

THE WEEKLY PRINT

At Conservative and Reform rabbinical schools, a debate over red lines on anti-Zionism; In Israel, discord in coalition over Haredi conscription; 'If it's Jewish, we have it': Inside D.C.'s new Jewish history museum; State Dept. official who quit over Gaza pivots to anti-Israel NGO; Birthright Foundation sees record number of donors in 2023, raising over \$85 million, new CEO says; Nonprofits brace for more trauma among most vulnerable displaced Israelis; Poll: Roughly half of U.S. Jews changing behavior because of antisemitism

FEBRUARY 13, 2024

At Conservative and Reform rabbinical schools, a debate over red lines on anti-Zionism

There's little tolerance for anti-Israel sentiment at many synagogues. Now, rabbinical schools grapple with anti-Zionism among students

By Gabby Deutch

The global Jewish community is in crisis. But in the U.S., there is a severe shortage of rabbis to help American Jews make sense of it all. And among the up-and-coming generation of Jewish leaders, a small but outspoken number of young rabbis are pushing back against the deep-seated support for Israel that has been a hallmark of American Jewish leadership for decades.

A large Conservative synagogue on the East Coast came face-to-face with the divide between some young rabbis and

the synagogues they hope to serve last year. When several candidates applied for a rabbinical position at the synagogue, the congregation's search committee was thrilled to be in the increasingly rare position of having options — and to their surprise, one of the first candidates they interviewed came in eager to critique the synagogue's approach to Israel and armed with a plan to push it to the left.

"Maybe just your rabbi is pro-Israel but maybe the synagogue is not," the candidate suggested, according to a person who was

in the interview. (The individual asked for anonymity to discuss sensitive hiring decisions.) The synagogue's president then explained to the candidate that Zionism is a core value for the synagogue's leaders and its congregants, a position from which the candidate diverged.

"Obviously," the person from the search committee told *Jewish Insider*, "they never got to the second stage of the interview."

Officially, Zionism is a key pillar of all three major Jewish denominations in the U.S. But in the more progressive Reform and

Conservative movements, some prominent rabbis are raising the alarm about a small but significant number of rabbinical students and early career rabbis who identify as non-Zionist or anti-Zionist, and who lack the connection to Israel that has for decades been a key part of what it means to be Jewish in the diaspora.

The debate comes nearly three years after a now-infamous open letter signed by almost 100 rabbinical students from Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Theological Seminary and other non-Orthodox seminaries in May 2021. In a post-Oct. 7 landscape, those conversations have shifted.

Administrators at the seminaries are stuck between competing priorities: If they set clear boundaries about the centrality of Israel to their religious movements, they risk alienating some of the already small number of young Jews seeking to enter the rabbinate.

"It's perceived as a buyer's market. There's not enough students, so schools are reluctant to draw clearer ideological boundaries that require their students to adhere to," said Yehuda Kurtzer, president of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America.

Setting clear ground rules around Israel — explaining it's downright unkosher to believe Israel shouldn't exist as a Jewish state — is rare. The leading liberal rabbinical schools and Jewish movements have instead taken a big-tent approach to Israel that welcomes even those students who take a position that is firmly at odds with the Zionism espoused by their seminaries. The result is that many students emerge from these schools with an approach to Israel that may put them at odds with their future congregants.

"There's still a pretty pronounced gap in most sectors of the Reform and Conservative Jewish world between the rabbis being trained now, and their ambivalence around Israel, and the people that they're serving," said Kurtzer. "This could create a real problem if the schools are effectively putting people out of the system who hold these views, but they can't get hired and sometimes get fired, because their views don't align with what the laity basically believes."

Things get fuzzy when the seminaries are asked to define the boundaries of acceptable attitudes toward Israel, and whether there is a place for anti-Zionist students at the liberal seminaries.

"They know that our movement is firmly Zionist and supportive of the State of Israel. There are lots of different ways to identify in terms of being Jewish and being a part of the Masorti-Conservative movement," said Blumenthal, CEO of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and its rabbinic arm, the Rabbinical Assembly. "I think they need to decide how they feel about the fact that our movement is Zionist and supportive of the State of Israel."

"There's no loyalty oath that we expect, but we do expect deep, serious engagement in the history, in the culture, in the ongoing reality of Israel, and people can choose to express that in their own ways, from their own point of view," said Rabbi Lisa Grant, the director of the rabbinical program at Hebrew Union College's New York campus. The Reform seminary also has campuses in Cincinnati, Los Angeles and Jerusalem.

Conservative rabbinical students who identify as anti-Zionist are making an affirmative choice to study at institutions that are strongly supportive of Israel, according to Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, the official head of the Conservative movement.

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But Blumenthal declined to say whether he had concerns about the fact that there are some students graduating from the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies who describe themselves as anti-Zionist.

"I don't think I need to be on the record on that at this moment," Blumenthal said. "I

think this is not the right time to be talking about those lines. I think our focus right now is on Israel and the needs of Israelis."

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, dean of the Ziegler School American Jewish University in Los Angeles, has made clear that there are limits to what is considered in-bounds.

"There's a strong recognition that the Reform movement and Conservative and others as well have failed, in many ways, to do enough to teach that sense of peoplehood, that sense of connection to fellow Jews, feeling their pain and suffering," said Rabbi Bradd Boxman, the spiritual leader at Congregation Kol Tikvah, a Reform synagogue in Parkland, Fla.

"We're not going to take someone who is hostile to the enterprise of Jewish national self-determination. But we do create within that large latitude for the range of ways people can contribute to that national effort," Artson said of Ziegler, which is affiliated with the Conservative movement but is much smaller than JTS.

These conversations have only become more urgent — and more fraught — after the Oct. 7 terror attacks in Israel and the resulting war in Gaza.

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Boxman, a J Street activist, is unafraid to condemn Israel's military occupation of the West Bank while also clearly communicating his love for Israel. At his synagogue, the guidelines for debate around Israel are clear: Non-negotiables are Israel's right to exist as a Jewish, democratic state.

Rabbinical students with a range of perspectives on Israel told *Jewish Insider* that Israel is generally not formally addressed at the liberal seminaries beyond the time students spend in Israel — one year for Reform HUC students, and usually at least a semester for Conservative students.

"They send us to Israel our first year

and then we return to campus and there are such few opportunities to engage with Israel on campus,” said an HUC student who requested anonymity to speak candidly about their school. “I want to feel better prepared to talk about Israel when I enter the rabbinate, and I don’t feel as though my school is helping me with that.”

“[Discussions about Israel are] the third rail of Jewish life, as much as we don’t want it to be,” said Miriam Leisman Rubin, a third-year student at JTS who is currently spending the year in Israel. In her experience, Israel is a topic that was rarely discussed when she was in school in New York. “We need people to be aware of the same facts, even if their opinions are different, and we can’t just walk into rooms and go, ‘Nope, we’re not going to touch that. We don’t discuss that.’”

“There’s been an eroding commitment by liberal rabbinical schools around Israel for a long time,” Kurtzer said.

The result is that students are afraid to talk about Israel, wary of being “canceled,” one student told JI, explaining that students are not given the skills to address Israel in an authoritative rabbinic voice. One Israeli instructor who works with American rabbinical students called the phenomenon “death by Israel”: a fear of talking about the Jewish state from the pulpit.

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Since Oct. 7, American Jewish life has seen a strange renaissance. At a time of deep distress and increasing antisemitism, more people than ever are going to synagogue, hosting Shabbat dinners and seeking Jewish community. For many, that renewed connection to Jewish life has also correlated with a stronger connection to

Israel. A pro-Israel rally at the National Mall in Washington in November drew close to 300,000 people, the largest and most diverse gathering of Jews in America since the Soviet Jewry march in 1987. A November poll from the Jewish Electorate Institute found that more than 90% of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jews identified as emotionally attached to Israel.

But the strong pro-Israel sentiment in the overall Jewish community, counterintuitively, isn’t translating into the most Jewishly dedicated rabbinical students at the Conservative and Reform rabbinical seminaries. The HUC student told JI that since Oct. 7, it’s been easier to speak about Israel with more secular Jewish friends outside of their seminary than rabbinical school classmates.

Younger Americans in general lean much more liberal than the population at large. The same is true for their attitudes toward Israel. That’s the atmosphere in which rabbinical students have been educated.

“If you are a Jew who is a member of one of the liberal movements, you also were much more likely to go to a liberal arts college, in which the same dialogue and conversation around who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed has been dominant,” said Leisman Rubin. A lot of people “internalized the negative characterizations of Israel in the absence of counter-arguments in those types of communities.”

A December poll found that 91% of American Jews over the age of 50 supported Israel’s military campaign against Hamas. Among Jews between the ages of 18-29, that number dropped to 60%.

“There is a generation of [young] rabbis and Jewish leaders who don’t have the same sense of vulnerability of what it means to live without a Jewish state, or the sense of powerlessness that maybe people of an older generation understand, that never again will the Jewish people be powerless,” said Artson. “There is a sense of ignorance of history and nuance.”

Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt, senior rabbi at the Conservative Congregation B’nai Tzedek in Potomac, Md., in 2021, said the growing antipathy towards Israel among young rabbinical students was so noticeable that he brought together a coalition of rabbis to combat the problem.

“Unfortunately, the default position certainly in many of the rabbinical seminaries has been that one must be critical of Israel, to the point that is almost an assumption and a given,” said Weinblatt. “We hear that students who are good old-fashioned Zionists, pro-Israel advocates, often feel intimidated, and are afraid to speak up.”

Weinblatt started the Zionist Rabbinic Coalition, which has more than 200 members, after the publication of the 2021 letter. Written amid Israel’s last conflagration with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the students called their missive an “appeal to the heart of the Jewish community.” In an emotional letter, filled with references to Jewish teachings, the students accused American Jewish institutions of complicity in Israeli violence against Palestinians.

The letter caused an immediate uproar, sending the Reform and Conservative movements into crisis. Some students were let go from rabbinic internships. Nearly every one of the more than a dozen rabbis and rabbinical students who talked to *Jewish Insider* for this article mentioned the letter. Students at JTS and HUC who chose to sign the letter are still being asked about it in interviews for internships and full-time positions, and some prominent rabbis have pledged not to hire anyone who signed it.

Artson, the dean of the Ziegler School, wrote in a poignant response in the *Forward* at the time that the letter failed to apply its empathetic lens to the Jewish people.

“There was a partial application of the Jewish recognition that all people are made in God’s image, specifically about the value of Palestinian life and longings for freedom,” Artson wrote. “But there was no affirmation of love for the Jewish people, of which we are a part and which we aspire to lead.”

There was no response from JTS, the larger Conservative seminary, or HUC.

Many of the students who signed the 2021 letter have been asked about their stance on Israel in interviews for post-graduation jobs. Some were forced to defend their choice to sign the letter. But there is also some self-selection involved — they may look for congregations with a more left-wing approach to Israel. “There were places that I chose not to apply to at least in part because of their Israel work, that I felt

it was not nuanced enough and not tolerant enough of dissonance and diversity of opinion,” one HUC student with left-leaning politics on Israel told JL.

Current rabbinical students, most of whom are in their 20s, have only known an Israel run by right-wing leaders. Benjamin Netanyahu has been prime minister since 2009, save for a year and a half from 2021 to 2022, making him Israel’s longest-serving leader. That can be hard to square with students’ progressive politics.

“Some people who are on the right have said that being pro-Israel means being pro-occupation, or being pro-Israel means being pro-every policy of the Netanyahu government, which is just ludicrous. It would be like saying, being pro-America means that you have to support every policy of whichever administration is in charge,” said Rabbi Jill Jacobs, executive director of T’ruah, a rabbinic human rights groups. “I want to reclaim the term [pro-Israel].”

Like many progressive rabbinical students, Jacobs wants to see more focus on the Palestinians from within the U.S. Jewish community. But she does not see disengagement, or seeking an end to the Jewish state, as options.

“At this point, there is a state. There’s 9 million people who are citizens of it. We’re not going back,” said Jacobs. “I think the question to ask for people who feel like they don’t want a connection to Israel, or they don’t feel connected to Israel: Half the world’s Jewish population lives there, and Jews are a people. What’s your connection to half the world’s Jewish population?”

There’s a core tension at the heart of many of these conversations — as Jews, how much do we emphasize the universal versus the particular?

“I think if you have an obligation to our family and our people, which we do, we have to be concerned about how we keep our people safe in Israel, here and everywhere. But if we’re only concerned about the well-being of the Jewish people, and we don’t have that concern, then we’re missing a whole part of the Jewish tradition,” said Union of Reform Judaism president Rabbi Rick Jacobs. “I think it may be that some of our younger rabbis and young rabbinic students are in that dynamic tension and land a bit more universal than particular.”

“I think that we understand that there’s a horrible human tragedy unfolding on the other side of the border. There’s no question about that,” said Rabbi Daniel Gordis, who lives in Israel and has for years argued that liberal seminaries, including his alma mater JTS, are not doing a good enough job of educating about Israel. “But we were attacked. And my instinct is, I care about the Jewish people first — not at the expense of, but first.”

A famous teaching from Rabbi Hillel asks: If I am not for myself, who is for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?

“I think in the Jewish world, people are landing on one or two of those questions. Not as many of us are really wrestling

with all of them,” said the Union of Reform Judaism president Rabbi Rick Jacobs.

“I think if you have an obligation to our family and our people, which we do, we have to be concerned about how we keep our people safe in Israel, here and everywhere. But if we’re only concerned about the well-being of the Jewish people, and we don’t have that concern, then we’re missing a whole part of the Jewish tradition,” Jacobs continued. “I think it may be that some of our younger rabbis and young rabbinic students are in that dynamic tension and land a bit more universal than particular.”

For rabbis — people who devote years to studying in a seminary and then the rest of their lives to working in the service of the Jewish people — is there a special obligation to land more on the particular, to identify more closely with Jews who are under attack than others?

Leading rabbis in the liberal Jewish movements say yes. A notable number of their successors are more ambivalent.

“What has been taught in non-Orthodox synagogues over the last couple of decades has been an emphasis on *tikkun olam*, and appropriately so,” said Weinblatt, referring to the Jewish notion of “repairing the world,” the idea that animates many Jews involved in advocating for social justice causes.

“That is a very critical, essential, important part — an integral part — of Judaism,” said Weinblatt. “But sometimes it’s been done to the exclusion of recognizing the other half of what Hillel had said, which is, if I am not for myself, who will be for me?” ♦

In Israel, discord in coalition over Haredi conscription

As the IDF seeks to lengthen mandatory and reserve service as manpower needs increase, some are calling to end the dispute over the Haredi exemption from service

By Lahav Harkov

Coalition lawmakers called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to conscript Haredim to the IDF rather than extend mandatory service for those already enlisted, exposing potentially destabilizing cracks in Netanyahu's governing coalition.

The IDF published a plan last week to increase its manpower in light of the war in Gaza and expected ongoing security needs. According to the new plan, mandatory military service for males would rise from two years and eight months to three years, and for women in combat from two to three years. In addition, the retirement age for regular reservists would rise from 40 to 45, and would require more time per year.

Politicians in the opposition pointed out that the vast majority of Haredi 18-year-old males are exempt from serving in the IDF by declaring that they are full-time yeshiva students, and said it would be unfair to add to the burden of those who already serve when Haredim are not required to do so.

The matter of Haredi enlistment has been controversial for over 20 years. Repeated Supreme Court rulings in recent decades declaring their exemption from military service unlawful and requiring the Knesset to pass new legislation on the matter, and Netanyahu-led coalitions' failure to do so, has led to multiple elections. The insistence of Haredi parties Shas and United Torah Judaism on continuing the exemption and, at times, enshrining it in law, has also been a factor in several parties refusing to sit in governing coalitions with them, contributing to the consecutive election cycles of 2019-2021.

While voices within Netanyahu's religious-right coalition calling for change are growing – and now include Haredi representatives – at least some continue to take a hard line against Haredi enlistment.

Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli and MKs Dan Illouz and Moshe Saada wrote to Netanyahu on Tuesday, noting that in the war that followed Hamas' Oct. 7 massacre of over 1,000 Israelis, 569 Israeli soldiers were killed and over 2,800 were wounded.

"In the continuing wartime reality, the number of soldiers needed to fulfill the mission of our long-term security... requires renewed preparations and appropriate legislation," their letter reads. "The immediate need [for the IDF plan] is understandable and clear, and the legislative amendments must be advanced to ensure that the IDF acts within the law, but the bill naturally and justly floats a broader matter that is pushed off from decade to decade without a solution."

The Likud lawmakers called to "expand the circle of those who carry the burden" of military service.

"Unlike in regular times, a situation in which certain groups in society carry the burden of security on their shoulders, with the price that they pay, while other groups in Israel continue in their routine lives, can no longer be calmly accepted," they wrote.

Chikli, Illouz and Saada suggested that the bill be temporary, for the next year, and in that time, a law be passed "to allow additional groups in the public to take part."

Others in the coalition have also expressed misgivings about the proposal in recent days, with Finance Minister Bezalel

Smotrich saying that while "the Haredi public is dear and beloved and contributes much to the State of Israel, it is now necessary that it take a more significant part in the missions of defense and security."

"Religious Zionism," the form of Orthodoxy that Smotrich ascribes to, "proves that it is possible to combine learning Torah and observing the mitzvahs...together with military service on the front," he added.

Some Haredi politicians have tried to remedy the situation, with Welfare Minister Yaakov Margi of Shas telling Haredi news site *Kikar Hashabbat*: "When you hear how many have fallen, when you visit [hospitals] — you understand that action must be taken...There is a need in Israeli society to see haredi society participate in the effort."

"I can't explain it, even with the value of studying Torah...to any mother whose son is on the front, who cannot sleep at night for months. I can't explain why young Haredi men are not conscripted," he said.

Margi, who served in the IDF, presented a plan of his own, summing it up as: "whoever is learning Torah will continue to learn, but whoever is not learning — and there are many — will be conscripted."

Interior Minister Moshe Arbel, another Shas member and IDF veteran, asked Maj. (res.) Yossi Levi, CEO of the Nahal Haredi organization that seeks to help ultra-Orthodox soldiers in the IDF, to draw up plans for more Haredim to enlist.

However, United Torah Judaism has not budged from its traditional position.

While not addressing the enlistment bill specifically, the Haredi bloc's leader, Housing Minister Yitzhak Goldknopf, took

the position that everything is fine within the coalition in a recent interview with Kikar Hashabbat saying: “Who’s having a bad time here? What does the government have to do with the war?”

A month before the war, Goldknopf threatened to topple the government if it did not pass a bill enshrining the Haredi

exemption from mandatory service.

UTJ MK Moshe Roth argued in an interview with *Jewish Insider* last month that the Haredi conscription exemption “won’t change...because nobody wants it to change. It’s a political sport...It’s good for the polls when an election comes around.”

Roth said that “the IDF doesn’t need

more manpower” and that legislation cannot change social norms. In fact, he said, it would be ideal if as many people learned Torah full time as served in the IDF.

At the start of the war in Gaza, thousands of Haredim expressed interest in volunteering for the IDF. By December, 449 had enlisted. ♦

FEBRUARY 15, 2024

‘If it’s Jewish, we have it’: Inside D.C.’s new Jewish history museum

The Capital Jewish Museum, which opened last summer, asks visitors to think about their own place in history. A new exhibit about Oct. 7 makes that task even more urgent

By Gabby Deutch

In the century after the first synagogue in Washington, D.C., was built in 1876, the small building housed many things — various churches, a motorcycle shop and, ironically, a pork barbecue store.

The story of the building, which was the original home of Adas Israel Congregation, is distinctly Washington. The guest of honor at its grand opening was President Ulysses S. Grant. American flags appeared on the *bimah* behind him; what is now a regular feature within U.S. congregations was then scandalous, an unholy marriage of church and state. Later, when a group of Jewish Washingtonians wanted to purchase the building back in the 1960s for historical preservation purposes, they had to lobby Congress to approve the sale.

Now, for the first time in more than 100 years, that building is again a gathering place for Washington’s Jews. This time, it’s the home of the new Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum, the first museum dedicated to examining the history of Jewish life in the nation’s capital and the ways Jews engage with Washington in the present. A small exhibit now on display is one of the first at a Jewish museum to deal with the Oct. 7 terror attacks in Israel and

their aftermath in the U.S.

Washington’s Jewish community has largely been ignored by historians and scholars, who have focused on Jews who come through the nation’s capital for other reasons, like politics. The museum’s curators decided to address both the unique history of how Jews first settled in Washington and what their lives looked like in the nation’s capital, as well as the many ways American Jews have been an integral part of the U.S. political system. The stories are irrevocably linked, according to the Capital Jewish Museum, and worthy of exploration — particularly since Washington is among the top-five largest Jewish communities in the country.

“It’s this massive Jewish community, but there’s never really been a book or any primary sources used to write about its history. It’s always Jewish members of Congress, Jewish members of the Supreme Court. It’s the national story,” said Jonathan Edelman, collections curator at the museum. “We felt this responsibility to not only teach the wider community about our Jewish community, but also to teach the Jewish community about itself.”

The museum opened last summer

after a yearslong construction process that required moving the building, on wheels, from its prior location a block away, where developers wanted to build a parking lot. Now, the two-story brick building anchors the 32,000-square-foot museum, with a modern glass structure connected to the original synagogue. It was designed by the same firm that created the National Museum of African American History and Culture; like the many Smithsonian museums in Washington, admission to the Capital Jewish Museum is free.

Visitors are encouraged to think about their place within Washington’s history — whether it’s racial history (for more than five decades, Washington was the largest majority-Black city in the country), social history (political activism is an undercurrent in each exhibit) or cultural history (like the kosher delis and Jewish bookstores that were once common downtown).

“We’re moving away from romanticizing history and just nostalgia to more, like, looking at a fuller picture of the history, and then also sending visitors away with something,” Edelman said, describing the museum’s mission: connect, reflect, act.

“The ‘act’ part is really, I think, what sets

us apart from, 'Let's just collect documents and artifacts.' This is Washington. This is a place where important decisions are made. You can have an impact on these decisions," said Esther Safran Foer, the museum's president. Safran Foer was previously the CEO at Sixth & I, the pathbreaking downtown synagogue and cultural center that she helped revitalize. (It's an appropriate transition for Safran Foer; Sixth & I was the next home of Adas Israel, after it left the small building that is now home to the Capital Jewish Museum.)

The first floor of the old synagogue building, which used to house a classroom and a *mikveh* (ritual bath), now tells a chronological history of Washington's Jews, beginning in 1790. Upstairs, visitors can sit in the original wooden pews from the synagogue and watch a short film about its history.

At each point, the number of Jews in the region is shown alongside the total population of the District and the size of the District's Black population.

"From 1955 to 2011, D.C. was a majority Black city and the largest majority Black city [in the country]," said Edelman. "D.C. is a very Southern city. It doesn't feel Southern today, as it did back then, but it certainly was, and being white and being Black meant very different things for you in Washington. And that included for the Jewish community."

Like others who move to the nation's capital, Jews came to Washington to work in the government. That meant wars brought Jewish population booms — first the Civil War, and then both World Wars. Jews faced fewer restrictions when seeking jobs in the federal government than when looking for jobs in fields such as law and medicine.

Many other Jews arrived in Washington to work as merchants, or in family-run businesses. Often, they already had relatives in D.C.

"No Jews literally got off the boat here," Edelman said, explaining why Washington didn't have the same kind of high-density tenements that were a feature of Jewish life in New York City in the 20th century. "Jews came in from other places, so Jews were in all four quadrants of Washington. There was no one Jewish neighborhood."

The rest of the museum is more contemporary and interactive, tying the

political history of the nation's capital to the city's Jewish story. Fun relics of now-defunct Jewish institutions line the walls. Visitors walk by a bright neon sign that once hung outside an old Jewish bookstore, which declares, "If it's Jewish we have it!"

Museum visitors are greeted with a prompt: "Who is Jewish Washington?" Interactive plush blocks (a plus for young visitors to the museum) show photos of Jewish Washingtonians, ranging from disability rights activist Judith Heumann to Jewish AIDS educator David Green to a local girl who recently celebrated her bat mitzvah, along with more famous Washingtonians such as Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died in 2020.

This section is meant to allow visitors to see themselves among the Jewish residents of the city, whether that's a high-powered political official or standard K Street employee. It is also an invitation to non-Jewish visitors to learn more about Washington's diverse Jewish community, and even about Judaism.

"Our hope is that we will be communicating with the larger community," said Safran Foer.

After a group of local social media influencers went on a press tour of the museum last year, "they just were really grateful to see that they didn't feel like they had to come in knowing what it was to be Jewish, or what Judaism has been like," said Maura Scanlon, the museum's communications specialist. "They learned it, but they learned it at the same time as learning the history of D.C. and Virginia and Maryland."

A large permanent exhibit on debate and *tikkun olam* documents Jews who have come to Washington to engage in activism. One wall shows a collection of Jewish political buttons dating back decades (From 2012: "Vote Romney, it's a Mitt-zvah." From 2000: "MOT [member of the tribe] for Gore/Lieberman.") It also highlights moments that Washington's Jewish community played a key role in organizing, such as the original Freedom Seder in 1969 and the Soviet Jewry march in 1987. The museum encourages action; one interactive wall, for instance, guides people to take steps to support refugees.

On the top floor, in a makeshift exhibit

that is filling the space until an exhibit on Jewish delis opens in May, is a ragtag collection of interesting, largely unrelated objects from the museum's permanent collection. In the back of that room is perhaps the most surprising area of the museum: A small section focused on Israel-related activism since Oct. 7.

"It's just showing people, telling them, 'You are also living through history,'" said Edelman. He recalled sitting on his phone, "doomscrolling," a couple days after the Hamas attacks, when he realized he needed to start collecting objects from the protests that were happening. He's used to showing up at protests and rallies, asking people if he can keep their signs to display in the museum.

A display case showcases posters of Israeli hostages and signs Edelman collected at the November pro-Israel march on the National Mall, as well as material from pro-cease-fire protests organized by Jews. Hanging on the wall is a handmade object made to look like a Torah, created out of cloth banners and PVC pipes, that says "All human life is sacred and precious." Edelman saw someone holding it at a Rabbis for Ceasefire protest, and he ultimately had to go to Philadelphia to pick it up to bring back to the museum.

The items "reflect the museum's goals of recognizing and amplifying the wide variety of opinions among D.C.'s Jewish community," a placard on the wall reads.

But perhaps the most D.C. part of the entire museum is an object that sits near the Oct. 7 exhibit: a double Rolodex, open to the contact cards for iconic *Washington Post* reporter Carl Bernstein and Linda Tripp, a key figure in the Clinton impeachment. It belonged to a former head of the IRS.

"There's a direct line to the Oval Office. Yasser Arafat was in there. Nora Ephron. It's completely random, but a very Washington thing," said Edelman.

"Those people do live here. They work here. They impact the city, but they also impact the country," Safran Foer said, referring to the Washington big-wigs who call the city home. "That's one of the things that sets us apart — this city apart and the museum apart." ♦

State Dept. official who quit over Gaza pivots to anti-Israel NGO

Josh Paul leaves Biden administration for DAWN, which supports BDS and calls Israel an apartheid state

By Lahav Harkov

Josh Paul, a former director in the State Department Bureau of Political-Military Affairs who resigned in protest over military aid to Israel amid a flurry of media attention and applause, has joined Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), an advocacy organization headed by an anti-Israel activist that calls for a boycott of Israel.

Paul presented his decision as a moral stance in a resignation letter he posted online 10 days after Hamas' Oct. 7 terror attack killed over 1,200 Israelis and the terror group took 249 hostages. Playing a role in the Biden administration's support for Israel was one "moral compromise" too many after 11 years of involvement in U.S. weapons transfers. U.S. support for the war against Hamas, he wrote, is "built on confirmation bias, political convenience, intellectual bankruptcy and bureaucratic inertia," as well as "blind support for one side."

The letter and a subsequent *New York Times* op-ed railed against the idea of "security for peace — the notion that the more secure Israel feels, the more concessions it will be able to make to the Palestinians." The letter accuses Israel of "ethnic cleansing" and "apartheid," and draws an equivalence between "the kidnapping of children...whether taken at gunpoint from their kibbutz or taken at gunpoint from their village," an apparent reference to Palestinian minors arrested for suspected involvement in terrorism.

Following his resignation, Paul was feted in the media, with a lengthy interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour and appearances on other networks, along with

a nearly 3,000-word profile in *The New Yorker*.

The New Yorker's Ben Wallis-Wells described Paul as concluding that Israeli security was an obstacle to peace over a decade ago when he was a Ramallah-based consultant advising the U.S. security coordinator to the Palestinian Authority. The reporter described Paul as struggling to hide his ideological bias when discussing the war: "He had a tight line to walk — to sound not like he was making an a-priori ideological case for peace, as an activist might, but like his skepticism of supplying the Israeli military reflected the hard-won experience of the national-security state."

Now, Paul has come down on one side of that tightrope, joining DAWN as a non-resident fellow. The press release about Paul joining DAWN states that he is expected to contribute his expertise on Israel and the Palestinians, with a focus on weapons transfers and arms deals.

DAWN was started by dissident and columnist Jamal Khashoggi, who was murdered by Saudi agents before the organization publicly launched in 2018. According to the DAWN website, it seeks to promote "the human rights, liberty, and dignity of every person in the Middle East and North Africa...upheld by democratically elected governments," and focuses on "governments with close ties to the United States and on the military, diplomatic, and economic support the U.S. government provides them."

Sarah Leah Whitson, DAWN's executive director, is formerly the director of MENA for Human Rights Watch. A 2010 article in *The New Republic* argued that fighting

within the organization led its founder, Robert Bernstein, to conclude that HRW "has lost critical perspective on a conflict in which Israel has been repeatedly attacked by Hamas and Hezbollah, organizations that go after Israeli citizens and use their own people as human shields." Bernstein named Whitson as the driver behind the group's sharp anti-Israel turn.

Months after the Bernstein op-ed was published, Whitson and others from HRW met with Hamas officials to assure them of the organization's "neutrality and objectivity."

Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic* has described Whitson as having "trafficked in a toxic stereotype about Jews" and "suggest[ing] a global conspiracy by Jews to dominate the world politically, culturally and economically."

Whitson has drawn an equivalence between Israel's military actions in Gaza and the Holocaust and evoked the blood libel on X (formerly Twitter).

She also spread the conspiracy theory that Israeli helicopters attacked revelers at the Nova music festival on Oct. 7, where Hamas massacred attendees and no Israeli helicopters fired.

DAWN has had an "Israel-Palestine program" since 2022, and in that short time, NGO Monitor, an Israel-based research institute that tracks the funding and activities of such groups, has compiled a long list of actions DAWN has taken against Israel. They found that the group has received funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Ford Foundation and George Soros' Open Society Foundation.

The organization holds the position

that Israel is an apartheid state, and penned letters calling for the U.N. to adopt sanctions and for the world to institute an arms embargo against the Jewish state. Both of those letters were co-signed by organizations like Al-Haq, Addameer and others, which Israel has designated as

terrorist groups for their ties to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

DAWN has called for individual IDF officers to be banned from the U.S. and investigated by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes.

The NGO also opposes the Abraham

Accords, which it calls “regressive” and “an endorsement of arms sales and political favors between the U.S. and authoritarian regimes...in exchange for the sidelining of Palestinian rights.” ♦

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Birthright Foundation sees record number of donors in 2023, raising over \$85 million, new CEO says

Elias Saratovsky, who started his position on Sept. 1, says the organization pivoted after Oct. 7, will reflect Israel's new realities in future trips

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Elias Saratovsky had five weeks on the job as the new CEO of the Birthright Israel Foundation before the Oct. 7 massacres in southern Israel and the start of an ongoing war against Hamas, which have radically altered the field of philanthropy, Israel travel and Jewish communal life around the world.

Birthright initially halted its scheduled trips and introduced a new volunteering opportunity for alumni — and then for any Jewish young adult. In late December, it resumed its trips, albeit with drastically fewer participants than normal.

But while Birthright Israel has scaled back its activities because of the war, the Birthright Israel Foundation, which funds the trips, had a record year in terms of donors in 2023, raising more than \$85 million, with hopes to continue seeing increased donations going forward, according to Saratovsky.

This week, *eJewishPhilanthropy* spoke with Saratovsky about his first few months in his position and how Birthright Israel has responded to the Oct. 7 attacks and ongoing war in Israel.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Judah Ari Gross: *So you're almost six months into this position. You started on*

Sept. 1, meaning you had about a month — which included the High Holy Days — before everything changed on Oct. 7. How have you been finding it?

Elias Saratovsky: So, first of all, it's a huge honor to be in this role and to lead the Birthright Israel Foundation. The work that we've done over the past 24 years has really transformed a generation of Jews — 850,000 participants from 68 countries.

Ensuring that the Jewish community, particularly young people, are feeling a sense of connection and pride and sparking their Jewish identity is really important. I was on the first trip that went to Birthright in December 1999, so for me, personally, this is very meaningful. And I came into this job

knowing that this was going to be a hugely important role.

And then certainly in the morning of Oct. 7, through the devastation and heartache, I realized very quickly that our work will be more important than ever because we're going to have another generation of Jews for whom it will be very important for us to make sure that they have a connection to Israel and a connection to the Jewish people worldwide. And that's what Birthright provides. We've been the largest provider of Israel experiences, not only for American Jews, but worldwide Jewry.

JAG: *In the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7, Birthright put its Israel trips on hold. But how has the foundation had to shift or pivot since the start of this war?*

ES: I'll get to the fundraising piece in a second. But I want to address what we did in the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7 because I think it's really important in terms of what we're working on. We realized right away that we needed to engage our alumni base across the country, here in the U.S. and globally, and many of our alumni have been on social media telling Israel's story. And we've continued to educate and inspire our alumni and provide them the resources so they can be the advocates for Israel at this critical time.

And we also realized right away that while that was necessary, it wasn't sufficient, and we ran a pilot of giving our alumni — and then all Jews between the ages of 18 and 40 — the opportunity to go to Israel to volunteer, to provide them an opportunity to assist in food rescue operations and also in logistical centers. And we were blown away at the response. We initially thought that we would have about 200 participants in the first two months, and it turns out we had 1,000 volunteers in Israel between the beginning of November and the end of December, and we plan to have an additional 2,000 by April. And it was really our ability to pivot very quickly and at scale, the ability to bring over 1,000 volunteers, and it speaks to the power that we have and the reach that we have with our alumni.

And we also have participants on our 10-day trips on the ground right now — we have about 1,000 participants this winter — and then hopefully many, many thousands this summer.

In terms of fundraising, we had a record year in 2023. We had more donors than we've ever had before. We raised over \$85 million for our efforts. We continue to attract new donors at all levels through our direct marketing campaign, including new seven-figure donors that are inspired by our work and want to be part of our community.

JAG: *How much of that record fundraising came from pre-Oct. 7 and how much was post-Oct. 7?*

ES: That money was raised throughout the year, but certainly after Oct. 7, we saw a number of people realize that there's a lot of work that needs to be done to advance the Jewish community and to ensure that our young people have the confidence and the pride to talk about Israel and to experience Israel, and that Birthright Israel is a huge part of that solution. So we've had a number of new donors that came after Oct. 7 and we continue to see that happen every single day.

JAG: *Obviously, this comes as the Adelson Family has scaled back its financial support for Birthright Israel considerably in recent years, with the expectation that new donors would step in and fill that void. Have you succeeded on that side of things so far? Have the new donors covered the loss of the Adelsons?*

ES: We continue to bring in new donors because two things have happened: The Adelsons' support went from \$40 million to \$10 million, but also the cost of the trips went up by 30% after COVID-19. So we continue to both bring in new donors to fill that void, and also a large number of our current donors have increased their investment in our work, and we continue to invite more people to come in.

I should mention the Adelsons, over their lifetime, gave half a billion dollars to this program and continue to be our largest donor. We're very grateful for their support and very grateful to the tens of thousands of other donors that have stepped up in the last few years.

JAG: *This is more of a question for the trip providers, less for the foundation, but I imagine this is something you would know: Is Birthright altering its trips going forward to account for the Oct. 7 attacks and how Israel as a country has changed? Of course, the trip included visits to the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum and to the Har Herzl military*

cemetery, but they were also meant to be fun and exciting. How will you factor the current mournful state of the country?

ES: I've been to Israel since Oct. 7 and I'm actually going again this week. It's not an understatement to say that the country has totally changed, and our trips reflect that.

There are a number of different things that we're doing to reflect the current scenario. One, on every single trip there's a volunteer component now. We want to make sure that our participants are part of that civic effort to help Israel. Two, every single participant is bearing witness. Not necessarily down south. All of our trips focus on strict safety protocols so we don't get near the Gaza border, we don't get near the Lebanese border, but they're meeting with survivors of the Nova Music Festival and survivors from the kibbutzim and the towns that were impacted. We're also meeting with family members of the hostages. That's a very critical component of our trips, to make sure that the participants understand what's happening with those family members and the centrality of the hostage families in Israel. And we're also devoting more time to the geopolitical aspects of Israel right now, since that's a critical component of what happened on Oct. 7.

A lot of the other factors of the itinerary are staying the same, but there's no doubt that the events of Oct. 7 and the aftermath are reflective in the itinerary. We're also providing a lot more time for the participants to reflect on what they're experiencing and ensuring that there's time for conversations between the participants from the Diaspora and the Israeli participants to make sure that they both understand the shared experiences that they're going through.

JAG: *How has the dip in participation this winter affected things going forward?*

ES: We want to bring as many participants as possible to Israel this year. And in fact, our registration is off to a good start, obviously fewer than last year, but we already have over 6,000 participants that have applied, registered, paid their deposits, and we want to take as many people as possible, whether on our 10-day trip or through Onward, our more immersive internships. And obviously thousands of volunteers continue to apply, 90% of them are Birthright alumni. We think it's

important for young people to go to Israel, to experience Israel, to feed off the resilience that the Israeli people have right now. And we also think it's important for Israelis to see Birthright participants from all over the world coming to Israel and experiencing Israel right now.

JAG: *Do you know what specifically accounts for the dip in enrollment numbers? Is it primarily safety concerns or do people see Israel as a controversial place to visit so they want to avoid it?*

ES: It's largely safety concerns. We've done focus groups on this. We've taken participants to Israel during conflicts and wars, and we have a track record of providing a safe experience without compromising the experience and we continue to do so. We follow strict Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command guidelines. We monitor the trips on a constant basis. We have security guards on every single trip. But I understand why people are worried today about going to Israel.

And at some point — God willing, soon — the war will be over. It'll be quieter. And we fully anticipate that the demand will skyrocket in a similar way after COVID-19 ended. We went from taking just a few thousand participants in 2020 and 2021, and then over 30,000 participants in 2022 and close to 30,000 in 2023. So we know that the demand will come back in a large way.

We also anticipate that there'll be a large number of Jewish young adults who never thought about their Jewish identity but, as

a result of antisemitism and discrimination on their college campuses or in the communities, will want to explore their Jewish identity. And Birthright is a natural place for them to experience Israel.

JAG: *And on the more technical, logistical side of the trips, how has the decision of almost all airlines, save for El Al, to cut their flights to Israel affected things for Birthright?*

ES: We have the ability and the capacity to take as many participants as possible, certainly tens of thousands this summer.

And we all pray that this war will come to a peaceful resolution with Israel meeting all of its objectives and that many, many more people, including tens of thousands of Birthright participants, will be able to get to Israel as soon as possible.

One of the things that I constantly hear from participants is that they feel vulnerable and scared back home. And when they get to Israel — whether it's to volunteer or on a Birthright trip — they automatically feel more connected with other Jews and they feel safer. And they come back feeling more resilient. And we want to provide that for tens of thousands of participants this year.

JAG: And in terms of hotels, so many rooms have been taken up by evacuees, has that been an issue at all?

ES: We've taken that all into account. We have best-in-class logistics people. And we certainly have the capacity to take people to Israel this summer.

JAG: Shifting back to the fundraising side, in terms of the new donors who you

said have been coming in since Oct. 7, can you tell me a little bit about sort of who they are? Are they people who are generally involved in the Jewish community? Are they more outsiders? Parents of Birthright participants?

ES: All of the above. We're seeing a lot of people coming to Birthright Israel Foundation to invest in this work.

This is a project that's been in existence for almost 25 years — we have our 25th anniversary next year — and we want to be in existence for many more generations. So people are answering the call. And in order for us to send as many participants as possible, we need more [donors] to join us. And we've been actually very inspired by the new people who are coming on board.

JAG: *At this point, how common is it for there to be former Birthright participants, especially from the earlier years, coming back and donating?*

ES: That's a huge priority of ours. Certainly as an alum of this program myself, I believe that it's important for my generation now to step up and ensure that the gift that we received is passed on. So we are seeing more people stepping up. We would like a lot more of it. It will be a huge focus of our efforts. And my hope is that five years from now, 10 years from now, as [my generation] continues to get older and have more earning power, that we will give back, provide this gift for tens of thousands of other participants. ♦

Nonprofits brace for more trauma among most vulnerable displaced Israelis

In the weeks following Oct. 7, the government struggled to cope and asked NGOs working with people with disabilities to step in and help

By Ruth Marks Eglash

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

MA'ALE HA'HAMISHA, Israel – Tali Goldsmith recalls with clarity the nonstop rocket sirens, sounds of heavy artillery filling the air and jeeploads of Hamas terrorists pulling up outside her home on Kibbutz Zikim in southern Israel on Saturday, Oct. 7. The mother of three, who has lived on the kibbutz bordering the northern edge of the Gaza Strip since childhood, sheltered with her husband, Ilan, and three daughters in the family's safe room for nearly 17 hours.

Four months later, however, as most of the family, which was evacuated to Kibbutz Ma'ale HaHamisha near Jerusalem, is working through the trauma of that day, and grappling with an uncertain future, Goldsmith's eldest, Lior, won't discuss even a single aspect of what happened on that dark day.

Lior, 21, whom Goldsmith explained is on the autism spectrum with some intellectual disabilities, shut out the world with headphones and listened to music for most of Oct. 7. Although she now wakes up screaming every night, "she refuses to share how she feels with us and does not want to talk about what happened at all," Goldsmith told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

In the immediate aftermath of Hamas' murderous rampage through southern Israel, roughly 30,000 residents of the *kibbutzim*, *moshavim* and towns near the Palestinian enclave were evacuated from their homes. An additional 100,000 people, including from the north, were evacuated

by the government in the days that followed, and another estimated 100,000 people living in areas slightly beyond the government's designated evacuation zone fled by themselves.

The sudden and brutal disruption to life for more than 200,000 Israelis — the majority of whom are still living in temporary accommodations such as hotels — has been enormous, with people struggling both emotionally and financially. But for people with physical and mental disabilities, such as Lior, and their families, the sudden disruption to their daily routine and to their familiar surroundings has been especially traumatic.

For Lior, the war that landed on her doorstep meant not only leaving behind the comfort of her family home, but also the shuttering of the special work program she attended daily in Sderot. In the weeks that followed Oct. 7, she had no daily framework, and the family had no assistance in caring for a frightened young woman struggling to communicate her thoughts and feelings.

"When we arrived here, we had no idea what had happened or what would happen," Goldsmith said, adding, "It was awful. Lior was miserable, and emotionally, I was broken. I could not deal with anything."

The family did receive offers of help from social workers and well-meaning volunteers but, Goldsmith said, the situation was so overwhelming — Lior needs 24-hour supervision — and "my whole belief system had been destroyed, I didn't trust anyone."

It took three weeks for the Goldsmith family, who were now crammed into two hotel rooms, to connect with representatives

from Shekel, an Israeli nonprofit that provides a variety of services and integrative programs for people with cognitive, intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In contrast to government agencies, Shekel, like many other nonprofits, almost immediately mobilized its staff and activities following Oct. 7, offering free specialized services to people with disabilities — and their families — who had been directly affected or displaced by the terrible events.

Along with setting up a 24-hour hotline, Shekel staff deployed to hotels and other evacuation centers to offer trauma treatment, as well as daily activities so that primary carers would have a break to concentrate on their own lives. In addition, the organization's vocational rehabilitation day centers in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv opened their doors to more than a dozen evacuees from the north and the south, including Lior.

Inbal Milo David, the director of therapeutic centers at Shekel, explained to *eJP* that in times of war and national crisis, people with disabilities "are an especially vulnerable sector of the community."

"Some are exposed to relentless sirens and rocket bombardments on a daily basis, without fully understanding what is happening or what they are feeling," she said. "Others face massive changes to their routine and find it difficult to adjust."

"We have seen a constant rise in stress, anxiety attacks, sleep disturbances, challenging behaviors, somatic symptoms and other mental health issues," Milo David said, adding that there is a massive shortage of "psychotherapists experienced

at working with people with disabilities and with trauma.”

Evacuating people with disabilities is extremely complicated, Ofer Dahari, Shekel’s CEO, continued.

He described the days following Oct. 7 as “chaotic” and said that in certain locations, the government’s welfare system collapsed entirely.

“Many people turned to nongovernmental organizations,” said Dahari, pointing out that it took the government several weeks to begin functioning again. “While some people were evacuated to hotels, others needed help finding accessible apartments – the difficulties people with disabilities faced were huge.”

“We know this situation is hard for everyone but for the people we work with, we need to think about how they will adapt to a new staff, to new work placements, to new educational frameworks, new neighborhoods, new bus lines and more,” he said.

At Access Israel, a nonprofit that promotes inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities, founder and chairman Yuval Wagner said his staff has also been working nonstop since Oct. 7. From physically helping to evacuate people with disabilities to helping evacuees find accessible accommodation, Wagner said the organization was now working on processing what it had learned from the current crisis and was already preparing for the next emergency.

“One factor we need to focus on is preparedness,” he stated, noting that a possible war in the north with the Iranian-backed Shiite group Hezbollah would likely be worse than the war now raging in Gaza.

“Even though the war in the south was intense, there were breaks when we

could evacuate people with special needs,” Wagner said. “Now we need to think outside the box because when we talk about a war with Lebanon, it will be much more intense, and we don’t know if it will even be possible to move all those in need.”

“Unfortunately, the government is not doing much in this regard,” he said, highlighting Access Israel’s “Protected as Possible” project that is working on finding solutions for those who do not have quick access to shelters or safe rooms.

Tali Marcus, the executive director of Bizchut, an organization that works to promote the rights of people with disabilities, said she was also working to understand the legacy of the current emergency in order to help society’s most vulnerable in the future.

Marcus said that while nonprofits such as Shekel and Access Israel quickly adapted their activities following Oct. 7, “the government was in shock. They were not doing anything and civil society, like in every other sphere of life, stepped in and began working to help.”

She said that certain regulations such as prioritizing the evacuation of people with disabilities and the elderly or providing accessible and appropriate accommodation were not properly enacted by the government.

“There was a lot of confusion,” Marcus continued, describing how there were many stories of the authorities “sending text messages to religiously observant people on Shabbat or sending people to places that were not accessible.”

While most of those logistical problems were eventually solved, Marcus said one of the biggest problems was the lack of a comprehensive national database for people with disabilities, which is partly due to Israel’s privacy laws preventing personal

information from being shared between different agencies.

“We are working on this now,” she said, describing a pilot program that will allow municipalities access to a master list of people with disabilities in their area and dictate when and where those people would be evacuated to in future emergencies.

Marcus also said that there needed to be a better mechanism in place to help those whose disability prevented them from being evacuated, pointing out that some people opted to stay in their homes because it was too hard to move them.

For Tali Goldsmith and her daughter, Lior, however, the biggest challenge now is what comes next.

The events of Oct. 7 and subsequent war have scuttled well-laid plans for Lior to begin living more independently in a young adult group home, which was slated to open on neighboring Kibbutz Yad Mordechai.

“We can’t even think about that now,” said Goldsmith, who prior to Oct. 7 had been working with the local municipality and Shekel to open the new group home. “Who knows when we will go back and if that will even happen now.”

Asked about the future of the project, and similar ones already operating in the south and the north, Shekel’s Dahari said that the Yad Mordechai home and another one being planned on Kibbutz Kfar Aza were now on hold.

“We don’t know what is going to happen,” he said. “The whole idea of these projects is that while we operate the home, the community adopts the people who live there. At this stage, we don’t even know when and if those communities will function again in the future – and if they do, will they have the energy to accept among them a group of people who have greater needs?” ♦

Poll: Roughly half of U.S. Jews changing behavior because of antisemitism

New AJC survey finds a quarter of American Jewish adults say they have personally experienced antisemitism, 63% say they feel less safe; results unsurprising but still 'shocking,' CEO Ted Deutch says

By Haley Cohen

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Roughly half of American Jewish adults say they have changed their behavior, including where they go or what they wear, out of their fear of antisemitism. A quarter of U.S. Jews have personally experienced targeted antisemitism. And nearly two-thirds (63%) say that American Jews are less secure now than they were a year ago.

Those were some of the findings of a survey released Tuesday morning by the American Jewish Committee, which measured attitudes on antisemitism both within and outside of the Jewish community.

The findings were unsurprising but still “shocking,” AJC CEO Ted Deutch told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

“The fact that over 60% of Jewish adults feel less secure living in America than they did before, says this is a problem for all of America, not just the Jewish community,”

Deutch said. “Big picture is that what had been an enormous challenge for our community already has become a five-alarm fire, and it requires everyone to do something about it.”

The results are a compilation of data from two surveys. The AJC’s fifth annual survey of 1,528 American Jews was initially conducted on Oct. 5, 2023, with the goal of fully launching the following week; however, fieldwork was paused when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7.

In response to the attack, and the subsequent increase of antisemitism and anti-Israel activity nationwide, especially on college campuses, the questionnaire was adjusted to add survey items to measure awareness of the terrorist attacks and the impact of those attacks on feelings of safety in the U.S. The revised survey ran from Oct. 7- Nov. 21, 2023.

The second survey was of U.S. adults, collected from a nationally representative sample of 1,223 Americans over age 18. Data

for this companion survey were collected from Oct. 17-24, 2023.

The report found a certain disconnect between younger American Jews (18-29) compared to adults over 30. Forty-four percent of the younger demographic said antisemitism is a very serious problem in the U.S., while 55% of those over 30 reported the same.

Overall, 53% of respondents said antisemitism in the U.S. is a very serious problem, compared with 43% who said the same in 2022.

The 2023 survey repeated and added to a section from last year’s survey examining the continued increase of antisemitism on college campuses — which was climbing even before Oct. 7. One in five (20%) respondents with recent or current college experience said they have felt or been excluded from a group or an event on campus because they are Jewish, nearly double the share from 2022 (12%). ♦