candidates in the race to try to tie themselves to Cicilline, who left office as a popular political figure. But he has not yet endorsed anyone in the race. Whether voters are paying attention — or even know there is a special primary taking place later this year — remains to be seen.

“My obligation as a pollster would be to read you the names of the candidates without any bias, not to group them in any way, not to give a candidate an advantage over another candidate. By the time I get to the ninth or 10th name, you’re pretty much tuned out,” Paleologos said. “We’re basically looking at running for class president, and it’s a popularity contest.” ♦

JUNE 9, 2023

Chuck Todd prepares for his next act

The outgoing ‘Meet the Press’ host on the state of journalism, the Trump era, rising antisemitism and the long-form documentary projects he’s pitching

By Matthew Kassel

Chuck Todd has felt a sense of relief since he announced on Sunday that he would step down from NBC’s “Meet the Press,” the long-running Sunday news show he has anchored for nearly a decade.

“It’s a spotlight that can have a glare to it, and I think there’s only so much time anybody can do it and handle it,” he said in a phone interview with *Jewish Insider* on Thursday. “I didn’t want to get to the point where I was too jaded or cynical, and I was getting close. I’ll admit it.”

But there were also more personal reasons for his decision, including the recent deaths of two close friends, which “really rattled me,” he explained. “I lost my father when he was 40 and I was 16,” he said. “My son, my youngest, he’s 16 right now. I’ve seen people die doing this work.”

“I still have a lot of ambition. I still want

to be a part of the solution and what’s wrong with media consumption and journalism in the 21st century,” Todd, a veteran Washington journalist, told *JL*. “But I think there are other places I can do that.”

Todd will be succeeded by Kristen Welker, NBC’s chief White House correspondent, in September. While he will continue at NBC as chief political analyst, Todd said he will also be turning his attention to more creative efforts, citing two TV documentary projects he is now “in the middle of pitching.”

In conversation with *JL*, Todd, 51, elaborated on those plans while reflecting on his tenure at “Meet the Press,” which has overlapped with three presidential administrations. Even if he has yet to interview President Joe Biden, the outgoing NBC moderator said he remains hopeful about landing a sit-down before he leaves. “There’s still time,” he said.

The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Jewish Insider: How have you been feeling since the announcement?

Chuck Todd: Personally, I’ve been feeling really good. I feel both a sense of accomplishment and, at the same time, a sense of relief. Because it’s a spotlight that can have a glare to it, and I think there’s only so much time anybody can do it and handle it. I didn’t want to get to the point where I was too jaded or cynical, and I was getting close. I’ll admit it. I already feel intellectually refreshed. I feel like I’ve made a bunch of the changes that needed to be made, and it was sort of like, OK, now let’s solidify, and in some ways, the best way to solidify it is to transition. And I think, especially because

it's Kristen, I had always — the last couple of years, to be frank — viewed her as the person who might be best prepared to do this, and I think it's pretty clear she is.

JJ: *You advocated for her to succeed you?*

Todd: 100%.

JJ: *You've been in the role for nearly a decade. Did that motivate your decision to step down?*

Todd: It'll be nine years when I finish. It'll be literally a full nine years. As I say, if you believe in term limits, it's one year longer than two presidential terms, which feels appropriate. It feels about right. It does. I've been thinking about this for a while. I had lost two people very close to me in the last nine months. Probably my two closest friends, to be frank. One was fairly recent, somebody I'd worked with for 30 years at every job I had or he had, we were together. In fact, I acknowledged him on the show about a month or so ago after he passed away. That really rattled me. He and I had kids the same age. His kids were a couple years older. He and his wife were just about to take the next chapter. The next great chapter. His last kid was in college. This was Vaughn Ververs. And he's gone. I lost my father when he was 40 and I was 16. My son, my youngest, he's 16 right now. I've seen people die doing this work.

JJ: *It's not the healthiest profession.*

Todd: No, and I still have a lot of ambition. I still want to be a part of the solution and what's wrong with media consumption and journalism in the 21st century, reshaping and all this stuff. But I think there are other places I can do that. And what was great was I didn't know how NBC was going to feel about this, and I think they really were a little nervous about me leaving leaving, so I'm in a great position. I viewed Tom Brokaw as a model of how to do this, and I tried to follow that model. Now I want to help coach; I want to be behind the scenes a little bit. I'll still dabble in front of the camera. But in some ways, there's only a certain amount of time I think anybody has on the frontlines if you want to stay credible,

if you want to stay, I think, whole in yourself, to be frank.

JJ: *So there wasn't any pressure from executive leadership at NBC?*

Todd: I didn't feel it, but, you know, maybe there was. I mean, I'm also self-aware. I certainly wanted to do this before somebody told me I should do this. How's that?

JJ: *You mentioned in your announcement that you'll be working on producing some docuseries and docudramas. Could you elaborate on those projects?*

Todd: I've got two that I'm in the middle of pitching now and I've had a couple others in the works. I don't want to say what they are. This is something I've been dabbling in for the last couple of years. I got something bought and then everything was going well and then all of a sudden the streamer changed direction in what they wanted and we were one of the victims. I'm learning this world and all this stuff. But all of it that I'm getting involved with is in service of what I think is, we need to help — you cannot assume people get educated about today's news just through news streams, whether there's a newscast, whether it's a Twitter feed, whether it's a podcast. Sometimes people learn about authoritarianism through docudrama.

One of my favorite examples is "Chernobyl." I don't know how many people would have read the book. This was all based on amazing material that the Ukrainian government released to the public. They turned it into a docudrama, and they told you exactly how they changed things. To me it was like, here's this incredible education that the world needed about what happened at Chernobyl, but you can deliver it multiple ways so that you have as many people learn about it as possible. And if that is through a docudrama, then do it; if it's through satire, do it; if it's through a straight-up news report, do that, too. I'm not losing focus on what I want to do. I'm just going to try different platforms to do it.

I've always said the basic form of journalism is education. What is our job? We're educating our viewers. I always

viewed myself that way, and I didn't fully appreciate it until I started at "Meet the Press," because the number one reason people say they watch a Sunday show is to be educated. They didn't say it was to be informed; they literally said the words educated. They're like, 'Hey, I want to keep up,' 'I'm trying to keep up with the news,' or 'I want to be able to talk at work,' or 'I've got a certain interest in X,' whatever it is. But it was a real sort of, 'Hey, let's remember what we do for a living.' At a minimum, we're in the education business, and there's plenty of ways to educate people.

JJ: *Is there anything you can broadly reveal about the subjects of the two projects you're pitching now?*

Todd: One has to do with international elections, sort of tracking democracy versus authoritarianism around the world, and doing so in a compelling way — like, it's on the ground with these local campaigns. I think in some ways, if Americans see what's happening in other fledgling democracies, it can be a learning experience. Sometimes it's easier to see it if you see it somewhere else. You go, 'Oh, that looks familiar.' That's a quick synopsis of one example. But then there's other things. Like, we know so little about what happened during Reconstruction.

I think there are good ways to tell stories of important times in history, and you can grab an event to do it. So if you use a presidential assassination as a hook — because people like a true crime story — while you're learning about Garfield, you might learn more about what the hell happened with Reconstruction. I haven't said I even sold that, but I'm giving you an example of what I think is possible out there, which is, how do you put some sugar with the broccoli of history? If you don't understand what happened during Reconstruction, you don't understand race relations today. That is one of my theories, and if you can find ways to tell good stories, I always say, who needs to make stuff up? What has happened is fascinating enough, so tell the real stories and maybe somebody will learn something about it.

That gives you an idea of where my head is at. I dabbled in this with the Meet the Press Film Festival. That was sort of the point of it.

I think documentaries are the new books in that, what books were in the 19th and 20th century for people, today it's documentaries, it's podcast serials. In many ways, what's replaced the 20,000-word magazine article? Not to say they don't exist anymore.

JL: *Tim Alberta's recent Atlantic piece on Chris Licht might prove that wrong.*

Todd: Well, did he or didn't he? I've always said that audience is much smaller than you think, when you write about media. There's a reason there's not a lot of books about media, because they don't sell. It's the same group of people who read them. But my point is, what we see now, I think podcasts have replaced the big magazine piece, in many ways, and we're seeing that in the way people consume history books and current events. I mean, look how much faster we seem to go from 'something major happened, let's make a docudrama out of it.' But I think we ought to do that more for our current history a little bit better. I think we've all realized how much we've all lacked in our history education collectively as a society.

JL: *Somewhat tangentially, I'm thinking back on some of the memorable moments from your tenure on 'Meet the Press.' The line about 'alternative facts' from Kellyanne Conway is one that stands out in particular. Is there anything you have in mind?*

Todd: I think 'alternative facts' will be something that's always connected to me and that show and to Kellyanne Conway, because it became definitional. I think what made that moment, in hindsight, so important is it was definitional on sort of the new world we now are having to deal with — which is, now there's a whole ecosystem that is devoted to an alternative set of facts. There's an entire ecosystem devoted to questioning reality — and, as we found out, there's a market for it. It wouldn't be out there if there wasn't a market for it.

JL: *You haven't interviewed Biden since he became president.*

Todd: I haven't yet. There's still time.

JL: *Are you optimistic?*

Todd: I have no idea. President Biden has promised me an interview multiple times, so I look forward to it, and I'll just leave it at that.

JL: *Maybe he'll do you a solid now that you're about to leave.*

Todd: We'll see. Who knows. I have a feeling the decision is in a lot of people's hands.

JL: *Like many of your colleagues in the news media, you were frequently subject to personal attacks from former President Donald Trump while he was in office. How do you view the level of vitriol now — not only directed at you but more broadly?*

Todd: It's a distraction. The laziest criticism on social media is blaming the media. There's nothing lazier, dumber and more uninformed than trying to blame the media for whatever X issue there is. The issue isn't the media; the issue is the people doing the stuff. There are some members of the media who cover that stuff well; there are some members of the media who cover it poorly. But this is not the 'media's fault.' Many people who criticize were hoping that I would somehow be biased and get angry that I wasn't somehow advocating or being an activist and all of this stuff. In this job, I don't think activism works, and it shouldn't. The whole point, I think, of a good Sunday show is you're trying to explain what is happening. Why is it happening, why are they making these decisions, can you explain yourself? But you have to cover the world as it is. You have to cover the Congress that you have, not the Congress that you want. If you want to cover the Congress that you want, join an editorial board or start writing a column.

And look, I get it. People were frustrated, people were angry, so it's always, 'let's shoot the messenger.' But what I've learned over this is that most of the criticism I get says more about the person leveling the critique than anything about me. It's always in the form of their own biases. I think my former EP put it well. He said, 'The right thought you were biased to the left and the left

thought you were a traitor and belonged on Fox,' or whatever it was. The point was, it was simply because I was covering politics as it is. I was covering what's happening, not pretending something else mattered more.

A good journalist shouldn't care if they're popular. The worst thing to happen to journalism is when you combine an incentive structure that makes popularity part of the job. I think the dumbest thing that every news organization does is put up a 'most read' list or 'most clicked-on' list. Why are you doing that? You're basically outsourcing your own editorial judgment to the masses? Like, let somebody else do that, that's fine. You want to provide those statistics, that's fine. But you're featuring it? And then what happens, you see it with op-eds, at editorial boards, and you watch it — a topic ends up number one most read, and then all of a sudden, five different people write the same column or some form of it. Why? Traffic.

So, I do think that we have really screwed up incentive structures, and because activists masquerading as journalists have gotten a following, there's some sort of distorted reality of what journalism should be. And look, I'm aware of the business. The business is changing rapidly and is going to continue to change rapidly.

JL: *That did cross my mind.*

Todd: But it's like, think about the outlet you work for. Could it even have existed 30 years ago on a daily basis? The answer is no. So on one hand, it's terrific, right? You've been able to do something that the barrier to entry 30 years ago would have been impossible. But I'm sure you guys get grief all the time because you either don't say this about Israel or you don't say that about Israel. You want to talk about a taste of polarization? Let's put it this way, nobody is dispassionate about their opinion of Israel. There's no dispassionate analysis of it that gets tolerated.

JL: *You can't write anything about Israel, it seems, without drawing some sort of criticism.*

Todd: Right, and it's like, that's the nature of the politics.

JJ: *With the rise of antisemitism we've seen recently —*

Todd: Boy, can I just tell you, if you'd have told me when I took this job in 2014 that among the nastiest things I would get would have to do with me being Jewish, I would have said, 'Oh my God, that's a 20th-century mindset. What are you talking about?' I never would have believed that in 2014, and I will say everything changed once the Trump era began. The amount of antisemitic attacks that I personally received, that my family received — I stopped counting. But it's astonishing. We swept all this stuff — we swept antisemitism, we swept racism, we all wanted to believe, 'Oh, it's just a fringe that still thinks these things,' and I still want to believe that it's still not a majority that thinks these things. But that fringe turned out to be a lot bigger than we thought.

JJ: *Have the attacks given you a sharper sense of your own Jewish identity?*

Todd: I think it gives me a better perspective at what happens to the otherizing of people. And I think a lot of Jewish people would like to think, 'Hey, we've always had that.' But you have to in some way see it and experience it at the same time. And watching what's happening, in many ways, to the marginalizing — we're trying to otherize people on gender or they're trying to otherize people on some other things — that's where I think, 'sharpen' is a nice way of putting it; it sort of sharpened my view of how to cover these stories.

JJ: *Does that relate to your desire, as you suggested earlier, to provide more background on Reconstruction and how it ties into the present?*

Todd: Right. We've got to understand our own history and our own sort of evolution here. I think we all struggle, and this gets to one of the things that has divided left and right — which is, how do we deal with our founders? How do we deal with the first 150 years of this country? We're arguably getting up to close to 60 years of being a multiethnic democracy. Have we really only been a democracy for 60 years? I think that's

a healthy debate for scholars to have and academics to have, and it certainly roils left versus right a little bit. But everybody needs nuance. There's a little bit of an attempt to go one way or the other, and it's sort of like, every era has flaws, and sometimes you're not aware of what those flaws are for 50 years. Sometimes it takes 200 years.

When I was putting together what I was doing with Garfield, I got really into this book about the history of Washington, D.C., and the brief period it had home rule in the late 1860s. It got taken away. Essentially, Grant appointed developers to an oversight board that basically took over the entire development. But, D.C. had a Black mayor — in the 1860s. It's astonishing how close we got to the 1965 moment back in 1866 and 1868 and 1870, and how elusive it turned out to be. You want to talk about the ultimate what if? What if Reconstruction stuck? What if Reconstruction had held?

The point is, the more people are educated about what happened, basically, in the period between 1880 and 1930 and the rise of Jim Crow and the whole antebellum movement and all of that — these are things that we've memory-holed away as a society. We don't like teaching it because it's bad news. It's where we sort of went off on the wrong track. We did good things. We helped Europe, and the Industrial Revolution was a positive. But thinking about my own education, we memory-hole the bad stuff.

JJ: *It sounds like a more front-facing interest in history for you.*

Todd: Look at how often some big breaking-news event needs some historical context to make you understand it better. That is what I feel like the Trump era shined a light on. It goes back to Francis Fukuyama, who right after the fall of the Berlin Wall wrote the infamous essay *The End of History* — this idea that, OK, we're never going to fight a war again, we've matured as a civilization, whatever it is. And I feel like, unfortunately, we did spend the '90s and the first decade of the aughts deciding that this is a new era and everything that happened pre-1989 doesn't matter anymore. How wrong that ended up being, obviously.

JJ: *Looking ahead, what kind of themes*

are you expecting to explore as we head into the presidential election?

Todd: I'm obsessed with all of these voters who tell us they don't want Biden and Trump. What are they going to do when there's Biden and Trump? And one of the things I know that NBC wants me to do is, essentially, go have this conversation around the country. For many people, it's going to be the ultimate test of the lesser-of-two-evils mindset that we've often used to describe our presidential politics. It feels like this is the most glaring example we've ever exhibited yet. It's funny, I always thought that Gore-Bush was the election that nobody realized mattered, until it did. Until after the election happened, and it was like, 'Oh, my God, this one matters.' But people had no view of either guy. Neither guy seemed threatening enough or galvanizing enough to make you either fall in love or fall in hate. So in some ways, we came to a tie almost by shrugging our shoulders. That's not going to be the 2024 election. No one's going to be shrugging their shoulders.

The other thing is — and I don't know how we fix this problem — but we are starting to have a divide that, when it happens in other countries, that divide is the end of democracy, and that is this massive, rural, urban divide. You know, [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan is the most unpopular in Istanbul; his power base is all outside the major cities. Hugo Chavez — all of his power base was outside of Caracas. That is something that I don't think Americans fully realize, but we are behaving like other democracies that ended up having authoritarian figures get power and hold power — and it's having that power over the rural vote. That's another thing that I'd love to see us as a news division tackle more.

I think it's a fair critique that a lot of news organizations aren't. We show up in rural America when there's a disaster, manmade or natural. We're not there on a day-to-day basis, and I understand why. Where's all the industry happening? There's certainly rational reasons why we devote as much time as we do to the other area. But we've got to have, particularly in political years, some understanding of why there is so much distrust between rural and the rest of America.

JI: Does that approach mean you'll potentially be acting more as a kind of roving correspondent going forward?

Todd: I certainly would enjoy doing that. I think there's a little bit of that. I've always said that the job of "Meet The Press"

is to explain Washington to America and America to Washington. I look forward to getting back out in America. ♦

JUNE 8, 2023

Lawmakers pushing ahead on Abraham Accords naval cooperation bill despite U.S.-UAE friction

The UAE recently suspended its naval cooperation with the U.S., as Iran steps up its activity in the Arabian Sea

By Marc Rod

Despite recent reports of friction in the U.S.-United Arab Emirates naval relationship, lawmakers on Capitol Hill are pushing ahead on efforts to establish deeper maritime cooperation among the U.S. and Abraham Accords member states.

The UAE announced at the end of May that it had pulled out of a U.S.-led multinational naval security force, which works to counter Iran in the Middle East, two months prior. U.S. officials said, however, that they had not received notification of such a move. Shortly after, Iran claimed it would form a joint naval force with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

These developments could be setbacks to the goals of the MARITIME Act, a bipartisan and bicameral project of the congressional Abraham Accords Caucus, which aims to develop a collaborative strategy among Abraham Accords nations to counter Iranian and Iran-affiliated naval threats. The effort comes amid several recent seizures by Iran of tankers and commercial ships in the Arabian Sea.

"We need to keep on working with the UAE," Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), a lead sponsor of the MARITIME Act, told *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday. "They're an incredibly important partner to us in the Middle East, and we do not want to take their friendship for granted."

She added that she remains "very committed to the MARITIME Act and making sure that we do continue to be good partners with them."

Sen. James Lankford (R-OK), a fellow co-chair of the Abraham Accords Caucus, told JI that he was skeptical of Iran's claims of a naval alliance with its erstwhile regional rivals, noting that "the maritime threat is Iran in the area — they're the ones that are shipping weapons to Yemen to be able to shoot at the Emiratis and the Saudis."

Lankford described the potential cessation of Emirati cooperation with U.S. naval forces based in Bahrain as "the bigger issue," but noted that the UAE has historically "been very cooperative with us" in the naval arena — and other emerging cooperative fora.

"It's important that we maintain [cooperation] because it is [in the interests of] the Emiratis' national security to be able to maintain that," he said. China's not going to have the same presence in that area as the United States and as other partners in the region will."

"We're still going to continue to be able to work [on integrating maritime forces]. Free flow of navigation through the entire area is important to the entire world," Lankford continued. "The Emiratis know that. We want to be able to continue to cooperate with everyone in the region."

A spokesperson for Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV), another lead sponsor of the MARITIME Act, told JI that she will "continue working to strengthen regional security cooperation through her legislative efforts."

"The Abraham Accords and Congress's legislative efforts to bolster partnerships

in the Middle East present a unique opportunity to promote collective security to defend against Iranian aggression," the Rosen spokesperson said. "Senator Rosen believes that the U.S. should continue to closely engage with partners in the Middle East to make clear our enduring commitment to regional security and the benefits of U.S.-led multilateral naval partnerships." ♦

New super PAC prepares to defend Jewish councilwoman in competitive Queens race

The independent expenditure group, Future NYC, is planning to spend up to \$100,000 in its effort to defend Lynn Schulman, a Democrat who has drawn two challengers in the June 27 primary

By Matthew Kassel

A newly created super PAC is preparing to launch its first ad campaign in the coming days to help boost a Jewish city councilwoman from Queens who is facing a competitive primary election later this month.

The independent expenditure group, Future NYC, is planning to spend up to \$100,000 in its effort to defend Lynn Schulman, a Democrat who has drawn two challengers in the June 27 primary, Jeff Leb, the super PAC's treasurer, told *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday. The ad campaign, which will include mailers and digital ads, is likely to begin early next week, he confirmed.

Schulman, who chairs the Committee on Health, is the first openly gay woman elected to public office from Queens and the only Jewish Caucus member to represent the borough. The 65-year-old freshman incumbent, whose district includes the heavily Jewish neighborhoods of Forest Hills, Kew Gardens and Rego Park, is now defending her seat amid an abbreviated two-year term cut short because of recent redistricting.

Her rivals in the Democratic primary are Ethan Felder, a labor lawyer and Jewish community activist who ran for a Forest Hills Assembly seat last year, and Sukhi Singh, a small business owner and former representative of the Sikh Cultural Society. There is no publicly available polling, but local observers suspect the race could be close, even as Schulman has won endorsements from a range of prominent local elected officials, including Reps. Grace Meng (D-NY) and Ritchie Torres (D-NY).

In an interview, Leb, who has not previously revealed his plans for the primaries, called the race a "priority" for

Future NYC, which is among a handful of outside groups that will also reportedly be engaging on Schulman's behalf. "She occupies a position of great importance within the Jewish community and the New York City Council," Leb explained. "She can speak from a different lens."

Schulman has advocated for LGBTQ rights as well as affordable housing and health care accessibility. She has voiced opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement and vowed to "support council resolutions expressing solidarity with Israel." In February, she was among a large group of council members who left the Progressive Caucus over disagreements on police funding.

Felder, for his part, has been outspoken on Jewish and pro-Israel issues. He has pledged to back funding for law enforcement while promoting what he describes as a "holistic" approach to public safety. Meanwhile, Singh, whose campaign website touts a "progressive plan," has stressed his support for funding educational programs to combat hate crimes.

The three candidates have all qualified for public matching funds. Schulman has reported spending nearly \$90,000 in the race, while Felder and Singh have each spent around \$45,000 on their campaigns.

Leb, a veteran political consultant, has previously been involved in efforts, funded largely by New York real estate executives, to oppose far-left candidates for local, state and federal office. He said the new group had no intention of attacking Schulman's opponents and will instead seek to highlight her "support for the Jewish community," her tenure on the health committee and her "pragmatic views."

He declined to reveal the super PAC's donors, whose names have not yet been publicly disclosed. Last cycle, Leb ran a separate independent expenditure group, Common Sense NYC, that spent nearly \$100,000 to support Schulman, who had twice run unsuccessfully for the City Council. Among the group's contributors were the real estate developer Stephen Ross and World Jewish Congress President Ronald Lauder, who donated a combined \$1.5 million.

According to Leb, Future NYC will be spending up to \$1 million this cycle, including in the general election. In addition to Schulman, who is among a small number of potentially vulnerable incumbents, Leb said the group will be supporting at least two other Democrats, Marjorie Velazquez in the Bronx and Linda Lee in Queens, who are both facing primary challengers.

Future NYC had also been planning to spend \$150,000 against a Democratic socialist incumbent in Harlem, Kristin Richardson Jordan, before she abruptly withdrew from her primary a few weeks ago.

The unexpected departure also forestalled a barrage of attack ads from another new independent expenditure group, SAFE NYC, which was preparing to spend \$400,000 to oppose Jordan's campaign. The super PAC is expected to spend in other races this cycle but has yet to reveal its plans. ♦

The Washington doctors helping women navigate breast cancer

Dr. Rachel Brem and Dr. Christy Teal's new book, 'No Longer Radical: Understanding Mastectomies and Choosing the Breast Cancer Care That's Right for You,' aims to help women understand their options

By **Tori Bergel**

One in eight American women are diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.

That ominous fact opens Dr. Rachel Brem and Dr. Christy Teal's new book, *No Longer Radical: Understanding Mastectomies and Choosing the Breast Cancer Care That's Right for You*. Despite the disheartening statistic, Brem and Teal's 307-page guide to all things breast cancer was not meant to evoke fear. Rather, it's a resource to help women understand all of their options as they navigate an incredibly difficult time in their life.

An internationally renowned breast cancer expert, Brem is the director of breast imaging and intervention as well as a professor and vice chair of radiology at The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences; she is also the founder and chief medical advisor of the nonprofit Brem Foundation to Defeat Breast Cancer. Teal is chief of breast surgery at GW and director of the university's Breast Care Center, as well as an associate professor of surgery. The two also have personal histories with breast cancer themselves.

"When I saw my ultrasound, I knew what it was," Brem, 64, told *Jewish Insider* last month ahead of the book's launch. In a twist of fate, Brem discovered her own breast cancer while testing new ultrasound equipment at the hospital. "My emotional response to that was, I feel so sorry for all the women who are in these shoes, you know, [who] find out they have breast cancer and don't have the vast experience and intricate knowledge of the literature that I do. So [*No Longer Radical*] was written to try to fill that void."

Most diseases have a clear-cut treatment

path once a diagnosis is made, but breast cancer requires much more involvement from the patient, a task that can feel daunting to many.

"There are very few things in medicine that require the patient to make so many critical decisions," Brem said. "The right decision for every woman is different, and they're all correct decisions as long as they're made armed with the information that they need to really be able to make the best [decision] for themselves."

Decisions such as whether or not to get a mastectomy, which type, or opting instead for a lumpectomy or other treatment, are all explored at length in the book. Yet, the duo makes clear they are not trying to push readers into a specific course of care.

"We're not pro-mastectomy. We are pro-educating and telling patients what their options are, and just having a conversation and a discussion. Ultimately, it should be the patient's choice," Teal, 56, told *JL*.

The book also tackles annual and high-risk screenings, the many types and stages of breast cancer — one chapter dives deep into pathology and treatment — what to know if you're diagnosed at an early age or post-menopause, BRCA mutations and genetic predispositions, dating after surgery, women with dense breasts, and a number of other possible concerns.

"I think that women are either afraid to ask [about their options], or if they're asking, then they're often being told no," Teal said, an experience she dealt with firsthand from colleagues after deciding to undergo her own prophylactic double mastectomy in 2011 at 44.

Teal's decision came from watching her mother, Nancy Brown, battle breast

cancer for nearly two decades. Brown was first diagnosed at age 60 in 1997 — within a month of Teal's best friend — with what Teal described in the book as a somewhat "easy" cancer. A lumpectomy, sentinel lymph node biopsy and radiation, followed by five years of tamoxifen, allowed her to live cancer-free for 13 years before the discovery of a new lump in 2010 sent her back to the examination room. Brown's new cancer, which Brem ended up diagnosing, was much more aggressive; originating in the opposite breast from her first bout, it had spread to nearby lymph nodes and required more involved procedures, driving Teal to consider her own preemptive measures so as to avoid similar issues in the future.

Despite seemingly no genetic predisposition — multiple tests by Brown had come back negative — Teal was happy with her decision to get preventive mastectomies, though certain colleagues insisted the procedure was only necessary for women with known genetic mutations.

"I had a lot of conversations with my mom about the fact she knew that she would end up dying from breast cancer. She was hoping that we would be able to keep her alive until she was in her 80s," Teal recalled. "And she almost made it to 80. She was 79 when she ended up dying from breast cancer [in 2016]. So when that all went on, when she had her recurrence, I really, truly just felt relief that I didn't have to worry about getting breast cancer."

Brem's personal journey also began with her mother. When Brem was 12, her mother, Lea Frydman, only 33 at the time, was diagnosed with breast cancer and given just six months to live. It was in that moment that Brem, who had always known

she wanted to be a doctor, chose to dedicate her life to the disease. Frydman ended up living for another 44 years, despite a lengthy battle with ovarian cancer that started after over a decade in remission from her initial diagnosis. In her early years, the BRCA genetic mutation hadn't been discovered yet, so it wasn't until 1996, when Brem was 37 and her maternal aunt had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer, that she decided to get tested. Her results came back positive for the mutation.

Timing is everything, Brem said of choosing the right preventative care, but, like what happened to her two weeks before her prophylactic double mastectomy was set to take place, "cancer knows no time," and even the most carefully laid out plans can be upended if the cancer presents earlier than expected.

"Ninety-five percent of early breast cancers are cured, or at least women live more than five years, but a very high cure rate. But you have to find early cancer to have a curable cancer," Brem said. "The consequence of early screening and

improved therapy is that the death rate from breast cancer has gone down by 40% over the past two decades."

Neither Brem nor Teal believe that otherwise healthy women with no family history need to go through extensive screenings beyond what is generally suggested, but they strongly advise annual mammograms for those 40 and over, and for those who are at higher risk or have a genetic predisposition, they stress the importance of early detection.

Ashkenazi Jews, for example, are considered a high-risk group for BRCA gene mutations, with the gene being found 10 times more often in Ashkenazim than the general population, as cited in the book. "I would recommend every woman of Ashkenazi heritage who has any family history of breast or ovarian cancer do genetic testing," Teal said.

Ashkenazi men are also at a higher risk. Whereas only one in 833 men will develop breast cancer in their lifetime, according to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, rates in Ashkenazi men are much higher.

"For men who have the BRCA2 mutation, the risk of breast cancer is similar to the average American woman, which is 12%, or one in eight, and so we now talk about screening Ashkenazi Jewish men who have the BRCA2 mutation," Brem said. "We don't cover it in the book, but men who have the BRCA mutation, whether it's 1 or 2 or other mutations, often have a markedly increased risk of prostate cancer, and [it] occurs at a younger age."

From women to men to the loved ones standing beside them — who are also the focus of the book's penultimate chapter — *No Longer Radical* is a resource for everyone.

"We love what we do on the one-to-one, we love taking care of patients. It's incredibly gratifying," Brem said. "But this is an opportunity to take care of people, men and women, on a much larger scale where we can reach more people and have an impact beyond our practice."

(Disclosure: Dr. Rachel Brem is the mother of Jewish Insider's chief operating officer, Andrea Wolf.) ♦

JUNE 5, 2023

UAE restaurants to offer bottled water drawn from the air

Ma Hawa, a joint venture with Israel's Watergen, plans launch of its sleek blue bottles at U.N.'s COP28 climate conference

By Shoshanna Solomon

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

Diners at a selection of top restaurants and hotels in the United Arab Emirates will soon find a new brand of bottled water on their tables produced from the humidity in the Gulf state's air.

Presented in sleek blue-glass bottles with a silver cap, Ma Hawa non-carbonated water is being introduced in an Abu Dhabi-based joint venture with Watergen, the Israeli company that pioneered the process of extracting drinking water in commercial quantities from the atmosphere.

"We are now building the brand and working on a pricing strategy," Watergen CEO Steve Elbaz told *The Circuit* in an interview at the company's Petah Tikva main office near Tel Aviv.

Sales of Ma Hawa — which means water and air in Arabic — are scheduled to begin during late summer in the UAE. An official launch is planned to take place in Dubai at the United Nations climate conference COP28 in December.

Founded in 2009, Watergen is owned by Israeli-Georgian billionaire Michael Mirilashvili and uses technology developed

by Israeli entrepreneur Arye Kohavi that requires only 20% humidity in the air and a temperature of least 15 C (59 F) in the facility where its generating station is housed.

"That means we can generate water everywhere around the world, except Antarctica for the moment," Elbaz said.

Comparing the quality of Ma Hawa water to that of premium mineral water, the 38-year-old CEO offered me a glass. The chilled water, which has minerals added in the production process, was thirst-quenching, with a neutral taste. It came from one of the dispensers employees use

throughout the building that are connected to two generating units on the roof.

Ma Hawa's bottled water will initially be sold in the UAE through the joint venture, Abu Dhabi-based Baynunah Watergeneration Technologies SP LLC. The company is in talks with potential partners for its production and sale in other regions.

Watergen produces a variety of units that generate from 20 to 6,000 liters of drinking water per day. They are being used in schools, hospitals, army camps, rural villages, natural disaster areas, outdoor events and office buildings. Soon to be introduced is a unit for home use.

All the units are "plug and play" – meaning you bring them to a location, plug them into an electricity outlet and generate water. Watergen's heat-exchange technology can produce up to five liters of water for one kilowatt of electricity. Generating water on location also helps save energy by reducing carbon-intensive transportation to remote areas and reduces the consumption of plastic bottles.

"For companies like Watergen, I think real disruption can happen when the technology is used for home use by the private consumer," said Eliran Elimelech, vice president of strategic partnerships at Start-Up Nation Central, a Tel Aviv-based nonprofit. "For that, the price needs to be very attractive."

SNC, which connects international governments and businesses with Israeli tech companies, has often showcased Watergen, Elimelech said. SNC also used two of the company's units to provide 12 hours of drinking water for thousands of participants at the outdoor Climate Solutions Festival it held in Israel's Hulda Forest last year.

"I have seen it in action," Elimelech said. "It is fast and efficient, and there were no hiccups."

Here's how the Watergen technology works: a filtration system absorbs air from the environment and transfers it to the heat exchanger, which is the heart of the technology. Using proprietary software, the heat exchanger extracts the water and transfers it into a buffer tank. From there, it passes through filters and UV lamps to purify and add minerals to the water, according to specifications set out by Watergen researchers. The water is then

transferred to a drinking water tank and ready for use.

In-house research teams continue to work on refining the company's technology, along with the water's mineralization and formula, Elbaz said. Watergen has also set up water research facilities at universities, including Tel Aviv University, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in Israel, and Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi, to make sure the company continues to be a leader in the field. At this point, Elbaz asserts, Watergen is "10 years ahead of any potential competitors."

According to U.S. data firm CB Insights, competitors to Watergen include U.S. firm SOURCE Global, whose technology uses solar heat to generate water from air, India's Uravu Labs, which in March raised \$2.3 million in seed funding for its water technology that uses renewable energy to create water from air, and Kenya's Majik Water.

Like Watergen, these firms are tapping into a need to quench the world's growing thirst. According to the U.N., some 2 billion people globally don't have access to safe drinking water today, and some half of the world's population is experiencing severe water scarcity for at least part of the year. With climate change and population growth, these numbers are expected to become ever more severe.

Watergen's units have been deployed in some 100 countries, including in hospitals and a municipality in the Gaza Strip, in a medical facility at a refugee camp in Syria and at a girls' school in Sierra Leone.

To expand its scope, the company is now gearing up for the mass production of its units. "By year-end we will have seven production lines," Elbaz said.

Watergen currently produces its machines through joint ventures in the UAE, the U.S., Israel and China, Elbaz said. Another joint venture with India's SMV Jaipuria Group is in the process of opening production lines, he added, with two more partnerships on the way, though he declined to provide details.

In May, Israel's *TheMarker* reported that Watergen was going to lay off 30% of its local workforce and move its R&D lab to the UAE. Elbaz said that indeed some local workers had been laid off, but others had been

relocated to the UAE, India and the U.S., to beef up local teams.

"We prefer to have those talents and brains that we have here, close to the production lines, to the customer," he said. The company has 200 employees globally, with some 100 in Israel, though the numbers "are dynamic" because of the growing partnerships, he said. The company's R&D will remain in Israel to continue the development of future products and solutions, he emphasized.

Watergen is a private company and reveals limited information about its finances.

Elbaz, a French immigrant to Israel 20 years ago, was appointed CEO in January after leading the firm's mobility division for less than a year. He previously worked with VCs, startups and Skoda Auto's innovation unit.

His role as CEO will be to steer the company through the mass production phase and seek out new markets and opportunities.

These will include making its water units mobile, utilizing solar power and putting them in cars and trucks. The firm has already forged a partnership with Skoda to equip one of its desert rally cars with a water-making device. It has teamed up with U.S. electric vehicle maker Mullen Automotive Inc. to put water generators in its EVs, and with Living Vehicle to put units powered by solar panels in its luxury trailers.

The company is also looking at creating lower-grade units to produce water for manufacturing purposes, like vehicle paint shops or textile manufacturers, and for aviation and aeronautical purposes.

Looking ahead, Elbaz said he believes Watergen's bottled water "will gain a lot of traction" while the company develops units with lower electricity consumption and expands to wherever water is scarce.

"Water is a basic human right and this is what we can bring," he said. ♦

New mural celebrating city's Jewish community unveiled in Los Angeles

Artwork is part of a city-wide initiative highlighting different communities and cultures; event was held in partnership with the local ADL chapter and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Footprints in the desert; pomegranates and safflowers; a parent and child; Los Angeles County landmarks in silhouette; and a woman lighting Shabbat candles, against a backdrop of various hues of blue. The flames of the candle spell out “L’Dor Va’Dor” in Hebrew letters, to acknowledge the impact of various generations of Jewish Angelenos. These and other images constitute “The Common Thread,” a mural designed by Iranian-Jewish muralist and native Angeleno Cloe Hakakian that integrates Jewish tradition, Jewish history and the Jewish present in Los Angeles.

The wall-sized mural in the heavily Jewish Pico-Robertson neighborhood is the first in the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations’ LA vs. Hate’s project “Summer of Solidarity,” an initiative that celebrates diversity in the city and comes at a time of rising antisemitism in Los Angeles and the nation. It was commissioned during Jewish American Heritage Month in May, and was unveiled on Sunday at a press conference and block party at the corner of Glenville and Pico, held in partnership with the Los Angeles chapter of the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles.

A recent ADL report found 3,697 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States in 2022, a 36% increase from 2021 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. Among the incidents were the separate shootings of two Jewish men on consecutive days in Pico-Robertson.

Under a scorching mid-afternoon sun, both Jewish and civic community leaders shared words of encouragement for the community and awe for the mural, which measures 328 inches wide by 189 inches high and is protected against fading and defacement by MuralColors’ Preservation Coatings, all environmentally safe materials designed to remove any tagging or overpainting.

Robin S. Toma, the executive director of the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations Commission, presented “a vision of common aspirations” for a diverse, inclusive and equitable county community. He noted that antisemitic incidents have risen 30%, and reminded the assembled that anyone witnessing or experiencing hate does not have to take it to the police; instead they can dial 2-1-1 or visit LAVsHate.org, where 24/7 help is available in any language.

With the mural project, Toma said, “We hope to create safe spaces for the community to connect with each other across identities. This is a time that we need to strengthen and showcase that unity within our county is much stronger than hate.”

Cesar Echano, who was the victim of an anti-Asian hate crime in 2020, said he is getting better because of support from the community and the media. “We have no place in our community for hate, for racists, for discrimination,” Echano said. “We stand for unity, we stand for freedom, we stand for humankind, we stand for human rights, we stand for love and peace.”

Calling the Jewish community “strong and resilient and diverse,” L.A. County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath said that “there’s no room for antisemitism, period... We have to root it out wherever it exists in

all of its forms.” Horvath said she had called on the L.A. sheriff to collect data on acts of antisemitism over the last five years; now Jewish community leaders are expanding on that for all of L.A. County.

Ilan Davidson, president of Commission on Human Relations — and a cantor in San Pedro, Calif., for the last 29 years — invoked the well-known Hebrew song “Geshet Tzar Me’od” (“The world is a narrow bridge”) — based on a teaching from Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. He cited songwriter Elana Arian’s reinterpretation of Nachman’s line “the main thing is not to be afraid” as “the most important thing is on the other side of fear.”

“What [Rabbi] Nachman meant was ‘Take your fear and channel it into something positive,’” Davidson said. “What will you do with your fear? What will you do when you are being attacked?” This is what we do. We turn it into a positive demonstration and positive message that we as a community will not tolerate anyone causing fear for any of our communities here in Los Angeles.”

“Hate is pervasive everywhere, and we fight back with love,” said L.A. City Councilmember Katy Young Yaroslavsky. She added, “The Jewish community is not an island. We stand in solidarity with every marginalized community.”

State Sen. Ben Allen noted that the neighborhood where the event was held was peppered with landmarks of Jewish L.A., such as the Museum of Tolerance, Young Israel of Century City, The Happy Minyan and Factors Deli, and was across from the future site of ETTA’s Bhatia Family Village, which will house adults with developmental disabilities. Allen called the mural “a wonderful symbol of love in the heart of our community.”

Jeffrey Abrams, ADL's regional director, noted that according to the L.A. federation's survey, half of L.A. households have one or more immigrants, and in 50,000 households, the entire household is from another country. "The Jewish community represents the same experiences of so many other communities in Los Angeles," he said, mentioning the Latino, African American and AAPI communities as examples. "All of us are or were strangers in a strange land. We must continue to work together to make the city, the county, the state and this country reflect more of what we have in common than what sets us apart."

The ideas for the mural came from two brainstorming sessions facilitated by an organization called MuralColors, to generate ideas for what elements and images would be included in the artistic mosaic. Facilitators asked community members leading questions like "where does your culture reside?" and "what do you wish others understood about your culture?" to guide participants in identifying their personal understandings of what comprises Jewish identity and culture in Los Angeles.

The artist received the suggestions and over the course of 10 days created a mural that moved from abstraction to concrete imagery, extracting from the submitted words experiences that — together — illustrate the roots and experiences of Los Angeles' Jews that explores collective

memory.

"The mural depicts a mother lighting Shabbat candles, with their flames illuminating the Hebrew script for *L'dor V'dor*, from generation to generation," muralist Cloe Hakakian explained in a voice memo that was played at the event. "The folds of her headscarf become vignettes that celebrate the diversity of Jews within our community and the cultural experiences shared across time and place. There is a young child held in the arms of her mother as older generations stand behind her, each figure wearing a pattern from the diverse cultural diasporas in Los Angeles County. Footprints move through the desert toward a bright horizon, a metaphor for migration, healing, and resilience within the Jewish community. Silhouettes of culturally significant Los Angeles county landmarks sit on the horizon, reminding the viewer of the greater community within which the Jewish community thrives."

Hakakian told the crowd that the artwork was "a direct product of the thoughts, feelings and emotions of individuals within the Los Angeles Jewish community...I hope that this mural shows the community that they are not alone and further even to those not in the community I hope that this mural can spark a conversation and inspire a positive change."

Mary Kohav, the federation's vice president of justice, equity, diversity

and inclusion (JEDI) and community engagement programs, told eJP that "the way the patterns... bring out the history, foods that are symbolic, the shades of skin on the people who are displayed... It's the power that art has to do something that dialogue or outreach doesn't quite do."

After the formal presentation concluded, the celebratory block party featured musical performances by Mostly Kosher and We The Folk, food and refreshments, family-friendly activities and additional information about the LA vs Hate services and partners.

The federation's president and CEO, Rabbi Noah Farkas, told eJP that the event advanced the federation's growing partnership with other organizations. "We've lived in a world of Jewish competition for a long time, and the ADL and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles are pioneering a new cooperative stance. This mural and LA vs Hate is a perfect example of the synergies."

LA vs Hate is commissioning and revealing new murals celebrating different communities and cultures across the county throughout the summer, partnering with community organizations along the way. The next two are in July in South L.A. featuring the Black community's long history battling racism in L.A., and in August, honoring the LGBTQ+ community in Long Beach's Bixby Park. ♦