

**HOUSING FOR SENIORS JEOPARDIZED
BY ADMINISTRATION'S PLAN TO SLASH HUD**
By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- Stunned by Clinton administration plans to slash housing grants for low-income senior citizens, Jewish activists are predicting devastating effects on America's aging population.

"Through the government's hand, more elderly will be added to the ranks of the homeless," said Joanne Hoffman, director of housing for the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in New York.

"The demand is so dramatic and the need so great it is irresponsible for the government to dismantle this program," Hoffman said.

In a pre-emptive strike to save the embattled department of Housing and Urban Development, budget cutters in the administration have proposed a drastic overhaul of the agency.

The proposal would eliminate funding for dozens of programs, including those that finance the construction of low-income housing for the elderly and others that provide support services at such facilities.

The White House estimates that the proposed restructuring would save \$800 million over the next five years.

Activists say that the administration's move could not come at a worse time for America's elderly population -- both Jewish and non-Jewish -- which continues to grow at a record pace.

Included in the ballooning growth are senior American Jews who increasingly are turning toward low-income housing, according to Hoffman, whose federation runs nearly 3,000 units, making it one of the largest sponsors of low-income housing for seniors in New York City.

Though Jewish professionals in the field do not have specific figures, they estimate that through local federations, B'nai B'rith and independent associations, the Jewish community provides housing to thousands of low-income seniors.

Those facilities serve both Jews and non-Jews, in accordance with fair-housing laws. The same laws that prohibit exclusion of non-Jews from Jewish-run facilities also bar these facilities from recording the number of Jewish residents.

Need For Low-Income Housing Grows

B'nai B'rith, the international service and fraternal organization, runs 27 homes across the country housing more than 5,000 low-income seniors.

Other low-income housing facilities under Jewish auspices -- including those sponsored by federations and independent associations -- offer about 15,000 apartment units, according to Ellen Feingold, public policy chairwoman of the North American Association of Jewish Homes and Housing for the Aging, which is a membership and advocacy organization for these Jewish-sponsored facilities.

The need for low-income housing for seniors has swelled to an all-time high across the nation

with an estimated eight people waiting for each available unit, according to recent studies.

For fiscal year 1995, HUD, under Section 202 low-income housing for the elderly, has slated \$1.279 billion for new construction, according to a HUD document.

Under the Congregant Housing Services Program, another \$25 million is allocated for supplemental services.

B'nai B'rith has seven new construction projects in the developmental stage, according to officials of the organization. These projects, which have already begun the application process, may or may not secure funding under the 1995 budget. In any case, future projects are certainly in jeopardy, officials said.

The same is true for Jewish federation-sponsored housing, which is always looking to provide more units, federation officials said.

That Jewish seniors require such housing dispels the myth that most of the elderly in the community do not have such needs.

"There is a perception that the elderly American Jew is middle class, and that's simply not true," Hoffman said.

The problem for poor elderly Jews is "a problem the Jewish community is only beginning to face," said Mark Meridy, B'nai B'rith's senior housing specialist. "Certainly this is going to gain prominence as people continue to live longer and the need for housing increases," he said.

Jewish Activists Caught Off Guard

The proposed HUD budget caught Jewish activists across the country off guard.

"We were surprised to see this on the cutting block," said Diana Aviv, director of the Washington office of the Council of Jewish Federations.

Since the election in November, Jewish activists working on the domestic front have concentrated their efforts on tracking congressional Republican proposals on welfare, balanced-budget amendments and school prayer.

They did not, they said, expect threats to come from the White House.

Under the administration proposal, 60 HUD programs would be combined into three megablock grants for local communities.

Although low-income elderly housing providers could compete for diminished funds, Jewish professionals hold little hope that their programs would receive nearly as much funding as they do now, especially when competing against disabled housing, public housing, and emergency housing.

In addition, under the proposal, beginning in 1998, elderly housing facilities will be competing for the same funds with homeless programs and housing for people with AIDS.

Calling the proposal "the final blow" to the "dismantling of public housing," Hoffman said, "We will have no place to send the low-income elderly. This is really a crisis."

Without low income housing as an option, senior citizens will be forced into nursing homes without the "dignity and independence we provide," she said.

At a news conference on Monday, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros argued that the restructuring will actually benefit low-income elderly housing because the grant application process will shift from private organizations such as federations and B'nai B'rith to local and state authorities.

The private organizations would then be able to apply to the state and local authorities, which, according to Cisneros, can set aside funds for specific purposes.

But some Jewish activists are not buying his pitch.

When asked whether she was reassured by Cisneros' assessment that funding would still be forthcoming, Feingold said, "I am confident of nothing."

While eliminating funds for new construction poses a long-term threat to the elderly population, plans to eliminate grants for support services that some buildings receive pose a more immediate problem.

Thanks to a HUD grant, for instance, over 500 low-income senior citizens living in B'nai B'rith's Covenant House in St. Louis currently eat hot meals seven nights a week instead of the five funded by private donations, according to Judy Lee, executive director of Covenant House.

The \$487,000 grant over five years also allows the Covenant House to provide transportation for its residents to doctors' offices.

"I just don't know what they would do without this assistance," Lee said.

Lee added that low-income housing "is important not only to the older members but to the families who are trying to do their best. The ripple effect would be dramatic."

With all activists clearly concerned, Aviv of CJF tried to find the silver lining in an otherwise bleak future for low-income housing programs.

"We have to study very carefully what the rolling of 60 programs" into three would mean, Aviv said, pondering whether the changes "will mean a diminution of funds or a better process."

In the meantime, CJF will join B'nai B'rith and Christian non-profit groups in fighting to keep the grant program intact.

Officials from Jewish and non-Jewish organizations that would be affected by changes at HUD met with HUD officials Monday night to air their concerns.

Since Clinton will not deliver his budget to Capitol Hill for months, activists plan to use the time to lobby the White House and prepare an all-out push on the Hill.

"This is a significant battle that we are going to fight both in Congress and the White House," said B'nai B'rith's Meridy.

HEZBOLLAH KILLS TWO ISRAELI SOLDIERS AS FIGHTING IN SOUTH LEBANON ESCALATES By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- Two Israeli soldiers were killed and three wounded during two clashes with Hezbollah gunmen in southern Lebanon on Monday.

In the first incident, Sgt. Hadar Kehati, 19, of Rehovot, was killed when Hezbollah units fired mortar shells, katyusha rockets and anti-tank missiles at an Israel Defense Force post in the eastern sector of the security zone.

Another Israeli soldier who was lightly wounded in the clash was treated at the site. According to Radio Free Lebanon, two Hezbollah gunmen were killed in the fighting.

Hours later, an Israeli army officer was killed and two soldiers lightly wounded in a clash with Hezbollah fighters in the western sector of the security zone. The officer's name was not immediately released.

Israel Radio reported that the soldiers were on a routine patrol when the Iran-backed Hezbollah gunmen opened up with small arms and anti-tank fire from close range. The wounded soldiers were treated at the site. Other members of the patrol pursued the attackers.

Monday's casualties bring to 19 the number of Israeli soldiers reported to have died in fighting in southern Lebanon this year.

The IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, vowed Monday that Israel would continue its battle against Hezbollah.

"We will continue to take on every operation that seems to have a good chance of hurting Hezbollah, inside the security zone and outside it," Barak said.

Responding to recent threats by Israel, the leader of Hezbollah, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, vowed earlier this week to launch suicide attacks on Israeli targets around the world.

COALITION SURVIVES NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE, ENDING A POLITICAL ROW OVER KING DAVID By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- A blazing political row over the sexual mores of King David petered out quietly in the Knesset on Monday when a no-confidence motion introduced by opposition Orthodox parties was comfortably defeated by a margin of 56-41.

The government's fears of a close call were eased when, shortly before the debate, the fervently Orthodox Shas Party said its members would absent themselves from the vote on the orders of the party's religious mentor, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.

A Likud Knesset member, Meir Sheetrit, also abstained from the vote, saying he refused to be a "tool" in the hands of Orthodox rabbis bent on attacking the government.

The furor erupted on Dec. 14, when, during a passionate Knesset debate about the peace process, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres voiced some critical words about King David's passionate pursuit of Bathsheba, a married woman.

In the debate prior to Monday's vote, Rabbi Avraham Ravitz of the United Torah Judaism Party weighed in with a passionate harangue against the foreign minister's behavior.

Peres himself chose not to participate in the debate, despite earlier predictions that he would reply by citing the Prophet Nathan's words of censure spoken to King David after the Bathsheba affair. Instead, the minister of justice, David Libai, replied on behalf of the government.

He said only: "David melech Yisrael, chai vekayam. (loosely translated as 'David, King of Israel, lives forever') I propose that this motion be voted off the Knesset agenda."

In the ensuing debate, Avraham Burg, an Orthodox Labor Knesset member, did read Nathan's censure.

IN SYMBOL OF ISRAEL'S CHANGED STATUS, U.N. VOTES TO SUPPORT PEACE PROCESS

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- The United Nations General Assembly passed its widest-ranging resolution on the Middle East last week, supporting the ongoing peace process by a lopsided margin of 149-4.

In a reflection of the changes in Israel's status in the world body in recent years, it was Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Libya on the losing end of the Dec. 16 vote.

Sponsored by Norway, Russia and the United States, the resolution expressed "full support for the achievements of the peace process thus far."

Sudan and Antigua abstained.

Israel welcomed the measure, whose wording was worked out in negotiations involving the sponsors, Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"This is an impressive expression of the wide international support for progress toward peace and in the policies of the Israeli government," said Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Gad Yaacobi, following the vote on the resolution.

"This is a continuation of the positive shift in the relations between Israel and the international community," he said.

By contrast, Israeli officials downplayed the significance of two other measures passed last week, declaring illegal Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights and of Jerusalem.

The United States was the only country joining Israel in opposing these resolutions. The vote on the Golan resolution was 77 in favor, two opposed and 70 abstentions. The Jerusalem measure passed by a vote of 138-2, with seven abstentions.

Another resolution, calling for Palestinian "self-determination," was scheduled to be approved this week.

The wording of the resolutions represent a definite softening from those of their predecessors.

Unlike resolutions passed annually before the peace process got underway, the resolutions do not "condemn" or "strongly condemn" Israel, but merely "determine" Israeli actions to violate international law.

Israel had opposed these three resolutions, arguing that they prejudged issues that are to be negotiated in accordance with the ongoing peace talks.

But Israel was not overly concerned about their impact.

"The fact that the Palestinians get an endorsement for their position won't effect what we'll achieve in bilateral negotiations," said one Israeli diplomat here.

"The U.N. will support post-facto whatever we achieve between us," he added.

CANADA GRAPPLES WITH HIGH NUMBER OF ISRAELIS WHO SEEK REFUGEE STATUS

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- Claiming alleged persecution, 590 Israelis filed refugee claims in Canada in the first nine months of 1994, according to Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board.

The high number of claimants ranks Israel fifth on the list of countries from which self-described refugees are seeking to emigrate, according to the board's quarterly statistics.

The only countries with higher number of claimants were Sri Lanka (2,406), Somalia (2,006), Iran (899) and India (738).

By contrast, there were just 129 applicants from Rwanda and 69 from Bosnia, according to the statistics.

Many of the claimants from Israel are previous emigrants from the former Soviet Union who claim that they were subject to religious persecution after arriving in Israel.

Many of the claimants said the persecutions stemmed from the fact that they were married to non-Jews.

The issue has garnered widespread publicity in Israel, where officials express outrage at the notion that emigres who fled the former Soviet Union with Israeli assistance are now claiming persecution.

Amid reports that hundreds of Israeli immigrants from the former Soviet Union had been admitted to Canada as refugees based on these claims, Israeli officials have registered official protests with the Canadian government.

Immigration Attorney Charges Fraud

Meanwhile, the growing number of claimants from Israel has prompted one of Canada's most prominent immigration attorneys to charge recently that these claimants are perpetrating a massive fraud on the Canadian government.

Each claimant has cost Canadian taxpayers between \$50,000 and \$100,000 (Canadian), said Mendel Green, a senior partner with the Toronto law firm of Green and Spiegel.

He said that the majority of the claimants from Israel either abandon their cases or have their applications rejected.

To date this year, he said, 445 such cases have been rejected and 72 withdrawn, while 344 have been granted refugee status.

"The situation is despicable. Canadian immigration consultants have gone to Israel, distributed brochures in Russian on how to claim refugee status in Canada and get welfare," Green said.

"They've encouraged them to lie. There are many unscrupulous lawyers who have made a lot of money," he added.

Echoing the protests of Israeli government officials, Green described the Israelis' claims of persecution as "factually ill-founded."

According to Green, the claimants from Israel include Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Israeli natives who claim they had to flee because of their pacifist views or radical political leanings.

But the great majority of the rejected refugee applicants are Russian-speaking, said Green, who teaches immigration law at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario.

Besides clogging the already overloaded refugee board system with their meritless cases, Green charged, many of the Russian Israelis work in Canada's underground economy while collecting welfare.

Restaurants and gas stations are among their favorite places of employment because they receive their salaries in cash, he said.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
AS NEW CONGRESS TAKES OVER,
YOUNG JEWS FLOCK TO JOIN STAFFS**
By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- When Jason Schwartz was 13, he told his mother he wanted to be the first Jewish president.

In January, he will take the first step in his nascent political career when he starts his job as a legislative assistant to the only Jewish freshman in the new Congress, Rep. John Fox (R-Pa.)

Schwartz will be joining a small band of young up-and-coming Jews who call Capitol Hill their home.

Young people, including Jews, come and go on Capitol Hill, but rarely has there been such a dramatic changeover as the one that will take place next month when the Republicans take over both the Senate and House for the first time in 40 years.

No matter who is in the majority, however, young Jewish staffers on the Hill are linked by their Jewish heritage and by a desire to make a difference.

Some are active in Jewish life on the Hill, which includes religious services and an annual Chanukah party. Others connect with their Jewish colleagues to share thoughts and ideas on policy issues close to the Jewish community, or, if they have time, just to do lunch.

"We have a thriving Jewish life here," said Aliza Rieger, a legislative assistant for Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.). "We sort of have a Jewish network."

Having other Jews on the Hill who "speak the same language," is a plus, said Rieger, who is 24.

"We're a good support group," she said. "We talk, we hang out. There is definitely a cohesiveness and a recognition when we see each other."

Working on the Hill helps Rieger and other Jewish staffers stay connected to their Jewish heritage by offering them the chance to work on issues close to the Jewish community, like education and foreign policy.

"It would be very hard for me to maintain a Jewish connection if I wasn't working on Jewish issues," said Rieger, who handles foreign policy, Jewish community issues and other ethnic issues for Schumer.

Long Hours, Heavy Workload, Low Pay

Young people flock to Capitol Hill for a number of reasons. Some revel in the excitement of politics, while others use the experience as a stepping stone to higher positions. Still others come to the Hill as a break between college and graduate school.

Also, some say young people are the only ones who can handle the long hours, heavy workload and low pay that comes with many entry-level legislative positions.

They also can handle the possibility of losing their job at the casting of a ballot easier than someone with a family and a mortgage.

"I'm 22," Schwartz said. "I'm at a point in my life where I can do these things. If the opportunity comes up, I can go ahead and do it."

While Schwartz is taking advantage of his new opportunity, Michael Lapidès, 23, is looking for ones off the Hill. Lapidès' boss, Sen. Jim

Sasser (D-Tenn.), lost his bid for re-election in last month's Republican rout.

"The doors close Jan. 2," Lapidès said. "We've got the boxes all lined up," ready to move out of the office.

Since the election, Lapidès, who served as Sasser's projects assistant, has spent most of his time looking for a new job, and applying to business schools.

"I'm spending a lot of time on the phone calling friends and asking what's going on out there," he said.

Lapidès' time on the Hill was brief, about 6 months, but he said he would not trade it for the world.

"I may be out of a job, but if I had it to do over again, even with the same result, I'd do it. Working on the Hill was a great experience and I'll be able to tell people 50 or 60 years from now that I worked there," he said.

Michael Dannenberg, 24, is also leaving the Hill. He was the senior elementary and secondary education specialist for the Senate Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities, chaired by Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.).

Although he planned to leave in the summer to attend law school, he said being forced out by the elections was painful.

'The Nature Of The Business'

"It hurts because I'm leaving not when I planned to. It's being dictated by circumstances," he said. "But this is the nature of the business."

Dannenberg, who spent more than three years in Washington politics, said he is pleased with what he has accomplished in his time there.

He still plans to attend law school in the fall, and is looking for a job in the private sector.

Stephanie Lewis, 23, never made it to the Hill. She had been working in Democratic Rep. John LaFalce's district office in Buffalo, N.Y. since August, expecting to join his Washington staff after the elections. Instead, she is moving to New York City in hopes of finding a new job.

LaFalce lost his committee chairmanship in the Republican takeover and could not afford to keep Lewis on.

"It's a strange twist," she said. "It reiterates the saying, 'last hired, first fired.' But I've had a ball. I've really learned a lot."

As these three look for lives off the Hill, Schwartz, who has worked for Fox since high school, is looking forward to starting a life on the Hill.

"It's a dream come true," he said. "Working for Fox is the opportunity of a lifetime and I would probably take this job if they paid me \$1."

Despite the low pay, tough hours and minimal job security, most twentysomethings who work in Washington love what they do.

They say their jobs offer them opportunities they cannot get anywhere else. They get to be in the thick of national issues, play a role in drafting legislation and see the inside view of politics.

"There's no place like (Washington) in the world, especially if you like politics," Dannenberg said. "Where else can a 22-year-old get heads of major corporations on the phone?"

Rieger added, "The hill is great, but hectic. I tell my friends I feel like I work at the bottom of the Chicago stock exchange."