

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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MARCH 20, 2026

Court ruling reviving VOA sparks cautious hope for expanded Iran coverage amid war

The international broadcaster, along with Radio Free Europe, has struggled to deploy its Persian-language services to provide coverage amid an internet blackout in Iran

By Matthew Kassel

A federal judge's ruling this week that voided the Trump administration's efforts to shutter Voice of America, restoring more than 1,000 journalists and other employees by Monday, is raising some hopes that the embattled international broadcaster funded by the federal government may now be able to ramp up its Persian-language coverage to reach Iranians at a crucial moment amid war with the U.S. and Israel.

While VOA had resumed some of its Persian news broadcasting in recent months, it has been hobbled by a yearlong near shutdown ordered by the Trump administration that had reduced the organization to a skeletal staff — further battered by the tumultuous tenure of Kari Lake, who until recently served as the de facto leader of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, which oversees the network.

In a separate ruling earlier this month, the judge ordered that Lake's appointment as acting chief had been unlawful and

nullified her aggressive moves to gut VOA. President Donald Trump last week nominated Sarah Rogers, a senior State Department official, to take over USAGM — a position that requires Senate confirmation which Lake never received. The Department of Justice has not confirmed if it will seek to appeal the latest ruling.

One USAGM source expressed optimism that the judge's decisions would result in "more resources," but cautioned that "there are still leadership issues" in the Persian service — once one of VOA's largest divisions — stifling its ability to report exhaustively on news developments and offer coverage without the appearance of bias.

The Persian division — whose content had seen a growing audience among Iranian news consumers before the shutdown, according to a VOA fact sheet — is now led by Ali Javanmardi, an Iranian Kurdish journalist who has drawn scrutiny

for censoring the outlet's reporting on Iranian opposition figures such as Reza Pahlavi, the exiled crown prince who gained renewed prominence amid mass protests that swept the country prior to the war. One journalist with the Persian service said this month he was fired because of disagreements with leadership over the network's direction.

The editorial constraints and massive cuts to VOA's stable of full-time reporters not only "decimated the Iran division" but also "politicized it at a time when it is more important than ever for the United States to be speaking directly to the Iranians," the USAGM source told *Jewish Insider* before the recent rulings, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive issue. "It's a shame what has happened."

Now, as the joint U.S.-Israeli military campaign in Iran continues amid a near-total internet blackout imposed by the country's regime, the need to reach

information-starved Iranians has only grown more urgent, several experts familiar with the matter told JI.

But there are ongoing concerns that VOA as well as a federally funded but independent network, Radio Free Europe/Free Liberty, which operates a Persian service called Radio Farda, will continue to struggle due to government roadblocks that have obstructed their ability to produce meaningful stories and even to transmit broadcasts that Iranians have viewed as trusted sources during previous domestic conflicts.

“By adhering to the truth, U.S. international broadcasting can be a powerful tool in America’s arsenal, particularly in Iran where RFE/RL and VOA have strong brands and audiences,” Jamie Fly, who led RFE/RL from 2019-2020 and now serves as chief executive of Freedom House, a think tank promoting global democracy, told JI on Thursday.

Under current management, however, USAGM “seems to be doing everything possible to ensure that President Trump’s messages to the Iranian people are not heard, and in some cases, directly contradicted,” Fly added.

RFE/RL, which Lake tried but failed to shut down, has faced a litany of obstacles that have particularly diminished Radio Farda’s broadcasting presence in Iran. In addition to withholding funding that forced its Persian service to furlough half of its staff, Lake’s efforts to target the network included cutting access to a key U.S. transmitter in Kuwait that allowed it to disseminate its broadcasts in Iran and inhibiting the use of virtual private

networks that help circumvent internet shutdowns, among other hostile moves.

According to an RFE/RL source, USAGM “is still asking that” the network “use its own grant” resources to broadcast via short and medium wave radio from the Kuwait transmitter — which is federally funded. USAGM “resumed transmissions of Radio Farda” on shortwave in early February and medium wave in early March, the source told JI. The network has additionally paid for satellite as well as short and medium wave transmissions using its “own grant funds already through private vendors.”

“As the internet remains unstable” in Iran, the source said, “our journalists have been able to conduct interviews with and receive updates from Iranians on the ground only periodically.”

Despite such issues, Farda “continues to garner a significant audience online,” the source told JI. From Feb. 28 to March 17, for instance, “Farda published 738 posts on Instagram, recording 105.5 million impressions and 28.6 million video views.”

Even as the organization has managed to bypass some impediments to its operations, another RFE/RL source described intense frustration with USAGM, calling its oversight “dysfunctional” as the agency has sought to exert its control over a network that — unlike VOA — is not a government entity.

“They have no plan,” the source said on condition of anonymity to avoid reprisals. “There’s no strategy.”

USAGM “could and should be more cooperative when Iran blocks” internet access, the source told JI this week. “We should all be surging into Iran now,” where

RFE/RL has learned that university students in the country have been “sharing shortwave radios to hear” its broadcasts amid the war.

USAGM did not respond to a request for comment. On social media, Lake has otherwise touted VOA’s efforts to reach Iranians, despite criticism that she has hampered its resources and diluted its Persian coverage — which she wrote in one recent post that she had tried to “realign” with “U.S. foreign policy.”

Experts raised doubts about the possibility of an imminent news surge into Iran even if the judge’s recent ruling is expected to soon restore VOA to its pre-shutdown capacity. As USAGM maintained an adversarial posture toward VOA, RFE/FL and other federally funded nonprofit groups, it still remains to be seen if Rogers, the nominee to succeed Lake, will change direction. Lake, meanwhile, has pledged she will appeal the ruling invalidating her role and said that she will continue at USAGM as its deputy CEO.

Amid the changes, Ilan Berman, an Iran expert at the American Foreign Policy Council who serves on the board of RFE/FL, told JI in an interview that he was “cautiously optimistic there is going to be more coherence to administration” inside USAGM, after a year in which he questioned its “strategic mission.”

During Lake’s tenure, “there was no coherence to the informational enterprise” except for a “focus on disruption,” Berman noted. “The people who suffer are the people of Iran.” ♦

Squeezed by BDS, Nazarians shift USC endowment to Judaic studies, with HUC antisemitism program

New initiative will focus ‘on educating students about extremism, rising hate and antisemitism as a gateway to broader bigotry’

By Haley Cohen

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Shortly before the Oct. 7, 2023, terrorist attacks in Israel, Sharon Nazarian ensured that her new UCLA course on global antisemitism would be housed in the global studies department, deliberately choosing a diverse student body over the more niche Jewish or Israel studies departments.

But in response to rising Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions activity on campuses since Oct. 7, Nazarian and her family’s philanthropic organization, the Younes & Soroya Nazarian Family Foundation, announced a pivot this week, partnering with Hebrew Union College for a new initiative at University of Southern California’s Louchheim School for Judaic Studies.

The initiative will focus “on educating students about extremism, rising hate and antisemitism as a gateway to broader bigotry” through multiple courses, according to HUC, which has run a partnership with USC for more than five decades.

Initially, the family’s gift was earmarked for USC’s school of fine arts, established as an annual endowment for a guest lecturer from Israel, but “deans of that school refused to host Israeli scholars and academics within the arts and humanities,” Nazarian told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

“This is a boycott campaign that is becoming normalized. We as a family felt the only way to fight that was to use the endowment towards something that actually fights the fundamentals underneath the BDS movement, which is singling out one country for issues that no other country is held up to,” said Nazarian, a former adjunct professor at UCLA from 2005-2017 who briefly returned in 2023 to teach her new course.

“So this is a repurposing of that endowment, and we’re thankful to USC for agreeing and honoring our wishes as donors to put the endowment towards something even more critically important today, which is the study of contemporary antisemitism in the U.S. and around the world,” Nazarian, a graduate of USC, told *eJP*.

Nazarian said the courses are designed for Jewish and non-Jewish students alike. A class has been taught in past years at USC that is similar — focusing on antisemitism, racism and other forms of hate — which Nazarian said drew “a very diverse group of students coming from diverse ethnic and racial groups.”

“The beauty was that they all learned about antisemitism, racism and Holocaust denial,” she said.

“It’s an effective mechanism of attracting a more diverse group of students,” she continued, adding that the course is expected to be taught every other year,

while another class focusing on trends in global antisemitism will be taught the other years.

“Attracting students who are interested in global issues should still be a focus for us,” continued Nazarian. “How [else] can we understand global issues like climate change or global health? Antisemitism has to be understood and researched in that same lens.”

Recent events that have rocked Jewish communities worldwide — from the massacre in Bondi Beach in December to the foiled terrorist attack at a Michigan synagogue last week — have “only confirmed that thesis,” said Nazarian. “Hopefully, students of global issues will see that hate travels across borders. Understanding antisemitism is a unique lens to understand that.”

“This gift reflects exactly the kind of partnership that allows institutions like ours to meet this moment,” Andrew Rehfeld, president of HUC, said in a statement. “Hebrew Union College has long been committed to fostering Jewish identity, pride, and scholarship, and this initiative deepens that mission in a vital way. The Nazarian family understands that combating antisemitism requires sustained, serious effort — and their investment will ensure that students at USC have access to the rigorous, expert-led education this subject demands.” ♦

Netanyahu has less than two weeks to pass a budget — or go to early elections

The prime minister's governing coalition is struggling to stay intact to pass 2026 budget amid shifting political priorities

By Lahav Harkov

The war against Iran may have united the vast majority of Israelis who support its aims, but much of the governing coalition's prewar political obstacles still have to be resolved by the end of the month — including the passing of a state budget for the current year and a Haredi conscription law — or else an early election will automatically be called.

The coalition failed to pass a 2026 budget by Dec. 31, a regular occurrence in Israel, due to several policy disputes. By law, if the Dec. 31 deadline is not met, it may be extended to the end of March. However, if the Knesset does not pass a budget by the end of March, the law states that the body will automatically dissolve, with an election held 90 days later.

The Knesset is slated to go into recess on March 24, but it appears increasingly likely that the legislature will stay in session, with efforts to finalize the budget continuing until hours before Passover, which begins on the evening of April 1.

If Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition succeed in approving a budget, the official election date would be set for Oct. 26, though the parties could choose to hold it on an earlier date.

Some Israeli media have reported that Netanyahu would prefer to hold the election before Rosh Hashanah (Sept. 12) and the subsequent three weeks of Jewish holidays; other analysts have said he would not want an election after Oct. 7, because the date will serve as a reminder of his government's failure to prevent Hamas' 2023 terror attack.

If the coalition does not succeed in passing a budget, the election will be held at the end of June, and Netanyahu's Likud party will have to launch a campaign, potentially as the war with Iran is still ongoing.

Before the war, the biggest political challenge for Netanyahu's government related to issues surrounding Haredi military service.

The Haredi exemption from the mandatory IDF draft was canceled by the High Court of Justice in 2023, just prior to the Hamas attacks — and shortly before Israelis became acutely aware of the IDF's urgent manpower needs. Since then, the government has been embroiled in legal and legislative disputes over how many young Haredi men to conscript and what penalties should be imposed on those who refuse to serve.

With the issue unresolved, both Haredi parties quit their Cabinet posts last year, though Shas and parts of United Torah Judaism mostly continued voting with the coalition in the Knesset. Still, the parties demanded that a bill reducing penalties for not serving in the IDF be passed before they supported the budget.

While the head of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Netanyahu loyalist Boaz Bismuth, led the effort to draft legislation that the Haredi parties would agree to — the proposal would institute relatively low enlistment quotas and lessen and defer most penalties for refusing to serve — enough members of Knesset from other coalition parties opposed it that it was unclear that Bismuth's bill would get enough votes to pass.

Last week, Netanyahu and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich announced that coalition parties agreed to put aside all controversial legislation, including the Haredi draft bill, as well as a reform led by Smotrich to further privatize the dairy sector, which faced significant opposition within Likud. The Haredi parties were reportedly incentivized to drop their

insistence on passing the bill when Smotrich and Netanyahu agreed to meet their other budgetary demands.

Dropping the Haredi draft bill means that the status quo remains: The IDF is legally required to send draft notices to all Haredi men aged 18-26, though they do not have to send them all at once, and the government must stop funding yeshivas for young men who are required by law to draft. Yet the government does not plan to enforce the law while the war against Iran is ongoing, Cabinet Secretary Yossi Fuchs told the High Court on Thursday.

Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara flagged some Haredi budgetary demands as illegal, leading the parties to threaten once again to vote against the state budget unless the same amount of funding is diverted to places that Baharav-Miara would not reject. That dispute delayed a vote on increasing the wartime defense budget that had been set for Monday.

At the same time, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and his Otzma Yehudit party have yet to drop their most controversial proposal, the death penalty for terrorists, which they continue to demand be passed before the budget vote. Otzma has followed through on past threats to vote against the coalition or absent themselves from key votes if their demands are not met.

Ben-Gvir posted a video on X on Wednesday, in which an off-camera voice said, "I heard the Iranians say that you're dead." Standing in front of a gallows with a plaque with Israel's anthem, a memorial to Jewish underground fighters who were hanged by the British Mandatory government, Ben-Gvir said: "I am dying to execute terrorists. Death penalty for terrorists." ♦

MARCH 18, 2026

After relaunch, PJ Library's Get Together microgrant program sees spike in interest

A limited version of the program launched a decade ago, but a national version is seeing a wave of interest, prompting a full relaunch

By Nira Dayanim

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In the midst of a snowstorm in Washington, D.C., shortly after federal layoffs rocked the city, a group of Jewish families teamed up to dig their neighbors out of the snow. When the job was done, they gathered for a hot chocolate party — funded by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

The costs of the “it takes a village” snow-shoveling and the hot chocolate party, and thousands of other small Jewish gatherings, were covered by a PJ Library program providing subscriber families with \$100 micro-grants to cover hosting expenses for small Jewish-themed gatherings. The Get Together microgrant program has seen a steep spike in interest this year, particularly in smaller cities and rural areas, Jessica McCormick, PJ Library's director of family experience, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

Over six months, the Get Together microgrant program has distributed over \$1 million in grants. Between September and

December 2025 alone, 8,000 households held Jewish gatherings enabled by the micro-grants, 2,500 of which used the grants for the first time, according to McCormick. “It's moved at a sort of breathtaking speed,” she said.

The program was launched in 2016, but was only available in 10 locations across North America. In 2024, the grants were expanded to all PJ Library subscribers, relaunching in fall 2025 with a more streamlined submission process and a bigger team to review submissions and dispense grants. For 2026, the project's target was to engage approximately 4% of PJ Library's over 230,000 subscribers throughout the United States and Canada. So far, more than 2,000 grants have been issued. If things continue as they are, said McCormick, they are likely to reach 8% by the end of the year.

The microgrants have been highly successful in large hubs of Jewish life, like New York City and Los Angeles, but also in smaller markets like Minneapolis and Winnipeg, Canada.

But “by far,” said McCormick, the majority of “get-togethers” sponsored by the grants happen in what PJ Library describes as “all-access communities” — more rural areas where the population is not served by a JCC or Jewish federation.

“We're sending these funds into areas where people might be reaching out to the only other Jews in the area, or maybe they didn't know other Jews, but the micro-grant has encouraged them to go out and meet families and find community,” she told eJP.

Some 23% of grants have been used for activities tied to the High Holiday season, 31% were used for Shabbat or *Havdalah*, and 26% were used for Hanukkah celebrations. Other uses of the grants have ranged from the snow-shoveling support, to indoor stroller-walking events that sparked weekly bagel meet-ups.

“Everybody has micro-communities on their mind,” said McCormick. “And we're very proud to be able to say, ‘Let your people use our money. Let them know they should use our micro-grants to host their gatherings.’” ♦

MARCH 18, 2026

Israel conspiracies threaten Democratic hopes in Texas runoff race

Bexar County sheriff's deputy Johnny Garcia is facing off against Maureen Galindo, who has made antisemitic conspiracy theories a key feature in her campaign

By Matthew Kassel

An upcoming Democratic runoff for a red-leaning open House seat in Texas that could be competitive in November is now emerging as a stark

example of the growing tensions between moderate candidates and their fringe opponents on the extreme left over how to approach Israel and the rise of antisemitism.

The May 26 election in Texas' recently redrawn 35th Congressional District, which was created to favor Republicans and extends from San Antonio to Austin, pits

Johnny Garcia, a Bexar County sheriff's deputy who is backed by pro-Israel Democrats and establishment officials, against Maureen Galindo, a local activist who has used her growing social media presence to promote a range of conspiracy theories, including specious claims about Israel and its ties to the United States.

Despite spending only around \$4,000 on her insurgent bid and raising no money, Galindo, 38, narrowly finished first in the crowded primary earlier this month, clinching just over 29% of the vote — two points ahead of Garcia, who placed second. The other two Democratic primary candidates, John Lira and Whitney Masterson-Moyes, each won about 20%. Both have since endorsed Galindo in the runoff.

The unexpected result has raised serious doubts among mainstream Democrats and nonpartisan election observers over whether the party can win the seat if it nominates Galindo, who last year ran unsuccessfully for San Antonio City Council — and whose unhinged rhetoric is likely to alienate voters in the general election.

Her upset also underscores how, on both sides of the aisle, fringe candidates prone to conspiracism that increasingly focuses on Israel are managing to gain some traction — amid an uptick in antisemitic violence linked to the war in Gaza and now in Iran.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* last Friday, however, Garcia, 39, said he had anticipated the possibility of a runoff, projecting confidence about his ability to claim the nomination for a seat he and national Democratic leaders believe he is best suited to win this fall.

He said he had already expanded his coalition in the days after the primary, earning new endorsements from both current and former elected officials who had previously remained neutral, while otherwise drawing contrasts with an opponent whose unstable messaging, he argued, shows a lack of connection to voters' everyday concerns in the heavily Latino district.

"Although the desired outcome would have been making sure that we powered through the primary without a runoff, here we are in a situation to make sure that we are educating the voters about who the two candidates are," he said, claiming that only

"one aligns with" a district that he described as "very blue-collar."

He characterized Galindo, by comparison, as a polarizing figure whose penchant for incendiary rhetoric threatens to stoke intraparty divisions in the House and inflame tensions nationally, accusing her of fomenting antisemitism in her commentaries on social media.

"Antisemitism is dangerous, and this country has enough divide as it is with what we're seeing at the top by those in power," he told *J*. "We don't need more of that, in a time where division is so strong and hate is driven by antisemitism. We don't need more of that, especially coming from a Democratic candidate running for Congress."

During a moment of increased political tensions fueled in part by "wars in the Middle East" raising security concerns in the Jewish community, Garcia argued, "we don't need somebody like that making antisemitic remarks, and conspiracy theories, that could potentially drive what we just saw yesterday in Michigan," referring to the foiled terrorist attack that targeted a synagogue in suburban Detroit last Thursday.

Citing his career in law enforcement, Garcia, who said he had worked in construction and plumbing before serving as a corrections officer and later as a hostage negotiator on an elite SWAT team, broadly emphasized his appreciation for nonprofit security grants that help protect religious institutions from terror attacks. New federal funding is currently tied up in Congress amid a partial shutdown at the Department of Homeland Security.

"I support security grants for synagogues and Jewish schools, with the ability to also monitor hateful rhetoric and antisemitism online and to streamline the response across law enforcement agencies," Garcia told *J*. "Here in San Antonio, we understand that, when we have an attack anywhere in the nation, it is our direct response to make sure that the fates that are being directly impacted are remaining safe, and ensuring those who practice a particular faith, such those who attend synagogues, will be safe. That is a priority."

In her own campaign, meanwhile, Galindo has demonstrated an unusual fixation on Israel, while using messaging that invokes antisemitic tropes. "We need Congress members that put America before

Israel, I can't even believe I'm having to say this!" she wrote in one representative online post. "If it's not clear, I DO NOT SUPPORT AMERICAN TAX DOLLARS GOING TO ISRAEL AND WILL NEVERRRR ACCEPT THEIR BLOOD MONEY."

She has devoted much of her attention to what she suggests are pernicious links between San Antonio and Israel, while baselessly insinuating that "there may be Israeli soldiers" secretly embedded in U.S. federal immigration operations. She has frequently claimed that the Department of Homeland Security is based out of Tel Aviv, citing as evidence a screenshot purporting to show the agency had created its X account in the Israeli city — which X's head of product has dismissed as "fake news" and a "hoax."

Meanwhile, the first section in the issues page featured on Galindo's campaign website refers to "genocide," only mentioning Israel. "We must stop funding Israel with billions of American workers' tax dollars every year," she says. "Instead we can invest that money in a STRONGER AMERICA."

In an email to *J* last week, Galindo, who declined to be interviewed, did not answer questions asking if she was aware that her language on Israel echoes antisemitic conspiracy theories.

"Jewish-Americans are saying that Israeli government actions are escalating antisemitism which of course makes me fear how Israeli and American aggressions are harming Jewish people around the world!" she wrote in response.

She also refused to acknowledge that her repeated claims regarding DHS had been discredited. "It would be sus if the DHS in Tel Aviv post was debunked because I saw it with my own eyes that day!" Galindo said. "I hope X leadership isn't compromised. You should look into that for the safety of all Jewish people — we must stop harm to Semites and end genocide!"

For his part, Garcia expressed strong support for Israel and its relationship with the United States last week. "I firmly believe the actors of Hamas are a terrorist organization," he said. "We need to make sure our closest ally in the Middle East remains safe and has the ability to protect itself."

"Making sure the region remains safe and remains stable is a priority," he explained to

Jl. “We need to ensure the area does not destabilize and allow for other terrorist organizations to sprout and spring up, especially at a time where we are now in a new war with Iran.”

While he acknowledged Iran “has been a leading sponsor of terrorism for years and everyone agrees unilaterally that Iran cannot be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon,” Garcia disagreed with the manner in which the Trump administration has prosecuted the war, saying it has endangered American soldiers and resulted in escalating gas prices back home, at a moment when voters are more concerned with basic affordability issues such as rising grocery and health care costs.

“This war is careless and it’s reckless,” he told Jl, adding that military “families here in San Antonio are fearful their children will be going and fighting in this endless war.”

His centrist approach to foreign policy and other topics has earned Garcia endorsements from the moderate Blue Dog PAC and Democratic Majority for Israel, which recently included him on its first slate of non-incumbent House candidates for the midterms.

“Let’s be clear, there is only one Democrat who can win this race and it’s Johnny Garcia,” Brian Romick, DMFI’s president and chair of its political arm, said in a statement to Jl. “DMFI PAC is proud to support him because if Democrats are going to win back the House, we need to support candidates like Johnny who can actually win in November.”

Even as the nonpartisan *Cook Political Report* has ranked the race “likely Republican” in its election forecast, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has indicated it is optimistic it can win the seat, adding it to a list of “districts in play” late last year.

“Knowing their record of broken promises has turned voters against them, Republicans are attempting to save their microscopic majority by trying to diminish the power of

voters of color in Texas,” Rep. Suzan DelBene (D-WA), who chairs the DCCC, said in December. “Democrats will not let their cynical power play go down without a fight. The DCCC will work to ensure the people of Texas’ 35th District have the representation they deserve.”

Local political experts agreed the race could be in reach for Democrats this November, depending on the outcome of the runoff — where Republicans also are fielding two candidates after a primary where no candidate came close to securing more than 50% of the vote required to win the nomination outright.

“I wouldn’t consider any runoff in which neither candidate broke 30% in the first round to be a sure thing,” David Crockett, a political scientist at Trinity University in San Antonio, warned last week about the Democratic runoff. “This will hinge on turnout and organization, and where the voters for the third and fourth place finishers go.”

Jon Taylor, a professor of political science at the University of Texas at San Antonio, shared a more sanguine assessment, suggesting Galindo “may have benefitted from a low name identification primary.”

“But based on the also-rans from the primary and Garcia’s fundraising and organizational advantage,” Taylor told Jl, he suspects that Garcia will win the May contest. “Lira and Whitney Masterson-Moyes’ voters are more likely to gravitate toward the more moderate Garcia.”

Looking to the fall, “Garcia provides national Democrats with better material to work with in November and none of the liabilities of the more extreme and at times unbalanced Galindo,” noted Mark P. Jones, a political scientist at Houston’s Rice University.

Though the GOP had drawn the new seat to help give the party an edge — the product of mid-decade redistricting that transformed a solidly blue enclave held by progressive Rep. Greg Casar (D-TX), who is now running

for a different seat — experts said that a difficult national political environment now facing Republicans could shape their chances for a pick-up in the general election.

The Democratic nominee will face off against either John Lujan, a state lawmaker backed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott who flipped a blue San Antonio seat in 2021, or Carlos De La Cruz, a U.S. Air Force veteran who won a late endorsement from President Donald Trump that complicated the primary’s closing stage. Lujan, who placed first with 33% of the vote, bested De La Cruz, whose sister is Rep. Monica De La Cruz (R-TX), by six points, hardly a strong total for either candidate.

“Democrats across the country and in Texas over the last year and more have run well ahead of their historic vote shares,” said Cal Jillson, a professor of political science at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. “It looks like 2026 is shaping up to be a good Democrat year nationally and in Texas.”

Unless the political landscape changes “in the Republicans’ favor between now and Election Day,” he told Jl, “I would think any district that is less than” heavily favorable for the GOP “might be available to a good Democrat candidate running a good race.”

In the meantime, though, Garcia said that he is focusing on shoring up support in advance of the runoff, as he works to prevent his extremist rival from another upset. “Now more than ever,” he said, “we need to be united — not just as Democrats, but as a nation. We can’t allow hateful vitriol or further divides to fuel tensions and create an environment for attacks” targeting the Jewish community.

“My title in law enforcement, in the state statute, is peace officer,” Garcia explained to Jl. “That’s what we are, first and foremost. We’re not deputies, we’re not policemen. We are peace officers. And I believe strongly in peace and diplomacy.”

“That is what I starkly bring to this race” and what “we’re ultimately fighting to restore in Congress as well,” he said. ♦

As war wages in Iran, Justice Dept. reaches ceasefire with Tehran-backed network in Manhattan

Eighteen-year legal fight over the Iran-tied Alavi Foundation ends with a new group with similar leadership taking over its assets — and NYC skyscraper

By Will Bredderman

As tensions intensified between the U.S. and Iran amid the regime's violent repression of protesters in January, and as Tehran vowed itself "prepared for war," a long-running battle with the Islamic Republic's forces in Manhattan came to an end.

The final stages of the conflict between the Justice Department and the New York-based Alavi Foundation, which since 2008 has faced allegations of acting under Iranian direction, took place in secrecy — with scores of legal documents sealed and even vaulted away.

But materials filed on Jan. 12 with the New York State Charities Bureau revealed its ultimate outcome: a settlement that will provide compensation for numerous American and Israeli victims of Tehran-backed terror, but also enable a successor organization to recoup control of the foundation's vast assets, including its 36-story crown jewel skyscraper on Fifth Avenue.

The final deal — which a filing this month shows came together confidentially in the last days of the Biden administration, and has just begun to go into effect — will officially dismantle the Alavi Foundation and strip it of hundreds of millions of dollars. Formed as the Pahlavi Foundation in 1973 during its namesake shah's reign, Alavi was later commandeered and rechristened by figures tied to the regime of the mullahs, and the federal government accused it of conspiring with an Iranian state-owned bank to evade taxes and sanctions.

The settlement of the suit brought by the federal government compels payouts totaling \$318 million to the U.S. government and a wide array of people Iran and its proxies have harmed: in the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, in the

1996 Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia, in multiple 1990s and 2000s suicide attacks against Israel, in the torture and murder of an Iranian dissident, and in the 1990 assassination of Rabbi Meir Kahane.

In exchange, a new non-governmental organization, the Amir Kabir Foundation, will rise in Alavi's place. Named for a historic Persian imperial administrator, the new group will take full possession of 650 Fifth Ave., appraised at \$435 million, plus bank and investment accounts holding more than \$87.6 million, and properties from Queens to California worth tens of millions more and home to various Shia religious and educational facilities.

Records show that the Amir Kabir Foundation shares Alavi's old address and even its phone number, and that three of the five members of the Alavi Foundation's board of directors are part of the new group's six-person leadership team. This includes Dr. Hamid Yazdi, who has served as Alavi's president since 2013, and whose name appears on registration paperwork for the Amir Kabir Foundation. Yazdi did not respond to requests for comment.

And although by-laws for the new group require it to remain "independent from any national or international agencies," it will continue to provide funding and support for at least one longtime Alavi affiliate: the Qoba Foundation of Carmichael, Calif., which occupies an Alavi-owned property that the feds sought to seize in the early days of the case and which bears the name of a politically significant Iranian mosque.

The news that the Amir Kabir Foundation shared much of Alavi's leadership team and would regain access to the huge rental revenues from 650 Fifth Avenue and the network of religious facilities lodged at the old organization's properties alarmed longtime Iran-watchers.

"This is the Iranians playing anti-sanctions, anti-accountability three-card monte. They are treating the U.S. Department of Justice and the courts as if they are fools," asserted Dr. Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute. "Iran's only concern is maintaining the property. It's lucrative and, in theory, can help undermine U.S. security from within. If the CIA owned a skyscraper in Tehran, would they be so willing to give it up, or would they just shuffle the acronyms around and hope no one notices?"

The news also worried Lara Burns, head of terrorism research at George Washington University's Program on Extremism. Burns highlighted her own contributions to a report that found Alavi-backed groups had promoted anti-American, pro-ayatollah extremist rhetoric, and noted the group's history of violating sanctions, as documented in the federal case. She suggested "government fatigue" with the lengthy and expensive litigation process may have contributed to the federal decision to settle.

A former FBI agent, Burns further argued financial penalties like those in the settlement can at times serve effective "punitive and deterrent functions" — but not in this case.

"I do not believe restitution and fines serve either purpose in the case of Alavi Foundation, who has shown a willingness to continue its behavior at all costs and the fiscal ability to maintain that agenda," she argued to *Jewish Insider*. "Allowing Alavi to obfuscate their identity and basically start with a clean slate creates risks related to a continued foreign influence campaign on behalf of a regime that has called for the death of U.S. leaders and who has blatantly stated its intent to cause America harm through a variety of nefarious activities."

But Alavi's longtime attorney, Daniel Ruzumna, maintained that the new foundation would in no way serve as an alter ego to the old. He noted that the Alavi Foundation's board had completely turned over during the yearslong legal fight, and stated that all members of the Amir Kabir Foundation's leadership had submitted to interviews with the federal government and received no objection.

Further, he pointed to language in the document filed in New York subjecting the Amir Kabir Foundation to a five-year term of oversight from the state Attorney General's office, and said that it would operate under the "close supervision" of the Justice Department.

"AKF and its board members have no relationship to the Government of Iran, no connection to the Government of Iran, and

have never been accused of having a relationship with Iran — zero, nothing," Ruzumna said. "Any suggestion otherwise is categorically false."

The office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, which handled the case, declined to comment for this story. ♦

MARCH 17, 2026

Education Committee finds SJP and faculty groups play central role in campus antisemitism

Schools with Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine chapters were seven times more likely to experience violence against Jews, the report found

By Matthew Shea

A newly released report from House Republicans on the Education and Workforce Committee alleges that faculty members and student groups have played a central role in promoting and amplifying antisemitism on college campuses, particularly those affiliated with Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP).

The report, titled "How Campuses Became Hotbeds: The Rise of Radical Antisemitism on College Campuses," was released Tuesday and examines campus activity following the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel.

The report finds that faculty affiliated with Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine (FSJP) "played a significant role in legitimizing and amplifying antisemitism on college campuses," and that campuses with FSJP chapters were seven times more likely to experience "violence against Jews."

It alleges that some faculty members sought to "strip Jewish students of protections, incited protests that turned violent, taught antisemitic content in their courses and hosted programming that isolated Jewish students and demonized Israel."

According to the report, FSJP chapters have pressured universities to boycott Israel, reject the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition

of antisemitism and circulated statements that justified violence against Israel.

In one example, the report indicates that the FSJP chapter at Sarah Lawrence College challenged the school's decision to put the word "antisemitism" before the word "racism" in a two-day orientation curriculum. "We're worried [it] sends a message to incoming students about whose oppression matters," the school's chapter wrote.

"Faculty members also perpetuate antisemitism through university centers, such as Middle East studies centers, that offer a one-sided view of Israel as a 'settler colonialist' enterprise," the report states. "It also views Jews as white and the privileged 'oppressor,' rather than a diverse minority that has been persecuted for thousands of years."

The report found that in September 2024, the University of California Berkeley announced Ussama Makdisi as the inaugural chair of a newly created program in Palestinian and Arab Studies. However, earlier that year, Makdisi made a post on social media supporting the actions of Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, writing: "I could have been one of those who broke through the siege on October 7."

The report also alleges that student groups, most notably SJP, have

"consistently acted as ringleaders for antisemitic harassment faced by Jewish students on campus." It argues that institutions of higher education have "given in" to student demands and "failed" to discipline students promoting antisemitism. SJP chapters in particular "organize violent antisemitic disturbances, host antisemitic speakers and pressure universities to boycott Israel."

The report cites another incident at Sarah Lawrence College in which the school's SJP chapter posted a statement calling on peers to "defend the student intifada," described the Oct. 7, 2023 terrorist attacks as an "uprising" and shared an image "of a Hamas bulldozer tearing through Israel's security fence." The group later received a student leadership award after being nominated by the school's FSJP chapter.

"At the award ceremony, the individual presenting the award described SJP as having 'engaged in empathetic and powerful activism,'" the report states.

"Every campus that the Committee investigated while preparing this report featured an SJP chapter, or a variant of one, that served as a ringleader for antisemitic activity on campus," the report adds, noting that many colleges and universities not only "failed" to respond to SJP, but also

allowed “hostility towards Jewish students to fester.”

The report also suggested that foreign influence in American higher education is part of the problem, pointing to satellite campuses in Qatar operated by Northwestern University and Georgetown University. It alleges that both institutions have “housed faculty or fellows and student groups that foment antisemitism” without consequences.

“Neither NU-Q nor GU-Q have disciplined any faculty, students, or staff for antisemitism since October 7, 2023,” the report states. “The committee found that after October 7th, GU-Q entities that should be neutral promoted, participated in or hosted deeply one-sided events that legitimize antisemitic rhetoric.”

The report cites a series of incidents involving faculty and staff at Northwestern’s Qatar campus, including Professor Marc Jones, who it says has circulated a conspiracy theory that Israelis steal Palestinian organs and described Israel as “worse than Hamas.” It also references visiting Professor William

Youmans, described as an Al Jazeera specialist, who called Israel a “terrorist state” and defended Hamas following the Oct. 7 attacks.

Additionally, the report highlights a social media post from Sami Hermez, director of Northwestern in Qatar’s Liberal Arts Program, in which he wrote that “Zionists have control over European policy and power,” adding, “If you want to make the leap that Jews control Europe, I don’t care.”

At Georgetown University’s Qatar campus, the report alleges that student groups displayed posters reading, “We stand with violence on Israelis,” and that at an SJP event, some students “drew hearts around Hamas’ name,” while others left messages including, “Oh Allah, deal with the Zionists,” and expressed a desire for the Jewish people “to fall.”

The report also outlines a series of recommendations aimed at addressing these problems, including adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

It also calls on Congress to pass legislation such as the Civil Rights

Protection Act, which would require higher education institutions to be more transparent about procedures and investigations related to civil rights complaints, as well as the Defending Education Transparency and Ending Rogue Regimes in Nefarious Transactions (DETERRENT) Act, which would lower the financial threshold at which universities must report foreign gifts and contracts.

The report further suggests requiring U.S. universities operating overseas to make course syllabi publicly available, arguing that doing so would allow the government to hold faculty “who have exhibited blatant antisemitism” accountable.

“The findings in this report make clear that antisemitism in higher education is not confined to encampments at a handful of elite universities, nor did it begin or end with the events of October 7th,” the report states. “The evidence demonstrates that antisemitism is driven by persistent leadership failures and radical faculty and student groups that legitimize and foment antisemitism in classrooms and on campus grounds.” ♦

Josh Shapiro tests measured, pro-Israel message in progressive podcast tour

In preparing for a potential 2028 presidential run, the Pennsylvania governor said the Democratic Party must first agree that Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state

By Gabby Deutch

As Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro eyes a 2028 presidential run, he is using a series of big-name podcast interviews to refine and test out his messaging on Israel — and taking aim at California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a potential rival, in the process.

In interviews with the “Pod Save America” and “Higher Learning” podcasts that dropped in recent days, Shapiro put himself in the line of fire from interviewers with more left-wing views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than he holds. In response, he made the case that, as the starting point for any public political conversation about Israel, the fact of Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state must be respected.

“I think what is dangerous here, and I’m not accusing you of this by any stretch, is for those who think Israel doesn’t have a right to exist in [the] conversation. That to me is a recipe for permanent war,” Shapiro told “Higher Learning” host Van Lathan, who said a national conversation about Israel is needed. (“Higher Learning” is part of a podcast network from the digital media company The Ringer.)

The point of the discussion seemed to be to demonstrate a kind of modeling — that Shapiro, a Jewish Democrat who has long been both a supporter of Israel and a critic of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, can show Democrats how to have a difficult yet transparent and empathetic conversation amid deep disagreements over Israel’s actions in Gaza.

Shapiro is making clear that if he runs for president, he does not intend to sidestep the party’s most fraught foreign policy debate. He intends to shape it.

In the “Higher Learning” interview, Shapiro laid out his views on Israel while

taking flack from Lathan, who called Israel “one of the worst human rights violators” and said he is worried that in describing Israel as an “apartheid state,” people will think he is saying he hates Jews.

“I fundamentally disagree with your viewpoint, but I don’t think you’re an antisemite. I think that you are learning and struggling and grappling with issues that are really, really tough, and you formed an opinion, one that I disagree with, that you seemingly hold very honestly,” said Shapiro. “I don’t think that you’ve got hate in your heart toward someone because they’re Jewish. I think you’ve got different views, say, than I do about Israel or about the Middle East.”

Shapiro drilled down into the conversation he said often plays out about Israel, and drew a red line that he believes should not be crossed.

“Usually the conversation starts around the idea of does Israel have the right to exist, right? And exist as a Jewish state,” he said. “Peace to me are two nations, Israel and a Palestinian country, living side by side in peace with full recognition for one another, an acknowledgment that both have a right to exist and an acknowledgment that the goal of each country is not to wipe out the other ... I think if one doesn’t recognize Israel’s right to exist, then you’re — not you, then *one* is in effect for really just permanent war, because you’re effectively saying Israel’s got to go, and Israel’s not going anywhere.”

Shapiro’s podcast tour came amid a similar media blitz for Newsom. Both governors recently published memoirs outlining their political origin story, a move widely seen as a first step for politicians with national ambitions.

At an event earlier this month, Newsom said that Israel could “appropriately” be described as an apartheid state.

In response to a question about Newsom’s comment from “Pod Save America” co-host Jon Lovett, Shapiro castigated the California governor — without invoking his name — for using inflammatory language.

“If we really want peace, and I believe you want that, then we’ve also got to be acknowledging that language matters here, that words matter. And that we’ve got to use words that are actually rooted in reality and are able to bring the temperature down to create a space for that peace,” Shapiro told Lovett.

“I just think we’ve got to be really thoughtful and careful and not just look for buzzwords and not just sort of follow what’s going to get maybe some likes on Twitter,” Shapiro added. “But we’ve got to be thoughtful about a debate that is really, really hard to have, and we’ve got to have it.”

On “Higher Learning,” he more directly took on the apartheid allegation.

“You use the word ‘apartheid.’ Take a look in Israel. Someone who would identify as Muslim, someone who would identify as a Palestinian Christian. They live in a society with all of the same rights and legal responsibilities as Israelis,” said Shapiro. “They get elected to the Knesset, which is their parliament. They pay taxes. They can serve in the military. They are citizens in the world in a way that a true apartheid state would not allow for.”

Public opinion polling has shown declining support for Israel among Democrats. As Shapiro’s national profile has grown, he has not shied away from his Jewish background or his support for

Israel, both of which he discussed at length in his memoir, *Where We Keep the Light*.

The interviews with two major progressive podcasts suggest that Shapiro wants to proactively share his views on the Middle East with potential future voters — and that he does not view his position as something to hide from a Democratic base that may be less amenable to those views than in the past.

In both interviews, he outlined his staunch opposition to the policies of Netanyahu and President Donald Trump on Israel. He criticized Israel's actions in the West Bank and the violence by some Israeli settlers targeting Palestinians. He also sought to make clear that although he is a

supporter of Israel, his main goal is advancing America's interests in the region.

"I don't think that if you are critical of Benjamin Netanyahu, you're an antisemite. By the way, I'm critical of Benjamin Netanyahu. And I have been for years and years and years, even predating Oct. 7. I think his approach has made Israel less safe. I think it's undermined U.S. national security interests, which is my primary concern," Shapiro said on "Higher Learning."

On "Pod Save America," Shapiro called for the Trump administration to investigate the death of Nasrallah Abu Siyam, a Palestinian-American teenager from Philadelphia who was killed in the West

Bank last month, reportedly by Israeli settlers, and he said Netanyahu must take the threat of settler violence more seriously. But when Lovett asked what to do about these challenges beyond "calling for [Trump and Netanyahu] to become different people," Shapiro responded with an argument about democracy.

"These are the leaders that each country has chosen. I'm not going to speak to what the people in Israel chose. They'll have an election. They'll figure that out," he said. "Here in the United States of America, we need to have more of a check on this administration." ♦

MARCH 16, 2026

Ro Khanna facing new Democratic challenger hitting him from the political center

Tech entrepreneur Ethan Agarwal: 'He thinks being racist against Jewish people is going to help him win the American left. I don't care if he's right. I just think it's unethical and immoral'

By Marc Rod

Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) has become one of the harshest critics of Israel in the House, in recent months associating with some of the leading anti-Israel figures within the Democratic Party — at one point proudly declaring his ties to a far-left antisemitic podcaster.

In his pushback to the U.S. war against Iran, he has caricatured those supportive of taking military action against the Islamic Republic as part the "Epstein class" — which critics have accused of being an antisemitic trope — while defending right-wing commentator Pat Buchanan from past charges of antisemitism.

As a result, he is facing a primary challenge from tech entrepreneur Ethan Agarwal, who is accusing the congressman of embracing far-left views to seek national attention for a potential presidential campaign — at the expense of focusing on constituents back home in the Silicon Valley-based district.

"The district is being represented by a guy who could not care less about the

people in the district, and that's frustrating because I supported Ro when he first ran back in 2012," Agarwal told *Jewish Insider* on Friday. "He's completely [turned around] on basically everything that he said to his supporters."

Agarwal said he sees Khanna's activities, including his opposition to the Iran war and outspokenness against Israel, as plays for national attention, rather than representing the district that elected him.

Khanna "just totally does not give a s*** about the district. He's running for president, and he wants to run to the left on every issue," Agarwal alleged. "The district needs a representative that's focused on the district itself, and that's why I'm running for Congress."

Those allegations of political opportunism were echoed in a recent Washington Post column by writer James Kirchick, who reported that Khanna professed to being a strong ally of Israel and the Jewish community earlier in his career when he was seeking a role in the Obama

administration. The op-ed framed Khanna as a relentless self-promoter willing to change his views for attention and career advancement.

Khanna, in response to the allegations that he's lost focus on his district back home, told JI he was "proud of my record representing California's 17th district," pointing to his work to secure \$13.5 million in funding this year for projects including affordable housing, veteran housing, safe routes for children to get to school, clean water and transportation. He added that he has held nearly 80 town halls, is regularly meeting with local community leaders and is in touch with anti-ICE activists, and touted his constituent services and endorsements from local leaders and groups.

"And I'm willing to take on powerful people when accountability is needed. When I called for the release of the Epstein files, many dismissed it and said no one in the district would care. They were wrong. Constituents raise it with me regularly

because they want transparency and justice for survivors,” Khanna added.

Agarwal’s criticisms go beyond hitting Khanna for putting national issues ahead of local ones. He accused the congressman of engaging in shoot-from-the-hip social media commentary that has inflamed antisemitism at a time of heightened fears within the Jewish community.

“Even if you weren’t running for Congress or trying to run for president — what is wrong with you?” Agarwal said. “If the congressperson of the district is advocating these kinds of things publicly, it stokes and it inflames the culture on the ground.”

“He thinks being racist against Jewish people is going to help him win the American left,” Agarwal added. “I don’t care if he’s right. I just think it’s unethical and immoral.”

Khanna responded that he has “consistently condemned antisemitism in all forms,” including speaking out specifically against various recent incidents, that he has been “been clear in my support for Israel as a Jewish and democratic state,” that he has worked with Jewish leaders and visited synagogues within the district.

“This issue is personal for me. My nieces and nephews are Jewish through my brother’s marriage, which has deepened my understanding of why it is so important to speak out against antisemitism in any form,” Khanna continued.

Defending his affiliation with New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Maine Senate candidate Graham Platner and far-left influencer Hasan Piker, Khanna said, “I do believe like Franklin Roosevelt and President Obama that we need to build a big tent, and Mayor Mamdani and Graham Platner are part of that. I also engage with media across the political spectrum, from Hasan Piker to Shawn Ryan to Theo Von to Sean Hannity, because we shouldn’t shy away from debates or discussions with people with different ideologies. We must engage.”

Agarwal has publicly linked Khanna’s rhetoric to an assault on two people speaking Hebrew in a San Jose restaurant

earlier this week. The attack took place within Khanna’s district.

“It doesn’t take a genius to draw a line between those two things,” Agarwal said.

“We MUST capture and punish the perpetrators. Beyond that, we HAVE to turn down the dial of anti-Israeli rhetoric. [Khanna] acknowledge your role in this, and apologize for inflaming tensions,” he urged the congressman on X last week. “Take responsibility for creating the environment that enables these lunatics.”

In response, Khanna called the assault “horrific” and said it has “no place in our community,” adding that he had “unequivocally condemned” the attack and pushed for the attackers to be prosecuted.

“I’ve taken concrete steps to confront antisemitism locally. I’ve held multiple town halls and meetings with members of the Jewish community across the district to hear directly about their concerns and make sure they feel safe,” Khanna said.

He also highlighted his move two years ago to appoint a staffer in his office to serve as a point of contact for community members on antisemitism and a recent town hall he held with a local Jewish Democratic group.

“My focus has been making sure that when antisemitism occurs, our community knows it will be taken seriously and addressed immediately,” Khanna continued.

While he didn’t weigh in on the broader strategic goals of the U.S. operation in Iran, Agarwal has argued that it’s an unequivocal good for the Iranian people and the world that Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed on the first day of the joint U.S.-Israel operation, is dead, and criticized Khanna for trying to prevent or stop the U.S. operation against Iran.

“I am in support of the murder of Ali Khamenei because he was a brutal dictator and 20,000 Iranian Americans in [this] district — I spoke to many of them — agree with that,” Agarwal said. “I don’t know what happens from here. I think there’s open questions. I think there’s a good path, and there’s mistakes that can be made, but what I do know is that Iran is better off without him, and I think America is better off without him being alive.”

Khanna stood behind his advocacy for the war powers resolution, emphasizing the support it received among House Democrats, including Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and two moderate Jewish Democrats who initially opposed it. He said that the issue is a matter of constitutional authority.

“I have been clear that the Iranian regime is brutal and destabilizing, as we have seen in its repression of its own people and the killing of thousands of protestors. But launching a war of choice in the Middle East without fully understanding the risks to our servicemembers or the potential for wider escalation has been reckless,” Khanna said. “People in my district understand the cost of these endless wars and oppose them. They expect their representative to stand up for the Constitution and to ensure that decisions are made carefully and with accountability.”

Agarwal has also blasted Khanna for his comments linking the Iran war to the Epstein case.

“What does [Jeffrey] Epstein have to do with the war in Iran? ... aside from these being two topics he thinks are going to help him get elected president,” Agarwal said, adding that he believes that Khanna is using “Epstein class” as a broad pejorative to smear his political enemies, Israelis and the Jewish people.

Khanna told JI, “The ‘Epstein class’ refers to a group of wealthy and powerful elites who use their wealth and connections to operate as if they are above the law and not subject to the same accountability as everyone else. The phrase reflects the reality that Jeffrey Epstein and the people around him were able to operate for years without consequences,” and said “many prominent Jewish Americans” including Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-GA) and columnist Bill Kristol “have used the phrase after I coined it.”

“Attempts to twist the meaning of that phrase into something else is an empty political attack to distract from the real issue, which is accountability for powerful people who believe the rules do not apply to them, including rules of war,” Khanna said.

Agarwal also didn’t expound at length on Israel policy — emphasizing that his

first responsibility in Congress would be on local issues in his district. He did say, however, that he believes that Israel is “our strongest ally in the Middle East” and that a stronger relationship between the two countries is good for the U.S., the U.S. economy and the district.

With a nearly decade-long record in Congress, a prominent profile and \$15.5 million in donations on hand as of the end of the year, Khanna is strongly favored to

win re-election. In the previous election, Khanna picked up 63% of the vote in the all-party primary, rising to 68% in the general election against a Republican challenger.

But with some prominent figures in Silicon Valley’s tech scene getting behind Agarwal, he might have a chance at making Khanna work harder for his re-election.

Agarwal argues that Khanna is also taking the election for granted, and that his alleged lack of attention to local issues will

backfire on him, as well as his support for a wealth tax and his breaks with the local Israeli, Jewish, Iranian and other immigrant communities.

“I’m going to win this election by listening to the people in the district and being their advocate, as opposed to focusing on my national profile,” he said, pointing to Khanna’s national travel to 2028 presidential primary states. ♦