

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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Team Israel's World Baseball Classic team unveils its 2026 roster

The team is anchored by its pitching ace Dean Kremer of the Orioles, while Harrison Bader and Spencer Horwitz are among its best known hitters

By Matthew Shea

ROCKVILLE, Md. — Team Israel unveiled its roster for the 2026 World Baseball Classic on Tuesday, assembling a mix of major leaguers, high-level minor league players and homegrown Israeli talent as it prepares to return to baseball's biggest international stage in March — a moment that carries added weight for players and staff amid high levels of antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment worldwide.

The team, managed by Brad Ausmus, will

once again feature Baltimore Orioles pitcher Dean Kremer, a longtime fixture of the team, along with Philadelphia Phillies catcher Garrett Stubbs and offensive contributions from first baseman Spencer Horwitz of the Pittsburgh Pirates and outfielder Harrison Bader of the San Francisco Giants.

Officials involved with Team Israel say the roster is more talented and balanced than that of the previous tournament in 2023. But for many within the organization, the meaning of representing Team Israel

extends far beyond the field. Simon Rosenbaum, Team Israel's general manager and director of player programming for the Tampa Bay Rays, told *Jewish Insider* at the team's roster reveal at the Woodmont Country Club in the Washington suburbs that representing Israel on the world stage is deeply personal.

"For me, it starts with my family," said Rosenbaum. "My grandfather was born in Germany in the 1930s and was able to survive the Holocaust. His mom and one of

his sisters were not as fortunate, and he came to Israel, which became his home and where our family started. So to be able to represent Israel and blend that with baseball — which is another thing that I'm passionate about — it means a lot."

Rosenbaum said he's "proud to represent Israel," calling it a "huge honor." He said wearing the Israeli uniform comes with a responsibility.

"It's the only Jewish country in the world," said Rosenbaum. "Anything that we can do to represent that in a positive light and let people know that we're here — that we're proud to be here — is a responsibility that we don't take lightly."

That sentiment was echoed by Nate Fish, CEO of Israel Baseball Americas and a former Team Israel manager and player, who has been involved with the program for nearly two decades.

"It's always special every time we go out and stand on the first or third baseline, wearing our uniform, and 'Hatikvah' plays," Fish said, referring to the Israeli national anthem. "And you know you're on an all-Jewish team, and the families and friends and fans are in the stands. It's always a powerful experience."

Fish said that experience has taken on new meaning since the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel, recalling heightened security concerns during international competitions last year.

"We played in Holland in the European Championships this past year in September of 2025 and there were such serious security concerns for us that we couldn't leave the hotel for two weeks," said Fish. "So the team was not allowed to leave the hotel, except to go to the field to play in the games."

"There were fans who were having trouble getting into the stadium," he added. "They had to consider canceling the tournament."

Fish said the experience made playing for the team "that much more meaningful, because you're doing it in an environment where people openly don't want you there, and you still have to be proud, put the uniform on, go out on the field and represent your people with even more pride."

On the field, Israel will face one of the tournament's toughest paths, kicking off

play in Pool D in Miami in March, where the team will square off against juggernauts Dominican Republic and Venezuela, as well as the Netherlands and Nicaragua — a grouping widely referred to as the "group of death." The top two teams from each of the tournament's four groups advance to the next round.

"Obviously, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela rosters are littered with Major League All-Stars," Rosenbaum said. "It's going to be a massive test. That being said, the Netherlands are a really good team, especially offensively. Nicaragua added some players who are really good, and there's no team that we're going to take lightly."

Fish also noted that the Dominican Republic is "the toughest roster that we'll face," with Venezuela "damn near as good."

"You don't want to be playing those guys because it's like a team of Hall of Famers, and it's horrifying," said Fish. "If you look objectively at the tournament and the matchups and the way that the rosters match up, our must-win games are Nicaragua and the Netherlands if we want to advance into the second round."

Still, Rosenbaum said the team is "happy with the roster that we were able to put together," noting the acquisition of Bader to the team as a "big addition" to the team's outfield.

Israel is looking to rebound from a difficult 2023 tournament, when it went 1-3 in group play and was outscored 25-1 in its three losses, failing to advance beyond the opening round. Rosenbaum expressed confidence that this year's team is better positioned to compete, telling JI he believes Israel can go "toe to toe against all of them."

"I don't put a ton of stock in four games that we played a couple years ago," said Rosenbaum. "Our team is really talented. In baseball, anything can happen, especially in one game."

Meanwhile, Fish framed the setback as part of a longer cycle for the program, which has experienced both highs and lows over the years. In 2012, Team Israel failed to qualify for the competition. Five years later, the team proceeded to finish first in the group stage, sweeping the competition and setting up an underdog run that resulted in a sixth place finish — the highest in Team

Israel's history at the competition.

"We've failed plenty of times before, and we've also succeeded," said Fish. "We're not scared of the cycles. You learn what you can learn, put the best team together and hope the guys go out and perform."

A central figure in Israel's effort will be Kremer, whom Fish described as the unquestioned ace of the team. Rosenbaum called Kremer the "ultimate professional," adding that he expects the Orioles pitcher to have a "great outing."

Fish, who has known Kremer since he was 14, traced the pitcher's rise from an unheralded teenager to a dependable major league starter.

"He's not just a random big leaguer you're renting for the weekend," Fish said. "He speaks Hebrew. He spends time in Israel. His family is Israeli. He's been part of the program for 10, 15 years. Rolling into 2026, there's no doubt he's our ace."

"As far as what we expect from him is that he goes out there and gives us just really quality innings and our best chance of winning a game," Fish added.

Despite Israel's progress, expectations remain measured. The team has never finished within the top three at a World Baseball Classic competition, a feat Rosenbaum said would be "incredible."

"That's the goal," said Rosenbaum. "We have a lot of players who are fighting for their careers in Major League Baseball, trying to make an opening day roster, and so they're going to be motivated. We have other players who are motivated because of their family's connection to Judaism or Israel. I think the common thread is we want to win."

Win or lose, Rosenbaum hopes to use the platform to inspire the next generation of Israeli baseball players and continue the growth of the game in the Jewish state. Doing so, he said, would be a "huge success for the longevity of Israeli baseball."

"I've had a lot of great experiences playing for Team Israel in the European championships before, and I would like to give back, especially to the kids who are growing up in Israel who want to play baseball," said Rosenbaum. "I think someone like Dean [Kremer] and Harrison Bader can be amazing role models for them, to let them know what's possible." ♦

White House needs to confront limits of Hamas disarmament, experts say

The options for demilitarization 'strike me as not feasible from a military point of view and certainly not practical from a political point of view,' says the Carnegie Endowment's Aaron David Miller

By Matthew Shea

The White House launched Phase 2 of President Donald Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan last month, intending to transition the enclave toward demilitarization, technocratic governance and reconstruction. But before those plans can move forward, the administration still needs to confront a central reality on the ground: Hamas remains armed and unwilling to cooperate.

During the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January, the Trump administration unveiled the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), a committee of technocrats intended as a post-Hamas governing authority, alongside an outline for reconstructing the enclave.

That vision, however, was quickly challenged by Hamas' leadership. Speaking at the Al Jazeera Forum in Doha, Qatar, this past weekend, Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal, who is under U.S. indictment on terrorism-related charges, rejected the U.N. Security Council-backed plan for Gaza — a move that could complicate disarmament and Phase 2 efforts.

Experts told *Jewish Insider* that the administration's expectation that Hamas can be persuaded to voluntarily hand over its weapons is detached from the group's incentives and its perception of the war's outcome.

"Without first disarming Hamas, progress on every other facet of Phase 2 will be minimal at best," said Jonathan Ruhe, a fellow at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America. "The U.S. needs to adapt its strategy, which remains stuck on convincing Hamas to hand over its weapons."

Ruhe said Hamas believes it "won the war" and therefore "can't be incentivized to give up" power. He added that, absent voluntary disarmament, the administration may need to consider using well-vetted and tightly overseen "private military contractors" to carry out the task, a suggestion also recently put forward by former special envoy for Iran and Venezuela Elliott Abrams and JINSA's Eric Edelman and Rena Gabber.

Other experts were similarly skeptical that Hamas would relinquish control voluntarily. Michael Koplow, chief policy officer at the Israel Policy Forum, warned that Hamas is not going to "want to voluntarily give up their weapons without real guarantees," adding that the group's incentive to comply is "not very high."

"If you're going to get [Hamas to comply with the plan], it's going to have to involve some sort of guarantees for the group and guarantees for the leadership, which are going to be very difficult for the Israelis to swallow," said Koplow.

Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said Hamas is also unlikely "to surrender the actual administrative control of Gaza." He outlined what he described as a narrow and unattractive set of options for disarmament.

"There are only two ways to fundamentally demilitarize Hamas," Miller said. "There are only two forces capable of doing it. One would be the IDF, and you've seen how that has gone over the course of the last 2 ½ years. The second would be the deployment of thousands of American combat forces, which would take a while and

result in a permanent occupation of Gaza by the U.S. military. Both of these strike me as not feasible from a military point of view and certainly not practical from a political point of view."

Miller added that any disarmament process would likely need to be accompanied by an Israeli withdrawal from additional areas in Gaza. The IDF currently controls more than half of the territory, demarcated by what officials refer to as a "yellow line."

Until Hamas is disarmed, Miller said Israel is unlikely to permit large-scale reconstruction, given concerns that materials such as cement and metal tubing could be diverted for tunnel construction and weapons production.

Koplow also noted military means as an option for disarmament, but said the Trump administration appears to be leaning toward a "DDR" process — disarmament, demobilization and reintegration — an alternative to military force in which Hamas would give up heavy weapons first, transition away from armed activity and then reintegrate former fighters into civilian life.

"The idea is that you're not going in and destroying the group," Koplow said. "You're first getting rid of their weapons, you're then trying to transform the group itself into something different and then you're reintegrating the group's members back into society. Historically, that's the way that terrorist groups like this are disarmed."

Koplow cautioned that any such effort would be slow and contentious. "Hamas is going to make it difficult," he said, adding that demilitarization will be "a long and

drawn-out and very difficult process if it has any chance of working.”

“After all these months, the ISF still lacks a clear mandate,” Jonathan Ruhe, a fellow at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, said. “If Hamas disarmed voluntarily, as Trump’s plan envisions, any number of countries would contribute troops for relatively safe peacekeeping duties like safeguarding humanitarian aid, police training and border patrol. But because Hamas won’t disarm peacefully, Arab and other Muslim countries consistently refuse to put their forces in harm’s way.”

Under Trump’s original 20-point plan, a U.S.-led International Stabilization Force (ISF) was envisioned as a “long-term internal security solution.” Last month, Trump appointed Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers as commander of the ISF, and Israeli media reported on Monday that thousands of Indonesian soldiers were expected to deploy to southern Gaza in the coming weeks as part of the first foreign contingent.

Despite those moves, experts say the ISF remains constrained. No other countries have formally joined the force, and efforts to assemble it have been complicated by reluctance among potential contributors and Israeli security concerns over which countries would be permitted to participate.

Analysts also say the ISF still lacks a clearly defined mandate and could be limited to a supporting role rather than directly confronting Hamas.

“After all these months, the ISF still lacks a clear mandate,” Ruhe said. “If Hamas disarmed voluntarily, as Trump’s plan envisions, any number of countries would contribute troops for relatively safe peacekeeping duties like safeguarding humanitarian aid, police training and border patrol. But because Hamas won’t disarm peacefully, Arab and other Muslim countries consistently refuse to put their forces in harm’s way.”

Miller said the ISF would most likely deploy in areas already under Israeli control, rather than Hamas-held territory. “I see the stabilization force as exactly what its name implies,” he said. “It would be an after-the-fact deployment to monitor and stabilize. The heavy work of actually decommissioning weapons is going to take a very long time.”

Even if demilitarization were achieved, Miller said the question of whether and how Hamas members could be integrated into future governance remains unresolved. The group maintains an extensive bureaucratic apparatus in Gaza, including tens of thousands of civil servants and police officers, whose future role would need to be addressed.

“It’s probably going to involve making distinctions between Hamas fighters and Hamas bureaucrats, and making some very difficult choices about what level of reintegration, if any, you’re willing to allow for former Hamas members,” Michael Koplow, chief policy officer at the Israel Policy Forum, said.

“Hamas has 40,000 civil servants and 10,000 police,” Miller said. “Those people would be under the administration of whom?”

Koplow suggested that the group be completely dismantled and barred from maintaining governing authority.

“Hamas as a group, and certainly not as it’s currently constituted, can’t responsibly be given any role in future Gaza governance,” said Koplow.

“It’s probably going to involve making distinctions between Hamas fighters and Hamas bureaucrats, and making some very difficult choices about what level of reintegration, if any, you’re willing to allow for former Hamas members,” Koplow added. “Then the question is, does anybody who’s ever had a Hamas affiliation have to be hunted down and eliminated over time, or is there a world in which they can, as individuals, be integrated into whatever future Gaza governance and society looks like?” ♦

‘Bringing voice to the voiceless’: Former hostages Aviva and Keith Siegel heal through helping others

The couple, once held captive by Hamas, channel their trauma into humanitarian work, volunteering in Kenya’s Kakuma refugee settlement with IsraAid and amplifying the stories of those suffering in silence

By Melissa Weiss

Keith and Aviva Siegel have seen the horrors of war up close and personal — torn from their home in Kibbutz Kfar Aza and taken hostage deep into Gaza, where Aviva would spend nearly two months and Keith would be held for more than a year.

And yet, little could have prepared them for what they would encounter at the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, where they spent five days last month volunteering at one of the world’s largest refugee settlements with the Israeli humanitarian group IsraAid as part of the couple’s pivot to humanitarian efforts around the world.

Aviva, who was a school teacher before the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks, choked up as she recalled the pregnant teenagers she met in the camp, where hundreds of thousands of people have fled from places such as South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

One of the teens she met, a 15-year-old girl, had just given birth to her second child. She had her oldest child at age 13. “It was too much for me to carry,” Aviva told *Jewish Insider* from New York. “It was too much for me to carry because of so many things. You know, these girls, some of them have been raped, and there’s nobody in the world that’s protecting them, nobody.”

It was a familiar feeling for the couple, who have each recounted having seen fellow hostages after they had been sexually assaulted by their Hamas captors.

The people she met at the refugee camp, Aviva said, were “screaming out with no voice to tell how bad the situation is there. It took me to Gaza, to those moments, and so many moments and so many days of not

knowing if I’ll ever live, if I’ll make it, if I’m visible, if anybody is doing anything they could to take me out of there.”

“I didn’t understand in Gaza how the world let us stay there for so long,” she said.

The couple’s time in captivity — and after, as they became prominent activists lobbying for the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza — deepened their resolve to use their newfound prominence for good. From Kenya, the Siegels flew to Washington, where they met last week with First Lady Melania Trump.

“We were at the White House, and I told the first lady about our experience in Kakuma at the refugee camp, and the hardships and the horrific life they have there,” Keith said. “I kind of feel like I carry them with me, in my heart and my soul and my thoughts, and just to be able to be their voice here in the U.S.”

The couple exchanged experiences both with refugees in the camp and IsraAid staffers — many of whom are refugees themselves.

“I really felt like it was like a mutual understanding,” Keith said. “And also feeling like all of us, them and Aviva and I, have experienced suffering. All of us have experienced being hungry because we didn’t have food to eat, being thirsty because we didn’t have water to drink. Just the uncertainty, the lack of security and feeling like death could be imminent.”

Both Keith and Aviva said they were shaped by their early childhood experiences. Coming from apartheid South Africa, Aviva, whose family moved to Israel when she was 9, said that as a child, “I saw things that

shouldn’t be in this world.”

Being at the refugee camp, she explained, “brought me back to those days of being a kid in a place that is just a disaster. It’s a disaster.”

Growing up in the U.S., Keith said, “my parents raised me, and they showed me, by their example, *tikkun olam*. It’s one of the important concepts about values of the Jewish faith.”

“I’m sure my late parents would be very, very proud of me,” he added. “I feel like I’m continuing their legacy of things that were so important to them their whole lives. They were helping people in many, many different ways. Within their community, but also outside of their community and around the world.”

The Siegels were connected to IsraAid through Matan Sivek, a co-founder of the D.C. Hostages and Missing Families Forum and, with his wife, a leader of the group’s U.S. efforts. Sivek, who lives in Washington, joined IsraAid as the group’s head of strategic partnerships last year.

The pairing between the Siegels and IsraAid was, as CEO Yotam Polizer told *JL*, “a spiritual match.”

“It’s an unbelievable privilege to have Aviva and Keith, because they are really bringing voice to the voiceless,” Polizer said. “They are, for me and for us, the best example of post-traumatic growth, which I believe is the essence of Israel — how these terrible, terrible tragedies could also turn into opportunities to support others and to build bridges.”

IsraAid has operated in the camp for more than a decade, and employs approximately 50 people there. Among the

services it provides are health clinics, clean water access and schooling for some of the tens of thousands of children in the camp.

“Keith and I aren’t special in any way,” Aviva said. “We are just two people that were kidnapped from Kfar Aza and spent time in the world’s darkness, Keith for 484 days, and me for 51 days. And we know what it’s like to need help. So we need to help them. We just need to help them.”

Keith became emotional as he talked about the organization’s work across the globe. “I know there are many, many other people all around the world that are in big trouble, and I feel like it’s my responsibility as much as I can to search to be aware of people that are in trouble, and do whatever I can do to help them.”

For him, the pivot to the humanitarian field also served a deeper purpose. “Helping others,” he said, “is part of my healing.” ♦

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Senior Ed. Dept. advisor Noah Pollak calls for universities to have a ‘backbone’ in disciplining students for antisemitic activity

‘All it would take is a few examples of swift and severe punishment, expulsions, suspensions, that type of response, and everyone would get the message,’ Pollak said

By Marc Rod

Noah Pollak, a senior advisor at the Department of Education, offered a series of recommendations, including broader cultural changes and vigorous disciplinary action, on how universities can and should reform to better address antisemitism on campus.

Speaking at an antisemitism conference on Tuesday organized by The George Washington University Program on Extremism, Pollak said that schools need to have “backbone” in enforcing their disciplinary codes, offering as one example Brown University, which he said failed to uphold a new code of conduct rules when an encampment sprung up to protest the war in Gaza in 2024. He attributed schools’ reticence to a “cultural problem” for the universities.

“The schools have got to discipline students and faculty who are troublemakers, who break the rules, and discipline them hard, discipline them fast and discipline them very publicly,” Pollak said. “All it would take is a few examples of swift and severe punishment, expulsions, suspensions, that type of response, and everyone would get the message, and everything would settle down.”

Pollak argued that the ultimate answer to

antisemitism on campuses lies in overhauls to university governance to promote political diversity and proper enforcement of civil rights. He called for overhauls of Middle East studies departments and other academic programs he said have lost sight of their original missions. “You have to go upstream,” he said.

Broadly, Pollak also described many campus protests as “anti-intellectual” and “anti-democratic” and often “pretty stupid,” saying that many students are joining in to shout slogans and intimidate people with little idea of the actual issue about which they’re protesting.

“Universities could stop encouraging protesting — they could stop and they could demand that their academic departments actually diversify and expose students to the actual complexity of the world and not the slogan version of the world,” Pollak said.

He also argued that issues of distinguishing between protected speech and unprotected discriminatory conduct have been overstated and that the line is “not actually that complicated,” saying schools “did a lot of hiding behind the First Amendment as an excuse to avoid taking action.”

In particular, he added, the use of

“Zionist” as a euphemism for Jews is often “a pretty easy call,” and should not be treated as a “get-out-of-jail-free card.”

“It’s pretty obvious what [the anti-Israel activists are] up to. It’s pretty obvious the intent when they do that,” Pollak said. “A little too much stock has been placed in the idea that these are such blurry lines, it’s so hard to make these discussions. Well, it’s really not. You take a look at the activity that’s going on, and it’s pretty obvious what the intent is.”

He also said that schools should make clear how students file Title VI complaints and that they should have dedicated officials responsible for handling such complaints, who understand and can apply Title VI rules and regulations.

Pollak said that schools had been “caught off-guard” by the years of organizing by anti-Israel groups prior to Oct. 7, but that they are “doing a somewhat better job” now that they have had time to catch up, noting that he has heard anecdotally that complaints have dropped this year. ♦

State of Antisemitism in America 2025 report not just 'data points on a screen,' says AJC CEO

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

As a heated debate plays out in the Jewish community over the effectiveness of throwing millions of dollars at the problem of antisemitism, the American Jewish Committee's annual "State of Antisemitism" survey, released this morning, adds some ominous, though perhaps not surprising, data points to the discussion.

Thirty-one percent of Jews reported being the target of an antisemitic incident. Two-thirds of Jews felt that they were less secure in America than last year. And 93% of Jews felt antisemitism was a problem in America, compared to 70% of the general public. Thirty-one percent of Jews reported being the target of an antisemitic incident, 3% which were physical.

"We want leaders across our society to understand that while these appear as data points on a screen or on a piece of paper, every one of them represents the lived experience of Jews and Jewish families in America right now," Ted Deutch, the CEO of AJC, who formerly represented a heavily Jewish South Florida District in the House, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

The survey landed two days after Robert Kraft's Blue Square Alliance Against Hate aired a \$15 million ad on the Super Bowl, and less than a week after New York Times columnist Bret Stephens' call to "dismantle the Anti-Defamation League."

The seventh annual study shows that antisemitism remains elevated throughout America in the wake of the Oct. 7 terror attacks — even if at a similar level compared to the year before — and Jews feel less safe after a year of terrorism and deadly antisemitic attacks around the world. American Jews between the ages of 18-29 have borne the brunt of antisemitism, with 47% saying they were a target of

antisemitism over the last year, compared to 28% among those 30 and over, the survey found. SSRS, which conducted the survey, polled 1,222 Jewish respondents between Sept. 26-Oct. 29; it separately interviewed 1,033 U.S. adults between Oct. 3-5.

Much of the data is not news in the post-Oct. 7 world — Jews continue hiding their Magen David necklaces, and 25% of Jewish college students said they have felt or been excluded from a group or an event. Artificial intelligence is only exacerbating the fears of American Jews, with 65% of study respondents worrying that the programming will allow conspiracy theories to flourish. There is also considerable ignorance about the issue among non-Jews: Twenty percent of the general American population have heard of the term "antisemitism," yet have no idea what it means — 10% of respondents said they haven't even heard of the word.

AJC was prompted to hold the first "State of Antisemitism in America" in 2019, soon after the October 2018 attack at the Tree of Life congregation in Pittsburgh, which killed 11 people in the deadliest attack on a Jewish community in American history.

"This is antisemitism, and it threatens our society as a whole," Deutch said. He spoke with eJP about what he hopes funders take from this study, why antisemitism is a risk to all Americans and why threats to democracy put Jews at risk.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Jay Deitcher: There's been a lot of discussion recently about the idea that philanthropists are flooding money into initiatives to combat antisemitism without proof of their effectiveness as antisemitism surges. [As evidenced by a 2025 Jewish Funders Network study.] What do you hope philanthropists take from this data?

Ted Deutch: The reason it's so important for us to share this information with leaders across the country, and for Jewish community members to be able to share this with their neighbors and their co-workers, is to highlight that these attacks against the Jewish community are not a series of one-offs. The attacks in Harrisburg [at the residence of Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro] and Washington and Boulder [Colo.] and Bondi Beach [in Sydney, Australia] and Manchester, [England,] and Jackson, Miss., these and all of the other many attacks against Jews in America and around the world are all connected, and the threats to our Jewish community are the tip of the iceberg.

If we allow the 2% of the population to continue to face this kind of antisemitic hostility, if we continue to experience these kinds of attacks, it's dangerous for the Jewish community, but it's also dangerous for American society as a whole.

We go about our work, first and foremost, reminding the world that we are proud American Jews, and that we will continue to stand strong in the face of all these attacks. It's why we do so much to help train the next generation of global Jewish leaders. It's why everywhere we show up, we do so as proud Jews. We're going to continue to do that at the same time. We also need to help the leaders across the rest of society understand what's at risk for them.

JD: Nearly 80% across the board — among Jew and non-Jew — felt the phrase "Israel has no right to exist" is antisemitic. That was a bit down from last year for non-Jews. Forty-five percent of the general population said that they saw or heard about antisemitic incidents, such as physical and verbal attacks on Jewish people or religious institutions. Twenty-seven

percent spoke up about or reported the incidents, up 4% from last year. What do these statistics mean for the Jewish population?

TD: The 45% of adults [in the general population] who have seen antisemitism in the past year, pales in comparison to the percentage within the Jewish community who are seeing it or hearing it. We have to recognize that so much of what people are seeing and experiencing is based on what they've experienced on social media. For those non-Jews who know Jewish Americans, that number [who recognized antisemitism] was 54% and for those who don't, it's 32%.

Even when the data shows that people can identify it, the fact that the go-to response, time and time again after another tragedy, is to provide more security, which is necessary and which we welcome and which we advocate for, still, that's not enough, and it isn't normal in society for any group to feel targeted simply because they're gathering together to pray or to celebrate or for a community event. That's what we need people to understand.

For any other community, if a third of that community was experiencing this kind of hatred on a regular basis, being the personal target of an antisemitic incident, we wouldn't tolerate it, and we shouldn't tolerate it when it happens to the Jewish community.

JD: We've talked about security. We've talked about bringing up proud Jewish leaders. Now let's talk about Bret Stephens' comments. He called for the dismantling of the ADL specifically in an onstage interview following his 46th annual State of World Jewry address at the 92NY last week, and the AJC and other "sacred acronyms" were also referenced as organizations that are apparently misguided in focusing so much attention on combating antisemitism instead of cultivating Jewish identity and education. Where do you come down on the issue?

TD: The suggestion that we should focus on more Jewish education and creating proud and strong and resilient and knowledgeable Jewish leaders is exactly right. We should. It's a big part of what we do. I was just in Washington with our largest high school gathering we've ever had, our campus global board, our Access program for young leaders, bringing together Jews from around the world to learn with one another and to become leaders with one another. [It's] vitally important. But it's not either-or.

The question isn't, should we be committed to making sure that we're providing this kind of education and training, or should we be engaging in the

broader world? We have to do both.

We are 2% of the American population. That 2% of the American population has been involved at leadership levels in so many social struggles in our country throughout its history. Now is not the time for us to shrink from the responsibility to stand up for the group that needs us most when that very group is our own community.

JD: The AJC study shows that antisemitism is still high post-Oct. 7 at the same time that 77% of American Jews and 64% of the general public have less trust in the way democracy is functioning in the United States. When you talk about how we need to combat antisemitism while also educating and bringing up the youth, that can be read many ways too.

TD: Throughout our history, the Jewish community has fared the best in strong, well-functioning democracies, in countries where there is trust in government. Given that, having a strong democracy is absolutely something that we believe in. Just as fighting antisemitism helps to not only protect the Jewish community, but democracy as a whole, the flip side is also true: Having a strong democracy and democratic ideals also strengthens the Jewish community.♦

Will Democrats rally behind progressive activist Mejia as she vies to represent wealthy N.J. district?

Already several members of the state's congressional delegation have begun to coalesce around Mejia's campaign

By Marc Rod

With progressive activist Analilia Mejia's expected victory in the special election Democratic primary in New Jersey's 11th Congressional District, attention is now turning to the upcoming April special general election and the June regular election primary as the last chances for moderates and pro-Israel groups to defeat her.

AIPAC's super PAC, the United Democracy Project, which spent \$2.3 million attacking former Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-NJ), said in a statement that its "focus remains on who will serve the next full term in Congress" and that it will be "closely monitoring... the June NJ-11 primary, to help ensure pro-Israel candidates are elected to Congress."

Mejia is on track to receive less than 30% of the primary vote in a relatively moderate suburban district, creating an opportunity for a moderate candidate to challenge her. But several Jewish leaders, as well as a local analyst, said that that will be difficult to achieve.

"June is potentially irresistible for the other candidates who ran ... if any of these candidates could get a one-on-one shot at making it in June," Micah Rasmussen, the director of the Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics at Rider University, said. But unless the field can consolidate, Rasmussen said, it's hard to see how the result would be any different in June.

Rasmussen said he doesn't share the view of some Democrats that voters would be frustrated with a Democratic candidate who decides to challenge Mejia.

Though they haven't formally endorsed her yet, other members of New Jersey's congressional delegation appear to be

coalescing around Mejia — Reps. LaMonica McIver (D-NJ), Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) and Rob Menendez (D-NJ) participated in a town hall focused on Immigration and Customs Enforcement organized by Mejia on Saturday, and Menendez — a relative moderate aligned with the state's party machine — posted a photo with her on Sunday.

Malinowski has not yet conceded the race, but said during the primary that he would not run again in June if he lost. Essex County Commissioner Brendan Gill also does not plan to run again. That leaves the most likely moderate challenger as former Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way, who was endorsed by Democratic Majority for Israel and is believed to be AIPAC's choice in the race.

Way is holding in third with 17% of the vote. Her campaign did not respond to a request for comment on whether she plans to run again.

Local Jewish leaders on Friday were generally pessimistic about the chances of taking Mejia down in the June primary — for the full term in Congress — but there could be a path to defeating the ascendant progressive.

"I sat on a debate stage with Analilia Mejia when she said that Israel has a right to exist, but not as a Jewish state," Jeff Grayzel, a local Jewish leader who ran for the seat with ambitions of uniting the Jewish community behind his campaign, said. "It is said that Jews will be blessed when they stand together and will experience misfortune when they are divided. My pleas for Jewish unity in this race went unheeded. In my messaging to the Jewish community, I

warned of a repeat of New York City in NJ-11, and this result is a consequence of a house divided. I pray our people can unify to find a path forward."

Rasmussen said that Malinowski, who came closest to beating Mejia, would be the strongest candidate in a head-to-head race against Mejia in June, and Rasmussen said he could envision a scenario in which Malinowski ultimately took another shot at the seat despite his previous pledge not to.

"I think it's a little bit tougher for Tahesha Way to do that," Rasmussen said. "She would very clearly have outside spending with her. She'd very clearly have fundraising with her. But it's a little tough to go from a 17% result to a majority result. We'll see what happens. It doesn't mean she shouldn't think about it, she shouldn't consider it, but it's probably a stretch."

Jeff Grayzel, a local Jewish leader who ran for the seat with ambitions of uniting the Jewish community behind his campaign, lamented Mejia's victory as a disappointing development for supporters of Israel, and said the Jewish community needs to come together.

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Though Mejia is well to the left of candidates that the district typically picks,

Rasmussen said that it's "hard to come up with a situation" where the district — drawn to favor Democrats with a highly motivated Democratic voter base in a midterm year — would become competitive for Republicans in the April 16 special general election to fill out the remainder of Gov. Mikie Sherrill's House term.

"However, that's not to say that Republicans won't try," Rasmussen said. "If I were a Republican who had the ability to invest resources, I would certainly be taking a very close look at this race on these next three elections that are going to be happening this year in this district, and trying to see if I can take advantage of the very particular circumstances."

"I think it's pretty clear why voters went to Mejia, and it's not because she is a socialist or because she is the most left of any candidate in the race," Micah Rasmussen, the director of the Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics at Rider University, said. "Voters were driven away from Malinowski because of

that advertising. They did not view a machine candidate as a viable alternative. They saw Mejia as the candidate in the race who could most stand up to Trump ... the candidate who had the clearest position on ICE."

Rasmussen said that UDP's advertising against Malinowski "very clearly ... worked," citing the significant drop in Malinowski's share of the vote from the first early votes to be submitted — where he was receiving 60-70% of the vote — and votes submitted later in the cycle, as well as votes on election day.

"It's pretty clear that the reason they went in [Mejia's] direction is because she carved out a different position on ICE, which is very clearly on voters minds, and just convinced voters that she was the person who could best stand up to Trump, and that, it seems is what Democratic voters are looking for," Rasmussen said.

He was skeptical of the narrative that the result was a sign of a broader voter appetite for socialist or socialist-adjacent policies in moderate suburban districts.

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went to Mejia, and it's not because she is a socialist or because she is the most left of any candidate in the race," Rasmussen said. "Voters were driven away from Malinowski because of that advertising. They did not view a machine candidate as a viable alternative. They saw Mejia as the candidate in the race who could most stand up to Trump ... the candidate who had the clearest position on ICE."

The race also saw substantially higher turnout than most anticipated — surpassing 2024 primary turnout levels in not just the 11th District but every congressional district in New Jersey, according to Rasmussen — a sign of strong Democratic motivation to vote, likely spurred by President Donald Trump.

Gill's fourth-place finish — despite entering the race as the favorite given the backing he received from New Jersey Democratic institutions — is a clear signal that the state's Democratic machine has largely lost its ability to shape elections to its will, Rasmussen added. ♦

National Council of Jewish Women taps Jody Rabhan as CEO

Halfway through a five-year strategic plan, Rabhan will lead efforts to expand NCJW's advocacy efforts and build a new regional staffing model

By Nira Dayanim

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The National Council of Jewish Women has tapped longtime staff member Jody Rabhan as CEO, effective immediately following the departure of previous CEO Sheila Katz in October.

Starting at NCJW early in her career as a legislative fellow, Rabhan has since spent a cumulative 20 years with the council in multiple roles, including director of Washington relations, director of government relations and advocacy and, most recently, executive vice president. In a statement, Laura Monn Ginsburg, NCJW's president and board chair, touted Rabhan's long tenure and deep knowledge of the organization.

"Jody knows our mission inside and out — not just because she has helped lead it, but because she has lived it throughout most of her career. The board has complete confidence in Jody's ability to guide NCJW forward with strength, purpose and care," Ginsburg said.

In early October, Katz left NCJW after six years at the helm, joining the Jewish Federations of North America as chief

Jewish life officer. Prior to Katz's departure, Rabhan served as NCJW's chief strategy officer. In October, Rabhan stepped into the interim executive vice president role while the board weighed a national CEO search; they ultimately chose to stick with Rabhan and not to do the national search.

"I have had the honor and the privilege of learning just about everything I know through NCJW," Rabhan told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "To be a part of the leadership team over the last couple of years was an incredible opportunity, and now to be at the helm is something that feels so special. I'm so proud. I'm so privileged."

Rabhan described her trajectory — from a fellowship shortly after concluding her studies, to the organization's CEO two decades later — as unorthodox, adding that she feels deeply honored to lead the organization at "a pivotal moment for our country and a consequential one for NCJW."

"This is not an ordinary trajectory in this day and age," said Rabhan. "And I just feel so honored to be here in this moment."

NCJW is about halfway through a five-year strategic plan, and Rabhan will be tasked with bringing the priorities outlined in the plan to fruition. They include expanding

NCJW's advocacy efforts, building a new regional staffing model to bolster state and local "ground game" advocacy for issues ranging from reproductive rights to gun control, and launching the NCJW Center for Jewish Women's Leadership, to create more "entry points" for women's leadership.

The organization is also in the process of expanding its staff, particularly in communications and regional operations. With many of the NCJW's priority policy battles unfolding on the state level, over the next several years, the organization plans to develop a regional staffing model with staff based in eight regions nationwide.

"We have seen how in moments like this, how challenging it is to really make an impact on the federal level, and how important the states are to the issues that we care about. So it's really an investment in our field, in the leaders within NCJW and in service to being able to identify some really key issues that are historic and really unique to NCJW, where NCJW has got a real and clear moral voice and we can really make an impact for generations to come," Rabhan said. ♦

New report warns about the rise of activists pushing antisemitic content in K-12 schools

The report warns that the trend also contributes to declining academic outcomes and increasing anti-American views

By Haley Cohen

Political activists seeking to push extremist perspectives into the classroom are behind a nationwide acceleration of antisemitic content in K-12 classrooms, with increasingly active movements targeting school boards, district leadership and teacher organizations, according to a report published Monday by the North American Values Institute.

The group's 58-page report, "When the Classroom Turns Hostile: A Strategic Response to Extremism and Antisemitism in K-12 Education," shared exclusively with JI, found that in the aftermath of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel, what it described as radical ideological frameworks have dominated key education institutions across the country. Ideologies such as "oppressor-oppressed" are common in schools of education, accreditation bodies, teacher unions and district bureaucracies, all of which shape classroom materials.

The paper highlights teachers' unions and activist nonprofits as major sources of embedding radical views and ready-made anti-American content into professional development, much of which is able to bypass traditional oversight. It also raises concerns about "substantial" foreign funding flowing into Western education institutions to influence curricula by the Qatar Foundation International and Confucius Institutes in China.

The North American Values Institute, formerly the Jewish Institute for Liberal Values, is a nonprofit that monitors antisemitism in K-12 schools. It was founded by David Bernstein, a longtime Jewish nonprofit official who led the Jewish Council for Public Affairs from 2016-2021.

"We're very concerned about the ideological activists taking over union leadership," NAVI's chief program officer, Dana Stangel-Plowe, told JI. "While that may not seem new, we're seeing the DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] in particular taking a much more active role." According to the report, DSA "urges members to enter the field in order to 'transform our schools, our unions, and our society.'"

The report warns that these dynamics contribute not only to rising antisemitism, but also to declining academic outcomes and increasing anti-American views.

Attempts to combat this framework by promoting Holocaust or Jewish education have failed, the report's authors argue.

Rather, the writers offer several suggestions for reforming K-12 education, including changing teacher preparation programs and accreditation standards, confronting politicized teacher unions and advocacy networks, strengthening standards around curricula, addressing foreign funding and influence in education, empowering parents and school boards and building multi-ethnic coalitions.

NAVI rebranded in February 2025 in an effort to detach from its Jewish roots to expand partnerships in fighting antisemitism with other ethnic communities.

At the time of the rebrand, Bernstein told JI that the Jewish community "has been reluctant to fight at the ideological level."

A year later, Stangel-Plowe said that while there is still room for improvement, NAVI has increasingly been partnering with leading Jewish organizations.

The report comes two months after the House Committee on Education and the Workforce opened investigations into public school systems in Fairfax County, Va.; Berkeley, Calif.; and Philadelphia over alleged failures to address antisemitic incidents.

Federal investigations are "a good start but certainly not enough," said Stangel-Plowe. "School districts are used to functioning without much accountability. We need more federal and state oversight."

Still, she emphasized a need to address the root cause, rather than responding after incidents occur.

"K-12 education is being treated as a vehicle for social change and an oppressor-oppressed framework is dangerous to Jewish students, Jewish teachers, and teaches hostility towards Israel and more broadly Western values," Stangel-Plowe continued.

"We're seeing active networks, [including] in New York City and Philadelphia," she added. "We're seeing radical political actors taking over union leadership and that has an influence on teachers unions which influences school board elections. The problem is embedded not just in the unions but the entire education system from teacher training, licensing and programs."

"We can't fix an institutional problem with more lessons or programs," she said. "As important as education about the Holocaust and Jewish life is, institutional problems persist unless we have a real allocation of investments in a comprehensive solution across the ecosystem. ♦"

Amid criticism, Kraft's anti-hate group defends Super Bowl ad against antisemitism

The head of the Blue Square Alliance Against Hate emphasized the ad was intended to persuade all Americans — not just Jews — and survey research proved its effectiveness

By Haley Cohen

The Blue Square Alliance Against Hate's widely watched Super Bowl ad designed to combat antisemitism instead sparked a heated divide within the Jewish community over the effectiveness of its message.

Titled "Sticky Note," the ad from New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft's group featured a Jewish student being harassed by his high school classmates because of his religion, with bullies placing a "dirty Jew" sticker on his backpack. In a show of allyship, a Black classmate puts a blue square over the note. "Do not listen to that," he tells his Jewish classmate. "I know how it feels."

A chorus of commentators criticized the advertisement, which is part of a \$15 million media campaign that will also include ad spots during the Winter Olympics, for depicting Jews as victims in need of protection from non-Jews and for avoiding the reality that the source of many antisemitic incidents in schools stem from hostility toward or hatred of Israel.

But the leader of Kraft's group told *Jewish Insider* that the ad wasn't trying to appeal to a Jewish audience. Instead, Blue Square Alliance president Adam Katz told *JI* that with more than 100 million viewers, the Super Bowl provides an opportunity to reach an audience that is "unengaged — and in many cases uninformed — about antisemitism ... We're very focused on this audience that's lacking awareness, empathy and motivation to act," he said.

The Anti-Defamation League's Center for Antisemitism Research also responded to the flurry of negative feedback to the commercial by running its own test last week, and shared the results exclusively with *JI*. (ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt

was one of the first Jewish leaders to praise the message of the advertisement, amid the criticism on social media.)

The ADL was involved in testing audience reactions to the Blue Square Alliance commercial amid the political debate over its impact, Katz said. The group conducted a randomized controlled experiment between Feb. 5-6, where about 1,000 viewers saw the group's ad and a control group that saw an unrelated ad. The survey research, according to the ADL, found that the group that saw the antisemitism ad said they were notably more likely to "think antisemitism is a serious problem," interrupt friends or family who make antisemitic comments and feel more motivated to fight antisemitism.

While the ADL and Blue Square Alliance often partner with each other, the test was done independently.

Katz told *JI* that the commercial was also tested for audience reaction by the Blue Square Alliance before it aired. He told *JI* that, based on the initial feedback, the foundation made tweaks to the ad so it would resonate more closely with viewers disengaged with the issue of antisemitism.

"Our research goes very deep into who [the Super Bowl audience is], what do they know, what don't they know and we see very concerning data points around the awareness, visibility and concern about antisemitism. It's just not on their radar. We're talking about over 100 million Americans classified as unengaged on this topic who just don't see antisemitism as a significant problem, as their problem to solve or as something they can have an impact on. That's our audience."

Leading up to the Super Bowl, Katz said Blue Square ran focus groups mostly consisting of non-Jewish and racially

diverse Gen Zers and millennials. "We start by coming up with lots of different content and put those concepts in front of a testing audience, which is representative of our target audience of unengaged," said Katz.

By the time the ad was finished, Katz said, it was "tested many times in raising awareness, empathy and ultimately raising attention to become an ally."

"We have seen a particular rise in antisemitic sentiment among younger generations," continued Katz. "Gen Z is three times more likely to witness antisemitism but twice as likely to say it's not a problem. How do we reach that audience and give them a visible example of allyship?"

The answer, he said, is "allyship that feels approachable," such as in a school setting.

"We wanted to focus on [an example] of what it looks like when everyday allies can get involved."

Katz also said that the slur of "dirty Jew" is one that is increasingly commonplace in school settings, and one that viewers were most familiar with as an indicator of antisemitism.

"There are several real-life examples where students have been harassed using phrases like dirty Jew. We looked at the prominence of that particular phrase, we explored different things that could be written on that sticky note and we looked at what is really cutting across all different segments of the audience."

Blue Square "found that there were nearly 500 million impressions of the phrase 'dirty Jew' on social media in the last three years," Katz said. "The usage of that phrase is up 174% over the last three years. The usage of all slurs is up but not to that magnitude." ♦