

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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Former Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop brings the fight against antisemitism to NYC's business community

As the new head of NYC's leading business advocacy group, Fulop said he's preparing for 'this experiment of what it means to be an executive in a DSA world'

By Matthew Kassel

As he settles into his role leading the Partnership for New York City, a prominent business advocacy group, Steve Fulop, the former longtime mayor of Jersey City, N.J., has a few major issues on his mind, chief among them countering the rise of antisemitism.

For Fulop, a Jewish Democrat who assumed his new job last month, just five days after he left office on Jan. 15, such efforts are not only personal as a former yeshiva student who was also the grandson of Holocaust survivors. They are directly connected, he explained to *Jewish Insider*, to promoting a friendlier climate where businesses can feel safe and welcome in the city.

Many of the Partnership's Jewish board

members, representing some of the city's most powerful firms in finance, real estate and other leading sectors, also share his sense of urgency, Fulop said, as do many of the 800,000 employees who make up his group's core constituency.

"They often say of the tax conversation that we could talk about whether people stay or go, if they migrate elsewhere," Fulop said of his conversations with members in an interview with *JI* on Tuesday at his fifth-floor office in the Financial District, which looks out on Jersey City. "But if you continue on a trend where it feels like antisemitism is increasing and quality of life is decreasing, that is a trigger for people to leave very, very fast."

Citing statistics from January that

showed a sharp, year-on-year uptick in antisemitic incidents in New York City, Fulop emphasized that the city now finds itself on an "alarming" track. "Those are things that will push people to leave immediately," he warned.

"Obviously you have a fringe far left that often says antisemitic things and has normalized it, and that's not OK," he said. "If it continues on a trajectory, we will be vocal on it."

Fulop said that he has met with New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani "multiple times," and described their discussions as "very positive and pleasant," despite clear differences on hot-button topics ranging from support for Israel to proposed tax hikes on wealthy New Yorkers.

“To be honest with you, I don’t think we’re going to agree on everything,” he told JI, “but we do try to find places where we agree,” including such shared affordability issues as “housing growth” and child care.

Speaking from his own experience as a former Democratic “outsider” who also rose to mayor in his 30s, Fulop, who turns 49 next week, acknowledged that Mamdani has a “tough job” as he faces pressure from his far-left base in the Democratic Socialists of America, which has aggressively pushed boycotts of Israel. “There is clearly antisemitic rhetoric coming from that base,” Fulop said.

“Even if he’s not sympathetic to some of them, his base is very vocal,” Fulop said. “That’s going to be something that we pay attention to, when you start talking about some of the rhetoric around the BDS language, where the left pushes, and how [Mamdani] stands up to them,” he elaborated, referring to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel. “It’s early days at this point.”

Fulop’s assessment underscores how the business community, in conjunction with Jewish leaders and others concerned about Mamdani’s policies, is now formalizing an approach to act as a bulwark against the mayor while navigating a new political landscape it views as largely inhospitable to its goals.

Even as he expressed a desire to be “helpful” to Mamdani, Fulop has also indicated that he will not hesitate to stake out more adversarial positions on key areas where they are not aligned. In November, for instance, he described Mamdani’s proposal for a corporate tax hike as “absolute suicide” for the city.

“The goal is to be more aggressive on tenor, not necessarily adversarial all the time,” he said. “To be clear that we think that a fragile city environment is at risk.”

Regarding the administration’s track record on Israel and antisemitism a month and a half into Mamdani’s tenure, Fulop voiced reservations in particular about the mayor’s skepticism of the partnership between Cornell University and Israel’s Technion on Roosevelt Island, which Mamdani’s team had suggested during the campaign he would review.

“We think that would be shortsighted

and a double standard to Israel,” Fulop, who said he held a call “with some people affiliated with the partnership” to discuss the situation last week, told JI. “Singling out one country that happens to be the Jewish state is, I don’t think, OK with anybody.”

In his final days as mayor, Fulop signed executive orders banning Jersey City from engaging in BDS and regulating the kinds of protests outside houses of worship that Mamdani has struggled to condemn decisively as mayor.

“The guy following me wants to be like Mamdani, but he’s less charismatic,” Fulop said of his mayoral successor, James Solomon, a progressive Democrat. “I thought that there was risk, and better off putting guardrails in place — because you don’t know where things go.”

During an unsuccessful Democratic primary campaign for governor of New Jersey last year, Fulop had criticized efforts to legally codify the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition of antisemitism. But he said he believed that Mamdani had made a strategic error when, on his first day as mayor, he swiftly revoked — as part of a blanket repeal of all of former Mayor Eric Adams’ executive orders following his September 2024 indictment on federal corruption charges — an executive order that had adopted the definition in the city, along with an order prohibiting BDS in city agencies.

“It obviously elevated the idea that the incoming administration is anti-Judaism,” he told JI, saying he is closely monitoring Mamdani’s next steps amid rising rates of antisemitism the mayor has vowed to confront.

Fulop said that the Partnership’s board members, who met with Mamdani during the campaign as he drew criticism over his refusal to condemn calls to “globalize the intifada” and rejection of Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state, remain worried about his hostile views on Israel and commitment to fighting antisemitism. “Very, very very, very” worried, Fulop said.

Mamdani’s office did not respond to a request for comment from JI.

Eric Goldstein, the CEO of UJA-Federation of New York, which was among the first groups that Fulop met with when he took over the Partnership, said he looked

“forward to working with” the former mayor.

“Steve brings a strong record of public service, principled leadership and a commitment to civic responsibility,” he told JI. “We also support and appreciate Steve’s deep support of Israel’s existence as a Jewish homeland and commitment to fighting antisemitism and the delegitimization of Israel.”

Now that he is no longer a politician, Fulop, a former Goldman Sachs banker and Marine veteran who recently relocated to Hell’s Kitchen across the river from Jersey City, is appreciating his time away from elected office, he said.

“It’s a little bit of a different world not being on the elected side, which I’m thankful for, to be honest,” he told JI. “We’re in a very polarized environment here for people in elected office. So, for me, I think this is kind of a sweet spot of advocacy and impact without some of the headaches of being in elected office.”

Fulop praised his predecessor, Kathy Wylde, the former longtime Partnership leader who reportedly faced internal backlash from members who felt that she was too deferential to Mamdani. But the group finds itself in a moment “where we need to be more assertive with both our actions and voice,” he said, noting that he is seeking to focus on a “very narrow subset” of advocacy issues, including antisemitism.

To that end, he says he is expanding the group’s political advocacy arm, hiring an executive director to help steer its current \$10 million in reserves, on top of lobbying, research and a venture capital fund.

“I think we have a reasonable, centrist message that most people agree with — whether it’s antisemitism or homeless encampments,” he explained. “I think we’re in a place where most people would say, ‘You know what? What they’re saying kind of makes a lot of sense.’”

New York City is now “in a unique time and space,” Fulop told JI. “We haven’t seen a socialist mayor of prominence anywhere in this country for decades.”

“The Partnership has a significant voice in that,” he said. The city is “going to be front and center in this experiment of what it means to be an executive in a DSA world.” ♦

Former Trump admin official Richard Goldberg bullish on Trump enforcing Iran red line

Goldberg, a senior advisor at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies: 'We remain headed toward the president enforcing his red line'

By Matthew Shea

Readouts from Iran on progress made in the latest round of negotiations with the U.S. are evidence of the regime “simply buying for time” and evidence that Tehran isn’t willing to make the concessions demanded by the Trump administration, Richard Goldberg, a former Trump administration official and senior advisor at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told *Jewish Insider* in an interview Tuesday.

Following the second round of nuclear negotiations, which Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called “serious, constructive and positive,” Goldberg made the case for why he thinks there’s a high likelihood of future U.S. military action against Iran, and why he sees the negotiations as diplomatic theater.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

Jewish Insider: What is your initial takeaway from the second round of discussions and the Iranian foreign minister’s comments that the parties reached agreements on “guiding principles” for a potential deal?

Richard Goldberg: If this was operating in a vacuum, and I saw that readout from the Iranian foreign minister, I would tell you that I thought this was a readout of one of the many rounds the regime held with [Special Envoy for Iran under President Joe Biden] Rob Malley or other diplomats from past administrations, Obama or Biden, with the sort of silliness of the readout of “We’ve agreed to terms in principle of what we might talk about.”

It is one of the clearest signs of a regime that’s not willing to make the tough concessions that the president has demanded, and instead is simply buying

for time. I think that in their mind, so long as they appear to be the party that wants to talk, that is willing to keep talking, it somehow boxes in the president, politically, from being able to use force. Obviously it does not, but from their perspective, it also is a lifeline to talk like that, because it’s probably the only thing that separates them from financial collapse at this point.

Remember, at the beginning of the year, we saw a bank collapse in Iran, with reports that five other banks were to shortly follow. One of the narrative economic strategies of the regime when they see economic peril is to hold diplomatic talks and to speak positively about those talks and to create a pathway for those talks to extend themselves, because it creates confusion in the market and puts a bottom on the deterioration of the financial system for those who believe that there might be a deal at the end of the rainbow.

If you were to remove that false optimism, then the bottom drops out. There is no pot of gold waiting at the end of the rainbow. So politically, they think that they’re boxing in the president and delaying military action. Economically, they think they’re staving off financial collapse, but there’s nothing to demonstrate any credible willingness to dismantle all of their threats to the United States and the rest of the world, be that their nuclear program, their missile program, their sponsorship of terrorism and the repression apparatus that we just saw demonstrated at maximum violence.

In fact, we have seen just [yesterday], while they were talking, reports coming out of a round of more protesters being gunned down the streets at the end of the mourning period for the first slaughter. So I think the president is pretty clear-eyed on all of this. I think he can tell the difference between rope-a-dope and credible concessions. I

think he knows when a red line has been obliterated and we should be focused on the fact that force posture continues to build up in the region, and the president has indicated his continued willingness to use force. So all things being equal, it would appear that we remain headed towards the president enforcing his red line.

JJ: If these negotiations should fail, what would the military option look like?

RG: Well, no one knows. Obviously, there’s a range of targets that you would be thinking about in Iran. You would start with the greatest threats to the United States, those being nuclear and missile threats, and then you would move into the potential to degrade the regime’s command-and-control communications, the repression apparatus and, of course, the potential for a decapitation strike at the highest level of the escalation ladder.

We could also see a quarantine of Iranian oil exports the way that the president had conducted against Venezuela. Again, the regime is trying to project threats right now to deter that specific plan of action. I think that’s why you see [yesterday’s] news of them conducting some sort of military drills around the Strait of Hormuz, threatening to sink U.S. naval vessels, showcasing their missile threat, not just to the United States, but to energy infrastructure in the region. I think they are saber rattling for the oil market and to deter the president from taking action to strangle their financial lifeline.

So where do you go back to at the beginning? You go back to their missile threat, their drone threat, their naval threat and, if they’re able to already, attempt to blackmail the international community with

those threats. Those are threats that are long term and systemic, and we do the United States, our national security, our economic security, a great service by degrading those threats.

Many of the target sets come back to the same top-tier ones. That which poses the greatest threat to the United States needs to be at the top of the target list. But if you can mitigate those threats and degrade them, then you open up more options to strangle the regime economically by cutting off the oil flow, and you also open up more opportunity to degrade the regime's control and power via precision strikes, not just by the United States, but potentially by Israel as well.

JJ: If the U.S. takes military action, do you think there's any concern from the American side about the potential fallout in the region?

RG: The United States has defensive measures to slow an attack and mitigate an attack, and it has a range of offensive capabilities to remove the threat once it has attacked. We have seen the Iranians, both from their territory and via proxies, most specifically the Houthis, launch many of the capabilities that they're threatening today. We saw a short-range ballistic missile attack against our base in Qatar at the end of the 12-day war [in June]. We have seen other ballistic missile strikes in the past against Iraq after killing [Iranian Gen. Qassem] Soleimani. We have seen the Houthis using anti-ship ballistic missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles and drones to attack the U.S. Navy in the Red Sea over many months —

notably, our defenses destroyed all those threats. In the case of the ballistic missile attack on Qatar, I think the public reporting is that we were able to destroy most of the missiles, and those that got through did minor damage — and that's on the defensive measure side.

Then comes the offense. If the regime wants to open up that can of worms, attack the United States in that respect, and the attack is mitigated, the next strike will not be one that they come back from. Their goal right now in Tehran is to scare the president, scare the American people, and scare the oil market.

The objective from military planners inside the Pentagon, for the chair of the Joint Chiefs [of Staff] and for the president should be to stick to reality — What can they do? What do we need to defend against it? What are we going to do to remove those threats from any second or third third wave? What are the clear objectives that we want to have with the outcomes of our strikes that we want to achieve? How are we going to reassure the oil market that energy continues to flow, even if the regime attempts to disrupt flows through the Strait of Hormuz or attacks energy infrastructure? What are the relief valves we have at our disposal throughout the world? — and move in in the best interest of the United States, and I think that's what the president has shown he's willing to do.

JJ: Iran has indicated that they would retaliate against U.S. military bases in the region in the event of any military intervention. Many Arab allies host

American troops and have expressed concern about tensions turning into a wider conflict. What is your read on how Arab countries might be feeling?

RG: If you are a neighboring state that is an ally or partner of the United States, and your neighbor has a large missile and drone force like Iran, and you have critical infrastructure that could be hit by those missiles and drones, you would likely, whether true or untrue, distance yourself from any plans to attack. You'd want to be able to say to your diplomatic counterparts: "We were against this. We cautioned against it. We urged dialogue. We didn't want to see this happen. Don't attack us."

At a very basic level, that seems obviously what is happening and understandably so, and then there's also the potential that, in fact, some of these Arab dictatorships don't mind a weak dictatorship in Tehran that they know rather than having that dictatorship actually fall.

JJ: Which path do you think the administration is ultimately going to take?

RG: My suspicion is that the president has already made up his mind. He's moving in a very specific direction. Everything we see is quite calculated and with specific reason. The regime will not give him a deal that would be viewed as credible and history achieving, and the president, someone who has achieved history in his own action, multiple times by use of limited, but precise military action, will be called to repeat history and create even greater chapters for the history books. ♦

JFNA's Eric Fingerhut focuses on Jewish education in first State of the Jewish Union address

Fingerhut called on states to opt in to a tax credit that would provide funds for Jewish day school and yeshiva education

By Haley Cohen

As antisemitic incidents continue to roil Jewish communities nationwide, Jewish Federations of North America CEO Eric Fingerhut called on Congress to increase funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program to \$1 billion annually and to “make the program more flexible and simpler to use.”

Fingerhut also called on governors to support an educational tax credit on Thursday during JFNA's inaugural “State of the Jewish Union” address at the organization's Washington headquarters.

Fingerhut urged lawmakers to provide federal support for security personnel so that schools and synagogues don't need to cover the costs; expand the FBI's capabilities to detect and disrupt domestic terrorism; increase support for state and local law enforcement protecting Jewish institutions; hold social media companies accountable for antisemitic hate and incitement to violence through their platforms; and prosecute hate crimes “aggressively.”

The call for increased security comes as American Jews have faced several high-profile hate crimes in the past year, including the recent arson attack at Mississippi's largest synagogue. Less than two weeks after the attack on Congregation Beth Israel in Jackson, Congress put forward a budget of \$300 million for NSGP for 2026. While that figure is a small increase from the funding

provided in 2024 and 2025, it is lower than the allocations initially proposed by both the House and Senate and the amount requested by Jewish leaders.

American Jews have responded to the increase of hate and the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks in what JFNA coined as “the surge,” describing a rise in Jews engaging or seeking to engage more in communal life.

According to the organization, enrollment in Jewish schools and camps remains high. “This is why we strongly support the new federal education scholarship tax credit and urge all 50 states to opt in so the funds can reach the families and schools in every community,” Fingerhut said on Thursday.

JFNA confirmed to *Jewish Insider* that the group plans to hold sideline meetings with state leaders on Friday during the National Governors Association summit in Washington to encourage Democratic governors to participate in the education tax credit, which would create supplemental funding for scholarships for Jewish day school and yeshiva education.

Though the anti-Israel encampments and disruptive protests that plagued college campuses in the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7 and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war have largely died down, a larger percentage of Jewish college students report having experienced antisemitism than ever before.

Fingerhut encouraged passage of the bipartisan Protecting Students on Campus Act, which would require federally funded colleges and universities to inform students of their civil rights under Title VI and provide accessible information on how to file discrimination complaints.

“The state of the Jewish union in America is strong, but it is being tested,” said Fingerhut. “We are united in our commitment to America and to Jewish life, even as we worry about the real threats of violence and the growing acceptance of antisemitic rhetoric.”

Following Fingerhut's address, three heads of local federations shared challenges in addressing security and social needs in their communities. Rabbi Noah Farkas, president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles; Scott Kaufman, president and CEO of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation; and Miryam Rosenzweig, president and CEO of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation echoed that — despite varying degrees of antisemitism in their communities — there is a significant “antisemitism tax,” an increased financial burden to protect Jewish institutions.

“Every dollar we're spending [on security] we can't spend on the ‘joy’ part of being Jewish,” said Kaufman. ♦

With fourth cohort, Atlanta-based Jewish Kids Groups solidifies North American expansion

The organization, which provides Jewish after-school care as an alternative to Hebrew schools, is opening in new locations in five U.S. states and Canada, with plans for more

By Nira Dayanim

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In the spring of 2023, Jewish Kids Groups, the Atlanta-based nonprofit that designs and implements Jewish after-school programming for elementary-aged children, took its first steps toward national expansion.

Recognizing both a gap in after-school support for Jewish families and communal ambivalence toward traditional supplementary Hebrew school models, the organization — focused locally since its founding in 2012 — launched the Jewish After School Accelerator to help synagogues, federations and other community organizations develop Jewish programming after school on weekdays.

Three years on, JKG has helped launch 20 new sites, which serve a total of 711 students. The latest cohort, announced last week, will add seven locations to that total beginning this fall, expanding the organization's reach to Michigan, Florida, New York, California, Maryland and — for the first time — Canada. The organization is also accepting applications for a fifth cohort for the following school year.

According to Rachel Dobbs Schwartz, JKG's chief innovation officer, the organization's goal is to both expand "the pie" of Jewish families participating in some form of Jewish education — by building relationships with local schools and community organizations, attending PTA meetings, and engaging at community events — and establish "a new field" within Jewish education.

"There's about a convoy of school buses — around 7,000 kids — exiting Jewish

education on an annual basis," Dobbs Schwartz told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "Our goal is to try and stop that bleed by creating more options. We don't want to subdivide the pie of people who are already engaged. What we want to do is engage the unengaged."

Since 2023, JKG has provided its annual cohorts with a \$100,000 matching grant, 10 months of hands-on pre-launch support and two years of mentorship through the accelerator program. Each year, the new after-school programs scale in participants, from 15 in the first year to 45 by the third. "This sort of slow build also allows for medium-sized organizations, smaller organizations to participate in this," Dobbs Schwartz told eJP.

Inspired by services like the Harold Grinspoon Foundation's PJ Library, which "naturally" incorporates Jewish education into families' daily routines, the goal is to ultimately make the after-school model ubiquitous, said Dobbs Schwartz. "That adjacency service of giving someone something that they need, something that maybe they don't even know that they want, but they do, has been sort of the magic in many different Jewish spaces across the country," she said. "We see after-school [programs] in a very similar vein."

According to Dobbs Schwartz, while the programming is designed to cater to a range of Jewish involvement — including both those who aren't affiliated with a synagogue and those who "just can't get enough Jewish" — it has specifically engaged a significant number of families that weren't previously involved in synagogue life.

"We're seeing growth in Jewish engagement of the family. We're seeing

knowledge growth. We're seeing families feeling cared for, and families engaging in synagogue life in a different way than they had beforehand," she told eJP. "Fifty percent of the students who enrolled in these programs have never set foot in the synagogue before."

In 2013, when JKG was still exclusively in Atlanta, the organization received a \$50,000 grant from the Marcus Foundation, Jay Kaiman, the foundation's president, told eJP. The foundation has remained a significant supporter since, last year donating \$2 million to the initiative. Several other funders in the Jewish world have supported JKG as well, including the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Tepper Foundation and the Zalik Foundation.

"They put 'cool' into Hebrew School," Kaiman told eJP. "It was obvious to Bernie that [JKG's founder and CEO Ana Robbins] was right, that people don't like Hebrew school for a lot of reasons, and if she could put 'cool' back into it, then we thought that was a good bet. And it was. It started out with just one location, and we wanted to see how it went. And [they've] taken it over the years and grown it and made it what I consider to be very successful."

According to Kaiman, when JKG was first presented to the Marcus Foundation, the largest concerns were whether their proposed model would be widely adopted and if it would be viewed as competition within the Jewish education niche.

"They have not," said Kaiman. "They've looked at it as enhanced value added to programs within their own communities. I do believe it's a disruptor. But in this case, we really needed a disruptor." ♦

Sole Jewish lawmaker in Belgium faces backlash amid spat with U.S. over mohels

Freilich is 'reaching out his hand to find a solution, and being accused of disloyalty to his own country,' source tells JI

By Lahav Harkov

The long-simmering controversy over whether mohels can perform ritual circumcisions in Belgium broke dramatically into international public view this week, over a case involving the prosecution of three mohels.

The controversy, which touches on sensitive religious, legal and diplomatic matters, has ensnared the only Jewish lawmaker in Belgium, Michael Freilich, as well as the U.S. ambassador to Belgium, Bill White, who accused the country of antisemitism over the legal action. And it stretches from Antwerp, home to a large Orthodox Jewish community, to Washington, to Jerusalem, where Israel's foreign minister has weighed in.

In an X post on Monday addressed to Belgian Health Minister Frank Vandenbroucke, White wrote: "You must make a legal provision to allow Jewish religious MOHELS to perform their duties here in Belgium. It's done in all civilized counties as legal procedure. ... Stop this unacceptable harassment of the Jewish community here." He then received a reprimand from Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot, saying White's interference in a judicial matter was a breach of diplomatic norms.

But much of the fallout landed on Freilich, who is Orthodox. It comes after Belgian police arrested the mohels, Jewish religious authorities who conduct circumcisions, during a series of raids last May in Antwerp, home to a large Orthodox Jewish community. The individuals have been charged with performing a medical procedure without a license.

While Brussels has not specifically outlawed ritual circumcision, it requires a doctor to perform the procedure. There are no mohels who are also doctors in Belgium, a source close to Freilich told *Jewish Insider*,

and Jewish law requires a mohel to be Jewish. Muslims have no requirement for ritual circumcision to be performed by a coreligionist.

Freilich has become the target of accusations from his fellow lawmakers, in light of a recent interview to a Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Yid*, in which he recounted raising the matter at a roundtable discussion with members of Congress during a visit to Washington.

Belgium's Green Party demanded an ethical investigation into Freilich. Sammy Mahdi, the head of the Christian Democratic and Flemish party, said Freilich's behavior was "totally inappropriate" and compared it to a "member of parliament with a Muslim background lobbying in Morocco or Qatar to influence a court case in Belgium."

Freilich, for his part, has said he was not looking for the U.S. to pressure Brussels, but rather support for his effort to institute regulations that would balance freedom of religion and medical standards by allowing Belgian mohels to receive government-recognized certification without being doctors.

Germany, Sweden and the U.K. have such laws; Israel also requires mohels be certified, and Israeli Chief Rabbi Kalman Bar recently suggested that the EU recognize mohels ordained in the Jewish state to resolve any legal issues.

Vandenbroucke has declined to meet with Freilich on the matter, the source said. White wrote that Vandenbroucke plans to do nothing and that his "sneaky tactic" is to wait for the mohels' trial to end without confronting the matter.

Freilich and his party have been instructed not to speak to the media, but a source close to the lawmaker told *Jewish Insider*; "We need a dialogue with the minister, but he has been refusing. That is

why the ambassador was upset and said the only reason [Vandenbroucke] could be doing this is that he is an antisemite and doesn't want a solution."

The source compared the backlash against Belgium's sole Jewish legislator to the persecution of Alfred Dreyfus, the French military officer jailed for false treason charges at the turn of the 20th century.

Freilich is "not speaking against the state, he is reaching out his hand to find a solution, and being accused of disloyalty to his own country," the source said. "He is uniquely placed as the only Jewish MP, and understands the necessities for the Jewish community but also the necessity of addressing questions raised by the public at large ... which needs a high-level of hygiene and medicine."

In his initial controversial post, White also said that Vandenbroucke refused to shake his hand "because it was clear that [Vandenbroucke] dislike[s] America, the country that fought and where tens of thousands of our nation's sons died for Belgium's freedom twice — in WWI & in WWII."

Prévot said that White's "personal attacks" against Vandenbroucke are unacceptable and that "any suggestion that Belgium is antisemitic is false, offensive and unacceptable. ... The fight against antisemitism, and all forms of hatred and discrimination, is an absolute priority for our country."

"Belgian law permits ritual circumcision when performed by a qualified physician under strict health and safety standards. The specific case referenced is subject to a judicial investigation. I refrain from commenting on ongoing proceedings," he added.

White doubled down and said the matter is "absolutely a case of antisemitism.

You either have to make a change to the procedural accreditation, or you have to call prosecution of these three beautiful, religiously qualified, and wonderful men antisemitic. No other way around it!”

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar weighed in, noting a sharp increase in antisemitic attacks in Belgium over more than five years and citing an Anti-Defamation League study that found antisemitism is two to three times more common in Belgium than in other European countries.

“Suddenly, after thousands of years of Brit Milah being performed, the Mohel community is being targeted,” Sa’ar added. “Dear Minister, I understand that the mirror Ambassador Bill White has held up to you is unpleasant, but one might want to take

this opportunity to take a hard look in that mirror and acknowledge reality.”

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the chief rabbi of the Conference of European rabbis, said that “circumcision and kosher slaughter are not optional customs; they are core obligations, absolutely central to Jewish life. Efforts to restrict them in Belgium are not fair regulatory processes, but are direct attacks on Jewish religious rights. A country that cannot allow Jews the right to live fully Jewish lives is oppressing its Jewish citizens and violating its democratic principles.”

Belgium has long been one of the European countries most hostile to Israel. It joined South Africa’s genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice in December, joining Brazil, Colombia, Ireland, Mexico, Spain and Turkey. Last month,

Prévoit announced a ban on weapons exports to Israel, and Israeli military flights were also banned from Belgian airspace.

Sa’ar noted, “Jewish Belgian citizens living in Judea and Samaria are denied consular services, while Belgian Muslims are welcomed,” referring to a recent decision to no longer have the Belgian Embassy in Israel and consulate in Jerusalem serve Belgian-Israelis residing in the West Bank, such that they cannot receive birth certificates or passports or vote, while no changes have been made for Belgian Palestinians.

In addition, Belgium is one of only four countries in the 27-state European Union that does not have a national plan and coordinator to combat antisemitism. ♦

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Trip to Chicago offers ‘peace of mind’ to female IDF ‘tatzpitanivot,’ who monitor Israel’s borders

During eight-day stay in the U.S., Israeli veterans unpack their traumatic experiences, with support from the local Jewish community

By Tamara Zieve, Rachel Kohn

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Sitting on a bus in Chicago, thousands of miles away from her home in central Israel, Shirel Zafrani realized that for the first time in years, she had both of her earphones in. Zafrani, a former IDF *tatzpitanit*, or observer, never usually “allows” herself the privilege of fully immersing herself in her music — instead staying always alert, at least one ear open.

Zafrani, 26, was one of 17 former *tatzpitanivot* — female soldiers who monitor surveillance cameras and other equipment — who were hosted by North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe, Ill., for eight days last summer as part of Metiv: The Israel Psychotrauma Center’s Peace of Mind program, which for the past 18 years

has helped former Israeli soldiers cope with combat trauma.

The idea behind the program, which provides participants with 60 hours of group counseling plus individual therapy, is that the distance from Israel, combined with the love and support of Diaspora Jewish communities, plays a key role in creating a safe, quiet, and meaningful environment for former soldiers.

“I felt so secure in their area,” Zafrani told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “You really feel in a bubble ... you feel safe.”

This fall, several of the American hosts also visited Israel and the guests who had stayed with them. Bringing the encounter full circle, the Israeli participants organized a day trip for them in the Gaza border area, during which they visited the site of the

Nova festival massacre and the Nahal Oz base where *tatzpitanivot* were killed and kidnapped — there they were accompanied by the father of Noa Marciano, a *tatzpitanit* who was taken hostage during the Oct. 7 terror attacks and killed while in Hamas captivity. Marciano’s father took them inside the burned base and told the story of what happened there. The American group also went to volunteer with on-duty *tatzpitanivot*.

The role of the *tatzpitanivot* has drawn heightened public attention since the Oct. 7 terror attacks in southern Israel. In the days and months following the assault, stories of these observers stationed along the Gaza border — their warnings that went unheeded and the lack of protection that allowed 15 of them to be killed and seven to

be taken hostage in the attacks — elevated awareness of the unit's responsibilities and the immense pressure its soldiers face.

Before Oct. 7, the Peace of Mind program had primarily focused on soldiers from special combat units. Tzlil Aloni, founder of the Israeli *Tatzpitanivot* Association, approached Metiv and recommended that *tatzpitanivot* be included in the program. Aloni, who accompanied the participants on the trip, told eJP, "For years, they have been the 'eyes of the state.' Those who sit in front of the screen, manage fateful events and shoulder an unbearable responsibility, without holding a weapon in their hands."

"But behind the focused gaze on the screen, are hidden complex experiences, difficult sights and a sense of mission mixed with a heavy psychological cost. Since Oct. 7, the upheaval experienced by female observers in all sectors has deepened the understanding that they can no longer be left behind the scenes. They must move to the forefront. Thus was born the unique journey of 17 female observers to the Jewish community in Chicago."

Aloni said that when the association first approached the women, they encountered a number of concerns: fear of opening wounds, and feelings of undeservedness to be on the program in comparison with combat soldiers. "It took time to convey to them the simple and essential fact: you too deserve focus."

The North Shore Congregation Israel synagogue served as the space for group and individual therapy sessions — participants spent as many as six to seven hours in therapy every day — and community members organized an array of activities to help participants relax and lift their spirits during their evenings. There was a pickleball night and a spa night, as well as classic Chicago outings: an architecture boat tour on the Chicago River, shopping on the Magnificent Mile, a night at the theater. And no Jewish visit to the city would be complete without dinner at the local kosher ribs joint, Milt's Barbecue for the Perplexed. The *tatzpitanivot* and their therapists also spoke at a local synagogue's Shabbat service and at a communal Shabbat dinner afterwards.

Ten families opened their homes as hosts for the young women, doing their best to strike a balance between surrounding

them with warmth and care and giving them space and privacy. Johnny and Cheryl Seder hosted two participants in their Highland Park home, women in their early and mid-20s, whom they declined to name to protect their privacy. It was Johnny who first approached NCSI's senior rabbi, Wendi Geffen, about hosting a Peace of Mind group after learning about the organization from another local supporter.

He even rallied three friends to join him in helping the synagogue cover the cost of the program. "All the fundraising took less than five minutes," he said. "When I told them what it was about, they all wanted to help."

"In the wake of Oct. 7, many in our congregation felt a profound sense of helplessness — grief and concern for Israel combined with the painful question of what, if anything, we could do that would truly matter," said Geffen. "Hosting the Peace of Mind program offered our community a way to move from paralysis to purpose. It allowed us to live out the Jewish conviction that *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh* — that we are responsible for one another — by showing up in tangible, human ways for a group of remarkable women who had endured significant trauma."

Zafrani did reserve duty near the border with Lebanon during Israel's war against Hamas, which Hezbollah supported from Lebanon, firing missiles into Israel's north. A couple of weeks after the war broke out, Mitzpeh Adi, the IDF outpost in the Upper Galilee where Zafrani was stationed, was hit.

"I heard a shriek in the sky, and a missile landed next to me. I flew back and ran back to the operations room [*chamal*] like a cheetah," Zafrani recalled. The soldiers fled through the forest in the dark to a different base where they set up a tent for their unit and built a new military operations room from scratch. For many of the *tatzpitanivot*, that night was a traumatic experience, Zafrani said, but they didn't truly talk about it with one another until they reached Chicago.

"Suddenly — in Chicago — you're talking about it, and everyone is sharing what they went through, and it was a crazy sense of closure," Zafrani said.

Zafrani was already in individual therapy before she joined the Peace of Mind program,

but she drew a different type of strength from the group therapy. "You learn things about it in the social setting that you have to cope with yourself in front of the mirror of people. I was the last that spoke, and I didn't want to speak until the last moment, and I felt like I was a sponge." Zafrani, who said she is used to putting other people first, only felt free to release her own emotions at the end of the overseas program.

Prior to the seminar abroad, Peace of Mind participants take part in a two-day overnight outdoor workshop to discuss personal and team goals and expectations. Six weeks after the weeklong seminar, they participate in a follow-up workshop to reflect on individual and group insights gained through the program. Over the next five months, participants who have requested individual care, as well as those whom therapists have identified as requiring further counseling, undergo individual treatment plans tailored to their specific needs. Nine months after the beginning of the program, a concluding workshop is held, during which participants are assessed once more to determine any needs for further therapy.

Zafrani learned from the experience that "you have to take care of yourself, because if you don't, you're brushing it under the carpet; and it made me understand that not everything is OK like I thought."

The group of *tatzpitanivot* was one of the first all-female groups to be taken on this program, and Zafrani encourages more. "They [women] didn't go through less than men ... they need the tools," she said.

"Landing in Chicago was a turning point," Aloni, the *Tatzpitanivot* Association founder, said. "The powerful silence, after years of intensity, was met with endless love from the local Jewish community. Within a truly safe space, they went for seven days between tears of processing and unloading and liberating laughter. Immediate connections were created, without words, between the girls and their host families. For many of them, this was the first time they felt that it was not only them who were watching and protecting everyone — but that someone saw them."

"This journey was life-changing. Some of the girls closed circles in the face of bereavement and loss, others found the

strength to continue therapy processes in Israel, and many received the courage to return to their dreams — to study, travel and live in the fullest sense of the word.”

Ori Sidi, who served as a *tatzpanit* on the Gaza border during the war, flew to South America after a year of reserve duty, thinking it was the solution to healing from the experiences she had been through. “But obviously it wasn’t,” Sidi, 24, told eJP. The 12-day war between Israel and Iran began soon after she returned home, and she realized, “what a lack of inner peace — even when we don’t necessarily feel it — we experience as citizens of this country.”

Because of this, she feels that it is important that the Peace of Mind program is abroad. “To fly abroad without this existential fear, in your conscious or subconscious — you have this automatic peace of mind that comes,” she said. Combined with the “endless love” that she said the host families heaped on the group, it enabled the women to “really go through the process, in a truer and deeper way.”

For the Seders, expressing that endless love included attempting to shield their guests from the hostility toward Israel in the American press at the time.

“We didn’t have the news on, we purposely didn’t have the paper sitting out, like the front page of *The New York Times* or something, because it really was almost anti-Israel sometimes, and I think it would have been difficult for them,” said Cheryl. “They probably see it on their cellphones and everything else all the time anyway, but from a U.S. point of view, we didn’t want them to feel like we weren’t behind them 100%.”

Hosts were advised not to bring up the participants’ experiences as soldiers, just to be available to them if they wanted to talk. Still, when Cheryl would pick up her family’s two guests at the end of their long days of therapy, she could tell “they talked through a lot,” she said. “They had a lot of heavy issues they were dealing with.”

“One girl who was with us, she wasn’t even going to come,” Cheryl said. “She was like, ‘I don’t need that.’ Turned out she was one that needed it the most, probably; and she was the first one to admit that at the end of the week, and realized that she was dealing with a lot more than she thought she was. These things that were brought up in these therapy sessions, you know, you just can’t walk out of there all smiley-face, so it was hard sometimes to transition from that to something else. I think that’s why afterwards they had a yoga session or something like that — a little bit of a transition for them before they came back to their families again.”

Prior to the program, Sidi said, she had never grappled in such depth with the impact that her military experiences had on her mental health. “You don’t reach the depths you reach when someone says to you ‘now you need to talk about this.’ Day to day that’s not what you do — even in a heart-to-heart with a friend you don’t reach these depths.”

“Suddenly you’re with 17 girls; everyone went through their own process but all in all it’s very similar to what you went through. So to hear everyone’s story, suddenly you find out through someone else’s story that something you felt you experienced, someone else experienced too — and you

deal with things together with professionals, who helped us navigate our emotions and how you can function and tools you can use to ease it.”

“The last day, all of us had a day of closure, sort of, before they all got on the bus to leave to go back to the airport,” said Cheryl. The young women spoke “about how much they appreciated the opportunity and how much it meant to them, and how they didn’t even realize how much they needed it.”

“It was very moving at the end to have that experience with the girls before they left,” she said.

“Programs like Peace of Mind are essential because they transform abstract solidarity into lived relationship,” said Geffen. “They remind us that Jewish peoplehood is not merely ideological or political; it is relational and moral.”

For Johnny Seder, bringing the *tatzpitaniyot* to Chicago through Peace of Mind was the most meaningful thing he ever did in his life, he said.

As young soldiers, “do you think they know there’s millions of Jews in this country that feel for them every second?” he asked. “That’s the most important thing, I think, that happened. I wanted their parents and everybody to know, these American Jews — their kids are on the line, dying for us — there’s nothing that we won’t do.”

The next mission of *tatzpitaniyot* will likely take place in the fall. “This journey was just the first shot,” Aloni said. “We are already facing forward, and the next journey is already on the way. Because every Israeli observer deserves to know: We see you.” ♦

ADL report highlights accelerated Iranian antisemitic propaganda effort in Latin America

The new report details the Iranian-sponsored HispanTV's portrayal of Jews and Zionism as 'an omnipresent, evil force'

By Marc Rod

A new report released by the Anti-Defamation League on Tuesday highlights an acceleration over the past two years in antisemitic and anti-Israel rhetoric by HispanTV, Iran's Spanish-language state-sponsored media outlet that primarily targets Latin America.

"The Iranian regime's media outlet is spreading classic antisemitic conspiracy theories and anti-Israel propaganda to potentially millions of people across Latin America and beyond, making the Islamic Republic a destabilizing force not only in the Middle East, but across the Spanish-speaking world," ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt said in a statement. "With antisemitism already at historic levels globally, Tehran is funding a massive media propaganda operation that is priming the pump for spreading antisemitism and hate against Israel and Jews the world over."

The report urges governments to probe ties between HispanTV and sanctioned Iranian officials and government entities and consider designating the media outlet as a foreign influence operation. It also urges social media companies to take moderation action against or take down HispanTV's pages, satellite companies to reconsider

broadcasting the channel's content and internet hosting companies to cease providing services to the outlet.

The report was released in conjunction with an ADL-sponsored event on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference focused on Iran's malign activities in Latin America.

According to the report, HispanTV's content features a consistent narrative including antisemitic tropes about Jewish and Zionist influence, portrays Israel as the center of a global conspiracy, expresses support for violent extremist groups and the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel, praises the Iranian regime in comparison to Western democracies and denies Israel's right to exist.

"The failure of governments, international organizations, corporations, and others to take meaningful action against HispanTV has allowed the Iranian regime to export its hateful and violent conspiracies around the world," the report states. "If this threat is not seriously addressed, the result will likely be the radicalization of Spanish-speaking audiences across Latin America and beyond."

The report charges that "one of the most

pervasive themes in HispanTV's coverage" is an antisemitic depiction of Jews and Zionism as "an omnipresent, evil force" controlling governments as part of an interconnected malign plot.

The glorification of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad is also a "central narrative thread" in the coverage, positioning the terrorist groups as righteous, moral and necessary alternatives to the evils of Zionism, and lauds their alleged victories. The outlet covers Hezbollah and the Houthis in a similar light.

"HispanTV consistently frames Hamas's October 7, 2023 attacks as legitimate and praiseworthy acts of resistance worthy of celebration. This reframing is essential to the channel's ideological project, converting mass violence into a foundational myth of liberation," the report adds.

The outlet has downplayed or ignored high-profile antisemitic attacks targeting the Jewish community globally, according to the report. It also portrays Jews and Israelis as "operating a highly organized global disinformation apparatus designed to deceive the world and justify genocide," downplaying or dismissing the idea of antisemitism entirely. ♦

Josh Shapiro tells BBYO teens: Be proud to be Jewish

The Pennsylvania governor kept his Jewish identity front and center when addressing the opening ceremony of BBYO's International Convention

By Gabby Deutch

As Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro walked onstage Thursday night at the opening ceremony for BBYO's International Convention, the annual global gathering of the world's largest Jewish youth group, he was beaming — a result, perhaps, of being introduced by his niece, or his excitement at welcoming 3,400 Jewish teens to Philadelphia.

"It is so good to see you," Shapiro said to the crowd, before delivering an upbeat speech urging the teens in attendance to be proud of their Judaism and to strive to live out Jewish values as they defend American democracy 250 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "right down the street," Shapiro noted.

"What we've seen over the last 250 years is ordinary Americans rising up, demanding more, seeking justice, and people like you ushering in change. And now the reason why I'm so proud to be here with all of you tonight is that the theme of this BBYO conference is 'We the future,'" said Shapiro. "250 years later, I wanted to come here tonight and look you in the eye and say, You are the future and you have the power to

shape it."

Shapiro, who grew up in a suburb of Philadelphia and attended the same Jewish day schools as many of the locals in the room, earned applause and cheers throughout his remarks.

"I know we're facing some challenges out there, and this is a moment, I want you to know, where I lean on my faith, and I am proud of my faith, just like all of you," Shapiro said. "I need you right now to harness the teaching of our ancestors that show that we're a people that can overcome adversity. I want you to harness the power in this room and in your hands and find your activism."

Throughout his career in politics, Shapiro has publicly and frequently invoked religious themes in his speeches. Often, though, he uses generic phrases like "my faith teaches" when mentioning a quote from the Hebrew Bible. At the BBYO conference, though, he kept his Jewish identity front and center.

"I want you to wear your Stars of David with pride. That will give strength to others," said Shapiro. "I want you to

confront the bullies that you find in your communities, but I want you to confront them with a sympathetic heart and an effort to understand and change minds because understand those bullies, they are coming at that from a sense of weakness and ignorance, and you are the ones who can bring strength and light."

Shapiro's message to the teens was not political. He did not tell them to get involved in any particular cause — only to find something they care about.

"I want you to go home and organize in your communities, because hear me on this: *Tikkun olam* knows no religious boundaries. It is our responsibility to repair the world, to do this work, and I for one am optimistic it will get done because of all of you. Your presence here tonight, well, it unlocks two extraordinary forces in humanity: hope and optimism," said Shapiro. "I know this is a moment sometimes that can feel dark. Understand you are not victims. You are the ones with the power to make a change in your community."♦



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