

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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AUGUST 29, 2023

With polished Hebrew, Germany's ambassador to Israel draws inspiration from the job

While the Holocaust still plays a central role in German diplomacy with Israel, Ambassador Steffen Seibert tells Jewish Insider that does not disqualify it from sharing concerns over government policies

By Ruth Marks Eglash

If the unique diplomatic relationship between Israel and Germany is defined by events of the last century, namely the atrocities of the Holocaust, then Steffen Seibert, the German ambassador who arrived in the Jewish state just over a year ago, is in the right job.

A former journalist and news anchor, who more recently spent 10 years as the government spokesman under former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Seibert is smooth, sharp and as sensitive as one can be in a country that still bears the scars of the systematic Nazi genocide of Jews in Europe more than 75 years ago.

Seibert, who took up his post in Tel Aviv just over a year ago, has already made impressive strides in getting to know the country, meeting with leaders both in the

current and former governments, ordinary citizens and Holocaust survivors, some of whom he hosted in his living room earlier this year as part of a special Yom HaShoah program.

Oh, and he has also managed to learn fluent Hebrew.

"My wife thinks I'm a total nerd and I think she might be right," Seibert, who regularly uploads snappy and polished videos in Hebrew to social media, told *Jewish Insider* last week. "Speaking in videos is still very different from speaking in real life. Hebrew is one difficult language to learn."

Despite the difficulties, the ambassador said he is dedicated to his weekly lessons and always makes sure to do his homework – in between diplomatic appointments.

"I do it because it helps to show the people that watch the videos and the Israelis that I meet that I care deeply about their country, their language and their culture," Seibert said. "Because in Hebrew you find the history, the religion and so much of what makes Israel what it is."

In a wide-ranging interview at the German Embassy in Tel Aviv, Seibert discussed a number of issues — from Holocaust remembrance and the rise of the right in Germany, to the rise of the right in Israel, the controversial steps taken by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition to overhaul the judiciary and the mass public backlash the government has faced.

He also highlighted the importance of a \$3.5 billion deal for Israel to sell its Arrow 3 missile-defense system to Germany –

Israel's largest defense export in history – which was given the green light by the U.S. earlier this month.

“I can take absolutely no credit for it, but if and when it happens it will be a very big deal,” said Seibert of the agreement, which still needs to be ratified. “It is highly valuable for both sides – of great material value for Israel, and of a symbolic value for both of us because for many years the military relationship with Israel was more of a one-way street; us providing material to the Israelis.”

Seibert explained that the shift in the military partnership began several years ago when Germany purchased Israeli-made Heron drones to protect its soldiers abroad. The Arrow 3 procurement, which he explained was a direct response to Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, will “add a whole new dimension that will finally make the military-security relationship [with Israel] a two-way street, which is a good thing.”

Even as military ties between the two countries are changing, there is one consistent theme that colors Germany's relations with the Jewish state: the Holocaust.

Relations between Israel and Germany emerged slowly following World War II and only began warming after what was then West Germany offered the Jewish state reparations in 1952. Formal ties were established in 1965, yet even today, the website of Germany's Federal Foreign Office notes that relations with Israel are viewed as “unique” because of the events of the past.

“When you are the German ambassador here, you work on the whole breadth, the whole bandwidth of Germany-Israeli relations, which really covers everything, but you always come back to the issue that makes this relationship so singular, and that is the most unimaginable crime in human history, the Shoah,” Seibert said, using the Hebrew word for the Holocaust.

A main focus of Seibert's work in Israel has been to connect with the last remaining Holocaust survivors, to hear their stories, and also to explore ways to keep their memories alive.

“There is always the question of how we can make sure that every future generation will know about what happened. We need to pass on the knowledge and do it in a

way that doesn't let the Holocaust become just a chapter in history,” he explained. “For us Germans, it is part of our identity. Not a question of personal guilt for today's generations but one of responsibility – and that mustn't get lost.”

Even as the Holocaust still plays a central role in German diplomacy with Israel, Seibert said that does not disqualify it from sharing concerns with the government over policies such as the judicial overhaul and its approach to the Palestinians.

“It's no secret that the judicial plans this government is pursuing have caused great concern in Germany and we, like the U.S. government, have chosen to voice these concerns,” the ambassador told JI. “The German-Israeli friendship will always have as a foundation the memory of the Shoah and the responsibility that comes with that, but another foundation of this relationship is and always has been the values of liberal democracy that we share.”

He said that Germany has always viewed Israel as a “shining beacon of democracy” in the region and while it respects the country's right to make its own decisions, “when we feel that what is being planned here can harm Israeli democracy, then of course we have questions and concerns.”

Seibert, whose embassy sits just minutes from the epicenter of the anti-judicial overhaul protests at the Kaplan junction in Tel Aviv, added that he has found the mass public pushback against the government, which include weekly street protests, “inspiring.”

Asked about the rise of right-wing parties and political figures inside Germany, where polls suggest support for more extreme, nationalist views have risen in recent years to 20%, Seibert said a scenario where such sentiment becomes more mainstream in his country was “nightmarish.”

“What I've learned from Israel is that regardless of where you stand on the issue of judicial reform, it is incredibly inspiring that for 32 or 33 weeks, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have gone out into the streets to demonstrate for what they think is right, for their idea of democracy and for the values that we share,” he said. “If such a moment ever came in Germany, I would think of these people in Israel, and you would know where to find me.”

Seibert also shared concerns over heightened tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, which has seen some 35 Israelis killed in terrorist attacks and more than 200 Palestinians killed since the start of this year.

“This is an area, where as very close friends and partners of Israel, we have a disagreement,” he said. “We think that the current status quo of an occupation that's been going on since 1967, is neither in the interest of Israel's security nor does it do justice to the rights of the Palestinians — and that is also the way that international law sees it.”

“Right now, nobody can say that this is a safe and good situation of sustainable peace for the Israeli people,” Seibert pointed out. “There are horrible cases of Palestinian terror — we just recently saw a woman getting killed in front of her child and a father and son shot in the car wash — and we condemn this.”

Seibert also pointed to Palestinian civilian deaths, highlighting that while Germany believes Israel has the right to defend itself, “there is a disturbing number of Palestinians unrelated to terrorism [who] were killed this year already and their lives matter just as much.”

Seibert said that Germany still believes it's possible to find a political solution to the conflict and, he told JI, that as his country's envoy, he would like to do more to facilitate the process. In addition to peace, the ambassador said he would like to see greater collaborations between Israelis and Germans in the fields of science, education and culture and that he hopes to forge stronger ties with all sectors of Israeli society.

“It is probably true to say that we have traditionally looked at the Jewish part of Israeli society and mostly at the secular Jewish part of society,” observed Seibert. “We are now trying to do much more to get to know the Haredi sector and the 21% Arab Israelis.”

“I know there are great places where you can live and maybe there are places where you have a little less headache [as an envoy], but I don't think there would be any place that would be so fulfilling or important in my eyes,” concluded the ambassador. “I couldn't think of a better place for me to be right now.” ♦

At 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, past is present for many

Robert Kraft, Jonathan Greenblatt and Sheila Katz were among the event's speakers

By Melissa Weiss

Ahead of Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., 60 years ago today, Joachim Prinz, a rabbi who fled Germany in 1937, spoke out against Nazis in the same spot.

Prinz, president of the American Jewish Congress, addressed the crowd of about 250,000 just ahead of King.

"I speak to you as an American Jew," Prinz said on Aug. 28, 1963. "As Americans we share the profound concern of millions of people about the shame and disgrace of inequality and injustice which make a mockery of the great American idea."

On Saturday, a new generation of leaders stood before tens of thousands of people gathered in the same spot to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington.

Prinz's words "still resonate," Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, whose organization participated in the original march, said in his address. "They tell us: stand up in the face of hate, speak out and don't stand idly by."

"In 1963, we came here to this place alongside Dr. King and so many other leaders," Greenblatt continued, "to demand equal rights, justice and fair treatment to all. Now today, we've come here once again to demand equal rights, justice and fair treatment to all."

The fates of the Jewish and Black communities, Greenblatt added, are "intertwined" and "indivisible."

Many of the speakers at Saturday's event, which was organized by Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network and the Drum Major Institute, paid homage to Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was assassinated five years after the first march.

Rabbi David Wolpe called King "a

modern prophet" as he quoted the biblical prophet Micah.

"Micah looked at the world, a world filled with darkness and despair," Wolpe said. "And he said that each of us will sit under our own vine and fig tree and there will be none to make us afraid. And that is what we pray for. That candle, that moment, that promise, that dream that we listened to 60 years ago. And God-willing with God's blessing once again, listening to each other, we can hear the echoes and the promise of that dream again."

Sheila Katz, the CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women, noted that her organization participated in the original march. Pointing to the upcoming Jewish holidays, Katz suggested that "as the high holidays compel us to repair, we also act together. As our *kehila kedosha*, our holy community, we draw strength from one another. We remind ourselves that we stand in a long line of people of every race and creed willing to stand firm for the values we believe in. We remember Dr. King's refusal to be satisfied 'until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.'"

Rabbi Heather Miller, Lacey Schwartz Delgado and Yolanda Savage Narva also spoke.

Though most of those who addressed the crowd had not yet been born when King delivered his most famous speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, many of the event's speakers invoked the civil rights activist and tied his work to present-day efforts to build bridges between communities and fight hate.

"Standing on these steps 60 years after Martin Luther King gave his penultimate speech is a very emotional moment for me," New England Patriots owner Bob Kraft, who was 22 at the time of the first march, told

the crowd. "I watched the speech live on television. The clarity, power and cadence of Dr. King's words and his delivery was like nothing I had ever heard before. His speech truly moved me and it moved the nation."

In 1963, Kraft was a newlywed; his first wife, Myra, he said, "had come to events in Washington herself to stand up for change that was so needed then, and unfortunately is still needed now. As a young Jewish couple in 1963, the Holocaust was very much still in our hearts, having lost family members in the horrific atrocities that occurred only 20 years before in the '40s."

Seeing echoes of Nazi Germany in the U.S. at the time, Kraft said, was "unsettling and uncomfortable."

"Against this backdrop," Kraft added, "we were so proud to know that Jewish people were among the most active of non-Black groups participating in the civil rights movement."

Actor Sasha Baron Cohen, who as a college student in the U.K. wrote his thesis about the American civil rights movement and traveled to Atlanta to conduct research, reflected on long-standing ties between the Jewish and Black communities.

"I've never forgotten how I was welcomed by the staff of the King Center and the people of Atlanta," Baron Cohen said. "There, I learned about how Black Americans and Jewish Americans — and people of so many faiths — linked arms together, went to jail together, sacrificed their lives together and achieved historic victories together for civil rights."

Many of the day's speakers shared concerns about a resurgence in hatred and intolerance that has had deadly consequences for minority communities.

Evil, Imam Abdullah Antepli, a senior fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, explained, "says racism

is a Black problem, homophobia is a gay problem, Islamophobia is a Muslim problem, antisemitism is a Jewish problem. It divides us. It says Black churches are different than Black mosques. It divides us, weakens us, if we assign these forms and manifestations of hate to particular communities.”

“The hatred Dr. King stood against is the same hatred we’re seeing in communities across the nation more and more today,” Kraft said. “We saw what happened with that kind of hate in Germany in the ‘30s and ‘40s, and we saw the way it ripped the fabric of the country apart in the ‘60s. Today, it is

our job to fight all hate: hate against blacks, Jews, Asians, Hispanics and members of the LGBTQ plus community, so that history does not repeat itself.”

Haley Cohen contributed to this report. ♦

AUGUST 31, 2023

Book Review: ‘The Controversialist: Arguments With Everyone, Left, Right and Center,’ by Martin Peretz

Presidential historian Tevi Troy writes about the impact that ‘The New Republic’ had on American politics — and his own career.

By Tevi Troy

I have only met Marty Peretz a handful of times. But after reading his fascinating new memoir, *The Controversialist*, I wish I knew him better. That’s not to say that the author and former editor-in-chief of *The New Republic* hasn’t had an influence on me. In fact, looking back, his memoir and my own experiences show how far-reaching his impact has been on politics, culture, and the lives of many in Washington.

It is almost a cliché to note that *The New Republic* of the 1980s – universally referred to as *TNR* by the cognoscenti – was a must-read magazine. It provided news, insights, humor and, in many cases, made you gnash your teeth. Simply put, to be in the smart set you had to read it. And if you could write for it, well, that elevated you above the rest of the smart set who hadn’t.

I first encountered *The New Republic* as a college student while studying in London in the late 1980s. I wanted to keep up on what was happening in America, and I heard a lot of people talking about *TNR*. I got my first copy and read an article by a man named Charles Krauthammer, of whom I had never heard of at the time, citing someone named Irving Kristol, of whom I’d also never heard of at the time, observing that the Organization of American States was just like the U.N., except the U.S. only gets denounced in three languages, thereby saving translator

fees. At that moment, I resolved to read this magazine regularly, and to learn more about Krauthammer and Kristol.

TNR – and Peretz himself – didn’t mind infuriating readers either. And that fact helped shape my career. I recall an editorial penned by Peretz in 1988 in which he railed against the feckless liberalism of Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis for multiple pages, but ultimately decided to endorse him, dismissing George H.W. Bush with only one line: “Morally, I have no truck with him.” The editorial, and the obvious point that Peretz had severe reservations about Dukakis yet was unwilling to give Bush even a look, inspired me to write a letter to the editor making that point, my first item ever published in a national publication. A year or so later, I brought the letter to a job interview I had with the American Enterprise Institute’s Ben Wattenberg, a disaffected Democrat and *TNR* reader. Wattenberg liked my letter and offered me a job as his research assistant. Back when people looked at classified ads, *The New York Times* coined the slogan, “I got my job from *The New York Times*.” I got my job from *TNR*.

Over a decade later, *TNR* would again play a role in my career. I was working for Sen. John Ashcroft (R-MO), who was nominated to be attorney general by the

president-elect, George W. Bush. The nomination came under fire from Jewish groups. Many thought that an evangelical Christian could not be an impartial attorney general. Peter Beinart, *TNR*’s editor at the time, about whom Peretz has lots to say in his memoir, asked me to write about working for Ashcroft from an Orthodox Jewish perspective.

I wrote the piece, noting that “[A]s a devout person,” Ashcroft “feels an affinity to other believers.” Another *TNR* reader, John DiIulio, saw it. He was Bush’s director of faith-based initiatives and soon brought me into the White House orbit. Once again, *TNR*’s reach helped open doors for me.

After reading *The Controversialist*, it is abundantly clear that I was far from the only one influenced, challenged and enraged by the magazine. Peretz shows us what was happening behind the scenes in Washington’s hottest magazine. From his initial purchase of the magazine, with the help of his wife, a Singer sewing machine heiress, to the collection of the ideologically eclectic and talented staff and the fights they engaged in, Peretz gives *TNR* lovers the backstory they would have craved during the magazine’s heyday.

Peretz also tells us about his decades in Cambridge, Mass., where he long served as a lecturer – but never a professor – at Harvard.

While there, Peretz seems to have met nearly everyone of importance in the liberal intellectual and political establishments, and feuded with most of them. E.J. Dionne, Jamie Gorelick, Al Gore, Chuck Schumer, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Michael Kinsley, Hendrik Herzberg, Walter Isaacson, Pat Moynihan, Henry Kissinger and Tony Blinken all make appearances, among many more.

Peretz knew many famous people, but the magazine did not mind alienating them. He describes being introduced to Hillary Clinton at a time when the magazine had written some hard-hitting pieces criticizing her health care plan. According to Peretz, “She looked me straight in the eye, said, ‘Oh, I know,’ turned her back, and walked away.” On another occasion, the 73-year-old Norman Mailer didn’t like a *TNR* review of one of his books and sucker-punched Peretz in the stomach. Peretz does not seem too bothered by either of these incidents, which indicates how often *TNR* was offending people in those days.

In that vein, the most enjoyable part of the book is Peretz’s sharp pen. He holds little back throughout, offering many

funny observations. Of the late political scientist Judith Shklar, Peretz notes that she spoke Yiddish, but she was still no fun. Regarding Edward Said, Peretz observes, “He was a Palestinian Christian, but he even had several versions of where he was born. Maybe his mother didn’t tell him.” Of Kennedy and Johnson speechwriter Richard Goodwin, Peretz writes, “He was full of resentments. Like me, he hadn’t been admitted to Harvard for college, but unlike me he never shut up about it.”

Peretz clearly had his grudges as well. He still seems upset that his candidate in the 1968 presidential race, Eugene McCarthy, did not win the Democratic nomination. He also notes that the fact that Bobby Kennedy’s assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, was a Palestinian angry that Kennedy supported Israel. His explanation for the oversight: “Probably to avoid inflaming things more, the media didn’t look seriously into the Palestinian angle, and the Zionists didn’t protest because they were embarrassed by it themselves. As a result, an important event was rinsed of a central part of its meaning.” And he is definitely still bitter that his friend and former student Al Gore lost a close

election to George W. Bush.

The Gore campaign is a good point to highlight the decline of *TNR*’s influence. The magazine had always speared sacred cows, but its pro-Gore focus undermined that reputation. The rise of the internet also had an adverse impact. It meant a weekly magazine was no longer fresh when it came out, and our increasingly partisan society could no longer stomach a publication that presented multiple, contrasting perspectives in each issue.

It’s hard to find a modern-day analog to the *TNR* of the 1980s and 1990s, but Peretz thinks that *Tablet* comes close. As he writes, “*Tablet*, which Alana Newhouse founded in 2009 ... has become more political in recent years and has maintained many of *The New Republic*’s values.” *Tablet* is indeed terrific, but *TNR* of the 1980s and 1990s was sui generis. Peretz’s memoir is a great look back at how that special magazine came to be.

Presidential historian Tevi Troy is a senior scholar at the Straus Center at Yeshiva University and a former senior White House aide. ♦

AUGUST 30, 2023

Riverdale event to celebrate legacy of MLK speechwriter Clarence Jones

Wednesday’s event is being organized by Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, which Jones helped write

By Haley Cohen

Sixty years after Martin Luther King Jr. gave his iconic “I Have a Dream” speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, one of the men who helped draft it, his friend and attorney Clarence Jones, is set to speak on Wednesday at Manhattan College in Riverdale, a heavily Jewish neighborhood in the Bronx.

Jones, who assisted King in drafting

the first portion of the famous 1963 speech at Jones’ house in Riverdale, is scheduled to speak to the local community about Riverdale’s connection to the March on Washington and his commitment to Black-Jewish unity. The event is organized by Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), whose district includes Riverdale.

“I am commemorating the legacy of one

of Dr. King’s closest confidants, Clarence Jones, who resided in Riverdale in the lead-up to the March,” Torres told *Jewish Insider* ahead of the event. “Clarence Jones embodies [the] unity that is needed now more than ever. [He] sees the fight against antisemitism as a continuation of his civil rights activism.”

“We are all bound together in the struggle

against hate and extremism,” said Torres, a pro-Israel progressive and the only openly gay Black man in Congress. “An America shaped in the image of Clarence Jones is an ideal we’re striving for and celebrating. Celebrate we will in Riverdale.”

Jones, 92, was standing just a few feet away when King delivered his historic “Dream” speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

Jones has been a longtime activist advancing the cause of civil rights. In recent years, he’s promoted Black-Jewish relations. Jones recounts Jewish contributions to the civil rights movement in his new memoir, *Last of the Lions*, published this month.

Jones said in an interview with MSNBC on Monday that despite progress, America still faces similar challenges as it did six decades ago.

“I am telling you that there’s a level of violence, and there’s a deep level of antisemitism in this country,” Jones said. “I’m not trying to cry wolf. I’m not trying to

scare you. I’m just telling you what I see.”

The killing of three Black individuals at a Dollar General store in Jacksonville, Fla., by a white gunman in what is believed to be a racially motivated attack — on the same day as the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington — was a chilling reminder of Jones’ words.

Attendees on Wednesday are expected to include notable leaders in the Riverdale Jewish community, including Rabbi Binyamin Krauss, principal of the Modern Orthodox school SAR Academy.

“I’m honored to be a part of the event,” Krauss told JI. “I know there are national events to commemorate the March on Washington, but I’m happy we have a local one.”

Krauss said he plans to attend alongside a few SAR teachers and students, noting that the group would be larger if school were back in session.

“Even though it’s still summer break, we find it important to participate,” Krauss

said. “It’s important to connect with our community and with the values of August 28, 1963. Those values include *betzelem elohim*, everyone is created in God’s image. Standing up for justice and against injustice, those are important values for ourselves and our kids.”

The Riverdale event comes amid commemorations held around the U.S. throughout the week to mark the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington.

At the original march, Joachim Prinz, a rabbi who fled Germany in 1937, spoke out against Nazis just ahead of King’s speech. Prinz, then the president of the American Jewish Congress, told the crowd of about 250,000 lining the Reflecting Pool on Aug. 28, 1963: “I speak to you as an American Jew. As Americans we share the profound concern of millions of people about the shame and disgrace of inequality and injustice which make a mockery of the great American idea.” ♦

AUGUST 30, 2023

Rhode Island lieutenant governor promotes her support for Israel in closing week of congressional campaign

Sabina Matos has positioned herself as the most stalwart backer of Israel in a field that includes a Bernie Sanders-backed progressive

By Gabby Deutch

In the final days of a Rhode Island congressional primary, an unexpected issue has quietly come to the fore: Israel.

The Democratic primary in the special election for the 1st District, newly vacant after former Rep. David Cicilline, a Providence Democrat and pro-Israel progressive who stepped down earlier this year to run a foundation, takes place on Tuesday.

The race has not featured the heavy spending or brutal attack ads that played out in last year’s proxy battles over Israel in races in Michigan and Maryland, where pro-Israel establishment groups like AIPAC went

head-to-head with left-wing candidates backed by major progressive organizations.

But Rhode Island lieutenant governor Sabina Matos, who is facing a more progressive challenger in former state Rep. Aaron Regunberg, spent part of the penultimate weekend of the race speaking to a virtual fundraiser hosted by NORPAC, a grassroots pro-Israel group whose members are mostly in the New York area. The event raised \$20,000 for the Matos campaign.

“She seemed very heartfelt in terms of wanting to be strong on U.S.-Israel relations,” said NORPAC’s president, Ben Chouake, who co-hosted the event. Chouake

expressed concern that Regunberg — who appeared this weekend at a rally with Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) — is “basically going to be another member of the Squad,” referring to a group of far-left lawmakers who are hostile to Israel.

“I’m looking forward to being a strong ally, and making sure that the United States and Israel partnership continues, because they are our strongest democratic ally in the region,” Matos told *Jewish Insider* in an interview Monday. “I don’t want to make this a partisan issue.”

Larger pro-Israel organizations have not gotten involved in the race. JACAPAC,

a Chicago political action committee that supports candidates who are pro-Israel and pro-choice, endorsed Regunberg. He has also been endorsed by Reps. Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), two prominent Jewish progressives. “I care deeply about Israel’s future and the safety and well-being of all the people who live there,” Regunberg told *J* in July.

Matos said she will “definitely” support U.S. security assistance to Israel, and that she opposes the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. When asked what role Washington should play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Matos noted that Israel is a “sovereign country.”

“We cannot dictate what they’re going to do,” said Matos, who pledged to travel to Israel while in office. “We have to respect them. I think there has to be an ally and partner in something that I believe — that I apply not just in this case, but even in personal relations and in business relations — you talk to your friends in private about the things that you disagree on, but not start disagreeing publicly.”

Eleven candidates are running for the safely Democratic seat, and recent polling shows that there is still a significant chunk of voters who remain undecided.

“It’s really just been sort of this mad dash everybody, and their brother, and their sister, and their cousins looking to get elected to the House and jumping into the race,” political strategist Rich Luchette, who worked for Cicilline for a decade, told *Politico* this week.

The poll, commissioned by the campaign of former Biden White House official Gabe Amo, showed Regunberg in the lead, followed by Amo. Matos and State Sen. Sandra Cano are tied for third. That’s a dramatic fall for Matos, whose campaign released a poll in June showing her well ahead of Regunberg.

The lieutenant governor came under fire in July amid reports that dozens of the signatures she gathered to get on the ballot were forged. Matos has blamed the incident on a vendor hired by her campaign.

“It was tough to see that my campaign is the one that has been battered the most,” Matos said of the scandal, noting that it is not uncommon for campaigns to sometimes have signatures invalidated. The state Board

of Elections voted earlier this month to review all the signatures she had gathered.

But Matos noted that voters do not often raise the issue to her.

“They want to talk about the issues. They want to talk about what I’m going to do to protect their Social Security and Medicare, [and] what am I going to do to protect a woman’s right to choose, and ensure that abortion is protected and legal throughout the nation,” she explained. “People are very concerned with gun violence.”

Regunberg, too, has faced his own scandal in recent weeks: allegations of improper coordination with a Super PAC supporting him that is funded by father-in-law, who donated \$125,000 to the committee. His campaign has denied that anything unlawful has taken place.

With endorsements from the Congressional Progressive Caucus PAC and the Working Families Party, Regunberg has faced little opposition in his bid for the progressive lane in the race. Matos avoided the label, and cast herself as someone more focused on results than on ideals.

“I’m not big on labels. I like to get things done,” said Matos, who has earned the backing of EMILY’s List, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus’s BOLD PAC, Latino Victory Fund and the New Democrat Coalition Action Fund, along with several local unions. “Acting like, if I don’t get 100% of what I’m looking for, nothing works, is not what we need right now.”

Matos, who was born and raised in the Dominican Republic, came to the U.S. at age 20.

Matos was first exposed to politics when she was young; her father was the mayor of her hometown, Paraiso. She took from that experience an understanding of the power that local politicians hold to help people in need access crucial services, which she learned when people came to her house looking for assistance.

This most crucial role of public servants is she believes she is best suited for the role: After serving more than a decade on the Providence City Council, she has an “understanding of the needs of everyday Rhode Islanders,” and people’s struggles to provide for their families. Matos became lieutenant governor in 2021, when then-Gov. Gina Raimondo became commerce

secretary. Matos was elected to the role last year.

Growing up, Matos never met any Jews, until she arrived in Providence.

“Even though there are Dominican Jews, I was never exposed, never had an opportunity to learn about the Jewish community or the religion,” she said. “I know we’re very fortunate that we have a large Jewish community.” The 1st District includes parts of Providence, Newport and Bristol, where Matos on Sunday marked the 100th anniversary of the state’s second-oldest synagogue.

“It just caught my eye every time I go to a Jewish community building or a Jewish celebration, I see that they have to have someone guarding the door, a police officer. When I go to church, I don’t see that,” Matos said. “I think that’s a reminder of the threat to the Jewish community. We have to be actively engaged in making sure that we show our support, and that we provide resources, also, for them to be able to protect their institutions.”

A special election on Sept. 5, the day after a holiday weekend, on the last day of summer vacation for Providence students, means turnout will likely be low. But in a blue state with just two representatives, victory could mean years of job security and an immediate boost to the upper echelons of Ocean State politics.

“If you’re elected,” said NORPAC’s Chouake, “you have a pretty good chance of being there in perpetuity.” ♦

Iran-focused Jewish groups mark first anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death, prepare for new protests

Organization formed to support protesters has already issued several grants with more in the pipeline; Jews will struggle to participate in this year's demonstrations, which fall on Rosh Hashanah

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

This Rosh Hashanah — Sept. 16 — marks the one-year anniversary of the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini after she was detained by Iran's morality police for improperly wearing a hijab. The moment sparked mass protests that cut across sex, creed and class. School girls tore off their hijabs, businesses shuttered in national strikes and women across the Iranian diaspora chopped their locks in support.

The year has been trying for many Iranian Jewish leaders working in the nonprofit sector. Activists are putting new initiatives in place to prepare for a new wave of protests inspired by the anniversary, and many are calling for help from the greater Jewish community.

"Most revolutions are not consistently in the same level of dynamism," Nazee Moinian, a Middle East Institute analyst and member of the steering committee for the Jewish Committee to Support 'Woman Life Freedom' in Iran (JCWLF), told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "They are heated at one point and they go into a plateau situation, which is where we are now, and then they pick up again."

Her organization, which launched in March, distributes micro grants to support Jewish protestors, no matter their background. Funds can be used for anything from printing protest posters to transporting protestors to events to advertising events. Three grants have been handed out so far with many more under review, Moinian said.

"Americans want everything done

yesterday," Moinian said, making it clear that JCWLF is in it for the long run. "[Americans] have such short attention spans. [They] think that [because the protests have slowed down] it's dead. The genie's out of the bottle with Iranian people, and you can't put the genie back in."

Yet it has been difficult for many Jewish activists to attend protests over the past year because they are regularly held on Shabbat. Major anniversary protests are scheduled to be held when many Jews will be attending High Holiday services this year.

"It's like a slap in the face from the non-Jewish Persian community," Rabbi Tarlan Rabizadeh, vice president for Jewish engagement at American Jewish University, told *eJP*. As an activist in both Jewish and Iranian circles, she often feels "homeless," she said, "never Persian enough, never Jewish enough, never nothing enough," especially because she also doesn't see many in the greater Jewish community speaking out about the atrocities Iran is involved in, which includes funding much of the terrorism against Israel.

To help pull more of the mainstream Jewish community into the movement, the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, as well as partner organizations including Chaya and Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA), are conducting an outreach campaign to the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, an nondenominational organization that includes over 200 rabbis.

"We are collaborating on creative ways for community members to express solidarity with the protests while observing the holiday," Mary Kohav, the Los Angeles federation's vice president for justice, equity,

diversity and inclusion, and community engagement, told *eJP*. "From asking synagogues to invite Iranian congregants to share their stories, to preparing leave behind materials with action steps, to distributing buttons and bracelets that say [the movement's slogan] 'Woman, Life, Freedom' in Hebrew and Farsi. We are affirming our support for the people of Iran alongside an intersectionality of partners."

Rabbi Noah Farkas, president and CEO of the L.A. federation, told *eJP* that his organization had to do something. "We have a moral responsibility as Jews to speak out against what is happening in Iran, where women, political activists, students, and religious minorities are wrongfully imprisoned, brutally tortured or arbitrarily killed simply for exercising their right to peacefully protest."

The federation is also reaching out to politicians to ensure that they understand the importance of the movement and how they can help.

"Constantly speaking about this to your elected officials, it matters," Daniel Bral, an attorney and the board president of the Progressive Zionists of California, told *eJP*. "Because when such pressure's applied on these politicians, they understand that 'My constituency really cares about this, and I need to reflect the concerns of my constituents.'"

As a delegate to the California Democratic Party and on behalf of Progressive Zionists of California, Bral drafted a resolution supporting and expressing solidarity with the protestors in Iran that was adopted by the California Democratic Party.

This solidarity with the people of Iran needs to include offering refuge for those

minorities who want to flee the country, Mark Hetfield, the president and CEO of HIAS, told eJP.

There are, according to estimates, 9,000 to 20,000 Jews remaining in Iran out of a population that once numbered over 100,000 before the 1979 revolution. Because the Jewish population lives under Iran's autocratic regime, they are "so terrified that they literally are silenced out of fear," Matthew Nouriel, community engagement director at JIMENA, told eJP.

Since 1990, when the United States passed the Lautenberg Amendment, HIAS has brought tens of thousands of refugees to the United States. Originally aimed at Soviet Jews, the program now offers refuge to Iranian minorities including Jews, Christians, Baha'is, Sabaeen-Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians, processing them through Vienna.

The program is voted on every

September and has traditionally received bipartisan support, but in 2017 the Trump administration halted it.

In April, it was relaunched and already 50 refugees have arrived in Vienna. Over 10,000 are waiting, Hetfield said.

The program is "something we traditionally have tried not to make too public because it is sensitive because it involves bringing religious minorities out of Iran and to the United States," Hetfield said. "The events of last year have only underscored for us the importance of the program... We don't expect [demand] to diminish for the foreseeable future."

This demand for help can be retraumatizing for many whose families were forced to flee after the 1979 revolution. Old wounds are festering. Some, especially the older generation of Jewish Iranian Americans, have lost hope.

But losing hope isn't an option for the

younger generation of Iranians, said Nouriel, who dreams of one day going on Jewish heritage tours of Iran — visiting Queen Esther's Tomb — and plans to celebrate *erev* Rosh Hashanah with their family and attend a protest on Sept. 16.

"You have the luxury in America to have your hopes crushed, but they don't have the luxury of having their hopes crushed in Iran. They have to keep fighting," Nouriel said. "The young people have gotten to the point where they just don't care anymore. And that that's a really dangerous place for the regime because now you have a population of young people who literally are like, 'What are you going to do that you haven't already done? You're gonna arrest us. You're going to torture us. You're going to murder us. You've been doing that. It's nothing new for us at this point. So we're gonna keep fighting.' And I think that that's something that the entire world needs to get behind." ♦

AUGUST 28, 2023

Seven Democratic lawmakers break down takeaways from trip to Israel

Lawmakers said that judicial reform, Hezbollah's buildup on Israel's northern border, Iran, the Abraham Accords and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process were primary topics of discussion

By Marc Rod

As Israel continues to grapple with internal division over judicial reform, rising Iran-backed terror threats on its borders and the prospect of expanding the Abraham Accords, a delegation of 26 House Democrats traveled to Israel earlier this month on a trip sponsored by the AIPAC-linked American Israel Education Foundation.

Upon their return, seven of those members — all but one of them House freshmen, some of whom were visiting Israel for the first time, and others visiting for the second time this year — spoke to *Jewish Insider*, sharing their impressions

and takeaways from the trip and what they had learned.

The lawmakers described judicial reform as the top issue in Israel, and said they'd engaged in extensive conversations on the subject, but agreed that it is up to Israelis to resolve the issue. They largely shied away from expressing firm opinions on the topic, at a time when a growing number of progressive Democrats have been outspoken against the Netanyahu government's attempts at an overhaul.

Lawmakers said they believed there was broad consensus in Israel around the need for some reforms to Israel's judicial system.

"The most significant issue — that is top of mind for most Israelis — is judicial reform," Rep. Rob Menendez (D-NJ) said. "We also heard from [Opposition Leader Yair] Lapid, and others who, while not part of this coalition, have stated publicly that they believe there is room for judicial reform. And so I am hopeful that there will be continuing conversations with all sides."

Several lawmakers compared the ongoing turmoil over judicial reform to questions swirling around the U.S.' own judiciary; many Democrats domestically argue that reforms to the U.S. Supreme Court are sorely needed.

Rep. Haley Stevens (D-MI) said that, as a critic of *Dobbs* decision by the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, she “completely relate[s] to those who are in disagreement with a course and direction that their government is taking.” She added that she sees parallels between the power of far-right members of the Israeli coalition and the rising power of the far right in the U.S. and in Congress.

“Talking to young people who believe that the checks and balances system and the democracy of their country will be infringed on is something I have seen in our own country now,” Stevens continued. “Does that make it OK? That’s a question for Israelis to answer.”

Rep. Hillary Scholten (D-MI) said that there is space for U.S. officials “to speak from our own experience and what has worked and what has not.” But, she continued, the U.S. may not be in a place to judge Israeli democracy. “I think the United States could stand to reckon with the fact that we’ve got about a 30% confidence rating from the people of the United States of America, in our own judiciary,” she said.

Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-OH) indicated that the group had urged Israeli leaders to be mindful of the ongoing protests and seek room for negotiation.

“One of the comments we got was to ‘take a look at your judicial system. Wouldn’t you think that it should have reforms as well?’” Sykes recounted. “And the answer from [us] was, ‘Yes, there are things that we would reform.’ It’s not necessarily that reforms in and of themselves are bad. It just depends on what those reforms are.”

Multiple members mentioned a conversation they had with an Israeli family, some members of which had attended the protests, as particularly memorable. Sykes said that the family conveyed “a genuine love for the country and wanting it to succeed.”

“We are reminded that Israel is a democracy that allows people to have different views,” Rep. Don Davis (D-NC) said. “That is very much a part of a democratic process... Democracy is obviously running its course.”

Speaking with ordinary Israelis about the issue “just underscored how amazing Israel is [as] a very young democracy. They’re struggling with these issues, but

they’re doing it in a democratic way,” Rep. Wiley Nickel (D-NC) said. “I think that the U.S. needs to let Israel make those decisions for themselves.”

Lawmakers indicated, based on their conversations, that they believed there was still hope for a consensus solution, despite the governing coalition having passed a plank of the judicial reform effort that limits the power of the Supreme Court to overrule decisions by the executive and legislative branches.

“I feel good that ultimately democracy will prevail,” Rep. Greg Landsman (D-OH) said. “And just like here in the United States, where we’re working through similar issues in the sense that we have very serious threats to our democracy... ultimately the majority will prevail, the majority of us who are not on the far left or the far right.”

The Democratic lawmakers agreed that the trip had given them a better appreciation for the security threats that Israel faces, with several saying they were especially alarmed by Hezbollah’s buildup of increasingly sophisticated missiles along Israel’s northern border in Lebanon.

“The issues on the northern border, Lebanon, Syria, they are more serious than I realized... It is urgent, it’s a daily issue,” Landsman said. “This could turn violent very quickly as it has in the past. And this time, they have the ability to do enormous damage.”

“Iran has really encircled this country with these proxy terror groups,” he continued.

Scholten said that the group personally saw Hezbollah operatives maneuvering along the border — an experience that brought home the gravity of the security threats Israel faces on a daily basis.

“It’s one thing to talk about these talking points from the comfort of an office in Washington, D.C.,” she said. “It is another thing to be standing there in the desert, looking over the border with a Hezbollah spy in the trees looking down at you and your group.”

A trip to a kibbutz near the Gaza border, in short range of rocket attacks from the Palestinian enclave, also resonated with several participants.

“In this particular kibbutz there was a person that had been memorialized —

the person didn’t make it back [to a bomb shelter] in time,” Davis said. “To me to think that residents would have just a matter of seconds to get families, their children into a bomb shelter...it’s amazing to me.”

Menendez said that getting “that human connection was definitely a special part of the trip.”

“To talk to those folks and see firsthand their resiliency up close, to me, was something that really stuck out,” he said.

The lawmakers uniformly expressed support for Israel’s defense and concern about the threat from Iran.

“We have to acknowledge the fact that it is driven by the Iranian regime, and that as long as they continue to be a destabilizing force in the region, that’s a big part of the problem,” Menendez said. “We need to continue to be in close coordination with Israel on that front.”

But those asked about the issue steered clear of weighing in on the Biden administration’s recent deal to free hostages in Iran in exchange for billions in frozen Iranian funds — which Republicans have warned will free up additional funding for terrorists targeting Israel and the U.S.

“Often the administrations have extensive information, and I would like to believe that, based on information they had, that that was in the best interests of the American people,” Davis said.

The lawmakers expressed support for expanding the Abraham Accords, including to Saudi Arabia, as a potentially seismic development for the region. But lawmakers pressed on the issue largely avoided commenting on Saudi Arabia’s reported demands as part of the emerging trilateral normalization deal — some of which could prove problematic among U.S. lawmakers — in absence of a specific finalized deal.

“I think the devil’s in the details, but, you know, in a broader sense, having a deal with Saudi Arabia could be a game changer for Israel and for the Middle East,” Nickel said.

Some also framed expanding the Accords as a potential catalyst for Israeli-Palestinian peace and for deterring Iran — an increasingly common refrain in Washington.

Landsman described the lack of a “legitimate or credible governing authority in the West Bank” capable of maintaining

security as “the biggest obstacle” to peace.

“The Abraham Accords and these emerging partnerships with Gulf States — and hopefully the discussions with the Saudis bear similar fruit in terms of real partnership — that will be a pathway to peace,” he said. “Allowing these Gulf states to work with the Palestinians first in the West Bank, and then hopefully, ultimately in Gaza too, to establish that legitimate, credible governing authority and that can fundamentally get us... to a place where the West Bank, Gaza are secure.”

Sykes also said group members were “very concerned” about the expansion of settlements in Israel and their potential “hindrance” to the prospects of a two-state solution.

“We understand this is a challenge, and we get it,” Sykes said. She said the trip had increased her understanding of the situation as something of a “catch-22,” explaining that drawing down the Israeli presence in the

West Bank, particularly in Israeli-controlled Area C, could pose security concerns and allow areas to fall to Hamas.

“There is a security concern about that. A legitimate concern,” she said. At the same time, “the settlements make it more difficult [for] the Palestinians to want to negotiate with Israelis.”

Stevens, who sits on the House select committee on China, said that Chinese encroachment across the region was also in discussion during the trip.

“We were... informed about those efforts and the need to take them seriously, as well as the benefits of the Abraham Accords,” Stevens said, and the need to “[strengthen] our relationships with allies and partners in the region.”

Some lawmakers said their visit to Yad Vashem had left a significant impact.

“The thing that stuck with me and will always stick with me is how the United States chose not to engage, and how that meant so

many Jewish people were murdered at the hands of an evil, evil human being,” Sykes said. “As a Black person who does not have a homeland because my ancestors were ripped from their place and stripped of their culture and identity, I celebrate the fact that Israeli and Jewish people have that, even if we don’t. But I am also just reminded how important it is for us to stand up for people.”

Nickel, the great-grandson of a Polish Jew who fled Europe prior to the Holocaust, said that legacy was top of mind throughout the trip.

“The whole week I was there, I continued to think about what he would think of the current state of affairs, and how amazingly proud and glad he would be that Israel still exists as a country 75 years later... and how you need to continue to fight antisemitism, wherever it rears its ugly head, so that this kind of thing can never happen again,” Nickel said. ♦

AUGUST 28, 2023

Saudi Arabia aims to address gap between ivory tower and economy

Tech university to open center for applied research, launch \$200 million venture fund amid strategic overhaul of school

By Kelsey Warner

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

Saudi Arabia is getting more nimble as it tweaks the direction of its biggest research university to provide economic opportunities for the country.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced an ambitious strategic overhaul in mid-August at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, known as KAUST. The plan includes a new institute to accelerate the commercialization of the university’s research, restructuring KAUST’s research centers to match national economic priorities and a new \$200 million deep-tech fund to invest in early stage

companies.

The prince dubbed it “a new era for the university” that seeks to more tightly connect the school’s research priorities with the kingdom’s Vision 2030 plan to diversify the kingdom’s economy away from oil revenues.

Saudi Arabia has a stated goal of becoming a global leader in research and development, with an annual investment target equivalent to 2.5% of gross domestic product by 2040.

The university, which is located in Thuwal, a coastal village north of Jeddah, will focus its research efforts on economically productive sectors like health,

sustainability and the environment, energy and industry, according to a statement.

The new investment fund also bridges a gap: Deep tech, which often addresses complex engineering or scientific problems, is under-invested in the region, with Middle East venture capital investors often looking to pour money into already-proven technologies or business models that have been successful elsewhere.

KAUST itself is a unique institution in Saudi Arabia. Unlike other universities in the kingdom, it is one of only a few that are coed, and where classes in Islam are not required. KAUST also has internet access that falls outside the Ministry of Education’s

jurisdiction and censors, according to a paper in the peer-reviewed U.S. *Journal of Education and Practice*.

In the 14 years since it was established with a \$10 billion endowment (now estimated at around \$20 billion), the school has regularly ranked highly among global universities for citations-per-faculty, a measure of research output, while at the same time becoming more tightly aligned to Saudi Arabia's economy.

"KAUST has improved the rate at which it produces commercially viable innovations significantly in the last five years," Omar Al-Ubaydli, the director of research at the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International and Energy Studies, told *The Circuit*.

"They're highly active in things like solar power, desalination and material sciences.

"One thing they're emphasizing more

now than before is that the research outputs of the university be tailored to the needs of the local economy," Al-Ubaydli continued. "That's not something that was emphasized before."

Previously, the university was focused on "getting high-quality scientists and letting them do research. Now, they're very much directing the researchers and providing the funding to solve pressing local problems," Al-Ubaydli added.

The new strategy aims to support economic diversification, contribute to the creation of new high-tech jobs and provide opportunities for researchers, faculty members and students to apply their research.

KAUST will also look to strengthen existing partnerships with local players like Aramco and its petrochemicals subsidiary

Sabic, and renewables firm Acwa Power, as well as international companies IBM, Dow and Boeing.

"Among the most important initiatives resulting from these partnerships is the KAUST Reefscape Restoration Initiative, in partnership with Neom, which will focus on cultivating and restoring hundreds of thousands of coral reefs on an area of 100 hectares, on Shushah Island in the Red Sea," KAUST said in a statement.

The university has also inked a strategic cooperation agreement with leading academic and commercial institutes in the Chinese city of Shenzhen to collaborate on applied research across cutting-edge fields like aerospace, robotics and microelectronics. ♦