

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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The cases that made Nat Lewin — and the causes he made possible

Lewin and a cadre of high-profile friends and legal colleagues, allies and opposing counsel alike, are reflecting on his legacy ahead of his 90th birthday

By Gabby Deutch

Nat Lewin is one of the giants of the American legal profession: 28 oral arguments in front of the Supreme Court, the prosecution of union leader and alleged mob boss Jimmy Hoffa, responsible for the drafting of a historic amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a stint as a contributing editor at *The New Republic*.

But even Lewin did not win every case. One case that he lost concerned one of the most famous defendants of all time: Moses. Yes, *that* Moses.

It was a mock trial for the biblical prophet who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt

and took them to the Promised Land, but who himself was not able to enter the Land of Israel as a punishment for disobeying God.

"We put on the case of whether or not Moses had committed this sin he was accused of, when, in his impatience, he struck the rock, notwithstanding God's direction to him to speak to the rock, and then whether or not the punishment of not being able to go into *Eretz Yisrael* was too excessive a penalty for his offense," recalled Abbe Lowell, a Washington defense attorney who that day was defending Moses. Lewin

was the prosecution, arguing in favor of the punishment.

The jury — a.k.a. the congregants at Congregation B'nai Tzedek in Potomac, Md. — sided with Lowell.

"Nat had the harder argument, really, because it is such a harsh punishment, and yet he really, I think, rose to the occasion and defended God as well as anybody could," said Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt, who organized the event several years ago.

Lewin's epoch-spanning career touched pivotal moments in American history. He worked at the Justice Department through

the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, and he served as a senior State Department official during the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War in 1967.

Now, decades after rising to the pinnacle of the American legal profession — following a complicated start as a promising Orthodox law student who was shut out of white shoe law firms that would not hire an observant Jew — Lewin and a cadre of high-profile friends and legal colleagues, allies and opposing counsel alike, are reflecting on his legacy ahead of his 90th birthday this Saturday.

"I hope he lives to 120 and a few months. Nobody should ever die on their birthday, so that's why I always say 120 and a few months," Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz told *Jewish Insider* of Lewin, who he has known for 70 years. "He is a *Gadol Ha'dor*, a giant of our generation." (Coincidentally, the biblical character who lived to 120, and inspired Jews to wish the same for each other, was Moses.)

Dershowitz is three years younger than Lewin, whom he considered a role model.

"He was really among the first Orthodox Jews who really made it in the legal profession at places like Harvard and the Supreme Court and clerkships in Washington," said Dershowitz. "I was Orthodox at the time, and I was really trying to follow in his footsteps."

Born in Poland, Lewin and his family left the country when he was three years old after the Nazis invaded. They arrived in America as refugees, a sharp departure from the family's previous high status in Poland: His father had been a city council member in Lodz, and his grandfather, the chief rabbi of the city of Rzeszow, served in the Polish legislature. Lewin attended Yeshiva University and then Harvard Law School, but he was unable to get a legal job at a firm in New York.

"What affected the jobs I was able to get in the 1950s was just being Jewish," Lewin said in an interview this week. "Law firms in New York where I assumed I would end up practicing law were very openly antisemitic, or at least excluded Jews. They wouldn't say they were antisemitic. They would say, 'Look, we don't necessarily want a Jew as a partner.' And they were very open in

expressing that, you know, 'Jews need not apply to our law firm because we did not want [Jewish] partners.'"

Lewin instead finagled an appellate clerkship and then a Supreme Court clerkship in the chambers of Justice John Marshall Harlan II before joining the Justice Department. Through all of this, he maintained his Shabbat observance, even when doing so was more fraught than it is now, particularly in high-profile jobs.

Lewin's daughter Alyza, herself an attorney who worked in private practice with her father for many years, remembers his stories about his time as the second-highest-ranking official in the civil rights division at DOJ in the 1960s.

"Martin Luther King was assassinated on a Thursday [in 1968], and then the city just exploded with the riots on Friday. It was this emergency situation," Alyza said, noting that her father went to Attorney General Ramsey Clark to ask permission to leave work early, to get home in time for Shabbat. Clark agreed.

"And my father recalls driving up 16th Street and just seeing all the fires from the riots as he was driving out to Shepherd Park," said Alyza, who is now president of U.S. affairs at Combat Antisemitism Movement.

"I have had the opportunity," she added, "to be educated and trained and mentored by a person who really did teach me to have the confidence to be a proud Jew, to realize that you can fully engage in society while being not just a proud Jew, but an observant Jew."

While Lewin forged his own path as a high-level litigator who stuck to strict observance of Jewish law, he took on cases to try to remove barriers for other Orthodox Jewish professionals who wanted to forge a similar path. He authored a 1972 amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that argued that penalizing an employee for their religious observance violated civil rights law.

"He introduced the concept of failure to accommodate as tantamount to discrimination," said Dennis Rapps, a lawyer who for 50 years led the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs, which took on legal cases involving

Orthodox Jews. In the early 1970s, Rapps used to stay in Lewin's basement whenever he came to Washington. The two men would then drive to Lewin's office together in the morning.

"We got into his car, and he took the wheel with a yellow legal pad and pen in hand. We drove a short distance until stopping for a red light, at which time he began to write something," Rapps recalled. "When the light changed, he handed me the pen and said I should take down what he would dictate. And as it turned out, it was actually the drafting of the five lines that ultimately became the text of the reasonable accommodation amendment."

In the decades that followed, Lewin took on cases that would rewrite American Jews' relationship with the principle of the separation of church and state.

Larger, more secular Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Congress were "devoted to the extreme separation of church and state, and they were the ones who held sway," said Rapps. They wanted to keep the practice of Judaism apart from any connection to the government, arguing instead that the strict separation is what had protected Jews in America.

Lewin took a different position for the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, ultimately arguing in front of the Supreme Court that the public display of a Chabad-sponsored menorah outside of a courthouse in Pittsburgh did not amount to state endorsement of religion. The Court agreed in a 1989 decision, paving the way for a sight that is now so commonplace that it is almost impossible to remember that displaying a menorah in public spaces was once a controversial act.

"We've had one disagreement in our 70-year friendship, a friendly disagreement, but one disagreement. We actually debated it, about whether or not Hanukkah menorahs should be in public places, in government places, like in Central Park, and he ultimately persuaded me he was right," said Dershowitz.

It wasn't Lewin's only case representing Chabad. He did so in an earlier case in the 1980s concerning the ownership of the books and priceless artifacts in Chabad's extensive

library in Brooklyn. A descendant of a prior Lubavitcher Rebbe claimed that the books belonged to him because his grandfather had paid for them. Lewin argued on behalf of Chabad that the books were communal property, and he won the case. It was such an important victory for Chabad that the movement declared the date of the decision to be an annual holiday, known as *Hey Teves* (the 5th day of the Hebrew month of Tevet).

Seth Waxman, who served as solicitor general in the Clinton administration, worked with Lewin on the case. One of the expert witnesses was Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. Their team also brought the Rebbe's former librarian from Poland, who at the time was living in Israel and spoke no English. They had to get a translator for him who spoke Yiddish. Lewin — whose father wrote for a Yiddish newsletter — kept telling the official translator he was getting things wrong.

"We had this crazy situation in which the witness is testifying in Yiddish. The judge doesn't speak any Yiddish. There is an official translator. But the lawyer sponsoring the witness' testimony is arguing with the translator about whether it's an accurate translation, and the witness doesn't stop talking," Waxman recalled this week, laughing. "It was, in hindsight, one of the funniest things you can imagine happening in court."

Lewin went on to work on many more cases for Jewish clients — ones

that defended Jewish ritual slaughter for preparing kosher meat, the construction of an *eruv*, the ability of Jewish congregants to meet to pray when zoning ostensibly didn't allow it.

"He's the first lawyer you think about picking up the phone and calling on heavy duty constitutional issues in our country and as well as the Jewish community. He's the go-to guy," said Mark Levin, a conservative radio host who met Lewin when Lewin was representing Ed Meese, the attorney general under President Ronald Reagan, when Meese was tied to a government contracting scandal. Levin was Meese's chief of staff.

Lewin went on to represent an Air Force officer who was told he could not wear a yarmulke in uniform, a case Lewin lost at the Supreme Court but that ultimately led to the drafting of a federal law allowing members of the military to wear clothing for religious reasons. He has represented the parents of David Boim, an American teenager killed in a Jerusalem terror attack, in a case targeting American Muslim charities alleged to have supported Hamas. And for years, he and Alyza represented Menachem Zivotofsky, an American child born in Jerusalem, arguing that the boy's passport should list his place of birth as "Israel," rather than "Jerusalem."

"In my opinion, there's really no distinction between issues that promote Americanism and the Jewish community," Levin said. "I believe he [Lewin] looks at the Bill of Rights obviously applied to all

Americans, and he seeks and sought to ensure that those rights applied across the board, including to the Jewish community: free speech, freedom of assembly and also to protect the Jewish community from bigotry and bigots."

Lewin has risen to the highest heights of American law, an accomplishment made all the more notable by the fact that he had to fight at every turn early in his career against people who did not understand Orthodox Judaism and did not want to make room for observant Jewish lawyers to succeed.

"When I see them succeeding, and I read in the newspapers about Sabbath-observing lawyers who are appointed or elected to high government positions, I think, well, maybe I did contribute to an increasing acceptance of that by the general community," Lewin reflected.

This Shabbat, Lewin plans to celebrate his 90th birthday with his children and grandchildren, who are coming to Washington from as far away as Israel. He will begin the day the same way he always does.

"I'm thankful to God. I say *Modeh Ani* every morning, in addition to the regular *Shacharit* and tefillin and all that," Lewin said, referring to the daily prayer of gratitude, "because I'm thankful that God has enabled me to reach this stage in my life and have a supportive family and a wife who is incredible." ♦

Boca Raton Mayor Scott Singer, a Republican, hopes shift to right will push him to victory against Moskowitz

Singer told JI that his alignment with the GOP has been shaped by his Jewish faith

By Marc Rod

As Boca Raton, Fla., Mayor Scott Singer aims to unseat pro-Israel stalwart Rep. Jared Moskowitz (D-FL), the Republican is hoping that the region's conservative shifts will help propel him to victory.

Singer told *Jewish Insider* last week he's running for Congress because he "love[s] public service" and he sees the country at a "critical point ... where we can go back to the failed policies of four years ago or continue to advance the gains that President Trump has made," and he wants to help push Trump's agenda forward. That includes Trump's Middle East policy, which Singer lauded.

Singer, who is running in a traditionally Democratic district, emphasized his three-decade history of public service in the region, and said that he's "seen a renewed enthusiasm and resurgence in terms of conservative, common sense policies," particularly among Jewish voters, "as the Democratic Party has grown more and more left."

"We're seeing the Republican Party under President Trump becoming the party that really represents more of the issues that a lot of Jewish voters tend to care about," Singer argued.

He also noted that the district, Florida's 23rd, has seen a growth in conservative voters coming from out of state, many from states or cities led by Democrats. Trump came within two points of carrying the district in 2024, losing to former Vice President Kamala Harris, 50-48%. That was one of the bigger political shifts in the country, given that in 2020, Trump lost the district to Joe Biden by 13 points. Meanwhile, Moskowitz won his reelection bid 52%-48%.

Whether Moskowitz and Singer actually end up facing each other in November

remains somewhat of an open question, however, pending the outcome of Florida's upcoming redistricting process.

Singer told JI that his alignment with the GOP has been shaped by his Jewish faith.

"Judaism places a value on individual rights and opportunity, responsibilities, education and freedom," Singer said. "For hundreds of years, Jewish people were often excluded from Western society and had to make their way — often, as entrepreneurs or self employed, as generations of my family have been — finding ways for them to advance through society."

"The promise of America is so great because anyone can come here and achieve great things," he continued. "I've always leaned toward the right, because I found that this was a party that valued people's individual opportunities, merits and contributions, and a natural home that's consistent with the values that inform my faith."

Singer argued that Trump has been the strongest advocate and champion of the U.S.-Israel relationship of any U.S. president and a "strong voice against antisemitism, and people are realizing this," leading to shifts among Jewish voters toward the GOP.

He said that he "personally and spiritually [has] deep connections to the State of Israel and our ancestral home." And he said that a continued strong U.S.-Israel relationship serves both countries' interests.

"Israel has been taking a leading edge, fighting terror and fighting enemies who want to see the destruction of Western culture, Western values and the United States," Singer said.

"What concerns me is in the Democratic Party — and I think it's concerning a lot of

voters, including historic Democratic voters and mainstream voters — is the outrageous and moral failings of Democratic leadership to to confront or contradict claims of genocide when Israel was brutally attacked by terrible terrorists who created committed horrific crimes against women and children — murdering, raping, strangling, kidnapping and torturing," Singer continued, referencing the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terror attacks.

He downplayed anti-Israel trends among some on the right as "a few fringe commentators who seem to have lost semblance of what it means to be a conservative and do not represent the conservative movement."

Singer emphasized that those voices are out of step with Trump.

"What concerns me is in the Democratic Party — and I think it's concerning a lot of voters, including historic Democratic voters and mainstream voters — is the outrageous and moral failings of Democratic leadership to to confront or contradict claims of genocide when Israel was brutally attacked by terrible terrorists who created committed horrific crimes against women and children — murdering, raping, strangling, kidnapping and torturing," Singer continued, referencing the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terror attacks.

Asked how he'd describe Moskowitz's own record on these issues — the two-term Democratic lawmaker has been vocally supportive of Israel and has broken with many in his party on the issue — Singer offered little direct criticism for Moskowitz, instead arguing that he has limited power against what Singer described as a dominant anti-Israel current in the Democratic Party.

"You have to go back to the party and where you are," Singer said. "When you're a junior congressman and beholden to some of the increasingly hostile attitude

of the Democratic Party and Democratic leadership, including statements by leaders in the House of Representatives that call Israel's self defense a genocide. When they're running the party, it's very hard for any junior member to really stand out and make an effective difference in policy."

Moskowitz responded in a statement to JI, "I guess the people who are trying to assassinate me over my support for Israel — they obviously think I'm pretty effective," adding, "By [Singer's] own logic, I guess there's no reason for him to run for Congress because he won't be able to help the district, because he'll be a freshman."

Moskowitz has stood apart from most Democrats on various issues relating to Israel, including voting for a controversial bill providing aid to Israel while cutting funding for the Internal Revenue Service, voting to censure Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) for anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric, voting to override President Joe Biden's holds on certain arms sales to Israel and calling for stronger action by the Biden administration on a range of areas related to Israel policy, Iran and antisemitism.

The Democratic congressman has regularly crossed party lines to cosponsor legislation to support Israel and combat Iran with Republican colleagues.

Moskowitz is also facing a progressive primary challenger who has focused significantly on attacking his support for Israel.

Singer said that the U.S.' current focus, when it comes to Israel, should be disarming and removing Hamas from Gaza. He expressed support for the Trump administration-led ceasefire plan, and said

it's "too hard to speculate" what might come after that, including whether the U.S. should support a two-state solution.

Singer said that, as a member of Congress, he would be vocal against antisemitism, and said that "Congress needs to codify gains that are coming from the Trump executive orders and reevaluate its approach to universities and other institutions at all levels of education" due to what he said was their failure to protect Jewish students' civil rights.

"There's still a constant and present danger to people who love freedom, the Israeli people, and also the people who've been oppressed by 20 years of a brutal regime," Singer said.

He praised Trump's "bold and necessary action" to strike Iran's nuclear program last June, and said that the U.S. needs to "stand strong" against the Iranian regime amid its violent crackdown on protesters.

"What we've seen over the last few weeks with the terrible slaughter — the extent of which we don't quite fully know because of blackouts — of people longing for peace may hopefully send a signal of an end to this harmful regime," Singer continued. "We need to continue to work through our diplomatic, economic and military channels to ensure the safety of our nation, the safety of allies, and hopefully bring relief to people in various lands who've been threatened by this rogue regime."

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He said he would be open to bills to "increase standards" for schools receiving federal funding and to revoke funds to ensure that students' rights are protected.

He said that Congress also "needs to continue to work in terms of fighting antisemitism, in terms of definitions, training, support for institutions — at the state level, we have strong support for religious schools — and ensuring religious freedom for all people."

Singer said Congress should consider enhancing protections, such as the FACE Act, for religious institutions to allow people to worship freely and without fear, if necessary.

Singer argued that voices in the GOP that have been attempting to mainstream antisemitic ideology are confined to the "fringe," emphasizing that he sees the issues as more within the mainstream in the Democratic Party.

"There are fringe voices who seem to have lost the thread of the conservative movement and even in some cases, the pro-America movement, by their unfounded criticisms," Singer said. "And these loud voices should [continue] to be disregarded. Good speech drives out bad speech, and we need to continue to stand strong on all sides of the political spectrum." ♦

Deni Avdija to make triumphant DC return as star NBA player

The Portland Trail Blazers forward has emerged as one of Israel's all-time top athletes

By Matthew Shea

On Tuesday night, the Washington Wizards will host the Portland Trail Blazers for Jewish Heritage Night in a game that carries significance beyond the standings. The matchup coincides with International Holocaust Remembrance Day, giving it added weight amid heightened antisemitic sentiment across the political spectrum.

But despite that backdrop, the evening's focal point for the local Jewish community may actually be what transpires on the court. Deni Avdija, the 6-foot-8 small forward from Beit Zera, Israel, returns to Capital One Arena, where his NBA career began, no longer as a developing young player, but as one of Israel's — and the NBA's — breakout sensations.

Selected ninth overall by Washington in the 2020 NBA Draft, Avdija spent the first four seasons of his NBA career with the Wizards before being traded to Portland in July 2024. This season, he has found his footing in the league, making a dramatic leap that has drawn attention from fans and NBA stars alike.

With that higher profile, however, has come online backlash — “hate,” he has called it — focusing on his Israeli roots.

“It’s frustrating to see all the hate,” Avdija told *The Athletic* in an interview released last week. “I have a good game or get All-Star votes and all the comments are people connecting me to politics. Why can’t I just be a good basketball player? Why does it matter if I’m from Israel, or wherever in the world, or what my race is?”

Avdija said the backlash comes “for no reason,” and he’s judged as if he were “deciding things in the world.”

“What do people expect me to do?” said Avdija. “[Israel] is my country, where I was born, where I grew up. I love my country.”

He noted that as an athlete he doesn’t “get into politics,” but encourages people to

become more educated on the Middle East before speaking on the subject.

“Not everyone is educated and knows what is going on, and that’s what pisses me off,” Avdija said. “If you are not educated and you are not part of the Middle East ... just don’t say anything.”

Avdija has long carried the weight of representing his country on basketball’s biggest stages. At just 16 years old, he became the youngest player ever to appear for Maccabi Tel Aviv. At the international level, he led Israel to back-to-back FIBA U20 European Championship titles in 2018 and 2019, earning tournament MVP honors in 2019 and later becoming the youngest Israeli League MVP.

Now, midway through the NBA season, Avdija is averaging 26 points, 7.1 rebounds and 6.9 assists per game, placing him among the league’s top scorers (top 15 in average PPG and top five in total points) this season. The jump has vaulted Avdija into league-wide conversations — even earning him a commemorative cup night on Jan. 5, during the Blazers game against the Utah Jazz.

That same week, Avdija erupted for a season-high 41 points in a narrow 103-102 home win over the Kevin Durant-led Houston Rockets. Avdija’s record night drew prominent attention across the league and generated several highlight packages that spread across social media. After the game, Durant praised Avdija, stating: “He’s going to be a star.”

Avdija has also etched his name into Israeli basketball history. In March 2025, he became the only player from Israel to record a triple-double in the league, a milestone he reached playing against the Cleveland Cavaliers. Last month, he surpassed Omri Casspi as Israel’s all-time leading scorer in the NBA.

“This is a guy who, when he gets downhill, is a problem,” said Steve Nash,

a member of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, speaking about Avdija’s ability to drive to the basket during his “Mind the Game” podcast, which he co-hosts with NBA superstar LeBron James.

James called Avdija a “physical driver to the rim,” stating that he believes the Wizards are “kicking themselves” for trading him away.

“This year in particular, I’ve seen him expand his range and make some shots from the perimeter at a more consistent rate,” said James. “It’s resulted in him having a breakout career year so far.”

The Israeli phenom has even hit franchise records, becoming the fastest player in Trail Blazers’ history to reach 1,000 points, 250 rebounds and 250 assists in a single season and just the seventh player in the last 35 NBA seasons to do so over a season’s first 39 games or quicker — a notable milestone for a team long defined by the legacy of prolific scorer Damian Lillard.

Avdija’s surge has placed him in contention for major individual recognition and the potential to reach new heights for Israeli athletes in professional American sports.

No Israeli basketball player has ever been named as an NBA All-Star. Avdija could change that and is viewed as a serious candidate to make an appearance — finishing seventh in Western Conference All-Star voting and gaining over 2 million fan votes.

Avdija also holds the highest odds to win NBA Most Improved Player, a prestigious award and potentially another first for an Israeli-born player.

As Avdija chases history, he has a simple message for the critics: “Just respect me as a basketball player. You don’t have to love what I stand for or how I look, but if I’m a good player, give props.” ♦

Josh Shapiro's new memoir explores central role of Judaism in his life and politics

In 'Where We Keep the Light,' the swing-state Democrat provides the most intimate look yet at the centrality of Judaism to his understanding of the world

By Gabby Deutch

Each time Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro gets on a plane to visit different communities as he begins his reelection campaign, he'll silently recite Judaism's foundational prayer, the *Shema*, before takeoff, according to his new memoir.

Shapiro has always kept his Jewish faith at the center of his public identity. But in *Where We Keep the Light*, which comes out today, the swing-state Democrat provides the most intimate look yet at the centrality of Judaism to his understanding of the world. Widely expected to be eyeing a bid for the White House in 2028, Shapiro makes clear in his new book that he will not back away from his Jewish identity as his national profile grows.

"My faith has never been something I thought about doing a whole lot. Not because it's not important. The opposite, really. It's elemental," Shapiro writes. "It's why I sometimes sound a little vague when I get asked about my religion in interviews or when I try to put it into words. Kind of like when you get asked to explain how you fall asleep or blink. You just know to do it. It's part of you, without thinking. All essence and instinct."

The book begins with the story of the arson attack on the governor's residence in Harrisburg last year, hours after Shapiro hosted a Passover Seder there. It's clear that the incident, in which the assailant said that he targeted the governor because of what Shapiro "did to the Palestinians," impacted him deeply.

"No one will deter me or my family or any Pennsylvanian from celebrating their faith openly and proudly," Shapiro writes.

The next night, his family began their Seder by reciting *Birkat Hagomel*, which he described as "a prayer expressing gratitude

for surviving a dangerous situation." Shapiro again sought comfort in those days in the *Shema*, and its straightforward declaration of faith in God.

Along with his deep identification with Judaism, Shapiro doesn't shy away from his support for Israel in his memoir.

The Democratic Party has become more critical of Israel in recent years, and it is easy to imagine Shapiro deciding that the politically savvy move would be to talk less about his connection to the Jewish state.

Instead, Shapiro appears to have decided that the right move — a result, surely, of both political and moral calculations — is to reveal exactly what role Judaism and Israel have played in shaping him.

Early excerpts of the book revealed that Shapiro was asked by members of Vice President Kamala Harris' team, during the vetting process as she chose her running mate in 2024, whether he had ever acted as a foreign agent for Israel. He was also asked by Harris why he had taken such a strong position criticizing anti-Israel encampments at the University of Pennsylvania that year, and whether he would apologize for doing so. He took offense at both questions, wondering whether a double standard was at play.

He describes his first experience with advocacy, as part of the movement to free Soviet Jewry in the 1980s. He writes evocatively of a semester spent in Israel as a teenager with his Jewish day school, detailing the transformative moment he visited the Western Wall for the first time.

"My faith in that moment was around me. I was touching it. I was breathing it. My faith was alive and its roots grew deeper under me," Shapiro writes. "The semester in Israel flew by. I loved every minute of it."

Years later, he returned to Jerusalem with his then-girlfriend Lori to propose.

Many scenes in Shapiro's book also play out around the Shabbat table. There was the Shabbat dinner in 2017, early in Shapiro's first month as Pennsylvania attorney general, that was interrupted by news of President Donald Trump's ban on travel from several Muslim-majority nations. There was the Shabbat dinner in 2024 when he and Lori discussed the meeting he would have with Harris, two days later, about whether Shapiro wanted to be her running mate. The family's Shabbat dinner table was also pictured in his first TV ad during the 2022 general election for governor.

Shapiro said he drew this lesson of embracing his Jewish faith from his experience as attorney general working with law enforcement and the Jewish community after the 2018 Tree of Life shooting. In the years after, particularly as he ran for governor, he began to have more people express to him their fear of antisemitism and of being Jewish. The answer, Shapiro writes, is not to hide.

"There have been times when I have struggled to figure out what my responsibility is as a person so public about my faith, at a time when it is more tenuous than ever to be Jewish in America," Shapiro writes. "In these moments, I look to the Tree of Life community as my guidepost for what it means to live our faith out loud, without fear or question."

Whether Shapiro continues to focus more closely on his Jewish faith and the rise of antisemitism, as he does in the book — as opposed to a more universal appreciation of religion's positive role in society — is an open question. Shapiro likes to talk in stump speeches about his "faith," with the

word “Jewish” often conspicuously absent. In his election night victory speech in 2022, he quoted the Jewish book *Pirkei Avot*, or “Ethics of Our Fathers.” He talked about “scripture,” and how “my family and my faith call me to service.” He did not mention

Judaism.

With his new book, Shapiro appears to be betting that standing up for his values and beliefs — even if the short-term politics might not be in favor of campaigning as a proud Jewish candidate who remains

supportive of Israel — will be rewarded over the long haul by voters looking for someone who is authentic to his true self, standing by a time-tested set of clear moral principles. ♦

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Students balk at plan to overhaul Ziegler School, but AJU president stands firm: Change is overdue

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson to step down as dean of the program, become a 'distinguished scholar' at AJU; Jay Sanderson tells eJP that he understands the concerns, but rabbinical training needs to be rethought

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

American Jewish University's Ziegler School of Rabbinical Studies — one of the few rabbinical programs on the West Coast and the only Conservative one — is going to undergo a significant overhaul in the coming months, according to officials at the university. Though what that overhaul will look like remains unclear.

It may mean dropping its denominational connection, it may mean a radical reconsideration of its curriculum and pedagogy; it may mean all of those things. But it is not shutting down, Jay Sanderson, AJU's president, told *eJewishPhilanthropy* on Friday.

The rabbinical school's uncertain future came to light last Wednesday when Sanderson told a gathering of faculty and staff that Ziegler's longtime dean, Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, was leaving his current role — while staying on at the university — and that discussions were underway to reenvision the program.

The news was not greeted with overwhelming applause. One person cried; others passionately voiced their opposition.

While understanding of their concerns, Sanderson was unmoved and unsurprised.

Last May, when Sanderson was announced as president of American Jewish University, his friend Eric Fingerhut, the president and CEO of the Jewish Federations of North America, gave him some advice: embrace his reputation as a disruptor.

“Nobody in a situation wants change, even if they're not happy,” Sanderson told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “Everybody would rather be uncomfortable than go through a change process.”

Larry Platt, the chair of AJU, told *eJP* that the board stands behind Sanderson, having hired him because he's a disruptor. “He's doing exactly what the board wants him to,” Platt added.

Founded in 1996 with its first class ordained in 1999, Ziegler is located in Los Angeles, offering a West Coast alternative to New York City's Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Enrollment has only declined since, a trend among all non-Orthodox rabbinic schools, causing what is referred to as “the rabbinic pipeline problem” — an abundance of congregations unable to find a rabbi to lead them.

The overhaul of the Ziegler School comes amid a long-running discussion about the future and purpose of the American rabbinate, a conversation that was supercharged in November, with the release of ATRA dual study on rabbis and rabbinical students.

“Everybody talks about the challenges [of rabbinic schools] over and over again,” Sanderson, who prefers the term “conscious disruptor” to describe himself, said. “It's a very complex issue that, honestly, in the nine months I've been here, I've been surprised at how little real, actual transformation is happening in the field.”

He added: “I would argue that in really reimagining and thinking about rabbinic education, we are doubling down our investment in the space.”

Titled “From Calling to Career: Mapping the Current State and Future of Rabbinic Leadership,” the ATRA study showed that new rabbis preferred non-pulpit roles over congregational roles, despite lower pay, because pulpit positions were considered far more emotionally taxing with unrealistic expectations. At the same time, new clergy were increasingly being ordained at non-

denominational schools, often chosen because of convenience, not ideology.

Liberal American religious “institutions like AJU, HUC, JTS and Hebrew College all have very challenging and demanding questions before them,” Steven Windmueller, emeritus professor of Jewish communal service at the Jack H. Skirball Campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, told eJP. “And those questions include, where do we go from here?”

To counteract the dwindling number of students at the school, over the past half decade, Ziegler has undertaken a number of moves to make its program more attractive. It truncated a year off the program, shortened the amount of time students needed to spend in Israel, slashed tuition by 80%, sold off its 35-acre campus and shuttered its undergraduate program. Still, the student body remains small, with 34 students currently.

The 2011 Pew Jewish Community Study of New York, which showed the Reform and Conservative movements’ numbers were plummeting, should have been a “wake-up call for the Jewish world,” Sanderson, who is also CEO of AJU’s 2050 Institute, said. “But instead, people denied the facts.”

The question of how rabbinic schools should or shouldn’t change is not simply about how they define themselves denominationally, Windmueller said, “but also the ways in which we prepare that generation or next generation of rabbinic leadership” and “how we change the culture of how American Jews and American Jewish institutions understand the role of rabbi.”

These questions are not unique to the Jewish world — all American religious institutions are seeing their numbers declining, Windmueller noted, adding that nondemonationalism appears to be the way of American Jewry’s near-term future.

On a mid-January episode of Jonah Platt’s “Being Jewish” podcast, which was taped in July, Sanderson said he would like to see Ziegler go nondenominational. But when he spoke with eJP Friday, he emphasized that no decisions have been made and it will

be a thorough process involving the board and the entire community that will lead to the school’s transformation.

The changes to the school will affect the entire program, especially the course catalogue, so it can better train rabbis for the roles and issues of the Jewish community today, such as artificial intelligence and moderating conversations between generations.

“The job itself is not a job that is attractive to the same number of young Jews as it was 25 years ago,” Sanderson said. “We’re being courageous and saying, ‘Let’s figure out what we need to be doing for the next generation of Jewish life, not for the last generation.’”

The only thing Sanderson officially announced at Wednesday’s meeting was that Artson, who also serves as vice president of AJU, is transitioning into a new role as the Mordecai Kaplan Distinguished Scholar, effective July 1. His new position is named after the founder of the Reconstructionist movement.

“Rabbi Artson’s move certainly makes it seem like we are making big changes,” Sanderson said. “It doesn’t signal big changes. It signals a process to make these changes.” These changes, he said, are being made “about 20 years too late.”

Artson’s retirement as dean “signals a process publicly that has been going on privately since I started,” Sanderson said, adding that he considers Artson’s new position an “elevation” to “a more global institutional job.” Instead of simply focusing on the Ziegler school, he will serve as one of the faces of AJU and will be “in essence, the Jewish voice around all the tables of all the programs we have.”

Artson will be honored at a May 19 gala that will be held at Stephen Wise Temple in Los Angeles, a Reform congregation.

In Sanderson’s view, employees should not fill positions indefinitely, he said. In 2021, after 12 years at the helm, Sanderson stepped down from his role as president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, where he shook things up by pushing for increased security a decade before other communities, changing how funding and referrals for social services were

done and forcing collaboration between L.A. Jewish organizations.

“If we really want to propel a pipeline of Jewish leadership, you can’t stay at the same job,” he said, “because when you stay in the same job, the next generation of people don’t get a chance to leave.”

Sanderson acknowledged that the meeting on Wednesday was lively and, at times, fraught. Some students had come to the meeting upset after hearing Sanderson’s appearance on the “Being Jewish” podcast. They had felt he was talking down to the student body at times, which he said was a misunderstanding.

“Some of the emotions [were] around Rabbi Artson,” he said, “and it’s human nature to think about yourselves first. My job is to think about the Jewish people first and the institution.”

One attendee at the meeting reported to eJP that Sanderson avoided questions and raised his voice when responding to a comment, prompting seven students to file grievances about him. “The only reason I raised my voice was so that people could hear me because there was no microphone, and there was a [large] room,” he said. “Were there students that cried? One for sure.”

Prospective changes at the school are going to cause friction, Sanderson said. “At the end of the day, [students] should understand — as future leaders — that leadership means sometimes you have to put other people in uncomfortable positions for the greater good of the Jewish People.” Still, he understands the students’ confusion, comparing the current situation to someone going to a restaurant and not knowing what the menu will be.

Nothing about the curriculum or the school is going to change for current students, and Artson will remain dean through the end of this academic year, Platt told eJP.

“Will Brad be replaced?” Platt said. “Yes. Will the position be exactly as the position is constituted today? That’s to be determined.”

Platt estimates it will take half a year before significant changes to the school are decided, he said. But that, like everything, is “subject to change.” ♦

Antisemitism, anti-Israel rhetoric a key feature of Saudi Arabia's regional realignment

Riyadh is increasingly aligning itself with Islamist-oriented countries, like Qatar and Turkey

By Lahav Harkov

Anti-Israel and antisemitic messages from Saudi regime mouthpieces and state-sanctioned media have increased in recent weeks, as Riyadh has pivoted away from a more moderate posture to an alignment with Islamist forces, such as Qatar and Turkey.

Over the weekend, prominent Saudi columnist Dr. Ahmed bin Othman Al-Tuwaijri wrote an article in a Saudi news site attacking the United Arab Emirates, with whom Saudi Arabia has been at odds in recent weeks, as “an Israeli Trojan horse in the Arab world ... in betrayal of God, His Messenger and the entire nation.” He also wrote that “Israel is on a path to a rapid downfall and the umma will remain, God willing.”

The column, published after weeks of anti-Israel and antisemitic messaging from Saudi-backed channels, sparked an uproar from Western voices. The Anti-Defamation League condemned “the increasing frequency and volume of prominent Saudi voices ... using openly antisemitic dog whistles and aggressively pushing anti-Abraham Accords rhetoric, often while peddling conspiracy theories about ‘Zionist plots.’”

The Saudi site then took the article down. But when there was a backlash in the Arab world, it went back online.

An editorial in the Saudi government newspaper *Al-Riyadh* earlier this month said that “wherever Israel is present, there is ruin and destruction,” and that Israel “do[es] not respect the sovereignty of states or the integrity of their territories, while working to exploit crises and conflicts to deepen divisions.”

A conspiracy theory that has gained

steam on Saudi social media in recent weeks accuses the UAE of trying to push for a “New Abrahamic Religion” melding Judaism, Christianity and Islam, thus destroying Islam, an apparent reference to the Abrahamic Family House — meant to foster religious tolerance.

The shift in Saudi media comes after months in which imams at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, whose sermons are seen as reflecting official Saudi messages, have railed against Israel and the Jews. In a recent sermon, Sheikh Saleh bin Abdullah bin Humaid said, “Oh Allah, deal with the Jews who have seized and occupied, for they cannot escape your power. Oh Allah, send upon them your punishment and misery.”

“I’m ringing the alarm; I’m breaking the glass,” Hussain Abdul-Hussain, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said on the “Ask A Jew” podcast earlier this month. “I’m saying, listen, these guys are changing.”

Edy Cohen, a research fellow at the Israel Center for Grand Strategy, told *Jewish Insider* that the Saudi-backed Arabic news channel Al Arabiya is “very anti-Israel, they glorify the Palestinians,” though he stopped short of the characterization made by a prominent Israeli journalist last week that it has become worse than the Qatar-backed Al Jazeera.

Hussain Abdul-Hussain, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said on the “Ask A Jew” podcast earlier this month that the Trump administration needs “to have a serious talk with” the Saudis.

“I’m ringing the alarm; I’m breaking the

glass,” he said. “I’m saying, listen, these guys are changing.”

In the past, “you only got these crazy terrorist clerics, the al-Qaida types ... would be inciting against the Jews,” Abdul-Hussain said. “But this week, the [Saudi] state-owned media was inciting against the Zionist plan to partition the region and to divide the region. This is very new.”

Hussein Aboubakr Mansour, a researcher for the Z3 Project, noted in a recent interview on the “Tikvah Podcast” that the Saudi “interest is colliding with that of Israel in many places,” while “the interests of the Israeli and the Emiratis are converging in a lot of places,” leading Riyadh to lash out against both at the same time.

He noted a rise in “the Arabist discourse of Arab sovereignty, Arab unity, the Emiratis and Israelis want to fragment us.”

“[The Saudi leadership] heard [exiled Iranian Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi] said the new Iran will normalize relations with Israel, and this drove the leadership crazy,” Edy Cohen, a research fellow at the Israel Center for Grand Strategy, told JI. “Imagine Iran and Israel together ... the Shi’a and the Jews together; it’s their biggest nightmare.”

One reason for the turn in Saudi messaging is that Riyadh is “very afraid of Israel,” Cohen said, noting that it views recent Israeli actions as going against Saudi interests.

Cohen noted that Saudi Arabia was mostly quiet about Tehran’s violent suppression of the recent nationwide demonstrations, but behind the scenes, “the Saudis and the Qataris led a campaign for

Trump not to strike Iran.”

“[The Saudi leadership] heard [exiled Iranian Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi] said the new Iran will normalize relations with Israel, and this drove the leadership crazy,” Cohen posited. “Imagine Iran and Israel together ... the Shi’a and the Jews together; it’s their biggest nightmare.”

Before that, Cohen said, Israel’s recognition of Somaliland, which put Jerusalem on the UAE’s side against Somalia, angered Riyadh, a move he said led a diplomatic push for Arab states to condemn Israel. At the time, Israel’s Channel 12 reported that Saudi sources said Israel recognizing Somaliland threatened its chances of normalization with Riyadh.

Israel and Saudi Arabia have also staked out opposing positions on Syria, where Riyadh supports President Ahmad al-Sharaa, while Israel has been much more hesitant to embrace the new Syrian leader and has acted militarily to protect the Druze Syrian minority near its border.

Cohen said Saudi Arabia would still be willing to establish diplomatic relations with Israel if it brought them a defense pact with the U.S., but “at a price no [Israeli] prime minister would be willing to pay.”

Abdul-Hussain put Saudi’s pivot in the context of its failed regional ambitions. Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known as MBS, sought to move “from a country that has relied on oil for a

living ... to a country that looked like Dubai, where you have tourism and services, what they call a knowledge economy. ... Israel is clearly one of the highest knowledge economies in the world.”

However, Abdul-Hussain said, “his experiment has just hit a wall and this transformation is not happening.” In an indicative development, MBS’ flagship project of a futuristic city on the Red Sea known as Neom has been scaled back following delays and budgetary limitations, the *Financial Times* reported on Sunday.

Now, Abdul-Hussain said, “the quickest tool that [MBS] can get is to reconnect with the Islamists. ... Look at Turkey and Qatar using Islamism all the time to project influence, including in Gaza ... Washington clearly likes them for some reason, so [MBS is] thinking, why not use Islamism ... as a tool to project power at Saudi’s borders? This means they will have to bash the heck out of Israel.”

With the continued talk about a possible American attack on Iran amid the regime’s violent crackdown on protesters, Aboubakr Mansour’s prediction in JI last year after the Israeli and American strikes on Iran remains relevant: He argued that the success of the 12-day war would not bring Jerusalem and Riyadh closer together, nor would regime change in Iran. A less extreme government in Tehran could grow closer to Washington, threatening the Saudi-

American relationship.

“They have an interest in Iran remaining the pariah that it is,” he said at the time. “The Saudis are in a place where they want to see neither the Israelis nor the Iranians win. [The Saudis] want them to put each other in check, which will give [the Saudis] more leverage.”

Aboubakr Mansour told the “Tikvah Podcast” this month that he was “still shocked” by the Saudis’ “unbelievable pivot in terms of rhetoric, domestically and regionally, against Israel and the UAE.”

“The easiest way for them to [pivot away from Israel] is to insist on a Palestinian state, but that did not entail that, all of a sudden, they will recall a lot of Muslim Brotherhood figures from abroad ... using their online channels to denounce the Zionists ... getting closer to Turkey and Qatar. That itself, I was definitely shocked by,” he said.

Now, Aboubakr Mansour said, after Saudi Arabia changed its messaging, “you saw a massive activation of this huge and colossal empire of narrative control that the Qataris run” — meaning Al Jazeera — “in favor of Saudi Arabia. ... That’s a form of power, also, that has its own seduction, and I think the Saudis calculated that they have a very large symbolic comparative advantage that is best optimized to use this kind of populist anti-Zionist discourse in the Middle East.” ♦

Too Israeli for the world, too Arab for Israelis, women's olive oil collective presses on

After seeing foreign orders dry up and little interest in its workshops, Sindyanna of Galilee pivots to selling fair-trade, high-quality olive oil to the domestic Israeli market

By Rachel Gutman

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

KAFR KANNA, Israel — For two decades, Sindyanna of Galilee built its model on a simple three-step premise: sell high-quality, fair-trade olive oil from Arab Israeli farmers to international markets; funnel profits back into an empowerment collective for Arab women; and prove that commerce could build bridges between Jews and Arabs in the Galilee.

By early October 2023, it was working. Seventy percent of its revenue came from exports — to the British company Zeytun, American buyers like Dr. Bronner's and customers across Europe who valued the quality, the values and the cheerful, optimistic packaging. The cooking workshops at its visitors center in Kafr Kanna brought Jewish Israelis into Arab villages to learn traditional Galilean cuisine alongside Arab women, demonstrating that coexistence wasn't just a talking point — it was delicious.

Then came Oct. 7.

After the Hamas terror attacks and the launch of Israel's war against the terrorist organization in Gaza, longtime customers from abroad cut ties, not because of quality concerns, but because the products came from Israel, according to Hanan Manadreh Zoabi, co-manager of Sindyanna's Visitors Center. The word "Israeli" on the label — even for an Arab-led, women-empowering, peace-building enterprise — became toxic. Zeytun stopped ordering. Seventy percent of its revenue evaporated.

At home, Jewish Israelis stopped coming to the cooking workshops. The fear of entering Arab villages, even for an explicitly coexistence-focused program, became

insurmountable. The visitors' center sat quiet.

"Jewish Israelis are afraid to come to Arab village courses now," Zoabi told eJewishPhilanthropy last week. The international market rejected them for being Israeli. The Israeli market feared them for being Arab.

But Sindyanna — a self-sustaining organization that runs like a business but functions as an NGO, cycling all profits back into programming — isn't folding. Instead, it's doubling down on the most challenging path: winning over Jewish Israelis one bottle at a time.

Sindyanna's team is betting that its optimistic branding will help. Instead of just "extra virgin," its olive oil is labeled "Extra Positive," "Extra Peaceful" and "Extra Hopeful."

"The local market is now most important for us. More than overseas," Nadio Giol, Sindyanna's co-manager of the visitor center, told eJP. "We want to spread our message of hopefulness. The Israeli population is who we want to share our message of equality and democracy with."

It's an ironic twist. For years, Sindyanna exported its coexistence story to sympathetic audiences abroad, people who already believed in the mission. Now, financial necessity is forcing them to do what they always truly wanted: reach the Israelis who live alongside them but remain strangers.

"When one person puts our oil on their counter," Giol said, "that is a start."

Sindyanna didn't begin with grand ambitions. In 1993, a group of women in the Galilee town of Majd al-Krum noticed that Arab farmers in the region were sitting on exceptional olive oil but had no path to

market. Sindyanna started packaging and selling it from a single room.

The name, Sindyanna, is symbolic, referring to the Palestine oak, also known as the kermes oak, which dots the Galilee landscape — a tree known for deep roots, longevity and endurance. By 2003, it had become Israel's only World Fair Trade Organization-certified producer, a status it's maintained through an intifada, countless military operations, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Oct. 7 attacks and ensuing two-plus years of war.

"It's not easy to maintain a high level of fair trade," Zoabi said. Every bottle requires documentation, quality control, fair pricing negotiations with farmers and adherence to international standards, which many producers find burdensome.

Once the organization sells the oil that it has purchased from some 200 small Arab farmers, the profits go into programs for Arab women. This includes hydroponics training, cooking workshops with celebrity Israeli chefs and a home-based tourism program designed to give women economic independence.

"The women didn't know they had something here they could do something with," Zoabi said of the early days. Those same women now teach biodynamic beekeeping and run culinary programs. "There's no high-tech here," she added. "There are olives."

But the road has been rocky. The Second Intifada in 2001 devastated local sales, prompting the strategic shift toward exports. Then, the pandemic forced it to shutter the cooking workshops. "We were crushed," Giol recalled. But she and her team rebuilt, relaunching the programs just before the Hamas attacks. In 2023, the post-

intifada export model was also thriving.

Now, with export revenue slashed and the visitors center sitting quiet, Sindyanna's pivot to the domestic olive oil market isn't just about survival, according to Zoabi and Giol, it's about returning to its core mission of coexistence.

Zoabi pointed to the core of the problem geographically. "We live here in Kafr Kanna, and next door is Kibbutz Beit Rimmon. Our kids never play together, and they never meet," she said.

The communities are neighbors. They

share roads, regional infrastructure, a view, but the children grow up as strangers. "If we don't put our energy into trying to bridge our gaps, it won't happen," she said. "Food is the best way to do that."

Sindyanna's staff includes both Arab and Jewish women, who work side by side at the visitors center and warehouse. It's also why the collapse of the cooking workshops stung particularly hard. Before the war, famous Israeli chefs donated their time to run sessions bringing Jewish and Arab women together over traditional Galilean recipes.

The workshops weren't just culinary — they were structured encounters designed to break down mistrust through shared experience.

Now that's on hold. And while Sindyanna has built an online community of 5,000 supporters, digital connection can't replace the intimacy of cooking side by side.

"When a person comes here for a workshop and meets Hanan," Giol said, "they see she is a regular person." ♦

JANUARY 26, 2026

Tahesha Way campaigns as close ally of Jewish community in pivotal N.J. special election

Way is touting her support for stalled legislation that would codify the IHRA definition of antisemitism into law

By Marc Rod

Campaigning in a crowded field for the New Jersey congressional seat recently vacated by newly inaugurated Gov. Mikie Sherrill, former New Jersey Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way is leaning into her support for Israel and the state's Jewish community ahead of next month's special election primary.

Speaking to *Jewish Insider* last week, Way, a Democrat, cited the rise in antisemitism that is leaving Jewish voters "terrified" as one of the reasons she's running for office, alongside her concern about attacks on civil liberties, healthcare access, the economy and immigration raids.

She said that, going forward, it's "really my fervor and my hope to continue my work on behalf of the Jewish community," highlighting the work of the New Jersey-Israel Commission — which fell under her purview when she served as secretary of state — to increase trade between Israel and New Jersey as well as to push back on antisemitism.

"You think about the 1960s, when Blacks and Jewish people stood hand by

hand" in the Civil Rights Movement, Way said. "That's why I also made certain that my Israel Commission partnered with my MLK Jr. Commission, not just internally, but externally, going out to schools — especially our high school students — so that they could understand the history, understand the unity of two people in hopes of bringing about a better us."

"Tahesha Way understands what is failing the Jewish community right now, and especially this fight against antisemitism which is on the rise," Way said. "I have stood side by side with the Jewish community, overseeing the Israel commission and making sure that the needs and the protection has always been authentically there."

She said she also worked with the commission to send letters to college and university presidents after the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks to ensure that academic leaders took steps to combat antisemitism, and re-emphasized her support for legislation to codify the International

Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism — which was ultimately blocked by fellow Democratic leaders, including former Gov. Phil Murphy.

She alluded to those events, noting that she had "separated myself from governing partners" on that issue.

"Tahesha Way understands what is failing the Jewish community right now, and especially this fight against antisemitism which is on the rise," Way said. "I have stood side by side with the Jewish community, overseeing the Israel commission and making sure that the needs and the protection has always been authentically there."

Way said she would advocate for antisemitism legislation to codify the IHRA definition on the federal level as well, and to "streamline access" to security funding for Jewish institutions through the Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

"We need [representatives] who will stand with our Jewish communities without hesitation," Way said, asserting repeatedly that, "other candidates are not strong on

this.” Several other leading candidates also have spoken out against antisemitism and in favor of federal programs to combat it, as well as supported the IHRA bill.

She connected her own daughter’s experience surviving a mass shooting at the University of Virginia to those of Jewish students, and their parents, facing antisemitic harassment on their campuses after Oct. 7.

At the same time, Way said that the federal government should not step in to defund colleges and universities — as the Trump administration has — unless the institutions are “abdicating their responsibilities to students,” and that it must do so through due process and rule of law.

“Conditioning aid to Israel would weaken it at a moment when Israel faces real security threats, and I think it would undermine our credibility as a strategic partner,” Way said. “We work with Israel on these issues as partners, not by holding their security hostage to political demands. And ultimately, I believe, those aren’t conditions. They are the foundation of a strong alliance between two democracies.”

Way visited Israel in 2019 on a delegation with other state-level officials from around the country organized by the American Jewish Committee, calling it “one of the most

significant experiences of my life.” She said she wanted to “witness the alliance between our nation and Israel,” and that she had the chance to see the security and intelligence cooperation, the shared democratic values and the economic ties between the two countries.

She said she “absolutely” opposes efforts to condition or stop U.S. weapons sales to Israel, a position she said goes back to the understanding of the U.S.-Israel relationship she developed on that trip.

“Conditioning aid to Israel would weaken it at a moment when Israel faces real security threats, and I think it would undermine our credibility as a strategic partner,” Way said. “We work with Israel on these issues as partners, not by holding their security hostage to political demands. And ultimately, I believe, those aren’t conditions. They are the foundation of a strong alliance between two democracies.”

She added that she has been “clear about my expectations: responsible use of aid, commitment to humanitarian law and a path towards a two-state solution.”

Asked to clarify her vision of a two-state solution, Way said that Hamas’ dismantling is a necessary precondition to moving toward a Palestinian state.

She noted that she had the opportunity to hear from former hostage Eli Sharabi when he visited New Jersey last December, an experience she said led her to recommit

to supporting Israel.

Asked about the administration’s strikes on Iran last June, Way said that “Iran is a destabilizing force in the Middle East and an existential threat to Israel and the United States” which has harmed not only U.S. service members but also Iranian citizens. “The United States must ensure that Iran never possesses those nuclear weapons.”

She connected her concerns about the regime’s violations of its citizens’ rights to her own work in New Jersey fighting for civil rights and supporting democracy.

“That’s why I take democracy to heart, that is why I am so passionate about the United States-Israel relationship and alliance, because of the shared democratic values,” Way said.

Pressed on whether she would support strikes on the Iranian government in support of protesters, she again condemned the regime but said that the administration “cannot move unilaterally” and that Congress must be involved in any military action.

Way argued that voters are “are looking for someone who has already made a difference and has proven results for New Jersey families, and that is me, and I’m definitely not done yet,” and that she’s the only candidate with the diversity of government experience, as well as the only candidate who has been sued by the Trump administration. ♦



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