

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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SEPTEMBER 1, 2026

Vance speaks out against antisemitism, avoids controversy in RJC remarks

Confronting a skeptical crowd, the vice president expressed support for Israel and the Jewish community; he wasn't pressed directly on his past comments and affiliations that have most concerned Jewish Republicans

By Marc Rod

LAS VEGAS — Vice President JD Vance stuck to a pro-Israel line and rejected antisemitism in remarks on Monday to the Republican Jewish Coalition, avoiding any new controversies while not being pressed directly about some of his past comments and affiliations, including with Tucker Carlson, that have most concerned Jewish Republicans.

Attendees, with some exceptions, largely said that the speech helped Vance reassure skeptical Jewish and pro-Israel Republicans and boost his support with the RJC crowd ahead of a potential 2028 presidential bid.

Vance, in an off-record conversation with RJC Chairman Norm Coleman, audio and a transcript of which were leaked shortly after his remarks, was asked about a list of antisemitic influencers including Carlson and Nick Fuentes and his decisions about how to engage with those figures. He didn't directly address Carlson — who he has previously defended as a friend — in his response, instead highlighting differences he sees between figures like Fuentes (who he tagged as antisemitic) and Rogan (who he said wasn't).

"One area where I really do draw the line is on people who engage in what I call this blood libel attitude. I recognize a lot of people in this room might disagree with things that Tucker Carlson or Megyn Kelly or Joe Rogan has said, but — just to hone in on Fuentes and Rogan, I think these are two very, very different categories of people, both with their reach, but also within the ideas that are in their actual head," Vance said.

Regarding Rogan, he said that he thinks the best approach is to engage and make his case and try to reach his audience. Fuentes, he said, is a substantively different case who is not worth engaging with given both his neo-Nazi views and his personal attacks on Vance and his family.

"But outside of some pretty bright lines, I try to talk to as many people as I can," Vance continued.

Vance also highlighted a "growing suspicion" among the under-40 generation of the U.S.-Israel relationship and said that he believes that the best way to make the case for the relationship is to "actually get out there and talk about the ways in which it is in the best interest of the United States

of America," highlighting advanced missile defense technology as one example.

He said that other arguments that may have "made a lot of sense rhetorically 30 or 40 years ago" may not have the same appeal to young people today.

Asked about his past comments that Israeli and U.S. interests don't always align, the vice president said that Israel is important to U.S. national security and among the U.S.'s most critical alliances, as well as undergirded by a "deeper cultural symbiosis and harmony."

Vance was not directly asked about his recent comments accusing the Israeli government of conducting influence operations in the U.S. to undermine negotiations with Iran.

Vance suggested that Israel's focus on the Middle East and the U.S.'s desire to shift away from a two-decade focus on that region is "a natural place in which Israel is going to look at these things slightly differently than the United States of America. ... The most important thing is to say that there are alignments of interest across a whole host of issues."

Towards the end of his remarks, Vance

said that he sees antisemitism as having increased primarily as a result of immigration and the “importation of large groups of people who bring their ethnic rivalries” rather than changing sentiments in the American populace.

The vice president emphasized that he and the entire administration “love” the Jewish community and “you will very much always be on the team so long as I have any say in it.”

He argued that antisemitism — or the idea of punishing anyone for their genetics or ancestry, which he referred to as “blood libel” or “blood guilt” — is anathema to his Christian faith. He also highlighted past conversations with conservative activist Charlie Kirk about how antisemitism is “corrosive to the soul.”

“I think the antidote to antisemitism is the rejection of this idea of blood guilt,” Vance continued. “And I would tell any young man who claims to be a Christian that this is super corrosive for the soul.”

Vance said he feels a personal affinity and connection between the Catholic and Jewish religions and sees similarities between the two faiths — noting that he participated in a reading at the Orthodox Jewish wedding of his former chief of staff, Jacob Reses.

Vance, who spent the day on the campaign trail in Michigan with former Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI), called Rogers “the single most important candidate right now in this midterm election” and El-Sayed “one of the worst disgraces running in the history of the American political process.”

“You don’t see a bunch of innocent Jewish kids who almost lose their lives and empathize with the killer unless you see those people as less than human,” Vance said, referring to El-Sayed’s response to the attack on Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Mich., in March.

Several RJC board members, all speaking in their personal capacities, and other attendees largely said that Vance’s remarks had helped his case with the Jewish community.

“His sincerity was appreciated, and his comment that the under-40 generation doesn’t have the same emotional or historical attachment to Israel so must be

met where they are was correct,” Joshua Katzen, an RJC board member told *Jewish Insider*. “The audience was relieved.”

Katzen told JI prior to Vance’s speech that the remarks would be an opportunity to alleviate concerns from RJC members, and his remarks earned repeated standing ovations from the crowd.

“I am going to support him,” Yitz Applbaum, another RJC board member, told JI. “He is definitely strong on the U.S.-Israel relationship and totally understands the issues, especially with the youth and how we need to work to do away with antisemitism with people under 40. [That was] a very key part of what he talked about.”

Sander Gerber, also an RJC board member, told JI, “Vice President Vance spoke to an enthusiastic room who understands that the American Jewish community is a core part of the political future of our country. I applaud the VPs statements repudiating antisemitism on the right.”

Bobby Schostak, an RJC board member and former Michigan Republican Party chairman, said that the RJC is “honored to have [Vance] here” and that Vance “made clear his positions ... there was nothing concerning to me overall.”

“I think he needs to continue to reach out to us and us to him,” Schostak continued. “We have a good understanding going forward, but I didn’t find anything there, you know, alarming or concerning.”

Stuart Weil, an RJC member from California, told reporters that Vance’s remarks confirmed to him that any potential issues were a result of media distortion of Vance’s record.

“I will gladly support JD Vance as president of the United States,” Weil said. “As a big supporter of Israel, I believe that JD Vance will make a wonderful president. ... He just reinforced what I already know.”

Not everyone was won over by Vance’s comments, however, with one attendee expressing disappointment with his failure to repudiate Carlson directly. “He was given the opportunity to call out and separate himself from Tucker. To the disappointment of many, he ducked the

Tucker issue altogether,” the attendee told JI.

Schostak also acknowledged that others in the room might not have been satisfied with Vance’s answer.

“He addressed it as the elephant in the room. ... I think the way he responded was, ‘It was important to not ignore all factions of opinion,’” Schostak said. “I don’t know how well that was received.”

Radio host Sid Rosenberg, who in remarks before the RJC earlier in the day urged the audience to “give Vance a chance,” said that he was disappointed by Vance’s remarks.

“He was not strong enough on Israel. In fact he referred to Israel as ONE of our best allies. One of?” Rosenberg said on X. “He had a chance to hammer [Carlson] and [Kelly] but instead spent all his time defending [Rogan] over Nick Fuentes. He also blamed immigration for a lot of the antisemitism in our country today. Silly. Look, he’s still better than any Democrat candidate but I don’t think he wowed the STRONG Jews in the room tonight.”

RJC CEO Matt Brooks and other members of the group’s leadership offered strong praise and support for Vance during a press conference following the session.

“Coming into a room that many would say had not necessarily known who JD was and what was in his heart, or would be coming in skeptical to learn more — I think he really connected very very well with the audience tonight,” Brooks said.

Ari Fleischer, an RJC board member and former White House press secretary, told reporters that Vance “really helped himself tonight” and “answered a lot of the questions that people had about where his heart is.” He added that repeated appearances will help the crowd grow more comfortable.

“Today was not primary day, but I think today was progress day for JD Vance with the Jewish community,” he said.

Vance entered the room facing a divided crowd — with some in the audience skeptical of the vice president given his ties to Carlson, his public criticisms of Israel, his approach to negotiations with Iran and a host of other issues.

Uniformly, RJC board members and

Jewish Republican elected officials said that Vance's appearance at the RJC was a positive sign for him and for the Jewish community and that they were grateful that Vance was coming to address the crowd.

"I was surprised yet pleased to see that he's coming," Katzen said ahead of the speech. "I doubt that the vice president is coming to tell us that he thinks that Tucker Carlson's view of Judaism is correct. He's not here to tell us that. I have to think that he's here to build bridges. I wonder how explicit he'll be in rejecting the antisemites associated with Tucker Carlson."

He said that Vance "must understand that he's walking into 750 people who are very skeptical about his support" — largely because he "failed to respond when offered the opportunity" to people who have made antisemitic comments — so RJC members want him to address those concerns.

"I think his remarks can make all the difference," Katzen said, noting that Secretary of State Marco Rubio's name received loud applause from the RJC audience, while the same was not true of Vance.

"He can fix that tonight, and I hope he will. I would much rather have the Republican Party choosing between two excellent candidates [in 2028], especially the Jews in the Republican Party," Katzen said. "I don't want the Jews to feel like there's only part of the Republican Party that is a home for them, because the Jews have no home in the Democratic Party."

He said he would still prefer Vance to any Democrat.

RJC board members who spoke to JI otherwise generally declined to speculate about Vance's potential presidential ambitions or the 2028 race, arguing that it's too early to consider that election. Vance

was the only anticipated 2028 hopeful who attended the conference.

Board member Eric Levine said ahead of the speech that it's an "affirmatively good thing" that Vance is speaking to the RJC because it shows that the Jewish community and the U.S.-Israel relationship matter to him — particularly when juxtaposed with the increasing hostility toward Israel on the Democratic side.

Levine said that Vance has been helping President Donald Trump advance his Middle East policy — "and there has been no more pro-Israel president in the history of our country than Donald Trump."

"Having said that, it's a fool's errand to just deny reality," Levine continued, referring to Vance's "relationship and association with Tucker Carlson," who he said is indistinguishable from Nick Fuentes, former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), Hasan Piker, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed. "So it's unhelpful to have a relationship with Tucker Carlson, but that's up for the vice president to navigate."

He said he didn't expect a sweeping statement from Vance either in defense or denunciation of Carlson.

Others said they had fewer concerns about the vice president going into the speech, but saw it as an opportunity for the vice president to mend fences with those in the RJC crowd who were concerned.

Schostak said before the event that it was "terrific" and an honor for Vance to appear, and said that it was an opportunity to start a process of strengthening his relationships with members of the RJC and reassuring those who do have concerns.

"This is a process. You're not going to do everything in 45 minutes, but I think he's going to show us, honoring us by being here

and showing us that he cares about the American Jewish community and its fight against antisemitism and its support and his support for Israel's right to defend itself and its self-determination," Schostak said.

He said that the appearance was a "starting point to have those discussions for people that have any doubts or concerns" but he also argued that those concerns are largely based on incomplete comments.

"I think people are hearing things out of context. They're getting three-hour podcast sections sliced and diced and put into a digital feed," he said. "And I just think that unless you are hearing in its entirety, it's hard to draw an honest conclusion."

Applbaum before the event said he didn't share the concerns of some other RJC members, but that he hoped the speech would provide an opportunity for Vance to assuage their concerns.

Applbaum emphasized that Vance's association with Trump and his policies gives him strong credibility and credentials — "they're great for Israel, they're great friends with the Jewish people in Israel."

Brooks said that the RJC, not Vance's team, decided to close the event to the press, so that Vance could "talk to the people in the front of the room in a way that wasn't through the filter of the people on the press risers in the back of the room."

Brooks and Fleischer downplayed the event's significance as a stop on the 2028 presidential election trail, emphasizing that the speaker list had been selected with an eye toward the upcoming midterm elections, rather than the next presidential race.

Disclaimer: Yitz Applbaum serves as *Jewish Insider's* wine columnist. ♦

AUGUST 31, 2026

Michigan AG Nessel tells Jewish Democrats to put ‘needs of world’ ahead of ‘our own survival’

Nessel, who still hasn't endorsed Democratic Senate nominee Abdul El-Sayed, said she won't support Republican Mike Rogers

By Matthew Kassel

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Jewish Democrat, encouraged Jewish voters on Sunday to put aside concerns about their safety “in exchange for the opportunity to save the rest of humanity,” in a stark reference to the choices facing Jewish Democrats in the closely contested Senate election this November.

“We have a moral imperative to place the needs of the world above even our own self-interest and, yes, even our own survival,” Nessel told attendees in her remarks at the Michigan Democratic Jewish Caucus’ annual “Summer Simcha” gathering, where she was honored, according to reports confirmed by *Jewish Insider*.

Nessel’s comments did not explicitly refer to Abdul El-Sayed, the Democratic Senate nominee who has faced profound skepticism from Jewish Democrats over his hostile rhetoric toward Israel as well as his equivocal response to a violent terrorist attack on a synagogue outside Detroit in March.

But her plea to attendees suggested she was moving toward voting for El-Sayed, who also appeared at the event on Sunday to apologize for his initial comments on the synagogue attack in which he had claimed that “hurt people hurt people” and “violence is a cycle,” in remarks that were widely seen as insensitive to Jewish safety.

El-Sayed voiced regret for those remarks on Sunday, asking the caucus members “for forgiveness and a moment of grace” for what he called an ill-timed response. He

also clarified that there was “an opportunity for context later on,” a sentiment that some voters found offensive in light of the attack, which had been perpetrated by a Lebanese American man who has lost relatives in Israeli strikes in Lebanon, including a brother who was a Hezbollah commander.

Nessel has been among the most high-profile Jewish Democrats in Michigan to withhold an endorsement of El-Sayed, whose response to the synagogue attack she had criticized in a podcast interview last week as “making excuses” for domestic terrorism that raised questions about how he would respond to other potential acts of violence.

Despite her reservations with El-Sayed, Nessel has also clarified that, unlike some Jewish Democrats in the state, she will not back former Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI), the GOP nominee now aggressively courting Jewish voters who could help decide the election in a key battleground state.

In her speech on Sunday, Nessel alluded to Queen Esther, the biblical heroine of the Jewish holiday of Purim, in a dramatic illustration of the high stakes of the race.

“It is perhaps up to us now to follow in her path,” Nessel said, “and sacrifice the comfort, safety and security and even the very future of our own people in exchange for the opportunity to save the rest of humanity.” (In the Purim story, however, Queen Esther risked her own life to save the Jews rather than putting aside Jewish safety for a supposed greater good.)

She suggested the election hinged on

more than just Israel, whose existence as a Jewish state El-Sayed has refused to acknowledge. “What good is defending the historic homeland of our ancestors and demanding that candidates acknowledge its right to exist, if the planet upon which it rests is no longer inhabitable?” she said to attendees at the event in Birmingham on Sunday.

“Come November, what do your Jewish values tell you to do?” Nessel asked, arguing against voting to empower Republicans when other urgent factors are also at play that go beyond Israel as well as the Jewish community.

One Jewish caucus leader who has spoken privately with Nessel said her remarks “certainly suggest” she will vote for El-Sayed even if she has not offered her endorsement.

“I think there is a difference between holding your nose and voting for someone and endorsing and I think she appreciates the distinction,” the caucus leader told JI, speaking anonymously to discuss a sensitive subject.

Joan Lowenstein, a Jewish caucus member, told JI after the event on Sunday that “the people who will vote for El-Sayed agree with” Nessel’s comments to the crowd.

“Many do not agree and don’t want to turn their backs on Jewish life in the U.S. or in Israel so that we can have a Democratic Senate,” she said, adding that “even though many of us disagree with each other, we respect the validity of these views.” ♦

Six months into the Iran war, is Trump's economic pressure campaign yielding dividends?

Former Iran envoy Elliott Abrams: 'His policy is working right now, but the enemy gets a vote'

By Matthew Shea

As the conflict between the United States and Iran passes the six month mark, former White House officials and regional analysts remain divided over whether Washington's economic campaign and naval blockade are meaningfully changing the strategic landscape.

Hostilities briefly renewed for the first time in weeks over the weekend, as the U.S. struck Iranian rocket launchers to prevent them from deploying mines in the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran in turn fired on U.S. forces in Jordan. President Donald Trump vowed on Monday that the U.S. would retaliate for the attack.

Alexander Gray, former chief of staff on the National Security Council during Trump's first term, expressed confidence in the administration's trajectory, arguing U.S. leverage is "only growing."

"As President Trump has accurately noted, the military metrics of American operational success — destruction of the regime's navy, air force, and leadership — are clear. But it is the economic impact, and particularly the sustained pressure on the Iranian currency that is so damaging," Gray told *Jewish Insider*.

Richard Goldberg, a former Trump administration official, also expressed support for continued economic pressure and indicated that the current strategy will "put the United States on a course to total victory."

"Unless and until we have military solutions to deeply buried and hardened underground missile and command facilities, a return to widespread major military operations risks blowing up the global oil market without any assurance of bringing down the regime," Goldberg said. "On the other hand, if you can capitalize on all the strategic gains already achieved, put the regime on a pressure cooker clock

toward financial collapse, relieve the pressure on the global oil market by moving more and more product out of Hormuz via the U.S. military, and surge covert support to the Iranian people, you can put the United States on a course to total victory."

Brett McGurk, a former senior national security official who served under Presidents George Bush, Barack Obama, Trump and Joe Biden and now is a global affairs analyst at CNN, wrote this week that Iran is "not winning" the war, but is actually "losing its leverage" in the Strait of Hormuz.

However, other former White House officials warned that Iran could turn the tide.

"Right now the U.S. has the upper hand because Arab states are able to export some oil — through pipelines or the Strait of Hormuz — while Iran is not," Elliott Abrams, a former U.S. special representative for Iran during the first Trump administration, told *J.I.* "Iran's economy is being battered badly."

Abrams described the current balance as a "very good situation" for Washington, but cautioned that it "may not last" given Tehran's unpredictability.

"Iran might lash out at Gulf Arab oil facilities again, or at power and desalination plants," Abrams said. "That would present President Trump with a situation he's been trying to avoid: the need to go back to war. His policy is working right now, but the enemy gets a vote."

Jason Greenblatt, a former White House Middle East envoy in the first Trump administration, agreed that Washington currently holds the edge, but cautioned that it is "not yet" decisive.

"At the six-month mark, the balance of leverage remains with Washington, although not yet decisively," Greenblatt said. "The Trump administration's economic campaign is raising the cost for

Tehran and those helping the regime. President Trump's strategy is working because it attacks the regime's ability to finance the conflict while preserving overwhelming American military power."

Greenblatt acknowledged that Tehran retains the ability to "create instability," pointing to the flare up in tensions between the two sides over the weekend. However, he asserted that Trump has shown "zero tolerance" for maritime disruptions.

"The latest strikes show that Iran remains willing to create instability, but also that the United States is willing and able to enforce that warning," Greenblatt said. "The question now is whether anyone in Tehran has the authority to turn mounting economic pain into an agreement and enforce it. At the moment, I do not believe there is. But as President Trump's Operation Economic Outcast grinds on, that may change. That is the point of the campaign."

Meanwhile, other experts offered a more cautious assessment, questioning whether Washington's leverage can endure given Tehran's ability to outmaneuver economic pressure.

Dan Shapiro, former deputy assistant secretary of defense under the Biden administration and former U.S. ambassador to Israel, acknowledged that there has been a "modest increase in U.S. leverage" due to the economic and maritime pressures imposed by the Trump administration.

However, he expressed concern over the military and strategic costs required to sustain it.

"A range of measures have resulted in a decent resumption of oil flowing through the strait, although still well below pre-war levels and with far less shipping generally," Shapiro said. "But one really has to ask, how sustainable is this leverage? It requires a major U.S. naval presence to impose the

blockade, conduct escorts, and support an aerial defense against Iranian attacks.”

Shapiro cautioned that the administration’s economic pressure may not be as effective as expected, arguing that secondary sanctions may lack impact given the Iranian regime “cares nothing about passing that [economic] pain” onto the Iranian public.

“The exchange over the weekend suggests that at some point, Iran will resume threats against ships to regain leverage,” Shapiro said. “The only way we could prevent that is with a permanent U.S. naval presence that would significantly strain the Navy beyond what it has already endured over the last six months, with long-range implications for U.S. readiness and deterrence in other regions.”

Jonathan Ruhe, director of foreign policy at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, argued it is still unclear

whether either side has the edge six months into the conflict, but suggested that Iran “more likely” retains an advantage.

“At best, the verdict is still out on whether the U.S. has regained meaningful leverage over Iran,” Ruhe said. “More likely though, Iran retains the initiative and escalation dominance over the U.S. and its partners.”

Ruhe suggested Tehran views Washington’s shift toward sanctions as a sign that the U.S. has expended its military options.

“Economic pain is a small price to pay, especially because Iran’s regime thinks the latest sanctions regime is shot full of holes, and because it clearly doesn’t care if its own people suffer in the process,” Ruhe said. “If anything, the sanctions-first approach will merely embolden Tehran to step up its military threats to shipping, U.S. bases, and our Gulf partners.”

Rachel Brandenburg, a senior policy analyst at Israel Policy Forum, similarly pointed out that while Iran’s economic crisis is worsening, the regime is willing to absorb economic costs in order to survive.

“The Iranian regime has a very high tolerance for pain, particularly pain that is inflicted most harshly upon the Iranian people,” Brandenburg said. “It is unlikely that even a deteriorating economic situation changes the regime’s calculus with respect to Iran’s nuclear or ballistic missile program.”

Brandenburg added that Washington’s unilateral approach limits its options.

“The United States is operating mostly alone in this fight,” Brandenburg said. “It is clear that Trump prefers not to go back to war, and he has not displayed an ability to stick to one approach for very long.” ♦

AUGUST 31, 2026

Emanuel brothers donate \$550,000 to program training Palestinian doctors at Israeli hospital

The board chair of the medical nonprofit behind the program tells eJP that the gift followed a visit to the initiative in Tel Aviv last month by Rahm Emanuel

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center Presumed 2028 Democratic presidential candidate Rahm Emanuel and his brothers, Ezekiel and Ari, are donating \$550,000 to fund the training of pediatric doctors and nurses from An-Najah University Hospital in the West Bank city of Nablus at Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center through the medical nonprofit Rozana, the organization announced on Monday.

The gift, which was first reported by *Politico*, was made in honor of the Emanuels’ parents, Dr. Benjamin and Marsha Emanuel. The donation was made to the international organization’s American arm, Rozana USA.

During a visit to Israel last month, before the donation was announced, Rahm Emanuel visited Rozana’s training program for An-Najah hospital professionals at Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, calling it “one of the most inspiring examples of coexistence I saw in Israel.”

Kenneth Bob, chair of Rozana USA’s board of directors, told *eJewishPhilanthropy* that the donation was made as a result of that visit. “He was so impressed by what he saw,” Bob said on Monday. “It fit into his worldview, and he saw an opportunity to honor his parents.”

According to Bob, the donation represents the largest private donation that the organization has ever received.

The donation comes as some international medical organizations have

warned of growing strains on the Palestinian healthcare system in the West Bank.

Founded in 2013, Rozana has branches in Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the United Kingdom and the United States dedicated to promoting access to quality healthcare. In Israel and the territories, the organization focuses on so-called “health diplomacy,” connecting Israelis and Palestinians through medical care.

“This contribution will ultimately provide much-needed, improved care for Palestinian children while leveraging the field of healthcare to build constructive, trusting relations between Israeli and Palestinian medical professionals, bridging

the divide,” the Emanuel brothers said, according to Rozana.

The funds will help provide “clinical training, fellowships and leadership development program” for 11 pediatric doctors and 36 pediatric nurses through Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, also known as Ichilov Hospital, and it will enable the

establishment of An-Najah’s new West Bank pediatric hospital, Rozana USA said. The training program will be run through Ichilov’s Dana-Dwek Children’s Hospital.

“Training our doctors and nurses in specialized pediatric care will be a key part of making this new hospital successful. We are especially pleased that the program will

include training for respiratory technicians, as this is a new area of specialized training that is not currently available in [the West Bank],” Dr. Iyad Maqbool, CEO of An-Najah National University Hospital, said in a statement. ♦

SEPTEMBER 1, 2026

Experts testify Trump’s Houthi campaign and ceasefire have failed to deter Red Sea attacks

Rep. Mike Lawler: ‘Iran and its Houthi proxies have now simultaneously put pressure on two of the world’s most important maritime checkpoints’

By Emily Jacobs

Middle East experts urged members of Congress on Tuesday to empower the Yemeni government and resume diplomatic efforts to constrain the Houthis in Yemen, warning that the Trump administration’s bombing campaign against the Houthis and the subsequent ceasefire have failed to deter the group from targeting commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

At a House Foreign Affairs Committee Middle East subcommittee hearing on the threats posed by the Houthis to U.S. interests in the Red Sea, Nadwa Al-Dawsari, an associate fellow at the Middle East Institute, and Allison Minor, the director of the Project for Middle East Integration at the Atlantic Council, testified that the Trump administration’s approach to containing the Iran-backed terror group had not sufficiently weakened or deterred it.

“The United States does not have an ambassador appointed to Yemen, to Saudi Arabia or to the UAE, the countries that are most important to resolving the conflict,” Minor said. “We have career diplomats in place as chargé d’affaires, but unfortunately, it’s not sufficient.”

Asked who is filling that void by Rep. Bill Keating (D-MA), Minor replied: “You have caretaker career diplomatic staff in place. I think there are a handful of envoys this administration has appointed for a series of

global conflicts. I don’t think they have the bandwidth currently for Yemen.”

Lawmakers from both parties expressed concern over the negative impact on the economy caused by the Houthis’ repeated disruptions to commercial shipping in the Red Sea, with several connecting the campaign with Iran’s closure of the Strait of Hormuz. (Most recently, the Houthis have been attacking targets in Saudi Arabia, including ships, airports and oil facilities.)

“[The Houthis] have targeted American forces, attacked our partners and threatened commercial vessels transiting one of the world’s most important waterways,” Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY), who chairs the subcommittee, said.

“Iran transformed a local armed movement into a terrorist organization capable of threatening Americans and disrupting international commerce. ... This becomes even more dangerous in Yemen when the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz are involved. Iran and its Houthi proxies have now simultaneously put pressure on two of the world’s most important maritime checkpoints.”

Pressed on what Congress could do to protect freedom of navigation and commercial shipping in the Red Sea, Minor warned that, “until we have a durable resolution to this threat, we will continue to see a disruption to commerce that has immediate impacts on global energy

markets and long-term consequences for freedom of navigation globally.”

Minor also agreed with Keating’s suggestion that “the closure and the limitation on the Strait [of Hormuz] has given the Houthis even more leverage than before.”

Minor and Al-Dawsari concurred that the Trump administration has failed to develop a durable Yemen policy or provide enough support to the Yemeni government to counter Houthi influence and territorial control.

Both witnesses criticized the ongoing ceasefire between the U.S. and the Houthis as strategically unproductive, pointing to the terrorist group’s increased recruiting numbers and continued attacks on commercial shipping. The two urged the Trump administration to not treat the ceasefire as a long-term strategy.

Al-Dawsari and Minor also rejected the notion that prior U.S. military operations had significantly diminished the Houthis’ ability or willingness to fight.

“U.S. military pressure has imposed real costs on the Houthis, but airstrikes alone will not eliminate the threat,” Al-Dawsari said. “The Houthis have not been degraded.”

“Air strikes have disrupted Houthi operations and ... undermined some of their capabilities, but the Houthis have proven that they are able to regenerate some of

these capabilities,” she continued. “The Houthis have not engaged in peace negotiations in good faith. They used that time to rebuild their capabilities, recruit more fighters and prepare for the next war.”

Minor argued that, “U.S. airstrikes and Israeli strikes all failed to eliminate Houthi capabilities or alter their strategy. ... Each time the Houthis have come under attack from U.S. or Israeli strikes, they have used this to fuel their recruitment.”

Neither witness supported the idea of a U.S. military operation targeting the Houthis involving

ground troops, and both agreed that the Trump administration should fill the vacant U.S. special envoy for Yemen post and surge humanitarian assistance.

But Al-Dawsari and Minor diverged on how to achieve a lasting solution that

eliminates the group’s fighting capacity and ensures the Yemeni government can maintain control of the country.

Minor argued that the Trump administration needs to address the lack of a broader American diplomatic apparatus in the region while pursuing a “viable negotiated settlement that can contain Houthi threats while addressing the governance issues that have been fueling this Houthi threat for over a decade.” While Minor did not rule out the viability of military force completely, she urged the U.S. to stop “vacillating between costly U.S. military intervention and disengagement.”

Al-Dawsari, meanwhile, encouraged the Trump administration to partner with Saudi Arabia on a broader effort to provide intelligence and military training, as well as

any other assistance, “to support the Yemeni government militarily, politically and economically.” She also urged lawmakers to continue supporting the Houthis’ Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation.

“The most important source of leverage is territory,” Al-Dawsari said. “The United States needs to do the one thing that it hasn’t done yet: support the Yemeni government to take territory from the Houthis.”

“This is not the United States’ war, and it shouldn’t be,” she argued. “We need to provide [the government] with the necessary military and economic and political support in order to be able to take on the Houthis on their own long-term. That’s the only way to do it. There is no other substitute.” ♦

AUGUST 31, 2026

Style Across the Aisle puts Jewish pride on the runway

NYC Council Speaker Julie Menin will be dressed by Israeli American designer Elie Tahari, while Comptroller Mark Levine will be paired with a Chabad rabbi-turned-tailor

By Haley Cohen

When New York City Council Speaker Julie Menin walks the runway at the Metropolitan Opera House next week, she will be dressed by Israeli American designer Elie Tahari. The pairing is driven by their shared history of entrepreneurship and building success from the ground up, but amid heightened antisemitism, the moment also spotlights two proud Jewish and Zionist New Yorkers.

Now in its third year, Style Across the Aisle — set to coincide with New York Fashion Week — pairs 30 bipartisan elected officials with New York City designers based on shared geography, heritage or life experience.

This year’s lineup arrives against a backdrop of rising antisemitic attacks in New York City, which some Jewish leaders say has been fueled by Mayor Zohran Mamdani’s rhetoric targeting Israel. It includes several openly Jewish, pro-Israel lawmakers — among them Menin and City

Comptroller Mark Levine — walking in pieces by Jewish designers Tahari and Yosel Tiefenbrun, a Chabad rabbi-turned-tailor whose Tribeca studio sits blocks from Levine’s office.

Menin, the city’s first Jewish council speaker, will be dressed by Jerusalem-born Tahari — the designer credited with creating the tube top — due to a shared history of resilience, according to the event organizers. Both began their journeys as self-made entrepreneurs: Menin rebuilt her career after a downtown restaurant she owned was destroyed in the 9/11 attacks, while Tahari arrived in New York penniless — sleeping on Central Park benches — before transforming his vision into a billion-dollar fashion empire.

Style Across the Aisle founder Skye Ostreicher, a New York political personality, told *Jewish Insider* the event’s goal is to build bridges and remove labels — designer labels as well as political and religious ones

— that make it easy to reduce people to caricatures. “Very often, when we label someone ‘Jew’ or ‘Zionist,’ it’s easy to hate them versus if you see them as a human first,” she said.

Ostreicher, who identifies as “a proud Jewish woman,” said she worked to include participants of every background. Yusef Salaam, a Muslim member of the New York City Council once wrongly imprisoned as one of the Central Park Five, will walk this year’s runway in a suit designed by a fellow Harlem native who also served time behind bars.

Ostreicher said her red line are designers “who hate Israel,” whom she would not invite to participate. She’d hoped to welcome Mamdani, who — like Mayor Eric Adams before him — was invited to strut the runway, but he won’t be attending, citing a scheduling conflict, Ostreicher said.

“Of course we’re including Jewish designers. I like including everyone, that is

always my intention. If Mamdani did want to walk and wear a Muslim designer we would make that happen,” she said.

This year’s event lands on Sept. 9, days before the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a milestone that Ostreicher

asserted makes the case for unity even more timely.

The runway show also comes as the Met Gala — widely known as fashion’s biggest and most glamorous night, held annually in New York City in May — is facing

mounting backlash for its plans to honor British fashion designer John Galliano, who was convicted more than a decade ago of a hate crime in France for antisemitic remarks. ♦

SEPTEMBER 2, 2026

Prizmah CEO marks 10 years of boosting America’s Jewish day school system

Paul Bernstein discusses lessons learned as leader of the umbrella group, including new challenges that come with success

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Ten years ago, when Paul Bernstein began as the founding CEO of Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools, the philanthropic dollars funneled into Jewish day schools amounted to a trickle. The majority of funding came from a single donor, The Avi Chai Foundation, which was sunsetting its grantmaking in 2019. With many day schools still reeling from the 2008 financial crisis and struggling with enrollment, many Jewish leaders questioned if non-Orthodox day schools had a future.

“It was quite a low period for philanthropy in the Jewish day school world, particularly nationally,” Bernstein told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

Before Prizmah, there were five national organizations supporting day schools, separated mostly by denomination: the Progressive Association of Reform Day Schools; the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education; RAVSAK (an acronym of the Hebrew words for Jewish Community Day School Network); Yeshiva University School Partnership; and the Schechter Day School Network.

Knowing Avi Chai was shuttering, the Jim Joseph Foundation made it clear to leaders in the day school movement that it was interested in offering support, but it wasn’t willing to fund a fragmented market. And so Prizmah was born, merging the five

organizations into a single centralized support agency, with many employees from the prior agencies remaining with Prizmah to this day.

“We had a lot to prove,” said Bernstein, 59, who is a product of the U.K. Jewish day school movement. “Jewish day schools are much more of a norm in other countries, so seeing the relatively low enrollment, particularly in the non-Orthodox world in the United States, was a real [lesson] for me at the beginning of this.”

In the 10 years since Prizmah launched, day school enrollment has surged, with both the COVID-19 pandemic and Oct. 7 massacres leading many parents to move their children from public schools to private Jewish ones. Today, 101,000 students are enrolled in non-Haredi day schools, a 75% increase over five years ago. Success has triggered more investment from funders, and day schools are now a major focus of the Jewish Funders Network, as well as Jewish Federations of North America.

Working together as one agency, Prizmah — “prism” in Hebrew — allows investors to pool their investments so philanthropists “get more bang for [their] buck,” Bernstein said. In an interview marking the 10th anniversary, he discussed Prizmah’s most productive interventions, bridging denominational differences and how success can create new challenges.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Jay Deitcher: *Why did Prizmah work?*

Paul Bernstein: A number of factors. One was because, [after] seeing the unity of five organizations becoming one and starting this new organization, there were a number of people who chose to get behind it — the Jim Joseph Foundation being the prime example. They spoke about unity. They wanted it. It happened. They immediately came in and joined Avi Chai in the funding. So we had initial backers to get us off the ground.

The second was that the Avi Chai Foundation, during its sunset, was so deeply committed to the field and to the success of this. The third piece was that we proved that across denominations, schools and school leaders have a lot more that unites them than divides them.

Very early on, we organized a gathering around enrollment and admissions to schools [and] brought together representatives of a whole group of schools from different parts of the country in New Jersey. [Attendees discussed], what are our dilemmas that we are facing as we grow?

The first school to stand up was a smaller Midwest community school. Their dilemma was, “What does it mean for the culture of our school that we are enrolling more non-Jewish students?” which is a feature in small communities. To survive, you often enroll non-Jewish students. And while they were telling this story, sitting right next to me was a pretty *yeshivish*

school from Miami. I remember thinking, “What are they going to be thinking about this? Like, what do you mean, non-Jews in the school?” It felt to me like it would be quite an alienating experience for them.

When [the *yeshivish* school] stood up to present their dilemma, they said, “What does it mean for the *hashkafa* [philosophy] of the school when we’re enrolling more and more families from Latin America?”

Fundamentally, [both schools] were talking about, what does it mean when the demographics of your school is shifting? And they managed to figure out a way to learn from each other, despite those pretty fundamental differences.

JD: *What new challenges has Prizmah’s success created, especially the surge in day school enrollment?*

PB: The first challenge is, how do you make sure that [the increase in enrollment] isn’t just a short-term upswing? Some people believe it’s part of the surge post-Oct. 7, so the first challenge is, how do you turn momentum into something that is continuing?

The second thing would be where there is growth, how do you make sure you’ve got the capacity for the growth?

One of the reasons why we’ve had this consistent growth is because there’s greater recognition of the quality that Jewish day schools are providing. You want to invest more in excellence, which means you need really strong school leadership, and you need enough quality teachers to enable the existing schools to thrive and to be able to meet the new capacity.

The last challenge I would mention is that the growth is not distributed everywhere, so how do you address the schools and the communities that are not growing, and really help them join that trend?

JD: *Talk about the transition Avi Chai facilitated. How did it sunset while helping the field move forward?*

PB: In their 25 years of operating, they invested a lot in leadership. We still have some of the leadership programs they created. I’m not sure they, at the time, understood as well as we now see it, looking with hindsight, that they professionalized the field and really improved what was there. The fundamentals were strong.

The second thing they did was the decision to create Prizmah. They invested in our early years, so they [provided a] significant portion of our budget in the early years. They actively helped bring on other funders. They met with us and said, “We have a certain amount of money left, let’s work together on how to invest that money to make sure it positions Prizmah well to be ready and attract new funders to be able to take over.”

JD: *In the past decade, you’ve seen major philanthropic initiatives supporting Jewish education. What were the most groundbreaking?*

PB: We managed to really deepen and strengthen the leadership investment in school leaders. If you have the right leadership for schools, they will then do a better job in supporting teachers. We need to invest in teachers as well.

Then, there are new areas that have developed. For example, we very much believe in getting to a place where the day school world is data-driven, and we believe in Prizmah being data-driven. We’ve really built the data and research capabilities within the organization and for the field, so schools can now both gather data with our help, but also then benchmark themselves against other schools in the financial sphere.

[Another is] investing more in enrollment initiatives. For example, we’ve had this partnership with PJ Library now for all of Prizmah’s life, which is about bringing PJ families into day schools and increasing enrolment — that’s been very successful, and something we’re now extending that into the early childhood sphere because the retention of Jewish kids from Jewish early childhood into day schools is not as good as it should be.

JD: *What do you think the new federal tax credit for education will mean for the decade to come.*

PB: Generally speaking, when you ask people who are not at day schools why [they aren’t], the first thing they say is affordability. The federal tax credit has the potential to transform the affordability equation if we can mobilize the Jewish community very broadly to participate.

It is an opportunity to attract money that does not, in any way, take away funds from public schools because that’s not the way that the funding is structured. And if we’re able to raise the kind of significant funds that are possible, then we’ll really move the needle on affordability.

JD: *What are you looking forward to over the next 10 years?*

PB: The tax credit is one opportunity. Obviously, the momentum for growth is another opportunity. The recently announced partnership between the government of Israel and JFNA to invest in day school enrolment is a third.

I want to be able to look back in another 10 years and say that we seized the moment that we had 10 years into Prizmah with the success of our schools and just accelerated that growth and addressed the key issues in talent and in affordability and so on. ♦