

**CLINTON'S WELFARE-REFORM PROPOSAL
SPARKS WORRY AMONG JEWISH ACTIVISTS**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 20 (JTA) -- Jewish organizations are preparing a vigorous campaign against President Clinton's proposal to help fund welfare reform by reducing benefits to immigrants.

At the same time, Russian emigre communities around the country are reportedly in a panic, with new immigrants scrambling to figure out what the changes will mean for them.

"This is a horrific proposal that undermines immigration policy as a way to fund welfare reform," said Diana Aviv, director of the Council of Jewish Federation's Washington Action Office.

"This would create an undue burden and hardship that's impossible to meet," she said.

Clinton unveiled his welfare reform proposal in Kansas City, Mo., last week.

Although short of his campaign pledge to "end welfare as we know it," the plan outlines new measures to help wean impoverished families off welfare, including job training, child care and subsidized work programs.

To help pay for the plan, Clinton has proposed cutting aid directly to immigrants and indirectly to refugees, threatening entitlements for tens of thousands of newcomers each year, including thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

Under the current system, most Jewish emigres from the Soviet Union arrive in the United States under the sponsorship of a previously arrived family member, who promises to support the newcomer for up to three years.

In addition, the Jewish community, in conjunction with the State Department, provides English and job-training programs for eight months. Following that period, the emigres often go on welfare as they continue to learn English and look for employment.

Plan Extends Sponsorship Period

Clinton's plan proposes extending the period of time from three to five years that a sponsor is financially responsible for an immigrant.

Families earning more than \$38,500 would be responsible for immigrant relatives for 10 years, according to Clinton's proposals.

During the sponsorship period, no food stamps, social security insurance, Medicaid or funds through Aid to Families with Dependent Children are available unless the combined family income is lower than the national poverty level.

Under Clinton's proposal, Medicaid funding would still kick in after the original three years, but the other assistance programs would not be available until after five years.

The president's plan includes a six-year exemption for refugees, or those who are admitted into the country by demonstrating a well-founded fear of persecution in their homeland.

However, while the refugees are eligible to enter the welfare system for six years, if the welfare system is revamped to reduce eligibility to

two years, as the president has proposed, then refugees, like other welfare recipients will only be eligible for the benefits for a limited time.

Thus, Jewish activists say that it is misleading to think that Jews arriving from the former Soviet Union, most of whom arrive on refugee status, will not be affected by Clinton's proposals.

Thus Jewish organizations are gearing up for grass-roots lobbying efforts to oppose the plan.

"We feel that three years is an enormous burden. How can you bring your parents and other relatives here and take responsibility for them for five years?" said Aviv of CJF.

CJF has sent a letter to Clinton outlining its concerns on this issue.

Lynn Lyss, chairwoman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, agreed that extending the sponsorship period would place a burden on families already in the United States.

"We firmly reject financing mechanisms which assist one needy group by denying benefits to another," Lyss said.

"These measures will close the doors to a large number of elderly immigrant parents seeking to reunite with their U.S. citizen families," she said.

The United States currently admits 700,000 immigrants and 121,000 refugees each year.

Since Oct. 1, 22,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union have arrived.

The ensuing battle over funding for welfare reform could place Jewish groups in the uncomfortable position of fighting legislation that includes other welfare-related proposals they have supported for years.

Still, they are standing firm.

'The Plan Is Punitive'

"None of these laudable, even urgent initiatives should be allowed to come at the expense of denying appropriate federal assistance to non-citizens," said Martin Hochbaum, director of the American Jewish Congress' Commission on National Affairs.

Mimi Alperin, chairwoman of American Jewish Committee's National Affairs Commission, said, "The administration's financing plan is punitive and punishes young immigrant families."

In the Russian-speaking community itself, reports of the proposed changes have set off shockwaves, according to Mark Seal, associate executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Seal said his office has been inundated with calls about naturalization, with many of the Russian emigres anxious to become U.S. citizens to avoid being affected by any welfare-reform legislation. "All the naturalization classes are filled through the end of the year," Seal said of those offered by the New York-based HIAS.

But activists worry that Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union are often older individuals who, for various reasons, such as the language barrier and fear of government, are not likely to become citizens.

With Congress' attention focused on health

care reform and the upcoming elections in November, most political officials are predicting that welfare reform will not receive any serious attention on Capitol Hill over the coming months.

Some analysts here suggested that Clinton introduced the measure to give Democrats campaigning for re-election another issue to hang their hats on.

But U.S. Rep. Sam Gibbons (D-Fla.), acting chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, is pressing committee members to draft a welfare reform bill by next month.

Clinton's measure is expected to arrive on Capitol Hill late this week.

Congress has put numerous other reform proposals on hold until after the Clinton plan arrives.

Two Republican bills in the House and a third sponsored by the Mainstream Forum, a group of moderate and conservative Democrats, although similar to the Clinton plan, are less far reaching.

Sen. Lauch Faircloth (R-NC) and Rep. James Talent (R-MO) introduced legislation denying benefits to all newcomers, including refugees. But neither has garnered significant support in Congress.

The legislative process to reform the welfare system is certain to be a long one and no one is sure what legislation is likely to emerge.

But Jewish groups say they are committed to fighting to keep benefits for immigrants.

"The Jewish community is an immigrant community and has achieved all that it has because of the welcome we have received," said Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress.

"Having now established some measure of success, to say 'No more are welcome,' is just not right," Pelavin said.

INS BUDGET SHORTFALL COULD THREATEN THOUSANDS OF POTENTIAL JEWISH EMIGRES By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 20 (JTA) -- A \$100 million budget shortfall at the Immigration and Naturalization Service could threaten the fate of thousands of potential Jewish emigrants seeking to leave the former Soviet Union.

To lower costs, INS will begin July 1 to cut the number of refugee interviews in Moscow, from an average of 84 a day to 48.

Currently, anyone who is seeking to come to the United States from the former Soviet Union must travel to the Russian capital for an INS interview.

"There is this significant shortfall due to poor planning by INS and inefficient management," said Martin Wenick, executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. "They did not do their statistics properly and forecasted more income that did not come in."

INS Associate Commissioner for Management Ken Rath agreed with Wenick's assessment.

"The revenue projections were wrong and probably should have never been made," Rath said.

INS offices abroad are funded directly by fees charged to immigrants applying for papers when they arrive in this country. The United States ran an amnesty program for illegal immi-

grants in the late 1980s that resulted in a huge increase in applications for legal working papers.

INS officials did not account for the reduction in fees collected after the legalization program ended by early 1989. According to Rath, this year marks the first time INS overestimated revenues.

Despite claims by Rath that the State Department will fund the refugee program through the end of the fiscal year, Dewey Pendergrass, deputy director of the State Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement said, "The State Department has no funds to bail out INS. We are already stretched to the limit."

INS is a Justice Department agency, but the State Department is the lead agency for refugee issues.

However, plans are in the works to find funds from other government agencies but no agreements have been reached, Pendergrass said.

Under the annual ceiling set by the administration and Congress, INS is allowed this year to admit up to 121,000 refugees from around the world.

Scathing Letter Sent To Christopher

Due to the backlog of applicants seeking to leave the former Soviet Union, INS is expected to meet its annual quota of 55,000 refugees from the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and other Eastern European countries.

Wenick said there should be no reduction in emigration from that region for six to eight months. He added that during the first eight months of fiscal year 1994, 22,000 Jews have arrived in the United States, mostly from the former Soviet Union.

But the revenue shortfall could drastically affect the number of refugees coming from African nations and Vietnam, as INS travel budgets are reduced.

INS officials travel from European offices to meet with refugees in countries without permanent offices. Unless INS is able to make up for the shortfall, interviews will cease in the coming weeks as travel budgets run out.

Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) sent a scathing letter to Secretary of State Warren Christopher last week threatening to delay the confirmation process for Phyllis Oakley, the nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, until Christopher responds not only to the status of the funding shortfall but also outlines the conditions in the former Soviet Union for Jewish refugees.

The INS currently has only one office in the former Soviet Union to process all refugee applicants. Refugees from all 15 new republics must travel to Moscow with their families, usually at least twice, to complete all the necessary paperwork and interviews.

"Processing in Moscow has not kept up with the events of the past few years," Grassley wrote in the letter to Christopher. "I'm sure that you agree with me that it undercuts the humanitarian goals of our country's refugee program if bureaucrats unnecessarily add to or raise hurdles refugees already face."

Grassley asked Christopher for a list of steps he and INS plan to take to ease the burdens on refugees and how they plan to account for the budget crisis.

3 IDF SOLDIERS KILLED IN LEBANON, HOURS AFTER IDF RAID ON HEZBOLLAH BASE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 20 (JTA) -- Three Israeli soldiers were killed in southern Lebanon on Monday when members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement ambushed their patrol.

Another three Israeli soldiers were wounded in the ambush, and an armored personnel carrier was destroyed, when Hezbollah fighters fired mortars and rockets on the patrol.

Monday's casualties were the heaviest sustained by the Israel Defense Force since Feb. 7, when four Israeli soldiers were killed and five others wounded in a Hezbollah attack.

The ambush was followed by heavy artillery exchanges between Hezbollah and the IDF.

The ambush occurred hours after Israeli air force planes attacked hilltop bases of Hezbollah in eastern Lebanon, the second such attack in two days.

An IDF spokesman said the pilots who took part in the two raids reported accurate air-to-ground hits on all their targets and said that all planes returned safely to their bases.

There was no immediate word of casualties from the air assault among members of Hezbollah, which militantly opposes the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative.

Monday's air attack was the fifth raid on Hezbollah targets in the same general region in eastern Lebanon since Israel's massive June 2 air force raid on a Hezbollah base in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

As many as 50 Hezbollah members were reported killed in that strike and up to 200 were wounded.

While the IDF spokesman would not pinpoint the reason for the latest series of air attacks, observers believe they are designed to pressure Syria, the leading power broker in Lebanon, to return to negotiations with Israel.

UJA ADDS JORDAN TO ITS ITINERARY OF DESTINATIONS AROUND THE WORLD

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, June 20 (JTA) -- The United Jewish Appeal is now booking trips to Jordan.

The addition to the UJA's long roster of possible destinations around the world comes at the request of the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater, Virginia.

Members of the Virginia federation will be heading to the Arab country this October, in conjunction with a visit to Israel.

"This is not a tourist trip to Jordan; it is a trip of Jews trying to get a sense of the geopolitical field in which Israel is playing," said Mark Goldstein, the federation's executive vice president.

After getting initial information about tours to Jordan and contacting a group of Reform rabbis who visited earlier this year, Goldstein passed the information on to the UJA missions office in New York.

Last month, Nechemia Dagan, executive director of UJA Overseas Programs, notified federation campaign directors that the organization has contracted land agents in Jordan who are capable of arranging pre-missions there.

Dagan said UJA has current prices for mission services to Jordan and that they run slightly cheaper than services in Israel.

While Israel is at the center of UJA missions, there is often an optional "pre-mission" to other countries. Such visits are generally to countries where UJA, through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, aids the local Jewish community.

Past pre-missions have included Berlin, and, prior to attacks against foreign tourists, Egypt.

Among the other groups now planning a UJA-arranged visit to Jordan this fall is the leadership of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

The American Jewish Congress also plans to add Jordan to its travel program and, according to AJCongress officials, has received assurances the Jordanians will allow tourists with Israeli stamps on their passports to enter the country.

UJA itself is considering sending a mission of its top donors to Jordan and Morocco, long a UJA destination.

Dagan cautioned, however, that "because of the sensitivity of the political situation in the Middle East, I do not recommend considering Jordan as a standard mission destination.

"We will look into it as a mission option on a case by case basis," he said.

A sample itinerary for Jordan drawn up by UJA includes a visit to Mount Nebo, believed to be the site where Moses died; meetings with members of Parliament and businesspeople; and a tour of Petra, the ancient city carved from stone which is one of Jordan's major tourist attractions.

KNESSET MOVES TO BLOCK THE SUN IN EFFORT TO REDUCE SKIN CANCER

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, June 20 (JTA) -- In an effort to stem the alarming rate of skin cancer among Israelis, the Knesset is considering a bill that would reduce the price of sunscreens and require all outdoor pools and beaches to provide shady spots for people wishing to avoid the sun.

Knesset members last week unanimously voted in favor of the bill, which was introduced by Knesset Member Rafi Alloul of Labor.

Believed to be the first of its kind anywhere in the world, the bill must pass two more readings before being signed into law.

The legislation would also require schools to include lessons on health dangers posed by the sun.

Revenue for the bill would come from a 0.5 percent tax on tobacco products.

Alloul's spokesman, Danny Menkin, said the legislator had introduced the bill "after learning how many Israelis, particularly fair-skinned new immigrants from the former Soviet Union and elsewhere, were developing skin cancer due to a lack of education and the high price of sun-blocking products."

Depending on the brand and level of protection, a tube of sunscreen can range from \$12 to \$20.

Quoting statistics provided by the Israel Cancer Society, Menkin said that the rate of skin cancer here has increased dramatically. During the past decade, the incidence of melanoma has tripled in men and has quadrupled in women.

MOURNING LUBAVITCHERS TRYING TO RECONCILE FAITH WITH REALITY

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, June 20 (JTA) -- A week after the death of the Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, some of his followers in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn were coming out of mourning and trying to reconcile their faith with reality.

Lubavitchers -- many of whom once professed with perfect faith that the rebbe would rise from his hospital bed to usher in the messianic age -- are now taking a second look at the traditional messianic texts, including Schneerson's own teachings on the subject.

Although within the Lubavitch movement there had long been controversy over whether Schneerson was in fact the Messiah or merely the best candidate for the job, the concept of messianism, some say, was Schneerson's primary message and the driving force behind his efforts to spread Jewish observance.

There is also substantial disagreement over whether -- and how much -- emphasis should now be placed on the messianic aspects of the movement.

A spokesman for the international Lubavitch headquarters in Crown Heights said that most Lubavitchers were still too caught up in mourning to start contemplating messianic questions.

And Agudas Chassidei Chabad, the movement's umbrella organization, which is run by Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, the rebbe's longtime aide, has tried to downplay the messianic component of the rebbe's life and death.

The group issued statements dissociating itself from those who are not "respectful of the honor of God and the honor of" the rebbe, referring to those playing up the messianic angle.

It urged followers to concentrate on the concept of "hiskashrus," the rebbe's teaching that a righteous person's spiritual presence is greater than his or her physical presence.

In the wake of his death, however, some followers believe that the best way to continue the rebbe's work is to figure out how to bring the Messiah.

Tipping The Balance To Bring Moshiach

"The rebbe was not about building Judaism so Jews could live as Jews in America," said Rabbi Yosef Katzman, who organized a meeting Sunday to discuss messianism in the post-rebbe era. "The rebbe was about building Judaism so Jews would tip the balance and bring the Moshiah."

Hundreds of Lubavitchers gathered at the Oholei Torah Yeshiva in Crown Heights, where a series of speakers said that while the circumstances surrounding redemption had changed, the inevitability of redemption itself had not.

Katzman said that the new messianic scenario depended on followers, including emissaries sent by Schneerson to run Lubavitch outposts around the world, continuing to work toward the messianic "prize."

"Keeping the eye on the prize," said Katzman, "is what's going to keep us sane, what's going to keep us alive and what's going to keep us connected to the rebbe."

"Although earlier I did not have to plan on

it, because there's no point in planning on it, and according to Torah you should always think positive, and the scenario fit very well the way it was, it does not mean that another scenario -- which we also found and we knew that it exists in Torah -- will not be the scenario," he said.

Devotees of Schneerson -- who died June 12 at 92 following a heart attack and a long illness -- are busy studying the rebbe's writings, which they hope will lead them to some insight about how to proceed in the wake of his death.

"Would the rebbe have left us without a way to bring Moshiah?" Katzman asked rhetorically.

Rarely have the intricate Jewish laws and commentaries on the concept of the Messiah been so scientifically scrutinized in Crown Heights.

Outside the lecture hall Sunday, black-hatted men argued anxiously over ancient commentaries, trying to make sure that new interpretations had a real basis in Jewish texts.

Others said they maintained their faith but wanted to know how to explain events to people outside their fervently Orthodox world.

"Those who believed before are not despairing, because if you have faith you don't despair," said Katzman. "However, they want to know what to answer to other people outside Lubavitch who say, 'Oh, how did you say it and it turned out not true?'"

Not So Difficult To Bring Moshiah

While some Chasidic groups have insulated themselves from the outside world, under Schneerson's directives the Lubavitchers actively sought to make connections with Jews at all levels of religious observance.

Speakers urged members of the highly visible sect to remain steadfast in their faith.

"When there are people in the press telling the world that we are a messianic sect, baruch hashem (praise God)! What else is there?" asked Rabbi Moshe Lazar, a Lubavitch emissary in Milan, Italy.

Lazar also downplayed comparisons being made between claims that Schneerson will be resurrected and the Christian belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ.

"We must not say certain things that the goyim (non-Jews) say?" Lazar asked rhetorically. "Moshiah is our concept. They took it from us!"

And as if to ensure compliance, speakers on Sunday imposed a healthy dose of Jewish guilt on their audience.

"The rebbe tried so hard to inspire us and we failed," explained Rabbi Isser Zalman Weissberg. "He was so upset because he realized it isn't so difficult (to bring Moshiah)."

"How are we going to face the rebbe? We're going to have to face him," warned Weissberg. "We're going to have to face him very soon."

Many of the people who had gathered to hear the speeches were already aware of the difficulties but were determined to forge ahead.

"We're constantly waging a battle from within to keep faith," said a 28-year-old woman, who said she had come to the meeting in order to gain strength. "You have to force yourself not to despair."

But the woman insisted she could weather the hardship. "Is it overwhelming? No. Are we becoming stronger from it? Yes. It's just a test."