

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

*Alphabet's AI bet shows early returns under Israeli-American CFO Anat Ashkenazi • Will he or won't he? Analysts don't rule out Iran strike despite diplomatic flurry • Inside the Roadburg Foundation's \$37M donation to Israel's newest and northernmost university • Mamdani, socialist allies face first electoral test in battle for NYC House seat • 'No wrong door' into early-childhood investments, nonprofit consulting group says • Swing district Democratic congressional candidate in Omaha blasts rivals over their criticism of Israel*

FEBRUARY 5, 2026

## Alphabet's AI bet shows early returns under Israeli-American CFO Anat Ashkenazi

*The Israeli-American CFO first fueled Eli Lilly's success, and is now turning her attention to the tech sector*

By Gabby Deutch

**A**nat Ashkenazi has presided over a tremendous amount of growth in the five years she has spent as chief financial officer at two different Fortune 500 companies — first the pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, and now the tech behemoth Alphabet, the parent company of Google.

Some of that is being in the right place at the right time.

Eli Lilly debuted the weight-loss drugs Mounjaro and Zepbound in 2022 and 2023, respectively, which drove substantial sales growth for the company after Ashkenazi became CFO in 2021. Then Ashkenazi moved to Alphabet in 2024, steering the company's finances through massive investments in AI that are beginning to power a growth boost for the company.

Alphabet announced in its fourth quarter earnings call on Wednesday that its annual revenue passed \$400 billion for the first time.

But much of Ashkenazi's success is her commitment to keeping her head down and doing the work of helping companies grow. "Whether an organization is going through tremendous success and growth, or challenging times, the CFO should anchor the organization back to its core mission and values and chart the course forward," she said in a 2023 interview.

There is no splashy origin story for her entrée into the most rarefied C-suites of corporate America beyond her public resume: early stints at Ma'alon Standard & Poor's, the Israeli credit rating agency, and

at Bank Hapoalim, one of Israel's oldest and largest banks, before moving to the U.S. in 2001 to work at Eli Lilly. After that, she climbed the ranks, moving between senior finance roles.

Ashkenazi, an Israeli-American who studied at Hebrew University and got her MBA at Tel Aviv University, is rigorously focused on her work, at least in the public sphere. If she does speaking engagements or gives interviews, it's typically to a finance-focused publication or conference.

She is a straight shooter, and she likes to talk numbers. Her advice to young people, according to an interview on the "CFO Thought Leader" podcast in 2023, is standard business school fare that seems to have worked quite well for Ashkenazi: to

work hard and learn to seek out and accept criticism.

"I enjoy doing different things and moving. So if you look at my career, I moved every two or three years. I had a different role, a completely different role," she said in the 2023 podcast interview. "I had these moments throughout my career, I think they become really important early on in your career, when you have these opportunities and someone taps you on the shoulder and says, 'Come do this.'"

Ashkenazi's portfolio at Alphabet includes much more than the search tools Google is best known for. The company's reach includes YouTube, the AI chatbot Gemini, the self-driving technology startup Waymo and a growing cloud computing business. Last year, Ashkenazi's first full year with the company, was "a strong year of innovation and execution" that delivered "meaningful results across the business," she said in Wednesday's earnings call. In *Fortune*'s 2025 ranking of the most powerful women, Ashkenazi was ranked No. 51.

"She had two enormous challenges [when starting at Alphabet]. One, she was

taking over from an absolute superstar, CFO Ruth Porat, who is now the president [and chief investment officer] of the company," Mark Isakowitz, the former vice president of public policy at Google who now serves as chief of staff to Sen. Dave McCormick (R-PA), told *Jewish Insider*. "Two, she had to accelerate what had already started under Ruth, which is the capital allocation for the AI age." (Porat, like Ashkenazi, has Israeli roots: Though she was born in London, her parents met in Mandatory Palestine, and her father fought for Israel in the country's War of Independence.)

Alphabet's latest earnings report showed that the company's investments in AI were beginning to pay off, even with large financial obligations planned for the year ahead. Ashkenazi has pledged to double down on AI.

"As I look at the business, I see opportunities for further growth, propelled by AI, and the underlying momentum across the business," Ashkenazi said in her first earnings call at Alphabet in 2024. "I also believe that we are well-positioned to deliver meaningful innovation, which will translate

to revenue."

If Ashkenazi generally avoids the spotlight on any issues besides the most central components of her job, there is one other area where she is particularly bullish: the importance of investing in staff.

"What we do here, it's very intentional about people development. That's one of the core, actually one of the key areas of focus for me, as well for my team, is, how do I develop leaders that can lead in today's environment, tomorrow's environment?" she said in 2023 while still at Eli Lilly.

The role of a CFO, she said in another interview that year, is "financial and strategic leadership coupled with people and organizational leadership."

Starting at Alphabet, a Silicon Valley innovator far from Eli Lilly HQ in Indianapolis, Ashkenazi needed to get the staff on board.

"You have to win the trust of one of the largest companies in the world with 180,000 employees, so even if you get the hang of it the first day, you have to win the trust of other people," Isakowitz said. "From the outset, it appears to me she's done that." ♦

FEBRUARY 3, 2026

## Will he or won't he? Analysts don't rule out Iran strike despite diplomatic flurry

*U.S.-Iran negotiations scheduled are 'likely a diplomatic box-checking exercise and smokescreen,' FDD's Andrea Stricker said, while JINSA's Jonathan Ruhe said U.S. military action is 'unlikely for the moment'*

---

By Matthew Shea

**D**espite the Trump administration's willingness to diplomatically engage with Iranian officials, leading Middle East experts told *Jewish Insider* on Monday that military action against Tehran still remains a very real possibility.

"I can't tell you what I'm going to do," President Donald Trump told reporters on Monday evening when asked about the threshold for an Iran strike.

"We have a tremendous force going there [to the Middle East], just like we did

in Venezuela," said Trump. "I'd like to see a deal negotiated. But right now, we're talking to [Iran] and if we could work something out, that'd be great. If we can't, probably bad things will happen."

White House Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi are expected to meet in Istanbul on Friday to discuss a potential new nuclear agreement, according to reports. Jared Kushner, who has played a key role in recent high-profile diplomatic negotiations, is also expected to attend, alongside the foreign

ministers of Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, in the first meeting between the U.S. and Iran since U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities last June.

The planned talks come as the administration continues to exert pressure on Tehran — in response to Iran's violent crackdown on protesters last month, Trump has publicly weighed the possibility of U.S. military intervention, ordering the movement of additional military assets into the region and issuing a series of stark warnings on social media indicating that

U.S. forces are “ready, willing and able to rapidly fulfill [their] mission, with speed and violence” should a deal fail to be made.

While the administration has emphasized diplomacy as its preferred path, analysts caution that negotiations do not necessarily signal that the U.S. will not strike.

“Military intervention remains likely in light of President Trump’s demonstrated willingness to use force and the U.S. military buildup in the region,” said Michael Koplow, chief policy officer at the Israel Policy Forum. “Given the gulf between the American and Iranian positions and the general hard-line position of the Iranian regime on nuclear issues, it is hard to tag a nuclear deal as a likely outcome.”

Andrea Stricker, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told JI that a strike does remain on the table. She said that a deal could be difficult to reach and the upcoming meeting in Istanbul is unlikely to yield meaningful results or concessions from Iran.

“The planned meeting is likely a diplomatic box-checking exercise and smokescreen to enable a continued U.S. military buildup before Trump authorizes strikes,” Stricker said. “The administration’s demands that Iran abandon nuclear enrichment, cap its missile program, and halt support for regional proxies and terrorism, as well as stop executing its people, are nonstarters for the regime.”

Koplow said the administration’s “mixed signals” on whether it will seek diplomacy or take military action are likely “not a ruse or a diversion,” but instead a signal that Trump “has not actually made up his mind” and is “unsure what his end goal is.”

Jason Greenblatt, who served as White House Middle East envoy in the first Trump administration, asserted that “there’s no mixed signals,” arguing that the president’s messaging has been clear.

“President Trump has made the choice clear: a real, enforceable deal that ends Iran’s nuclear and missile threats and protects the U.S., our allies, and the Iranian people — or decisive action,” said Greenblatt, who emphasized that while Trump is reluctant to

engage in war, the president will not accept an agreement he views as insufficient.

“He is not a war president,” Greenblatt said, “but he will not accept a weak deal. Iran’s leadership should understand by now that President Trump means exactly what he says.”

Stricker also noted that Trump has consistently sought to avoid prolonged conflict, but argued that Iran’s internal repression and continued nuclear advances may push the president toward decisive action. On Saturday, satellite images revealed new activity at Iranian nuclear sites, a potential sign that Tehran is aiming to salvage remaining materials from the June strikes.

“President Trump favors stability and prioritizes ending violence in global affairs,” she said. “After achieving the defanging of Tehran’s nuclear program, the regime has shown it remains a threat — the ongoing massacre is too much for Trump to tolerate as the leader of the free world.” “The president will likely ensure the regime pays a price, but whether the price is regime change remains to be seen,” she added.

When detailing what potential U.S. military intervention could look like, Koplow said that it would likely be “limited” in scope.

“Any U.S. action is likely going to fall short of what the Israelis would like to see, which is a campaign that doesn’t stop until the regime has fallen,” said Koplow. “Trump seems to favor quick strikes, and he is also facing wall-to-wall opposition from Arab states regarding the prospects of a long campaign that destabilizes the region and damages prospects for trade, investment, and growth.”

However, other analysts read the shift to negotiations as a signal that intervention is increasingly unlikely. Jonathan Ruhe, a senior fellow at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America told JI that U.S. military action is “unlikely for the moment.”

“An even bigger concern now is that military action could be off the table indefinitely, in a way it wasn’t just a day or two ago, as renewed talks now seem more likely,” said Ruhe.

Ruhe also noted that a key indicator of Trump’s intentions will be “how long he keeps the ‘armada’ within striking distance,” referring to the U.S. military assets in the region. He added that negotiating with Tehran will likely result in an unfavorable outcome for the U.S.

“Negotiating with Iran is absolutely the worst possible option for the United States now, because Iran’s regime will go from being on the ropes to thinking it prevailed,” said Ruhe, noting that Tehran is unlikely to agree to an “acceptable deal,” instead using the “prospect of talks to stave off military threats.”

“[Iran] is trying to do what it always does, playing for time and seeing what concessions it can wrangle without ever giving up anything itself,” Ruhe added. “This leaves zero upside for the U.S., since Iran is too emboldened to agree to serious concessions. There’s plenty of downside, too, since U.S. credibility would be dangerously eroded in Tehran’s eyes if Trump fails to fulfill his earlier threats.”

Koplow said Jerusalem is also concerned about a potential nuclear deal and is likely to perceive Iran’s willingness to enter talks as a way of “dragging out the process indefinitely.”

“[The Israelis] are concerned that Trump will back off his threats to take action or end up signing a deal that falls short of addressing the entire basket of issues — nuclear, missiles, and proxies,” said Koplow.

Ali Shamkhani, a senior adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, had said Tehran would strike Israel in response to any U.S. military action, in an interview with the Lebanese-based *Al Mayadeen*.

Stricker warned that any agreement that falls short of dismantling the regime’s power structure and fails to address key issues would be problematic not only for the U.S. and Israel, but for the Iranian public.

“Any deal with the Islamic Republic would represent a historic betrayal of the Iranian people,” Stricker said. “The only negotiation America should entertain with Tehran is the exit of top regime officials from Iran and their relinquishing of power prior to an orderly transition to democracy.” ♦

# Inside the Roadburg Foundation's \$37M donation to Israel's newest and northernmost university

*Donation builds on existing relationship with Tel Hai College, which is becoming Kiryat Shmona University in the Galilee, and long-standing ties between Canadian Jewry and northern Israel*

By Judah Ari Gross

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

**A** day after the Israeli government held its weekly meeting in the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona to approve a new NIS 400 million (\$130 million) rehabilitation package for the war-battered city, the Vancouver, British Columbia-based Ronald S. Roadburg Foundation announced a CAD 50 million (\$36.6 million) donation to the city's nascent university. This represents both the four-year-old fund's largest donation to date and the largest-ever donation to Kiryat Shmona University in the Galilee, formerly known as Tel Hai College.

The donation builds on an initial CAD 8 million (\$5.9 million) gift the foundation made to Tel Hai College, whose main campus will now be named for the foundation, which was created through the estate of the Vancouver-based Jewish businessman. This new support comes as part of a broader Canadian effort to bolster northern Israel, particularly through the academic institution, which was officially approved to open next fall as an accredited university, instead of as an academic college (the former being both research-focused, as opposed to teaching-focused, and able to award doctorates).

Shortly after the donation was announced on Monday, *eJewishPhilanthropy* spoke with Mark Gurvis, the foundation's CEO, who previously served as CEO of the Vancouver Jewish Federation, about the gift and the foundation's support for northern Israel.

*The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

**Judah Ari Gross: Tell me how this gift came about. What is the foundation's history with Tel Hai College?**

**M**ark Gurvis: So on the one hand, we're a young foundation, only four years old, but there are people involved on the board and myself, as the CEO, who have a long history of relationship with this region. We're Vancouver-based, and Vancouver is one of six Canadian communities that have partnered with the Galilee Panhandle. That partnership goes back to 1995, so 30-plus years. And so we have been connected with the region and with Tel Hai for many years.

As our foundation was getting started and was starting to focus on what we wanted to do in Israel, it was natural that we would look to the north. As we built out our program, we decided we would focus on strengthening the whole Galilee. And we reached that decision before the war, and in that context, we made a pretty early commitment to Tel Hai to help them with a new building on the eastern campus for its computer sciences faculty. That was a CAD 8 million commitment, which we made three years ago — before the war.

Over the course of the war, we were involved in emergency efforts, especially in this region. We started focusing on Tel Hai as part of the solution for the period after the war, when people would focus on reconstruction efforts. We knew that Tel Hai was already the major economic and social driver of the region. We focused on positioning Tel Hai — as it was becoming a university — to be able to fulfill that potential.

The announcement today builds on the initial CAD 8 million commitment and

expands it to CAD 50 million.

**JAG: Just a few weeks ago, I spoke with Sarah Mali from the Jewish Federations of Canada about the Canadian Jewish community's support for Tel Hai and the north more broadly. How does this donation from your foundation fit into that effort? Was there a direct partnership or more a case of mutual awareness?**

**MG:** The commitment that they made is separate from what we've done, but we were all very much in dialogue as this was all unfolding.

I would also note that one of our board members was the chair of the Vancouver Jewish Federation's emergency allocations committee and is now chair of the national Jewish federation system in Canada's [Oversight Committee for the Pan-Canadian Initiative]. So the relationships are very close. And our foundation's involvement here is built on the foundation of the Vancouver Jewish Federation and smaller community federations that have been involved in this region.

**JAG: Of course, turning Tel Hai College into Kiryat Shmona University is only part of the effort to revitalize northern Israel. There's also improving transportation and social services and employment opportunities. Before making this investment, did you have discussions with the Israeli government about those issues to ensure that this gift would have the intended impact?**

**MG:** I would say our engagement has, by and large, not been directly with the

government. Tel Hai has managed the process with the government and [getting accreditation] through the Committee on Higher Education and working with the administration for the reconstruction of the north. Tel Hai really led that process directly. Some of us from the foundation met with the education minister, Yoav Kisch, two years ago.

But through Tel Hai, the government was aware of our plans to invest. And we're not the only ones; other foundations have stepped up recently with very significant commitments at Tel Hai: the Stef Foundation [for Education for Creativity and Industrial Entrepreneurship], the

Gottesman Foundation, the Canadian Jewish Federations. So the momentum is building, and we couldn't be more pleased about that.

**JAG: What are your expectations with this gift? Does the foundation plan to continue supporting the university in the long term, or is this like “seed funding” to help the school get off the ground?**

**MG:** For sure, we will be with them on this path for many years to come. First of all, we're not in a position to pay out CAD 50 million all in one day — God bless. This was already an expansion of an existing

commitment, so it will probably take over 12 years for us to pay the full commitment.

We have had discussions with Tel Hai to focus on where the first half of the funds will go, with an agreement that in four years, we'll talk about the second five-year allocation.

We have worked with them to bring flexible funding. Our funding will be used not just for several academic buildings but also for faculty positions and administrative resources and the development of an Institute for Regionality. With that kind of approach, we're able to help them tackle multiple problems — multiple challenges, I should say.♦

FEBRUARY 3, 2026

## Mamdani, socialist allies face first electoral test in battle for NYC House seat

*The fight to succeed Rep. Nydia Velazquez pits Mamdani and the DSA faithful against the congresswoman and her protege*

---

By Matthew Shea

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and his allies in the Democratic Socialists of America are set on contesting congressional turf home to one of the city's biggest Hasidic Jewish communities — setting up a battle royale in the 7th Congressional District that could either blunt Mamdani's brand of socialist politics, or bolster the new mayor and his far-left supporters.

Mamdani was only days into his term when he endorsed New York state Assemblymember Claire Valdez, who, like Mamdani, is a DSA member, to succeed retiring Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY), whose district delivered Mamdani's

strongest primary margins last year and contains most of the so-called “commie corridor”: a chain of trendy, gentrifying Brooklyn and Queens neighborhoods where socialist support runs strong.

Velázquez, meanwhile, has backed Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso to be her successor, and some community and labor organizations have aligned behind him, pitting Mamdani's hard-left bloc against the older progressive establishment.

Mamdani has so far been cautious in spending his political capital on behalf of DSA allies. Even before entering City Hall, Mamdani scuttled a left-flank challenge to

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and persuaded a DSA-aligned city councilwoman to drop her bid against Rep. Dan Goldman (D-NY) to consolidate a left-wing lane for former city Comptroller Brad Lander.

Democratic observers who spoke to *Jewish Insider* were split over whether Mamdani is steering DSA or DSA is steering the mayor.

But Mamdani has now put his name and credibility on the line in this race, argued veteran Democratic strategist Hank Sheinkopf.

“He's not a mayor. He's a movement,” Sheinkopf said. “If he beats [Velázquez's

candidate], he gets more powerful than he's ever been. As long as you're winning, people are afraid of you. You start losing, the fear is no longer there and it makes him less significant."

Not long ago, Velázquez and Reynoso themselves were considered the left wing of the party, defying the once-feared power of the Brooklyn Democratic machine, helping to build a coalition of idealistic new arrivals, community groups, unions and longtime political reform organizations that became the dominant force in the borough's politics. But the political struggles of the last 20 years are long forgotten, and with the rise of DSA and Mamdani, the residents of what local political observers have humorously tagged the "commie corridor" are no longer content to be one factor among many — or to accept compromise candidates — in their demographic heartland.

"Progressive's not good enough any more. If you aren't part of the DSA, that isn't enough," said Marcos Masri, a political consultant and native of the district. "They are hungry, they want to hold the reins."

Valdez's career path is stereotypical for a DSA member. The daughter of an engineer from Texas, she studied sculpture at the prestigious School of the Art Institute in Chicago before arriving in New York for a job at a Queens-based museum. She then took a role in the visual arts department at Columbia University, and pivoted from creative pursuits to politics when an organizer recruited her to a bargaining unit for the United Auto Workers — itself amid a pivot in New York from its old base of industrial employees and dealership mechanics to radicalized grad students and administrative workers.

At Local 2110, Valdez signed an open letter just weeks after the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terror attacks that blasted the American labor movement for its historic support of Israel, and demanded the UAW as a whole embrace the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against Israel. The letter makes no reference to the Hamas massacre in Israel that incited the latest

phase of conflict.

"Workers in the U.S. are struggling against many of the same capitalist forces that maintain and bolster the Israeli occupation of Palestine. These forces rely on racialized exploitation, dispossession, and policing in the United States and around the world," reads the missive, which makes no mention of Hamas or the then-fresh terror attacks. "A global class of workers will not achieve liberation if fragmented by colonization, apartheid, and borders. These are the structures on which an ascendant global fascist movement is shoring up white supremacy, nativism, militarism, heteropatriarchy, and other tools of oppression to further divide us."

The epistle ends with the sign-off "Until Liberation and Return." A little over a year later, Valdez won election as a DSA-backed insurgent to the New York state Assembly, where she co-sponsored Mamdani's "Not on our dime! Ending New York funding of Israeli settler violence act." This legislation would forbid nonprofit organizations in New York from "unauthorized support of Israeli settlement activity," including in Jerusalem, and establish both monetary penalties as well as a basis for individual lawsuits for damages.

Reynoso, born in Brooklyn to Dominican immigrant parents, has followed a more traditional political career path. He served as an organizer for the now-defunct Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), before he joined the staff of City Councilwoman Diana Reyna. He succeeded Reyna in the City Council in 2013, part of a progressive wave that also lifted Bill de Blasio to the mayoralty, and participated in a council trip to Israel in 2015 over the protests of some activists. He won the largely symbolic borough president's office in 2021.

A Valdez victory would enhance both DSA and Mamdani's reach and prestige, said Sheinkopf, as well as give the mayor "a wedge" against the more pragmatic Jeffries in the House. If Reynoso wins the seat, Masri said it would show the mayor and

his socialist cadres still depend on other, older institutional actors to win and exercise power, and their clout — and ability to pressure elected officials leftward — would diminish.

But the race promises to be a test, too, for the district's large Hasidic Jewish community, the bulk of whom belong to the Satmar movement. Despite their religious objections to Zionism and strong network of social service networks that rely on city funding — and despite a few of their rabbis' receptiveness toward Mamdani — sources predicted the group's leaders would largely endorse Reynoso. The borough president, who had an at-times fraught relationship with Satmar leadership in the City Council, has heavily networked within the community in his current role.

But Masri questioned whether the community's mobilization would match the inevitable DSA get-out-the-vote campaign, which will draw on a city-spanning web of activists to knock doors for Valdez.

Further complicating the picture is the recent entry of another Democrat, Councilwoman Julie Won, into the contest. Won, who filed paperwork to run on Monday, has little institutional support, but could scrape off more centrist or right-leaning voters who might otherwise support Reynoso.

"If it's a very close race, and she pulls like 2,000 votes, that is something that can decide the race," Masri said.

Sheinkopf was more bullish on Reynoso's prospects, noting the political organization and trust Velázquez, his backer, built during her 16 terms in Congress. He argued Mamdani risks alienating potential progressive allies loyal to the borough president and congresswoman as he seeks to expand his socialist domain.

"He believes he is immune from any blowback," the strategist said. "This is not a credit card with unending credit. At some point the credit runs out. The shine runs out. You can't do this forever." ♦

# 'No wrong door' into early-childhood investments, nonprofit consulting group says

*New resource from The Bridgespan Group recommends choosing one topic to focus on, rather than trying to fix the whole field*

By Jay Deitcher

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

**A** growing body of research shows that the first five years of a child's life define their future. While their brain and body are rapidly forming, the care that they receive improves their ability to lead healthier adult lives, physically and emotionally. Accordingly, philanthropy has grown increasingly interested in supporting early-childhood programs. But the authors of a new guide on the topic found that many would-be funders don't know where to start.

"We repeatedly hear from donors that they understand the importance, but don't really know where to go within this space," Maggie Davies, partner at The Bridgespan Group consulting nonprofit and co-author of the guide, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

"A 15-page guide is never going to be enough," she said of the document, titled "Investing in Our Future: Critical Ways Philanthropy Can Help Every Young Child and Family Thrive." So the important thing, she stressed, is for philanthropists to just jump in.

The guide, which was released last month, is a follow-up to the organization's 2015 guide, created alongside the Pritzker Children's Initiative, which was titled "Achieving Kindergarten Readiness for All Our Children: A Funder's Guide to Early Childhood Development from Birth to Five" and remains one of the nonprofit's most accessed resources.

In the decade since its first guide was published, there is more research available proving the importance of early-childhood care for a child's brain, metabolic, nervous and emotional regulation systems. There is also a greater awareness of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs,

which are potentially traumatic events such as neglect that are tied to everything from jail time to substance abuse. Additionally, the field no longer sees the child as the sole focus of care; it now includes families and the broader community in interventions.

Investing in early-childhood initiatives intersects with many issues philanthropists care about, including education, racial equity, health, housing, gender equity and economic justice, Katherine Kaufmann, a Bridgespan partner and co-author of the guide, told *eJP*. Affordable health-care benefits women, who often bear the brunt of childcare, and helps with family economic stability. Because everything trickles down, donors' dollars are amplified.

"There is no higher ROI place to put that incremental dollar or million dollars or billion dollars for the country, than investing in that critical developmental stage from prenatal to 5, and in particular, prenatal to 3," Davies said. "That is when so much of the brain and the physical wellness and ability of that child to thrive as a future student, as a future adult, and contributor to our society" is formed.

The guide offers four recommendations of "critical areas for philanthropic investment," providing examples from case studies of initiatives across the country.

The first recommendation is ensuring that initiatives don't aim to be a one-size-fits-all solution to help every child. Philanthropists should invest in initiatives that continually refine their offerings to be tailored to the communities, families and the children they serve and expand access to more families.

The guide offers several examples of ways this can be done, by increasing the languages services are offered in, expanding

funding streams to allow different forms of insurance, offering telehealth options, broadening where initiatives are held and bringing in community leaders to gain trust from the clients served. Additionally, initiatives need capital to continually measure and learn from impact data.

The second recommendation is to support initiatives that take a holistic lens to caring for children, involving local leaders and the families being served in shaping the initiatives supporting children, compensating them for their time and expertise, elevating their voices in local policy decisions and keeping them updated on how programs are running.

The third recommendation is to build a "chorus of supporters," including elected officials and influential citizens, such as philanthropists, through storytelling to bring awareness to the realities facing children and their families. The guide suggests equipping parents, caregivers and community leaders with the skills to share their stories to advocate for policy changes themselves.

One example given in the guide is of the Clinton Foundation's Too Small to Fail, which partners with Hollywood professionals to weave lessons about early childhood and literacy into streaming services and television shows, such as "Law & Order SVU," "Doc McStuffins," "Orange is the New Black" and "Pequeños Gigantes," a popular Spanish-language talent show.

The final recommendation is to strengthen public investment through strategic, ongoing, bipartisan advocacy, lobbying and cultivating relationships with think tanks, policy coalitions and community, business and faith leaders.

"None of these opportunities on its own

will guarantee that all families and children in the United States will thrive,” the guide says. “However, each represents a significant contribution to that future.”

If asked where someone should focus their investment, Kaufmann would reply with more questions: “What do you care most about? Do you care about your community, the city you live in? Do you care about your state? Are you really interested in expectant moms? Are you really worried about or thinking about nurturing care and how we provide the array of options for families? There are so many options for making a difference in these earliest years that there’s almost no wrong door.”

Davies recommends that after choosing

an area of interest, philanthropists dive into research and case studies. They should reach out to others in the field, including donors and foundations. “Just get started,” she said. “Don’t sit and try to learn everything possible and craft a strategy and spend a lot of time before actually getting any dollars flowing.”

At times, early-childhood initiatives have “gotten short shrift” because even though they are seen as an important issue, they are not seen as urgent, and some people believe the early years are a family matter, not a national priority, Kaufmann said. But families are under more stress since the pandemic, and need help now.

The guide was funded by the Pritzker

Children’s Initiative, Imaginable Futures and the WK Kellogg Foundation, which Kaufmann said, shows that “existing donors are excited for new ones to join.”

Many of the largest donors in early-childhood initiatives are Jewish, which is not a surprise, Rebecca Brondfield, Bridgespan principal and co-author of the guide, told eJP.

“So many of the solutions here really speak to the Jewish way of supporting families in a community-based kind of delivery system, focusing on families, supporting early education, and we want to see more of that,” she said. “All children really deserve that kind of support and care across the country, too.” ♦

FEBRUARY 2, 2026

## Swing district Democratic congressional candidate in Omaha blasts rivals over their criticism of Israel

*Crystal Rhoades, the clerk of the District Court in Douglas County, is running on an unapologetically pro-Israel platform*

---

By Marc Rod

Democrat Crystal Rhoades, the district court clerk of Douglas County, Neb., is running for Congress in the state’s 2nd District on an unapologetically pro-Israel platform, with the explicit goal of blocking a progressive, whose record on Israel has attracted scrutiny in the pro-Israel community, from becoming the party’s nominee in the critical swing district.

Asked by *Jewish Insider* in an interview last week why she’s running for Congress, Rhoades answered simply, “to stop John Cavanaugh,” referring to the Democratic state senator seen as the front-runner in the race.

Rhoades, who said she’s been involved in Democratic politics in the area for two

decades, during which she has held three elective offices and served as the county Democratic chair, said that “it was just not a good idea to allow him to emerge as the nominee” in the swing district. “What’s best for this district is for someone other than John Cavanaugh to represent it.”

“With everything that is happening right now, with the Trump administration, there’s too much risk in his candidacy,” she continued, noting that if Cavanaugh wins, the state’s Republican governor would appoint his replacement in the state Senate, potentially giving Nebraska Republicans enough votes to redraw the district and move to a winner-take-all system in the presidential election, rather than the current arrangement in which the state’s

two congressional districts are allocated separate electoral votes.

The Omaha-area 2nd district has, in recent presidential elections, voted with Democrats.

“That, combined with his position on Israel — which I find to be abhorrent, and frankly, very inconsistent with American values and national security — were strong motivators for me to get into the race, because I do have a long history of service here. I’m well known to these voters, and the only one that can compete with his family legacy,” Rhoades said.

Cavanaugh is a progressive state senator who hails from a Nebraska political dynasty. He was one of only a handful of lawmakers who declined to sign on to a letter in the

state Senate expressing support for Israel on the first anniversary of the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks, and at a recent candidate forum swore off accepting any support from AIPAC or Democratic Majority for Israel.

"I support Israel and believe Israel has a right to exist. And I also believe a two-state solution is the only way to secure lasting peace," Cavanaugh said in a statement to JI in response to Rhoades. "Democrats in NE-02 want a candidate who will fight the Trump agenda and bring positive ideas to fix our economy, lower health care costs, and end the corruption we see from Trump and Washington. That's why I'm running for Congress."

In her interview with JI and a position paper she authored on Israel, Rhoades expressed a deep commitment to the Jewish state, its security and the U.S.-Israel relationship, and offered significant criticism for fellow Democrats who are critical of Israel.

She traced her support for the Jewish state to her time as a teenager working in a nursing home, where she helped take care of a Holocaust survivor and first learned about his story, antisemitism and the Holocaust.

**"For me, this is very cut and dry and not at all controversial or confusing," Rhoades said. "I just fundamentally disagree with the position that some of the members of the party have taken [against Israel]. ... It's really sad and it makes me quite angry."**

"I knew someone who described unspeakable evil and horror. This was a man who, in the '90s, was still hiding [extra] food," a practice he took up in the concentration camps, Rhoades said. "It's really difficult for me to express how much of an impression it actually made, but it was an incredibly powerful experience, knowing a survivor and having the opportunity to talk with them about what had happened."

She saved her money from that job and used it for a trip to Europe, during which she visited a concentration camp. She went on to study terrorism in college in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, which she said further enhanced her understanding of the threat of global terrorism and Israel's stabilizing presence in the Middle East.

"For me, this is very cut and dry and not at all controversial or confusing," Rhoades said. "I just fundamentally disagree with the position that some of the members of the party have taken [against Israel]. ... It's really sad and it makes me quite angry."

She said that she believes fellow Democrats are falling for misleading or false narratives pushed by online algorithms. She added that those who would support divestment from Israel, cutting off U.S. support or anti-Israel slogans like "from the river to the sea" have a fundamental lack of understanding of Israel's role in the world and in combating terrorism.

"It is, quite frankly, shocking to me that so many people are taking this position," she continued. "I really can't make sense of it. I just do not understand it."

In her position paper, Rhoades argued that Democrats who aren't standing with Israel are betraying Democratic values and vowed not to cave to anti-Israel pressures in the party.

"These principles: democracy, equality, and freedom from persecution, are supposed to be the foundation of our core values as Democrats," Rhoades wrote. "So why are so many ignoring them when it comes to Israel? I won't bend my values to appease a social media mob. I won't apologize for standing up for our ally. And I won't stop calling out double standards when I see them. That's not weakness ... it's leadership."

She said that she hopes her first trip as a member of Congress would be to Israel, a signal "to my colleagues and my constituents that these issues are of moral importance to me."

Rhoades told JI she believes the U.S.-Israel relationship has helped prevent terrorist incidents at home and elsewhere, and benefitted the U.S. in a variety of other ways — in technology, commerce, defense and intelligence.

She also emphasized that it's the only democracy in the Middle East and the only country in the region where women, LGBTQ people and minorities enjoy equal rights.

Rhoades said she hopes the ceasefire in Gaza holds, and that a two-state solution can eventually be reached, but that it must be negotiated between the parties and that Hamas cannot be allowed to continue to hold any authority.

She emphasized in her paper that the "eradication of Hamas" was the only reasonable response to the Oct. 7 attacks and that a two-state solution must guarantee Israel's security, demilitarize any future Palestinian state and end support for terrorism.

"While compassion for Gazan civilians is well-intentioned, it too often misses the point that they are oppressed by the same terrorist regime that insists on harming their own civilians to try to turn public opinion globally against Israel," she said in the position paper. "All leaders, but particularly Democratic leaders, should be calling that out as a betrayal of our core values."

Rhoades also expressed deep skepticism of the Palestinian Authority, writing that its "weakness and corruption facilitated Hamas's ascension." She called for "permanent enforcement," on an international basis, of the Taylor Force Act — which bars U.S. support for the PA until the governing body ends its payments to terrorists.

Rhoades did not attend a candidate forum in January where most candidates, including Cavanaugh, swore off pro-Israel support and several said they would have voted against a government funding package that included funding to Israel and maintained a ban on funding for UNRWA.

She told JI that if she had been there, she would have pushed back on the premise of the questions posed by audience members, which she said provided a "fundamental misframing of the issue," and conflated anger with Israel's leadership with all Israeli and Jewish people.

She vowed to vote in support of any and all resources Israel needs to defend itself, and oppose any legislation imposing new conditions on aid to Israel.

Rhoades told JI she would have supported the U.S. strikes on Iran last summer, but emphasized that the Trump administration should be consulting Congress before engaging in military operations in foreign countries. If presented to her for a vote as a member of Congress, she said she would have supported the U.S. operation.

Looking ahead, she said that Congress should be involved in any decisions regarding further action against Iran, but

that she is “very supportive of looking for ways to help the Iranian people, who, very clearly, are unhappy with their leadership.”

**“The problem is that people conflate [Israel and Jews], and in doing so, it always kind of ends up being antisemitic. The idea that Israel does not have the right to exist, in my mind, is just inherently antisemitic,” Rhoades told JI.**

In her position paper, Rhoades said that Iran cannot maintain any nuclear weapons or enrichment capacity, and additionally emphasized the need to work with other U.S. partners to “snuff out” Iran’s proxy forces.

She also argued that the debate over whether anti-Zionism is antisemitic “is the wrong debate” and that in practice, anti-Zionist rhetoric veers into antisemitism “almost immediately.” She said “it is insane” that the idea that Israel has a right to exist in safety could be considered controversial.

“The problem is that people conflate [Israel and Jews], and in doing so, it always kind of ends up being antisemitic. The idea

that Israel does not have the right to exist, in my mind, is just inherently antisemitic,” she told JI.

When political leaders endorse or refuse to condemn rhetoric like “globalize the intifada” or “from the river to the sea,” Rhoades said that she sees those officials as empowering antisemitism.

She expressed strong support for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition of antisemitism and for the Antisemitism Awareness Act that would codify the use of that definition in education.

“I’m not at all interested in any other definition,” Rhoades told JI, warning that spikes in antisemitism like the one currently happening in the U.S. have historically presaged authoritarian and oppressive regimes.

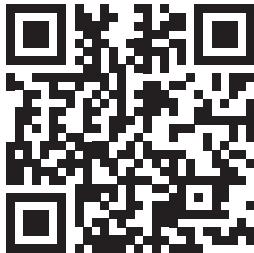
The 2nd District is currently represented by moderate Republican Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE), himself an outspoken supporter of Israel and prominent voice against antisemitism. Bacon, who has managed to fend off a series of Democratic challengers, is not running for reelection, and the *Cook*

*Political Report* rates the district as “Lean Democratic.”

Internal polling by Rhoades’ campaign has put her in second behind Cavanaugh, 25%-17% with 53% undecided, but there are also several other candidates in the race. Polling by Cavanaugh’s campaign in mid-January had him with a commanding lead, with 43% to Rhoades’ 15%.

Rhoades said she’s the only candidate in the race from a working-class background, and understands the challenges that voters who have been disillusioned with the Democratic Party face. She said she thinks she can bring those voters back to the Democratic Party.

Outside of Israel policy, Rhoades said her top priorities include implementing mandatory retirement ages for members of Congress, eliminating gerrymandering and strengthening checks and balances; investing in infrastructure to provide economic stimulus and better-paying jobs; and helping to lower health-care costs, including by de-linking health insurance from the workplace. ♦



## Catch up in the afternoons with Daily Overtime

*Offering a forward-focused read on what we’re tracking now and what’s coming next. An afternoon briefing reserved for our premium subscribers*