

**AJCONGRESS ENTERS HEALTH CARE FRAY,
CALLING FOR SUPPORT OF GEPHARDT BILL**
By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- The American Jewish Congress has decided to join the health care debate full-force and back U.S. Rep. Richard Gephardt's (D-Mo.) health care reform bill.

In a letter to House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-Wash.), Phil Baum, newly appointed executive director of AJCongress, wrote: "We have concluded that the comprehensive health care reform bill offered by House Majority Leader Gephardt addresses many of our goals for health care reform, including true universal coverage, reproductive services included in the basic benefits package and long-term care coverage."

AJCongress decided to endorse Gephardt's legislation because "it provides true universal coverage by 1999, thereby ensuring effective cost containment," Baum wrote.

"We always said there would come a time when there would be serious legislative proposals that had a chance of getting enacted, and that time is now," said Mark Pelavin, AJCongress' Washington representative. "Now is the time to move beyond enumerating principles which we support and take an active role."

AJCongress plans to contact members of the House leadership and other members of Congress to push for support.

Other Jewish organizations, while concerned with everything from universal coverage to reproductive rights to long-term care, have not taken a formal stand on any of the pending bills.

**JEWISH CONSERVATIVES JOIN FORCES
TO DEFEND THE CHRISTIAN COALITION**
By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- A group of leading Jewish conservatives has joined forces for an unlikely crusade: to defend the Christian Coalition, the nation's largest religious right organization.

Adding to the twist, this group of Jews is defending the Coalition from a perceived attack by the Anti-Defamation League, a mainstream Jewish organization.

And yet, while supportive of the Christian Coalition's conservative domestic political agenda, some of its Jewish allies seem largely unfamiliar with the views on Jews and Israel articulated by the group's leader, Pat Robertson.

Seventy-five Jewish supporters of the evangelical group recently signed onto a prominent advertisement in The New York Times on behalf of the Coalition.

The Aug. 2 ad castigated the ADL for being unfair to a group the signatories consider to be one of Israel's and the Jewish community's best friends.

At issue was a recently published ADL study calling the religious right, led by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, "a threat to pluralism and tolerance in America."

In the five years of the Christian Coalition's existence it has been highly successful in shaping the agenda of the Republican Party nationally and getting its candidates elected at the local level across the country -- to boards of education, library boards and planning commissions.

Signatories to The New York Times ad included some of the conservative Jewish world's leading lights, such as Irving Kristol, Herbert Zweibon and Midge Decter, who co-authored the text with Rabbi Daniel Lapin.

Lapin, an Orthodox rabbi, runs a little-known group called Toward Tradition from his home base on Mercer Island, a suburb of Seattle.

He founded Toward Tradition two years ago as a response to "a Jewish community more committed to the tenets of radical liberalism than the tenets of the Torah," he said in a recent interview.

Lapin and some other Jewish conservatives are aligned with the Christian Coalition on a range of ideological issues, from efforts to limit the size of government to opposition to teaching about homosexuality in public schools.

The Coalition and other Christian evangelical groups have also long been strong supporters of the State of Israel.

'Ample Area Of Commonality'

"There are numerous areas where we agree with the Christian Coalition," said Lapin. "There is ample area of commonality."

Lapin has addressed those areas of agreement at appearances at the last few annual gatherings of the Christian Coalition, called Road to Victory conferences.

Lapin is slated to speak again this year, while the Christian Coalition's executive director, Ralph Reed, is scheduled to appear at a Toward Tradition conference in Washington on Oct. 6.

According to Christian Coalition spokesman Mike Russell, other Jewish supporters of Robertson's organization include the Jewish Action Alliance, a New York-based group headed by Beth Gilinsky, and Marshall Breger of the Heritage Foundation.

The National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education, a Lubavitch-based organization, helped the Christian Coalition distribute its voter guides before the 1993 New York City school board elections.

Robertson's organization has recently been making a concerted effort to broaden its base of supporters by reaching out to Jews and other minority groups.

The Christian Coalition's chief Capitol Hill lobbyist, Marshall Wittmann, is Jewish.

"We have said to our grass-roots members: establish a dialogue with the Jewish community. Have a get-to-know-you type of meeting. We have had success in Pennsylvania, California and New York in getting the Jewish community mobilized," said Russell.

But some of the Coalition's new-found supporters seemed unfamiliar with Robertson's teachings about Jews and Israel.

When asked if there was anything Robertson

has said with which he disagrees, Lapin said, "I won't answer that. It's not my job to defend the Christian Coalition.

"There is some deep theological agenda having to do with a belief in Jews and the Holy Land, but it's irrelevant.

"I haven't studied what their views are," Lapin added.

In fact, Robertson outlines his views on the role of Jews and Israel in his 1990 book "The New Millennium."

He explains the eschatological views he shares with other Christian fundamentalists and the central role they believe Israel must play in bringing Jesus back to earth.

"That tiny little nation will find itself all alone in the world," Robertson writes. "Then, according to the Bible, the Jews will cry out to the one they have so long rejected, and He will come in heavenly power to give them deliverance from the earthly power of all the nations of the earth.

"Then we will have a reign of peace on earth known as 'The Millennium.' "

In a section titled "The Rise of Anti-Semitism," Robertson blasts Jews for persecuting Christians and warns that they are hurting support for Israel.

"The part that Jewish intellectuals and media activists have played in the assault on Christianity may very possibly prove to be a grave mistake," warns Robertson.

In the July/August 1990 issue of "Pat Robertson's Perspective," Robertson compared the plight of evangelical Christians in the United States to the treatment of Jews under Nazi Germany.

Decter, a fellow at the Religion and Public Life think tank, and co-author of the recent New York Times ad, said she was unfamiliar with this statement. When it was read to her, Decter called it "silly." When pressed, she called it "a ridiculous piece of hyperbole."

Gilinsky said, "I would disagree with that comparison," although she said she had not read any of Robertson's publications.

After being read some of Robertson's published statements about the role of Jews and Israel, Breger of the Heritage Foundation said, "To the extent to which a group will support the Jewish community it is worth getting that support, whether or not they have their own reasons.

"I'm not sure everyone has to love us unconditionally to have common coalition with them."

SENATE DEMANDS RELEASE OF STUDY CONCERNING U.S. TROOPS ON GOLAN

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- Members of Congress will have a study detailing scenarios of possible U.S. troop deployment on the Golan Heights in their hands by Oct. 15.

An amendment to the \$243 billion Defense Appropriations bill, approved by the Senate last week, requires the State Department to release a confidential study conducted by the Rand Corporation.

The study examines the roles U.S. troops could play in Middle East peace settlements.

The Senate bill, approved Aug. 11 with a

vote of 86-14, also includes several provisions for funding joint U.S.-Israel military projects.

Jewish groups opposed to the current peace process, who have banded together in a loose coalition with Christian pro-Israel organizations to oppose any U.S. peacekeepers on the Golan, hailed the amendment as a "major achievement."

Calling themselves the Coalition for a Secure U.S.-Israel Friendship, the 20 groups joined forces in June to oppose any settlement with Syria that includes U.S. peacekeepers.

A 'Useless' Deployment

"Our ultimate goal is to prevent such a deployment which is useless and would serve only as a fig leaf for Prime Minister Rabin," said Herbert Zweibon, chairman of Americans for a Safe Israel, a member of the coalition.

The issue of U.S. troops being sent to enforce a peace agreement between Israel and Syria came to the fore two months ago when the Senate overwhelmingly defeated a measure that would have enacted burdensome reporting requirements before the president could station troops on the Golan.

Many pro-Israel members of Congress, as well as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, fought against the measure, saying it was premature and could damage sensitive negotiations between Israel and Syria.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin joined the fray at the time, accusing the right-wing groups of trying to derail the peace process.

Most analysts believe that any future peace deal between Israel and Syria will require some international observers or forces, including from the United States.

The existence of the classified study only became public in the last few weeks after the Center for Security Policy, a conservative think-tank, found out about it.

Although no one seems to know the contents of the report, Zweibon said the amendment mandating its release satisfies his desire for a public debate. He said his coalition will not seek further congressional action before the study is made public.

AIPAC officials said the lobbying organization did not oppose the amendment to the Defense Appropriations bill, saying it is an internal matter between the State Department and members of Congress.

The Defense Appropriations bill will go before a House and Senate conference committee next month to reconcile differences between each chamber's version. Observers expect the amendment on the Rand study to emerge intact from the conference.

The amendment, proposed by Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.), requires the study to be released to Congress in both classified and unclassified forms. Among the joint U.S.-Israel projects funded in the bill is \$67 million for developing the U.S.-Israel Arrow missile program and its future deployment. The Arrow missile is designed to intercept ballistic missiles.

The measure also includes \$26 million for the Israeli Popeye missile program, an air-to-ground missile designed to extend the range of conventional B-52 bombers. Capitol Hill sources said they do not expect any opposition to these projects during the conference committee meetings.

ISRAEL REBUFFS IRAQI OVERTURES, ASSURING U.S. OF SUPPORT FOR POLICY

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- Israel reportedly has assured the United States that it will not respond to any diplomatic overtures from Iraq.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin conveyed the assurance to Warren Christopher during the U.S. secretary of state's recent shuttle trip to the region, according to media reports here.

It followed an overture several weeks ago by the Iraqis at the United Nations, to which Israel is understood to have responded coolly.

Rabin told Christopher that Jerusalem wholeheartedly endorses the Clinton administration's "dual containment" policy, which seeks to isolate and contain both Iran and Iraq.

This is the same line that Israeli diplomats abroad reportedly have been instructed to follow.

An Iraqi official reportedly expressed interest in ongoing peace moves in the region six weeks ago to Gad Ya'acobi, the Israeli ambassador to the U.N., who cabled home for instructions.

Ya'acobi reportedly was told, in effect, to rebuff his colleague from Baghdad.

Last week, according to Israeli reports, a further message arrived in Jerusalem that again expressed Iraq's clear interest in being appraised of the situation in the regional peace process.

Iraqi Minister Briefed On Accords

Over the weekend, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Azziz visited Amman, Jordan, and met with leading government officials there for what the Jordanians said was a series of briefings on the recent Jordanian accords with Israel and their continuing negotiations.

According to the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, the United States protested to Israel several weeks ago, after receiving information that Uri Lubrani, a senior defense official who coordinates Israeli policy in southern Lebanon, had met with Arab businessmen who represented Iraq.

Israeli government officials said they do not view the Iraqi overtures to Israel as signifying any real change in Baghdad's approach toward Israel, or the ongoing peace process.

Instead, they see it as an attempt by Iraq to curry favor in the West in the hope of speeding the removal of international sanctions that were imposed after the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

During that war, Iraq launched a series of Scud missile attacks on civilian targets in Israel. The attacks were accompanied by repeated Iraqi threats to destroy Israel.

Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin confirmed this view, saying that any overtures made by Iraqi officials to Israel were "aimed at improving (Iraq's) relations with America."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, briefing reporters from the Diaspora Jewish media on Tuesday, reiterated Israel's endorsement of the dual containment policy toward Iran and Iraq. He described both as "terrible countries."

Peres said relations with Iraq have their place in the search for regional cooperation, but "only after Saddam Hussein (is out of power) and not before."

(JTA correspondent Cynthia Mann in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

SEEKING HER WINGS, NEW IMMIGRANT FLIES FIRST TO ISRAEL'S HIGH COURT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- Citing sexual discrimination, a recent immigrant from South Africa has petitioned the High Court of Justice to force the Israeli air force to allow her to join a pilot training course.

Alice Miller, 22, brought the petition with the support of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel after the air force rejected her application to take the training course.

She claimed sexual discrimination alone was behind the rejection, since she had obtained a civilian air pilot license before emigrating to Israel and has since earned a degree in aeronautical engineering from the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa.

The air force, which was given 45 days to prepare its response to Miller's petition, said its refusal to let her take the course was based on the Israel Defense Force's opposition to allowing women to serve in combat areas.

The IDF already employs women soldiers as instructors for tanks, artillery and other front-line equipment, but not in combat.

Miller claims that the IDF policy not only prevents her from becoming a fighter pilot but also bars her from most senior army positions, since even posts such as the chief education officer require experience in combat units.

She said the policy also significantly reduces her professional chances in the civilian aviation field after her military service is completed, since companies such as El Al give preference to people with air force experience.

In supporting her petition, the Association for Civil Rights noted that most Western countries have begun integrating women into combat units and, far from hurting the morale of these units, female soldiers have shown themselves highly capable of handling combat assignments.

REACHING OUT TO DIASPORA JEWS, PERES SAYS GOLAN IS NO JERUSALEM

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Shimon Peres reiterated this week that when and if an agreement is reached with Syria on the Golan Heights, it would be submitted for a referendum to the Israeli public.

He also said the Golan could not be compared to Jerusalem, which is the "heart of Jewish life" and would never be divided.

He said there was no place for Palestinian sovereignty over Palestinian parts of Jerusalem. "Jerusalem is politically closed and religiously open," he said Tuesday during a briefing of reporters from the Diaspora Jewish media.

He expressed similar views a day earlier, via a satellite briefing at the Israeli Consulate in New York for the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

With regard to the Golan, Peres said, "I don't know if the Golan is ours or not. At least two times (in the past) the government said it is not ours."

The foreign minister said he believed that support for the peace process among Diaspora Jews is increasing every day.

BLOATED BOVINES CAUSE PANIC AMONG KOSHER CONSUMERS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- Rumors of milk being rendered non-kosher have been spreading like wildfire through the observant Jewish community and are being fueled by an unusual source -- methane.

Panicked calls from concerned citizens have flooded the offices of kashrut supervision agencies and rabbis nationwide as the rumors swirl from the bungalow colonies of the Catskills to the urban shtetls of Williamsburg, Boro Park, Lakewood and Baltimore.

The kashrut supervision agencies have, by and large, encouraged kosher food consumers to go on drinking milk and eating dairy products as their experts anxiously try to get to the bottom of the issue.

"We've got a lot of hysterical people out there and the public is clamoring for answers. The rumors are flying fast and furious," said an official at one kashrut supervision agency.

The source of the controversy is apparently a bovine digestive disorder.

The hay and feed consumed by cows can result in an excess production of methane gas, which causes some dairy cows to become so distended and uncomfortable that their milk production suffers.

To cure them, two procedures are commonly employed which may render the cows, and therefore everything they produce, treif, or nonkosher.

One procedure involves a farm worker inserting a needle into the cow's belly to allow the methane to escape. In the other procedure, for chronically suffering cows, a veterinarian makes a six- to eight-inch incision to untwist part of the cow's intestine and then adheres the intestine to the interior of the abdominal wall to keep digestion moving.

Procedures Puncture Vital Organ

The problem, say some rabbinical authorities, is that the procedures puncture the organ known in Hebrew as the "keyvah," roughly equivalent to the stomach, which is one of the vital organs that must be healthy in order for an animal, and its products, to be kosher.

The gas-releasing procedures have been performed for years.

But the controversy erupted recently when an on-site supervisor of a Cholov Yisrael dairy reportedly noticed that it was being done more often than people seemed to be aware.

Sharing his observation with a handful of people was all it took for the rumors to take off in religious circles, say observers.

In the end it may not be a problem affecting the overall kashrut of milk because relatively few cows are believed to have the procedures done to them.

Rabbinical authorities interpret the laws governing kashrut to mean that if most cows are kosher then all milk is kosher.

According to Rabbi Menachem Genack, rabbinic administrator for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, estimates of the number of cows who undergo these procedures range from 1 to 10 percent.

But more precise figures must be obtained

before that determination can be made, said experts.

Genack said that the Orthodox Union is in touch with the Food and Drug Administration and experts in bovine anatomy to find the answers.

At the moment, he said, "in terms of the OU's position, there's no change in the status of the milk."

Star K Laboratories, a major supervision agency based in Baltimore, is in contact with veterinarians and farmers.

"I don't have any answers yet," said Avrum Pollak, president of Star K. "We're looking into it. A lot of misinformation is being bandied about and in order to make a responsible statement to kosher consumers we need more information."

An official of the Central Rabbinical Congress of the Satmar Chasidim, based in Brooklyn, said that no prohibition against milk has been issued, though people have stopped drinking it.

There are two schools of thought in the observant world when it comes to the kashrut of milk.

The view followed by the OU is based on a ruling by the late Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, who said that since nearly all milk sold commercially in North America comes from cows, rather than non-kosher animals like pigs, it is safe to assume that all milk on store shelves is kosher and does not require additional supervision.

Other rabbis say that to guarantee the kosher status of milk, the milking of cows must be supervised by a competent Jewish authority. Milk and dairy products produced this way are known as "cholov Yisrael" or "milk of Israel."

Both regular and cholov Yisrael milk are affected by the possible problem.

Rabbinical authorities from all kashrut supervision agencies are anxiously working together to resolve the problem which, if it is widespread, would present a challenge of enormous proportions.

According to Rabbi David Senter, kashrut administrator of Kof K, based in Teaneck, N.J., "Rabbis from all supervision agencies are working together and pooling information. When the Jewish community has a problem, we come together."

An official of another supervision agency had a more cynical view of the reason kosher supervision experts are so worried: "Ninety-nine percent of our products are dairy and dairy based," he said. "It would close us all down if we can't give a hechsher (kosher imprimatur) on milk."

FLOATING THROUGH HAIFA ON LEAVE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 16 (JTA) -- The U.S.S. George Washington, the world's largest aircraft carrier, anchored this week in Haifa for a five-day shore leave for the crew.

The arrival of the giant floating city, with its 5,500 officers and men, was welcomed by Haifa's store owners.

But the arrival proved to be a major problem for Israeli users of cellular telephones.

The massive amount of electronic equipment aboard the 1,300-foot vessel caused major interference with the portable phones until Bezek, Israel's state-owned telephone company, managed to change the frequencies used by the phones.