

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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NOVEMBER 6, 2025

The 36 hours in Washington that took hostage families from grief to gratitude

The story of how the hostage families came to learn their loved ones were coming home, told to JI by key players

By Gabby Deutch

When several dozen people gathered at the Kennedy Center for a yoga class overlooking the Potomac River on Oct. 8, the class began with a practice familiar to anyone who regularly does yoga: intention setting.

The class was called "Yoga for Carmel," in honor of Carmel Gat, a 40-year-old Israeli yoga instructor who was taken captive by Hamas from Kibbutz Be'eri on Oct. 7 and killed last year alongside five other hostages, including Hersh Goldberg-Polin. Among those taking part in the class were former hostages and the family members of those still being held in Gaza, all of whom had gathered at the same spot a day earlier for a somber event marking two years since the attacks that reshaped their lives.

"What do you do in yoga? You set your intention. You think about the release of the hostages. That's all we thought about during the entire yoga session," recalled Matan Sivek, who until last month was the director of the Hostage Families Forum's U.S. operation. As soon as the class ended, a cacophony of cellphones began ringing as news broke about a possible deal.

"At 6 p.m., we got the news that the deal might be happening, that it's evolving super rapidly," said Sivek. Soon it was confirmed: Israel and Hamas had agreed to a ceasefire that would result in the release of all the hostages and an end to the war. The news capped off an emotional 36 hours, which began with the Oct. 7 memorial event at the Kennedy Center a day earlier.

Sivek sat down with *Jewish Insider* last week for a wide-ranging conversation reflecting on the two-year-long advocacy campaign — spearheaded by Sivek, his wife Bar Ben-Yaakov and leading Jewish organizations including the American Jewish Committee and Schusterman Family Philanthropies — demanding the release of the more than 250 people taken hostage by Hamas during the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks.

"I'm very happy that I am part of something that was successful at the end. There are many initiatives and nonprofits around the world who try to solve different issues, and they will never solve them. People try to end famine. They try to find a medicine for cancer. They try to stop addiction," said Sivek. "For us, it's something

that you can say, 'Wow, we really saved lives.'"

Advocating for the hostages was a task that Sivek and Ben-Yaakov took on almost by accident, but they ultimately became the address for Israeli hostage families who came to Washington to advocate for the release of their loved ones. The couple helped arrange meetings with Democratic and Republican lawmakers, officials in the Biden and Trump administrations and political and faith leaders around the country. Their strategy was to meet with anyone who would listen.

"We really were here to say that this humanitarian issue transcends all politics, and this was our strategy from Day One," said Sivek.

It made sense, then, that the moment when President Donald Trump shared with the families that the hostages would be coming the following Monday — five days after that yoga class — was in a phone call to the hostage families as they stood in Sivek and Ben-Yaakov's Georgetown living room. A video of the call, placed by Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, who put Trump

on speakerphone, quickly went viral and appeared on news broadcasts around the world.

"President Trump, you have the best crowd in the world," Lutnick said into the phone.

Everyone in the room shouted together, smiles on their faces: "Thank you!"

"You just take care of yourselves. The hostages will come back. They're all coming back on Monday," Trump said. Among those in the room were released hostages Keith Siegel, Iair Horn, Doron Steinbecher and Arbel Yehoud, as well as family members of Gali and Ziv Berman and Omri Miran, who at the time were still in Gaza, along with Horn's brother Eitan and Yehoud's partner Ariel Cunio.

"This is the moment when the world realized the timing of the release of the hostages," said Sivek.

The White House deputy press secretary, Anna Kelly, told JI this week that Trump was deeply affected by the story of the hostages.

"President Trump is always motivated to end human suffering around the world, and he was horrified by the images of Oct. 7 and the capture of innocent Americans, Israelis and others taken hostage by Hamas," said Kelly.

Within the Trump administration, Lutnick was working behind the scenes on behalf of the hostages. His wife, Allison, was the driving force behind his advocacy.

Allison Lutnick had gotten to know many of the families after a trip to Israel early last year, when she met the mother of Omer Shem Tov, a hostage who was freed in February. Allison then connected with Sivek when she moved to Washington this year, and soon after he facilitated a meeting between the Lutnicks and several freed hostages at the Lutnicks' apartment in Miami.

"We spent three three hours together in our apartment talking and sharing. They spoke of the horrors of what they'd been through and we spoke of the horrors of what we had been through 24 years earlier on 9/11," she told JI on Wednesday. At the time, Howard Lutnick was the CEO of the financial firm Cantor Fitzgerald, which lost 658 employees on 9/11, including his brother Gary.

"There was definitely a bond between all of us, having experienced a terrorist attack and the loss of loved ones and horrible trauma," she added. "Howard and I felt this very deep connection with them and what they were going through. We had an understanding of it."

Whenever Sivek asked, Allison Lutnick texted leading administration officials like Vice President JD Vance, Attorney General Pam Bondi and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth directly to set up meetings for them with hostage families. The Lutnicks' family foundation supported the Sukkah of Hope at the Kennedy Center, where the Oct. 7 commemoration event took place. (The sukkah was supposed to be set up on the Ellipse, outside the White House, but the government shutdown scuttled that plan. So Allison Lutnick, a Kennedy Center board member, reached out to the center's president, Ric Grenell — and, thus, it was moved there.)

She and her husband both spoke at the memorial event, and that morning in the sukkah, a majority of Trump administration cabinet secretaries gathered for a breakfast with the hostage families.

"We are part of you. We are with you, and we will help get them home," Howard Lutnick said in a speech. Less than 36 hours later, there was a breakthrough in the deal.

"The two-year anniversary of Oct. 7 was a day of intense emotion, sadness, mourning and disbelief and horror that it's been two years. And then the next day, Oct. 8, was this incredible elation. It just couldn't have been more different," Allison Lutnick said. "It was extraordinary to walk into Matan's house later that night and celebrate with the families. It was the first time I'd ever seen them smile for a picture."

She and her husband arrived at the impromptu celebration with two bottles of champagne. Meanwhile, Lisa Eisen and Stacy Schusterman, the president and the chair of Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, showed up with food for 30. They had been planning to host Sivek's family and all the hostage families for Sukkot that night — Eisen and her husband had purchased a larger sukkah in preparation — but the gathering never happened.

"I called Lisa. I was like, 'Lisa, you

worked so hard for this dinner, but I think we cannot make it.' And it was 6 p.m. At 7 we were supposed to be there," Sivek said. "I was like, 'A deal is happening. I cannot take them from the city. They need to stay here.'"

"I said, 'Well, this is the best excuse ever to not come,'" Eisen recounted to JI. She and her family sat down to eat, toasted the hostages and said the *Shehechyanu* prayer, expecting to have a much smaller dinner at home. Then Sivek asked her to come celebrate with them.

"So we packed up all of the food for 30 people, and we drove down to Matan and Bar's house, and we set up the meal because they had no food," said Eisen, who split the cooking with her husband: three kinds of soup (coconut lentil, red lentil and matzoh ball), schnitzel, salads, homemade hummus, pies and cakes. "It was one of the most powerful, moving, beautiful moments. And I have to say, Matan and Bar, it wouldn't happen without them. They were so tireless."

It was in that environment with hugging and crying and eating — critical to any Jewish event — that everyone realized this deal, finally, seemed to be real.

"This is how our kitchen became famous," Sivek said with a laugh. "For us it was some sort of closure as well, the fact that after two very difficult years, the announcement came from our kitchen."

Almost immediately, Sivek and his partners began booking the Israelis on flights back home; less than a week later, they would be reunited with their loved ones. It was a moment these Israelis had hardly dared to imagine during the agony of the preceding two years. In that period, their pain was shared by Jews around the world, who wore dog tags and yellow ribbon pins to constantly remind others of the people imprisoned in Gaza.

"Many people view this as a miracle that happened, that they're out, and of course, it seemed like a miracle. But there was a lot of work of hostage families and former hostages behind the scenes to make it happen," Sivek said. "I think that the Jewish people should be very, very proud of themselves, that we stood by our people, and we actually managed to save their lives." ♦

What New York City Jewish leaders are most worried about in a Mamdani mayoralty

JI asked senior New York Democratic officials and Jewish community leaders to discuss the top threats that a Mamdani administration could pose to Jewish life in the city

By Haley Cohen

New Yorkers elected democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani on Tuesday as the next New York City mayor, ensuring the city will be headed in a leftward ideological direction for the next four years. Mamdani's election has also sparked widespread concerns in the city's Jewish community about how the incoming mayor, who refused to condemn "globalize the intifada" rhetoric or acknowledge the state of Israel as a Jewish homeland, would impact the day-to-day life of Jewish New Yorkers.

Jewish Insider asked senior New York Democratic officials and Jewish community leaders — granted anonymity to offer their candid thoughts — to discuss the top threats that a Mamdani administration could pose to Jewish life in the city.

Respondents expressed worry that Mamdani's anti-Israel worldview could lead to heightened antisemitism, bring a vanguard of leftist operatives hostile to Jewish concerns into City Hall, impact the effectiveness of the New York Police Department and fray ties between the city and Israeli institutions or businesses. He has even vowed to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu if he visits, though experts have voiced doubt on the legality of the move.

These are five of the leading concerns from the Jewish communal leadership in New York City, home to the largest Jewish community in the country, about what Mamdani might do as mayor:

1. Mamdani has expressed a desire to defund, or even disband, the NYPD's Strategic Response Group — the unit that responds to major protests, such as the anti-Israel encampment on Columbia University's campus last year:

"He's been pushing for years to disband the NYPD's Strategic Response Group," a

source with knowledge of city government told JI. In December 2024, Mamdani tweeted, "As mayor, I will disband the SRG, which has cost taxpayers millions in lawsuit settlements and brutalized countless New Yorkers exercising their first amendment rights."

The SRG responds to hostage situations, riots and protests, including the deadly Park Avenue office building shooting that occurred in July. In April 2024, the Strategic Response Group was called in to assist with clearing the anti-Israel encampment that overtook Columbia University, which saw several incidents of physical assault against Jewish students.

"One question is if he's actually successful in disbanding them," the source continued. "That will depend on his will and bureaucracy and whether he can put together an administration to accomplish his tasks. If he's going to be an effective mayor, then yes he could do it. And if he is, then you're going to see completely different responses in the city."

"Something super important is whether a Mamdani administration would actually have a proactive approach to policing and using security in a way that will make sure Jewish New Yorkers are safe. If it's not a priority for them, then I'm afraid to see what will happen."

2. Mamdani could further politicize NYC Public Schools at a time when anti-Israel rhetoric and related antisemitic incidents have surged dramatically in K-12 schools:

In the aftermath of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terror attacks, New York City Public Schools launched new curriculum materials on antisemitism and Islamophobia in its schools. As mayor, Mamdani will have power to appoint a new chancellor of public

schools, who could rewrite that curriculum.

Former Rep. Jamaal Bowman, previously a far-left congressman who lost reelection in part because of his radical views towards Israel, has been discussed as a potential candidate to lead the country's largest public school system. Bowman embraced a number of hostile positions toward Israel in the aftermath of Oct. 7 and throughout his reelection campaign, including pledging to oppose funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system and endorsing the BDS movement.

The New York City Public School system has seen a surge of anti-Israel activity since Oct. 7. In November 2023, a Queens high school teacher said she was forced to hide in a locked office as a mob of students tried to push their way into her classroom, after learning she attended a pro-Israel rally.

In May, a "Teacher Career Pathways" newsletter for educators in the city's 1,800 schools called for students to be heard on the "genocide in Gaza." NYC Schools Chancellor Melissa Aviles-Ramos apologized for the mass communication, stating that it should not have been released without consultation from the mayor's office.

A political insider told JI there is anxiety the new administration will fuel anti-Israel discourse in the classroom. "There's concern about what curriculums will be used to teach about the [Israeli-Palestinian] conflict," he said. "What vendors will be used?"

The American Jewish Committee announced plans on Wednesday to "boost the 'Hidden Voices' curriculum in New York City public schools, which provides resources, lesson plans and workshops to highlight the histories and contributions of underrepresented groups in U.S. history."

3. Mamdani has expressed support for the BDS movement, which could

have a wide-ranging impact on Israeli partnerships with New York City companies or institutions.

Mamdani said in June that he would attempt to divest from Israel if elected mayor — including discontinuing the NYC-Israel Economic Council, which Mayor Eric Adams recently launched.

“His pursuit of discriminatory policies that boycott and divest from Israel, companies doing business in Israel, and U.S.-Israel tech partnerships could cost New York taxpayers billions over the next ten years,” said the head of a leading Jewish organization. “He knows [BDS] policy is discriminatory and antisemitic, yet he refuses to abandon it. Even worse, he continues to double down and has made it an important piece of his economic strategy.”

Mamdani has also said he would “reassess” the partnership between Cornell University and Israel’s Technion, potentially displacing it from its campus on Roosevelt Island. “Ending [the Cornell-Technion] partnership would deal a blow to the city’s booming tech sector, chase away innovators, destroy vital educational opportunities, and damage New York’s reputation as a global business hub,” Ted Deutch, CEO of the AJC, said in a statement.

A political insider and Jewish communal leader told JI those are policies Mamdani could enforce, but “he would have to go out of his way to.”

“He said he’ll divest from Israel but it would be unprecedented for him to start

organizing the pension boards under the comptroller,” the source said. “It doesn’t mean he won’t do it, but it’s more complicated than the stroke of a pen. No one knows if he will be passive, aggressive or proactive; there are many options of what we could do.”

4. Mamdani’s inability to condemn antisemitism from his public perch, while associating himself with extremist individuals could lead to a rise in antisemitism:

During the campaign, Mamdani affiliated with anti-Israel activist Linda Sarsour, considered to be one of the mayor-elect’s mentors and Imam Siraj Wahhaj, who Mamdani called one of the “foremost Muslim leaders” in the U.S. Wahhaj has a history of supporting controversial figures involved in terrorism, including testifying as a character witness at the trial of Omar Abdel-Rahman who was found guilty of seditious conspiracy for his role in plotting the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Jeremy Corbyn, who led Britain’s Labour Party and was suspended over antisemitic comments, also phone-banked for Mamdani in the closing days of the campaign.

Mamdani has said he would oppose using the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition of antisemitism, which would dismantle an executive order signed by Adams in June as part of a push against rising antisemitism.

“Even if Mamdani doesn’t do anything

to actually impact the day-to-day of the Jewish community, the symbolic impact of Mamdani’s victory [is] devastating,” another veteran Jewish communal leader said. “It shows that a person espousing views that most of us consider dangerous and antisemitic can get elected. It’s the breaking of a taboo.”

5. Mamdani’s failure to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism could weaken enforcement of laws protecting Jewish institutions:

Throughout his campaign, Mamdani repeatedly said he does not support Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and that his criticism of Israel does not amount to antisemitism. But the majority of Jewish Americans report that Israel is a large part of their Jewish identity.

Antisemitism watchers have noted that anti-Israel demonstrations — especially those on college campuses — have increasingly turned blatantly antisemitic by targeting Jewish, not Israeli, institutions such as Hillels and Chabad houses.

The communal leader and political insider added that it’s uncertain where Mamdani draws a line at anti-Israel activity crossing into antisemitism, and therefore whether he would protect Jewish institutions. For example, they said, “it’s unclear if he would use protesting a university Hillel with ‘Free Palestine’ as antisemitic or anti-Zionist.” ♦

Birthright Israel Foundation celebrates 25 years with \$220M raised toward new \$900M campaign

Organization hosts top Jewish philanthropists, past participants at Manhattan gala emceed by Jonah Platt, which honored Lynn Schusterman

By Nira Dayanim

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In 1999, with the lofty goal of bringing every young Jewish adult to Israel free of cost, the nascent Birthright Israel launched its first trip to the Jewish state. Over the next 25 years, the organization would bring over 900,000 young Jews from some 70 countries to Israel.

Last night, at a gala marking a quarter century of activity at Manhattan's Pier Sixty, Birthright Israel Foundation's CEO, Elias Saratovsky, announced two new goals: a \$900 million fundraising campaign aimed at securing the organization's future and bringing 200,000 participants to Israel over the next five years.

The campaign has already secured more than \$220 million in commitments, Saratovsky told *eJewishPhilanthropy* — \$132 million toward its \$650 million goal for trips, and \$90 million toward its \$250 million goal for legacy commitments.

"We have a solid foundation of gifts," he told eJP. "We're grateful to everyone who has given so far, and now the opportunity we have in front of us is to ask the entire Jewish community to support an organization that has impacted the entire Jewish world over the last two and a half decades."

Alongside Jewish summer camps,

Birthright trips are credited with increased connection to Israel and Jewish engagement among participants, research from Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies has found. A participant on the first Birthright Israel trip, Saratovsky also credits that experience for his own Jewish involvement.

But at \$5,000 per participant, the signature trips are also a mammoth financial undertaking, requiring both logistical mastery and a constant funding stream. (See: the organization's efforts to quickly charter a cruise ship in order to evacuate participants who were stranded in Israel after the skies were closed during the war with Iran last June.)

Since its early days, Birthright has benefited from support from some of the Jewish community's most prolific donors — chief among them Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt, as well as Sheldon and Dr. Miriam Adelson, who donated half a billion to the organization over 15 years; following Sheldon Adelson's death in 2021, the family scaled back its contributions, encouraging other donors to fill the gap.

Many of those supporters — representing nearly every major Jewish foundation and individual donor family — turned out for the Manhattan gala — a sprawling, candlelit

affair packed to capacity. At the event, which was attended by nearly 1,000 trip alumni, along with Jewish professionals and donors, Lynn Schusterman was honored for her contribution to the project, delivering a speech about the love that her late husband, Charles, had for Israel and the butterfly effect she's witnessed since the program launched.

"Each of you in this room has the power and the responsibility to decide how the story of Israel and the Jewish people unfolds. When my late husband, Charlie, passed away, I had this idea of creating what I call 'the Charlie' — young people who had gone on Birthright, got past their community and [gave] back from what they had learned and the impact of Birthright," said Schusterman.

The event was emceed by Jonah Platt. Schusterman's daughter, Stacy, and the co-president of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, Lisa Eisen, co-chaired the event. Other speakers included Birthright Israel cofounder Charles Bronfman, Saratovsky and Birthright Israel CEO Gidi Mark.

"This is a room filled with leaders, with dreamers, with community," said Platt.

Fortunately, for an organization seeking nearly \$700 million in donations, it was also a room filled with philanthropists. ♦

Nate Morris seeks McConnell's seat with populist, pro-Israel message

In an interview with JI, the wealthy businessman declined to weigh in on Tucker Carlson but said Republicans 'shouldn't be in the business of canceling anyone'

By Matthew Kassel

As the GOP uneasily contends with rising hostility to Israel among younger right-wing voters, Nate Morris, a 45-year-old Republican Senate candidate in Kentucky who is courting the populist right with an anti-establishment message, emphasizes there is at least one long-standing party axiom he will never abandon: unwavering support for the Jewish state.

Morris, the wealthy founder of a successful waste management company who calls himself a "Trump America-First conservative," said his commitment to upholding a strong U.S.-Israel alliance extends from his alignment with President Donald Trump's vision for the Middle East.

"I think he's been the most pro-Israel president we've had in our country's history, and I want to continue that kind of leadership on the issue in the United States Senate, on behalf of Kentucky and the country," Morris told *Jewish Insider* in an interview last Friday during the Republican Jewish Coalition's annual summit in Las Vegas, where he met privately with members to pitch his campaign to succeed retiring Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

Trump, he added, "has gotten it right, and obviously the success speaks for itself."

But Morris also cited a more personal reason for what he described as his unequivocally pro-Israel worldview, explaining that, as a "proud" evangelical Christian, he has "always believed Israel is the land that was given to the Jews by God."

"My views on Israel are never going to change," he pledged. "They're in my bones. That's the way I was raised. That's what my faith teaches me."

"Look, all our differences here and the different positions that are out there, we've got to have more education, we've got to have more conversations as a party," Morris said, without referring to Carlson or Roberts directly. "I want to discuss these things as a party, get on the same page as a party."

His comments, while hardly unusual in a deeply evangelical state like Kentucky, come at a fraught moment for conservative Christian supporters of Israel, in the immediate wake of Tucker Carlson's friendly interview with the neo-Nazi streamer Nick Fuentes, a source of sustained criticism throughout the RJC's three-day summit attended by elected officials, conservative activists, media personalities and other political candidates.

But even as Carlson had expressed his disdain for Christian Zionists, claiming they had been seized by a "brain virus," Morris was relatively cautious when addressing the interview with Fuentes as well as the backlash toward the Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank whose president, Kevin Roberts, has continued to stand behind Carlson.

"Look, all our differences here and the different positions that are out there, we've got to have more education, we've got to have more conversations as a party," he said diplomatically, without referring to Carlson or Roberts directly. "I want to discuss these things as a party, get on the same page as a party."

Morris also stressed that "we shouldn't be in the business of canceling anyone, but educating them and making sure they

understand the full context and what's at stake here."

"That's the way we're going to win as a party," he said, "and I think that is what's going to tamp out any differences that we have and that we shouldn't be having."

The hesitance to offer a forthright condemnation speaks not only to Carlson's strong influence in the MAGA movement but also to how his fan base likely overlaps with the right-wing coalition that Morris is hoping to activate in a competitive primary with two more-established rivals.

Morris, a friend of Vice President JD Vance who launched his campaign in June, is facing Daniel Cameron, the former state attorney general, and Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY), both of whom are strong supporters of Israel. Morris described the race as a "proxy war between Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump," as the outgoing senator has become one of the most vocal Republican critics of the president in the upper chamber and frequently warns of growing isolationism in the GOP.

Even as he worked as an intern for McConnell early in his career, Morris, who attended graduate school at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs as well as Oxford, has sought to tie his rivals to the retiring senator, arguing that Kentucky voters are "ready for change" and that Congress is in need of "new perspectives."

To underscore his point, Morris noted that Zach Witkoff, the son of Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, recently hosted an event for his Senate campaign, where Morris got the chance to "hear firsthand a lot of the inside details" about how the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas "came together."

"What I love about the president is he

uses tools of diplomacy, the same tools he uses as a negotiator and as a business leader, and he has applied those to his foreign policy to be able to get things done,” Morris said.

Trump’s approach “shows that when you have outsiders and business people negotiating, you can get great outcomes,” he added. “That’s one of the big reasons why I’m running for the U.S. Senate. I think that we need more people coming from the outside.”

“The thing is, unless you go there and see it, you don’t understand that every day, you don’t know what’s going to happen,” Morris told JI. “You’re under constant threat and potential for assault when you live there and when you’re a citizen of Israel.”

He also called Vance, who encouraged him to run for the open seat, a fellow “outsider” who “wasn’t a career politician” before he launched his own bid for Senate in Ohio just a few years ago. Morris said that they had talked about foreign policy “in the

context of” their “general worldview,” but did not elaborate.

Morris was previously a fundraiser for Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), the libertarian Republican, with whom he traveled to Israel in 2013 on a trip that included evangelical leaders. He said the visit instilled in him a heightened sensitivity to Israel’s ongoing security concerns. (Paul has regularly voted against military aid to Israel and opposed Trump’s attack against Iran’s nuclear program, as part of his overall opposition to foreign aid and military engagement overseas.)

“The thing is, unless you go there and see it, you don’t understand that every day, you don’t know what’s going to happen,” he told JI. “You’re under constant threat and potential for assault when you live there and when you’re a citizen of Israel.”

The first-time candidate acknowledged waning support for Israel in younger Republican circles, even as he declined to criticize Carlson and others for stoking anti-Israel sentiment on the far right.

He expressed concern about students who posed a series of antisemitic questions to Vance at a recent Turning Point USA campus event, but stopped short of addressing the backlash the vice president subsequently faced for choosing not to challenge the students’ hostile remarks about Jews and Israel.

While his evangelical faith primarily drives his own support for Israel, Morris said he also believes that “it makes the most sense for the United States,” and skeptical younger conservatives could be persuaded simply on the basis of that argument. “Even looking at it economically,” he said, “I could sell that all day long to any American, to say you’re going to prosper more by this relationship.”

“I think that these are the kind of tools that we can use to get over any hatred, any disagreement — any of the discourse that has been disgusting we’ve seen online,” Morris told JI. “These are the kind of things that can help change hearts and minds.” ♦

NOVEMBER 3, 2025

New translation of Hebrew works, ‘Class of 95,’ offers English speakers fresh insight into the Rabin assassination

The anthology’s editor, Barak Sella, says the works offer different perspectives on ‘one of the most important events in... Jewish history’

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The assassination of then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, 30 years ago tomorrow, remains one of the seminal moments in Israeli history. It represents the peak of domestic Israeli political violence and the beginning of the end of a two-state solution-based peace process. It also marked the last time that a fully left-wing coalition led the country.

The killing, by a religious far-right activist, Yigal Amir, who claimed to be following a religious decree designating

Rabin a *rodef*, or a person who can be killed because of the threat they pose to others, prompted general criticism of the religious Zionist community, from which the prime minister’s fiercest critics came. This, in turn, spurred feelings of being scapegoated by the national religious camp, whose leaders have denied collective responsibility for the assassination, putting the blame solely on Amir.

The memorial day dedicated to his assassination has almost always been a political affair, with speakers at the national ceremonies often criticizing Benjamin

Netanyahu, who presided over a particularly critical protest against Rabin days before the assassination and who has led the country for most of the time since the murder. Netanyahu often forgoes the events, making them even more lopsided politically. Such was the case this year as well, with a Tel Aviv rally on Saturday night, attended by some 150,000 people, which was rife with both thinly veiled and explicit criticism of the premier.

A new English translation of poetry wades into this complexity. Based on an anthology that was first published in

Hebrew in 2012, *Class of 95* presents 40 poems and prose that grapple with the event and its aftermath, along with a new foreword by Shalom Hartman Institute President Yehuda Kurtzer and afterword by Silvio Jaskowicz, the head of the Zionist Enterprises Department in the World Zionist Organization and secretary-general of the socialist Habonim Dror youth movement.

JewishPhilanthropy spoke with Barak Sella, the anthology's editor and an American Israeli educator and community organizer, about the book and his goals for it, why the assassination is not widely memorialized, particularly outside of Israel, and about the particular dangers of political violence in a country like Israel. (*Disclosure: Sella and this reporter are both fellows of the Jewish Federation of Tulsa, Okla.,'s Elson Israel Fellowship.*)

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Judah Ari Gross: What is your goal with this book? Who is the target audience?

Barak Sella: The target audience is Jews living around the world who don't speak Hebrew, first and foremost. And I would say above that, the target audience is Jewish educators, rabbis, anyone who this book could serve as a tool to educate and speak about the assassination in a way that's thoughtful and supports the idea of open conversation. But it's not only for educators. I think anyone who wants to learn about the event — but also figure out what they're feeling about it and what's their part in the story — can find a lot of value in this book.

The way I see it, the Rabin assassination is one of the most important events in Israeli history, but also in Jewish history in the last century. And it really matters how we remember this event. First of all, that we actually even remember and commemorate it, but it matters how we remember that event and what kind of shared narrative and story we tell.

Is this a story that's only the failure of democracy and of our ability to solve our differences in Jewish sovereignty? Or is this a story that will serve us as a warning sign... to what we need to build? Because for most of Jewish history, the Jews have not been sovereign. Jewish sovereignty is something that is on the margins of Jewish culture and

history. And it's something we need to learn. And remembering this event, not only the tragedy of losing a very important leader who, some people supported and some did not, but Rabin was also the leader of the Jewish state, and he was assassinated by a fellow Jew who did not agree with his path. So it's our failure to govern ourselves. I think anyone who cares about Jewish sovereignty, who cares about Jewish self-determination, who cares about peace, who cares about democracy, can find a lot in this book.

The reason I put it out is that I moved to Israel from the U.S. when I was 9. I was 10 when Rabin was assassinated. And for me, the Rabin assassination was parallel with my socialization into Israeli society. And I understood what it means to be Israeli as Israeli society understood what it means to be a society post-Rabin. I was very involved my whole life because I really saw that shaping this memory is crucial to what Israel will become. And the reason I put this book out now is because, unfortunately, what I've encountered over the years is that the Rabin Memorial Day is really absent from American Jewish culture, from the American Jewish calendar. You don't see Memorial Days. Educators don't really talk about it with students or teens. It's not something that the next generation is being educated about thoughtfully.

And there's many reasons for this, right? It's such a contentious topic. It's so charged. Israel is difficult as it is. And it also seems like [people think,] "This is something that happened in Israel. Is it really our place, in world Jewry, to create events and memorials around us. But I actually think that this is not an Israeli event. I think I see it as a Jewish event.

If you want to create memory, you need a story. It's not enough to have articles and op-eds. You need something that speaks to the heart, especially around an issue that's so contentious. What's beautiful about poetry is that it allows you to encounter perspectives that you might be very uncomfortable with or that might be difficult. But they're in a way that is open and allows you to not just say, "Do I agree or not agree with this opinion?" but more like, "Do I understand what this person is experiencing or is trying to say or is feeling?" And I think that is therapeutic and needed.

JAG: Like you said, the Rabin assassination is still so loaded, it's still such a charged topic in Israel, particularly regarding the relationship between left and right or secular and religious. Much of the secular left holds the religious right responsible for the assassination because of the incitement against Rabin, while the religious right feels scapegoated as a community. And those are such deeply felt beliefs that have permeated Israeli society, which anyone who wants to understand this place would have to understand. But this book doesn't exactly get into that. On its own, it's more of an artifact, a snapshot of the moment rather than an explanation of it. Are you or someone else building more of a curriculum around this to explain those dynamics?

BS: So first of all, I'm also going to develop a curriculum and I'm going to do speaking events and meet educators and students and talk to them about using this book of poems to talk about the assassination.

But also, yes, I think saying that it's an artifact is actually a great way of putting it. It's gonna be out there. And people will decide what to do with it. It's poetry. You can't tell people what to do with art. The idea is you put art out there, and you have to see what it makes people feel, what it brings up in them, and what they decide to do with it.

I do imagine that this could be something that if a rabbi is trying to think, "What do I talk about on [Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day] in my sermon?" They can pick up *Class of '95* and find something that speaks to them. A teacher, a parent, anyone who wants to talk to their children or their peers or with themselves can pick up this book and do some soul searching and soul sharing. That's the way I see it.

It's really interesting that you brought up the tension between religious and secular and right and left because the goal was to bring those tensions into the book. So one of my favorite poems in the book is by a poet called Yosef Ozer, who's a Haredi living in Israel. And he has this extremely powerful poem called *Lo Afiti Bedam, I did not bake with blood*, where he talks about the feeling of going around Tel Aviv with a *kippah* on his head and feeling blamed for murder and being framed. And he makes a comparison

between that and the blood libels of baking matzahs with blood. It gives this opening to an experience, for example, that a religious person had in Israel that I would say most non-religious people are totally unaware of. Even if they're aware of it, it gives them the opportunity to peek into the emotional experience.

There's a beautiful poem by Daniel Baumgarten. It's a very short poem. It's called *Silence*, and the poem is "Dear students/please raise your hands/what does it feel like to have peace/within reach?"

And that gives a perspective of an educator, a lefty, a Meretz supporter, who grew up during a time when he felt peace was in reach. And since then silence. The poem was written in 2015.

So I think the idea of the book is to invite people into conversation, into perspectives and feelings that they might not have. And many people, especially the older population, who do have personal experiences about the assassination, this book will allow them to access some of those memories and experiences and understand them in a better way.

JAG: How did you develop this project, both the book itself and the curriculum that you are preparing?

BS: So this [English] version of the book was sponsored by the Department of Zionist Enterprises at the World Zionist Organization. But this initiative has been something that's been developing for years. The first edition was published in 2013, so 12 years ago, under the title *Machzor 95*. (*Ed. note: This is a play on words in Hebrew, with machzor meaning both class and holiday prayer book.*) It was published as part of Dror L'Nefesh (the printing press of the socialist Habonim Dror youth movement), and it was actually published almost by mistake. We were planning to do some kind of poetry night for Rabin's 18th Memorial Day, and we went to search for the poets who wrote about Rabin because surely many people wrote poetry about such a momentous event, and we couldn't find anything. Then we realized that it was not in the conversation in literature. And we put out a call for proposals, and we were swamped by dozens of unpublished poems and short stories. And so we decided to

publish a book. The second edition came out in 2022.

This was the first time, the first attempt in Israel to put out poetry and literature around Rabin. But my ambition was always to translate it into English. And so for this edition, we selected 40 poems that we felt would fit better with the American audience, that would speak to them. And we published it in both Hebrew and English because there are still some differences. At the end, there's a very interesting note from the translator to help also understand some of the hidden meanings and more Israeli-centric connotations.

I did editing. Yoni Hammer-Kossoy did the translation. Yehuda Kurtzer did the foreword. Silvio Joskowicz, from the WZO, did the afterword. So a lot of people fed into this, but it's mostly an independent initiative of people over the years who wanted to support this idea.

JAG: It's interesting that, as you say, there wasn't a lot of art and poetry that came out of the Rabin assassination, despite it being such a significant moment in Israeli history. In comparison, it felt like in the weeks after the Oct. 7 attacks, every musician had a new song out about it, every artist was creating something related to it, and it continues today. Why do you think that is? Was the Rabin assassination too political? Too complicated because it was an internal thing as opposed to an outside attack? Or is it just a function of it being easier to self-produce art today?

BS: There are a lot of different possible reasons. One of them — and I think this is also one of the reasons that to this day the Rabin Memorial Day is not widely commemorated in the U.S. and in Israel — is that it's still controversial and still politically charged. So there wasn't enough of a demand for it.

Also, let's remember what happened to Israeli society after the Rabin assassination. We went into another political revolution. We went into the collapse of the peace process and the Second Intifada. So we didn't even have enough years to process this before we were thrown into a new world with, you could say, even more traumatic experiences that put Rabin's assassination

in the rearview mirror.

I was the spokesperson for the national memorial day for about three, four years. And there was always a tension about the purpose of the memorial day. Is it a day where one political camp says, "This is our vision and this was our leader, and you assassinated him," and the other political camp uses it to attack and say, "You always blame us," and to use it to talk about the failures of the Oslo Accords? Does it become a political match or are we able to say this day is not about left or right, it's about what it means to be one Jewish people in a democracy and to be able to have a democracy.

I think Israeli society has not succeeded yet in solidifying that the Rabin Memorial Day is a day about safeguarding democracy. It's still a day that has a lot of political warfare.

We divide the book into five chapters according to the stages of grief. And traditionally, Jewish grief ends after a year. The Jewish tradition differentiates between two types of mourning, *avelut hadasha* and *avelut yeshana*, new mourning and old mourning. New mourning is like if you lost a family member, a friend, anyone you love in your community. It's something personal. But then you have *avelut yeshana*, which is something that happened a long time ago that you don't have any personal or emotional connection to, but it's still something that you mourn. So the best example is the destruction of the Temple. It happened 2,000 years ago. No one was there. We don't know anyone who was murdered or massacred in the destruction of the Temple. But we mourn it because it's a collective sort of old mourning.

The last chapter is called *avelut yeshana*. Yes, many people today have a personal relationship to the Rabin assassination and remember where they were on that evening. But we need to shift the Rabin assassination from *avelut hadasha* to *avelut yeshana*, to something that is part of our canon, part of our story. It's not about what we felt about Rabin. It's about what we feel about this event and its meaning in our shared story and history.

JAG: We are seeing a period of increased political violence around the world.

And one of the goals of Zionism is to have Israel be a “normal country.” If you understand normal to be average, then maybe political assassinations — however terrible and abhorrent as they may be — are just the price of being normal.

BS: So I don't agree that Israel is a “normal country.” I think Israel is a normal country, and it's also not a normal country. First of all, in Jewish history, the Jews always wanted to be “ke'hol ha'amim,” “like all the nations.” And they begged [God], “Stop, we don't need to be the chosen people and have these prophets. We want a king. We want to be just like everyone. We want to be normal.” And Jews, I think, are always in this tension between how we are normal and like everyone else, and how we also

need to create something unique.

And in that sense, while I think a political assassination is maybe a normal thing that almost every modern democracy has had to deal with, for the Jewish people and for our specific history, it has a different meaning because the Jewish People are unlike all these other countries. We existed before the State of Israel. And if there won't be a State of Israel, we will exist after the State of Israel. All these other nations, they exist because they have a state.

Having sovereignty is not a given for the Jewish people. And so the meaning of political assassination is unique in the structure of a Jewish democratic state, which is a complicated and fragile and delicate thing.

Political violence is even more dangerous,

more charged and more unique [for us]. We have Gedaliah ben Ahikam [a biblical political official who was assassinated by Jews, which is tied to the destruction of the First Temple]. We have different events in our history that show us that when we turn against our leaders in this way, it usually leads to our demise.

In the U.S., they assassinated a president, and then they held elections and they moved forward. The Jewish people have a different fragility, have a different history.

So I think that the risks and costs of political violence in a state like Israel, which is small and surrounded by enemies, which is fragile while strong, is much more dangerous. So I think that's why it's a different issue. ♦

NOVEMBER 3, 2025

Longtime higher ed leader Gordon Gee says fear, not free speech, is ruling America's campuses

Gee, who served as president of five universities over 45 years, told JI he believes some administrators are opposed to reform efforts as a knee-jerk reaction to Trump

By Gabby Deutch

Gordon Gee has served as president of more American universities than almost anyone, as far as he knows. Most recently he led West Virginia University, from which he retired in July; before that, he oversaw Ohio State, Vanderbilt, Brown and the University of Colorado over a span of 45 years.

Alongside his various presidencies, Gee also helped open Hillel houses on two different campuses: Vanderbilt and Ohio State. It's a distinction that makes him particularly well-suited to opine on the state of American higher education, which has been grappling with the thorny and sometimes intertwined issues of antisemitism, free speech and student conduct.

A 2002 *Wall Street Journal* article attributed Vanderbilt's decision to increase recruitment of Jewish students to Gee,

himself a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. More than two decades later, under a successor Gee proudly claims, Vanderbilt is still courting Jewish students and positioning itself as a bastion of common sense amid the upheaval that followed the Oct. 7 attacks two years ago.

As Gee, 81, looks back on his career and reflects on the state of academia, he sees a growing chasm between what he described as two different kinds of universities: those like Vanderbilt, that have held firm to the principles of institutional neutrality, and those like his alma mater, Columbia University, that have struggled to take an impartial stance in response to campus protests and antisemitism — and that are wary of making significant change.

“One is the resistance. [They say] anything that comes out of the [Trump] administration, anything that they want,

anything, it is just terrible,” Gee told *Jewish Insider* in an interview last week ahead of a keynote address at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa. “The other are those institutions that are trying to determine a way to move forward and do so by knitting themselves together in different ways. Those are mainly the big public universities. Those are the real future of the American higher education system, and for Jewish students themselves.”

Immediately after Oct. 7, Gee called Rabbi Ari Berman, the president of Yeshiva University, and asked for help in recruiting other university presidents to sign onto a statement condemning the attacks, which was published in *The Wall Street Journal* as a full-page ad. But they were unable to get many of the big-name academic leaders they wanted.

“The biggest challenge facing university presidents is fear,” said Gee. “I think the university presidents, in many ways, are paralyzed, and a lot of it is brought on by themselves, because of the fact that they allowed themselves to become kind of engaged in this ‘go along, get along’ response, and now all of a sudden, when they discover that they’ve got to take a stand, it’s becoming very difficult for many of them.”

“That was when I really started to discover that there’s no moral high ground on this with a number of people. It was very distressing to me,” Gee said. “I think that so many people were walking on eggshells. They didn’t want to have disruptions. They also didn’t want to speak out.”

Although anti-Israel protests took place at West Virginia University, there was no encampment there in the spring of 2024, as happened on dozens of campuses around the country that semester. As Gee watched other university administrators fail to respond in clear ways to the protests that often crossed a line into harassment and targeting of Jewish students, he saw administrators afraid of upsetting stakeholders on campus.

“The biggest challenge facing university presidents is fear,” said Gee. “I think the university presidents, in many ways, are paralyzed, and a lot of it is brought on by themselves, because of the fact that they allowed themselves to become kind of engaged in this ‘go along, get along’ response, and now all of a sudden, when they discover that they’ve got to take a stand, it’s becoming

very difficult for many of them.”

Rather than protecting the free speech of pro-Israel students who were often cowed into silence by classmates, university leaders did little, Gee alleged.

“They were silencing those who were intimidated by it, those who were pro-Israel, those who wanted to speak up in terms of balance,” said Gee. “University administrators were allowing that to happen.”

As President Donald Trump has sought to make his mark on higher education by targeting campus antisemitism and going after university diversity programs, Gee does not share the same skepticism toward Trump’s proposals that has characterized the responses of many university administrators who worry the administration’s actions are too heavy-handed.

In recent weeks, the Trump administration has approached several top universities about signing onto a compact that would give them preferential access to federal funds. No university has yet signed on, with administrators claiming it amounts to government infringement on their academic freedom. Gee — generally a skeptic of federal meddling in higher education — isn’t entirely opposed.

“If the Obama administration were doing exactly the same thing, people would cheerfully say, ‘Oh, that’s right, and that’s what we’re going to do,’” said Gee. **“A lot of it has to do with the people in power, and I can understand that to some extent, but it doesn’t mean to say that the ideas are bad.”**

“Three-quarters of it is exactly what universities ought to be doing. A quarter of it probably is a bridge too far,” Gee explained. “But the very fact that a political administration, this Republican administration, can take on universities, and successfully so in many ways, has shown how the relationship between universities and the general public has deteriorated.”

While Trump’s approach may have come from a genuine concern about the academic environment, “they’ve used that not as a scalpel, but as a sledgehammer,” said Gee. Still, he thinks the vehement opposition in many corners of academia has to do with the messenger.

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Gee described himself as “always the optimist,” and said the current uncertainty facing academia — budget cuts, public distrust, a lack of understanding of its purpose — can be a “clarifying moment.”

“We need to understand we’re about teaching and learning. We’re not about propaganda. We’re not about ostracism. We’re not about making people feel inadequate if they don’t toe the line,” said Gee. ♦

VP Dick Cheney remembered as friend of Israel, strong voice on national security issues

Cheney, seen as a particularly powerful vice president, was a key voice in the George W. Bush administration during the War on Terror

By Marc Rod

Former Vice President Dick Cheney, who died Monday, was remembered by former officials and pro-Israel leaders as a supporter of the Jewish state and a strong voice on U.S. national security issues throughout his time in public service.

Cheney, seen as a particularly powerful vice president, was a key voice in the George W. Bush administration during the War on Terror and also served as secretary of defense under President George H.W. Bush, chief of staff to President Gerald Ford and a leader in the House Republican Conference as a representative from Wyoming.

"He was always a big supporter of Israel while he was in the Bush administration but also before, as a congressman and as defense secretary in the first Bush years," Tevi Troy, a presidential historian who served in the George W. Bush White House, told *Jewish Insider*, also highlighting the prominent pro-Israel voices with whom Cheney surrounded himself as vice president.

"I was always very impressed by how well-prepared he was, how knowledgeable he was and how focused he was," Troy continued. "In meetings with President Bush, he usually didn't say much — because he knew that if he said something, it might color how the room reacted. But he would give his views. He would listen attentively in the meetings and he would give his views to Bush afterwards. ... He was revered in the administration, and if he did weigh in on an issue, you knew that he was going to have a lot of sway on that issue. But he also knew what the role of vice president was."

Troy, reflecting on the dynamics between the president and vice president in several recent administrations, said that Cheney stands out in both his skill and knowledge but also in the fact that he had no ambitions to run for president — which Troy said gave

his counsel "more weight."

"It wasn't about what his long-term ambitions were, but what he thought was best for the administration and the country," Troy said.

Danielle Pletka, a distinguished senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, said that like other Republicans of his generation, Cheney's support for Israel deepened in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, as the U.S. and Israel faced a shared threat. She described him as a "great guy" who was "never confused about what was right."

"I think he recognized that the Middle East that we had nurtured over decades was one that in many ways allowed for the growth of Al-Qaida and he set about helping to change those things," Pletka said. "People excoriate him for the Iraq War — but I can assure you the people of Iraq don't excoriate him."

"At the end of the day, he was always an extremely fierce patriot and did what he thought was best for American interests, and like a lot of conservatives understood very clearly that our friendship and our partnership with Israel was part and parcel of that," she continued.

Pletka also described Cheney as "very clear-eyed" about the threats the U.S. faced in the Middle East, including from Iran, and that he "believed in seizing opportunities" to disrupt Iran and other adversaries.

"When I think about how Iran was allowed to exploit the situation in Iraq — I know he did his utmost to ensure that we pushed back, often without success in the second half of the Bush administration," she continued. "When we were losing in Iraq, he was absolutely instrumental in ensuring that the policy got turned around."

Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Yechiel Leiter said on X that the "passing of former

U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney marks the loss of a great American patriot, a devoted public servant and a dear friend of Israel."

"His leadership and his belief in the strength of the U.S.-Israel alliance will not be forgotten," Leiter continued.

The Jewish Federations of North America, in a statement, described Cheney as a "a dedicated public servant who was a friend to the Jewish community and played a significant role in strengthening the strategic partnership between the United States and the State of Israel."

JFNA said that Cheney "maintained enduring relationships with Jewish communal leaders and institutions, engaging in serious dialogue on matters of global security and the protection of Jewish communities worldwide," "demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the security of Israel" and helped expand military ties between the U.S. and Israel.

AIPAC said in a statement that Cheney, in his various roles, "worked to strengthen the ties between" the United States and Israel and was "a strong supporter of the U.S.-Israel partnership."

The Republican Jewish Coalition praised Cheney as "an American patriot and an unwavering friend of Israel and the Jewish community."

"Vice President Cheney had a substantial role in meeting the greatest challenges our country faced in the last 40 years, including 9/11," RJC Chairman Norm Coleman and CEO Matt Brooks said. "He understood the threats against the U.S. and the valuable role of U.S. allies, including Israel, in combatting them."

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said that Cheney's "intellect, experience, and resolve made America safer" throughout his years in government service.

"As grave threats to our security continue to loom, his commitment to American leadership will remain a lesson," McConnell continued.

In the latter years of his life, Cheney stood staunchly by his daughter, former

Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY), as she emerged as one of the most vocal critics of President Donald Trump in the Republican Party following the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Like his daughter, Cheney endorsed

former Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election, describing Trump as a threat to democracy. ♦

NOVEMBER 2, 2025

Philanthropist Sylvan Adams pledges \$100 million to Iranian missile-struck Soroka hospital

The Canadian Israeli donor's contribution will be matched by a similar contribution from both the Israeli government and the healthcare provider that runs the hospital

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Canadian Israeli philanthropist Sylvan Adams committed \$100 million to help rebuild the southern Israeli city of Beersheva's Soroka Medical Center, which was seriously damaged this summer in an Iranian missile strike. The donation, which was announced on Sunday during the Israeli government's weekly meeting, matches a commitment by the Israeli government and one by Clalit Medical Services, the healthcare provider that runs the hospital.

Adams told *eJewishPhilanthropy* that the Health Ministry's director-general, Moshe Bar Siman Tov, approached him about making a donation to the hospital, which had been searching for funders in the wake of the June 19 attack.

"I'm well known at the Ministry of Health," said Adams, who has also made significant donations to three other Israeli hospitals: Wolfson Medical Center in Holon, Sourasky Medical Center in Tel Aviv and Assaf Harofeh Medical Center in Rishon Lezion.

"[Soroka] was already in desperate need of modernization, and then it was partially destroyed by an Iranian ballistic missile. The serious condition of Soroka became critical," Adams said on Sunday.

"We began a dialogue. [I had the] opportunity to be the catalyst for two others to join: the government and Clalit," he said. "This is a beautiful public-private

partnership of an enormous size."

The collective \$300 million will go primarily toward the construction of a new fortified hospitalization tower. In addition, \$50 million will be dedicated to rebuilding and modernizing hospital infrastructure, and \$50 million will be allocated for "expanding emergency capacity, modernizing critical and maternal care, integrating AI-based diagnostics, precision medicine and next-generation imaging technologies," according to a statement from Adams' office.

While Adams' gift is the largest ever made to Soroka, it is far from the only substantial donation that has been made to the hospital since the attack. Soon after the Iranian strike, the Koum Family Foundation launched a major philanthropic effort to help restore Soroka, contributing \$50 million to the cause. "I'm grateful to the growing community of philanthropists rallying around the hospital, especially Jan Koum," Adams said in his remarks at the government meeting.

Adams told *eJP* that he hopes the investment will help turn Soroka Medical Center into one of the premier hospitals in the country and in the Middle East.

The gift was also part of Adams' broader effort to energize southern Israel, both to help it recover from the Oct. 7 attacks and as part of the vision of Israel's founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, to "make the desert bloom," he said.

Adams noted that he also recently announced support for an ambitious initiative to encourage 1 million people to immigrate to Israel in the next five years.

"How are we going to bring 1 million new immigrants if we don't have economic opportunity for them?" he said. "There's a push factor of antisemitism [around the world]. The pull factor has to be that we make life easy for the immigrants... that they don't have to downsize when they move [to Israel]."

At the government meeting, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed Adams, who was recently named president of the Israel branch of the World Jewish Congress, as a "great friend and benefactor of the State of Israel."

"You raise Israel's standing in so many fields and make a truly significant contribution. I want to thank you on my behalf, on behalf of the government, the citizens of Israel and especially the residents of the Negev," Netanyahu said.

This \$100 million commitment represents one of the largest single donations ever made in the State of Israel. It is also Adams' second donation of this size in the city of Beersheva. Shortly after the Oct. 7 attacks, Adams announced that he was donating \$100 million to the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, which is based in the city. ♦