



NEWS AT A GLANCE

NJCRAC delegates take to the Hill with resolutions on Mideast, budget

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

■ Delegates to the annual plenum of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council fanned out on Capitol Hill to lobby against school prayer and the balanced budget amendment. The lobbying came after the plenum passed a resolution supporting the Middle East peace process. [Page 1]

■ Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich denied any conflict of interest in his wife's role as a vice president of the Israel Export Development Corp., which is dedicated to setting up a free-trade zone in Israel. His comments came as Marianne Gingrich was preparing to leave for Israel. [Page 3]

■ Palestinian police detained 45 supporters of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine after the group claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack in the Gaza Strip. Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat said the roundup of DFLP supporters was part of an ongoing fight against "fanatic and extremist forces." [Page 3]

■ U.S. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and Israeli Energy Minister Gonen Segev signed an agreement for the Israel Electric Company to purchase \$90 million worth of equipment from an American company for a new power plant in the Negev. Brown also met with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat to discuss preferential trade treatment for the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority.

■ A Palestinian worker from the Gaza Strip won \$2 million in Israel's lottery, but was unable to get to Tel Aviv to pick up his award because of the closure imposed on the territories. Lottery officials assured him that he had six months to claim his money. [Page 2]

■ The Israeli public strongly prefers Avraham Burg over Yehiel Leket to serve as chairman of the Jewish Agency, according to a poll conducted by the Dahaf Institute. Of those surveyed, 13 percent favored Leket, the acting chairman of the Agency, while 58 percent chose Burg, a Labor Party Knesset member. The remainder expressed no preference.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 7 (JTA) — When Jewish communal leaders from across the country visited their representatives on Capitol Hill this week, they brought with them what they hoped were powerful lobbying tools: resolutions on the Middle East peace process, the balanced budget amendment and school prayer.

Most of the resolutions passed quickly and easily at the plenum of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, which is being held here Feb. 4-8. Some 500 professionals and lay leaders from most of the 117 local and 13 national agencies under the NJCRAC umbrella attended the annual event.

In a year lacking a single issue to galvanize the Jewish community, as did threats to the U.S. loan guarantees to Israel and the resettlement of Soviet Jewry in past years, most of the resolutions passed with little discussion.

The one resolution that generated some heat addressed the peace process. In it, NJCRAC "reaffirms its strong support of the Israeli government's peace initiatives and wishes it continued success in building upon the dramatic achievements of this past year."

The resolution passed after more than an hour of debate without substantive change from what was originally proposed.

The debate was much less forceful than had been anticipated, as most of the objections were ironed out before the start of the plenum. It was focused in part on language relating to the possible deployment of U.S. troops on the Golan Heights as part of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria.

Originally, there was some sentiment to propose a resolution endorsing the deployment of the troops.

Resolution reflects communal consensus

But the language that ultimately was presented to the assembly reflected the more general consensus of the community, which was that discussion of the topic should be postponed until an Israeli-Syrian agreement was imminent.

The resolution that passed Monday, in carefully circumspect language, stated: "The Clinton administration has been playing an important role in facilitating the peace negotiations, especially in regard to the Israel-Syrian track.

"The parties reportedly have begun preliminary discussions regarding a possible stationing of an international monitoring contingent on the Golan Heights, which might be one element of a comprehensive agreement.

"A premature attempt to formulate U.S. policy on this issue may complicate the already sensitive and complex negotiations between Israel and Syria. Implications of U.S. involvement in this or any other kind of international effort should be examined carefully when a specific proposal is presented."

The only ones to vote against the resolution were the representatives of the Jewish War Veterans. The organization filed its official dissent from the resolution's reference to the Golan because "it prejudices the issue."

The group said it opposes the idea of U.S. troops serving on the territory in question "without there being an American national security purpose and a defined withdrawal date."

There was some debate over other language in the peace process resolution that focused on international aid to the Palestinian Authority. The resolution called for the international community "to move quickly to fulfill earlier pledges" of aid, but language was modified to reflect some frustration with the Palestinians' own lack of accountability for the funds.

The resolution lauded the joint statement issued last week after the summit meeting in Cairo between the heads of Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. The regional leaders jointly condemned violence in the region and pledged to seek an end to terrorist attacks.

But, the NJCRAC resolution cautioned, "Words are not enough."

Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority "now must follow through immediately on their

commitments by taking more assertive measures against terrorism, including the confiscation of weapons in the hands of Islamic extremist groups and the arrest and prosecution of those who have committed acts of violence.

"We also urge the Palestinians to implement their commitment to repeal the PLO covenant, which calls for Israel's elimination," the resolution said.

One of the only moments of fiery rhetoric on any other issue came during the brief debate over the resolution opposing a proposed constitutional amendment that would require a balanced federal budget.

Barry Gross, a past chairman of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Greater East Bay — which covers Oakland, Calif. — protested the resolution, saying, "It's rare that a Jewish economic conservative is not isolated and kept out of power in the Jewish community."

"The NJCRAC process does not allow minority views to be heard on economic and social programs," said Gross, who is now a member of the NJCRAC executive committee.

"Our organization is viewed as the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, and as such we are less and less relevant," Gross said. "Unless we open our doors and policies we will not be at the table of power."

'The most inclusive process in Jewish life'

NJCRAC Executive Vice Chairman Lawrence Rubin countered by telling Gross and the other delegates that the umbrella group's process of consultation and debate over policy issues "is the most inclusive and deliberative a process that exists in Jewish life."

The resolution on the balanced budget amendment reflected a widespread concern on the local level about its possible ramifications.

The community relations councils represent their Jewish communities in intergroup relations work, present the mainstream Jewish view on a host of issues to the larger community and to local legislators and, in some places, organize events such as Israeli Independence Day celebrations.

Typically an arm of their local Jewish federation, the JCRCs are already struggling with the financial cutbacks that have beset many Jewish communities.

If federal funding to a raft of social service programs is cut to meet the demands of a balanced budget law, Jewish federations will have to try and fill the huge gaps in funding that will face hospitals, old age homes and other programs.

As a result, community relations professionals fear, the extra funding is likely to come out of their budgets.

Financial cutbacks have already made their mark. "We used to have 16 full-time people in our office, in 1985, and now we have six," said Joyce Kutler, director of public information at the JCRC of Greater Philadelphia.

Another major resolution that passed Monday was one opposing school prayer.

But because so much time was devoted to the peace process resolution, not all of the proposed statements were considered in the time allotted on Monday.

In a follow-up session slated for Tuesday night, a resolution urging that Jonathan Pollard be granted parole when he becomes eligible in November was expected to be presented to the delegates.

The proposed resolution was initiated by the JCRC of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

Pollard will have served 10 years of his life sentence for spying on the United States for Israel when he becomes eligible for parole. The hearings before the parole board are expected to be in April or May, sources said. □

Clinton's budget secures current aid to Israel, Egypt

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Feb. 7 (JTA) — As expected, President Clinton has asked Congress to maintain current levels of foreign aid to Israel and Egypt.

In Clinton's budget proposal sent to Congress this week, Israel would remain the largest recipient of U.S. foreign assistance, getting \$3 billion in economic and military assistance. Egypt would continue to receive its annual \$2.1 billion in aid.

The foreign-aid package proposed by Clinton, totaling \$21.2 billion, represents slightly more than 1 percent of the \$1.6 trillion budget for fiscal year 1996.

Clinton also proposed increasing Jordan's military aid to \$30 million. Last year Jordan received \$7.2 million in U.S. aid.

The budget proposal specifies that the additional \$22.8 million for Jordan would be used to replace transportation and communications equipment.

Jordan would also receive a boost if Congress approves Clinton's supplemental budget request for the fiscal year 1995.

In that request, also sent to Congress this week, Clinton asked for \$275 million to be used to eliminate Jordan's remaining debt to the United States.

Clinton called on Congress to show "continued strong economic and military support for Israel and Egypt and provide increased military support for Jordan."

"American diplomacy is key to continued progress in the peace process and in shaping international responses to the growing need for trade with, and investment in, the region," Clinton wrote in his budget message to the Congress.

The budget also proposes \$75 million in "economic assistance for Palestinians in the West Bank area and in Gaza" to "continue to promote Palestinian self-government through economic development and institution building." The budget also requests \$12 million to fund the five multilateral Middle East peace process working groups. □

Palestinian unable to claim lottery prize due to closure

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Feb. 7 (JTA) — A Palestinian worker from the Gaza Strip has won \$2 million in Israel's lottery, but has been unable to get to Tel Aviv to pick up his award because of the closure imposed on the territories.

The Hebrew daily Yediot Achronot reported that a man from Gaza City telephoned Israel's lottery offices, saying that he had picked the winning numbers in the Jan. 24 lottery.

The lottery was drawn two days after Israel sealed the West Bank and Gaza Strip due to a suicide bombing near Netanya that killed 21 Israelis.

Lottery officials said they wondered why the prize had not been claimed. They eventually discovered that the winning ticket had been purchased at a stand in the southern town of Netivot, where the Palestinian man had worked. When the man finally called, he said it was the first time he had bought a ticket. He was concerned that he would lose the money because of the closure.

"I don't know what to do," he said. "They don't let me leave Gaza because of the closure. What will happen? Will I lose the money? And I had thought: Finally, I'll stop working hard and have lots of money."

Lottery officials assured the man that he had six months to pick up his winnings. □

Speaker Gingrich denies conflict as wife promotes investment in Israel

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Feb. 7 (JTA) — Marianne Gingrich was headed off to Israel this week, traveling neither as the wife of the Speaker of the House nor as a Christian pilgrim.

Instead, she was going as an employee of the Israel Export Development Corp. to learn how to convince American companies to set up shop outside Beersheba.

The corporation is dedicated to setting up a free-trade zone in Israel. Backed by wealthy American Jews, the group hopes this summer to receive a formal contract for the zone from the Israeli government.

American and other foreign companies doing business in the zone would be exempt from most Israeli taxes and regulations.

As the firm's vice president for business development, Marianne Gingrich is helping to coordinate marketing efforts. One of three full-time marketers in the United States, she oversees "a host of marketing representatives working on a success-fee basis," said David Yerushalmi, the corporation's chairman and chief executive officer.

She earns \$2,500 monthly, plus commissions, according to news reports.

Newt Gingrich praised free zone in 1993

In 1993, U.S. Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) had praised the free zone idea to Israeli officials. But in a news conference in Washington on Tuesday, Gingrich denied any conflict of interest, saying he never referred specifically to the Israel Export Development Corp. in those meetings.

"I have been advocating free-trade zones and free-enterprise zones for [my] entire career," he told reporters.

"I've advocated it to [Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman] Yasser Arafat, I've advocated it to [South African President] Nelson Mandela, I've advocated it to every Israeli official I've seen.

"I believe that having free-enterprise zones and free-trade zones that resemble Hong Kong and Singapore in order to create jobs so that people in Gaza are able to actually have a better chance of going to work and are less likely to be terrorists is good for the world."

Gingrich also said, "Now, that's my advice to the Israeli government. I do not recommend any company to them. I couldn't care less who they pick. And I think there's a huge distinction."

Backers of the Israel Export Development Corp. were the primary forces urging the free-trade zone in Israel. They used their influence as prominent American Jewish philanthropists and businesspeople to win over Israeli officials.

They also organized a congressional lobbying campaign. Three congressional letters were sent urging the Israeli government to support the free-export zone.

Newt Gingrich was not approached to sign any of the letters. "Unfortunately, we missed him in 1993," Yerushalmi said.

To undertake the Washington campaign, the corporation retained former U.S. Rep. Vin Weber (R-Minn.)

It was Weber who recommended Marianne Gingrich for the job, Yerushalmi said.

"She has a professional and educational background in urban design, so she understood the planning issues. She understood the telecommunications issues; she was so excited by it, she was happy to come on board," Yerushalmi said.

"We hired her because of her skills and her

education and her enthusiasm. One of the things we did not do is advertise that Marianne Gingrich was working for us," he added.

But Chuck Lewis, executive director of the Center for Public Integrity, an ethics watchdog group in Washington, said her appointment raises "ethical issues."

"One of the reasons this is interesting is that she has no background in trade or the Middle East," said Lewis. "The company claims she is a marketing representative and doesn't need a trade background. People can draw their own conclusions."

Yerushalmi denied that Newt Gingrich's position had any influence on the decision to employ her.

"We don't need anything from the Israeli government at this point," Yerushalmi said. "We don't need anything from the Washington government. And we certainly have enough business connections. As a group we are as well connected as any in the world."

"The fact is this brouhaha is the precise example of why, if anything, her last name worked against her," he said.

Lewis acknowledged that "the rules about what spouses can or can't do are lax."

"There are lots of legislator spouses doing lots of things, including lobbying. In Washington it's kind of hohum in terms of how the town works," said Lewis.

Among the well-connected businesspeople on the Israel Export Development Corp.'s board and list of shareholders are some of the most influential Jewish philanthropists in America.

President Larry Silverstein is chairman of the board of directors of the UJA-Federation of New York. Shareholders include Morton Mandel, a former president of the Council of Jewish Federations, and Laurence Tisch, chairman of CBS and an honorary officer of UJA-Federation.

Marianne Gingrich has had no dealings with board members or shareholders, Yerushalmi said.

Douglas Bloomfield, a former lobbyist for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said Gingrich's position is good for Israel "as long as everything's kosher."

"It suggests that she, like her husband, has a high comfort-level with Israel, and that's positive," he said. □

Palestinians hold supporters of DFLP after attack on guard

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Feb. 7 (JTA) — Palestinian police detained 45 supporters of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine after the group claimed responsibility for a terror attack in the Gaza Strip.

Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat said the Tuesday roundup of DFLP supporters was part of an ongoing fight against "fanatic and extremist forces."

The DFLP is part of a 10-member Damascus-based alliance of groups militantly opposed to the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative. Leaders of the group said in a statement Monday that a unit of the Red Brigades Star, the group's military wing, had ambushed a civilian convoy that same day which was escorting two fuel tankers from Israel to Gaza.

An Israeli security guard was killed in the attack.

"We will not permit these groups to harm, not only the Israelis, but also the Palestinians and the peace process," Arafat told reporters.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials decided that trucks would no longer deliver gasoline to Gaza, but would drop it off at the Nahal Oz crossing at the Israeli border. □

NEWS ANALYSIS**Summit bolsters peace prospects but Rabin's political woes remain***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM, Feb. 7 (JTA) — February 2 ought to have been a triumphant day for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The historic summit meeting in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Jordan's King Hussein and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat gave the stalled peace process a badly needed shot in the arm, but it did little to bolster the premier's standing.

The Cairo summit marked the first time that the region's so-called "peace coalition" came together in a demonstrative show of collective commitment.

At the conclusion of the summit, the four leaders issued a joint communique condemning the ongoing terror attacks that have all but crippled the process.

They also called for a prompt move to "conclude the negotiations on the interim agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in all its aspects."

The summit provided the momentum needed for Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to resume their talks in Cairo on Tuesday.

The talks are aimed at implementing the next phase of the self-rule accord, which includes the holding of Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the concurrent withdrawal of Israeli troops from Arab population centers in the West Bank.

The head of the Israeli delegation to the Cairo talks, Yoel Singer, said Tuesday that the negotiations would focus on the easier of the two issues facing the two sides: the timing of Palestinian elections.

Clearly, the second broad issue — the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank — was something best put off until more progress had been achieved elsewhere.

Singer's Palestinian counterpart, Saeb Erekat, noted Tuesday that this week's round of talks would be in preparation for a meeting between Rabin and Arafat scheduled for Thursday.

It was at the Feb. 2 Cairo summit that Rabin and Arafat agreed to hold a meeting this week.

Substantial breakthroughs are unlikely

Although it is unlikely that the two will achieve any substantial breakthroughs, their willingness to meet reflects their desire to give substance to another aspect of the joint communique issued last week — to work "to improve the climate and build confidence" in the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative.

Last week's summit, particularly the leaders' condemnation of terror and violence, was a significant political success for Rabin, whose domestic standing is in steep decline as a result of repeated terror attacks by Islamic fundamentalist opponents of the peace process.

Yet Feb. 2 ended badly for Rabin.

Despite the successful summitry, engineered by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to reinvigorate the flagging peace process, the day's final balance boded ill for the prime minister.

At the end of the day, after all the summitry had concluded, domestic political developments intruded.

These developments could have dire implications both for Rabin's prospects of staying in power for the full Knesset term, which ends in November 1996, and for his ability to substantively advance the peace process.

Returning to his home at 2 a.m. last Friday, the prime minister was confronted by two Knesset members of the fervently religious Shas Party, Moshe Maya and

Raphael Pinhasi, who informed him that their party had decided not to rejoin his coalition.

They handed him a letter from Shas' spiritual mentor, former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who reiterated his long-standing respect for the prime minister and his long-held religious view that Israel must be ready to make "far-reaching concessions" in order to attain peace and thereby save lives.

"But this peace is not what we had prayed for," Yosef said in the letter.

"Blood is flowing like water," he added, referring to the recent terrorist attacks. "The security situation is now insufferable."

Compounding his disappointment, Rabin later read in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot — alongside huge color photographs of the summit foursome — results of the latest public opinion poll.

The poll showed Rabin trailing Likud opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu by 13 percentage points.

Adding to his misery — and to the whole nation's sense of distress — was yet another terrorist attack Monday in which an Israeli civilian guard protecting an oil truck was shot dead in Gaza by Palestinian gunmen.

On paper, Rabin continues to command a working majority in the Knesset, even without Shas.

Parliamentarians from Labor and the Meretz bloc — along with two members of Yi'ud who recently joined the coalition — comprise 59 of the 120 Knesset seats. Members of Israeli Arab parties provide another six votes — and thus a reasonable margin of safety for crucial votes, particularly those surrounding the peace process.

Shas' defection may revitalize other parties

But this parliamentary arithmetic is more brittle than it looks. Shas' defection is bound to infuse Likud and the other opposition parties with new vigor. One can now expect that they will use every parliamentary tactic possible to bring the government down.

Midterm parliamentary arithmetic, moreover, no longer necessarily reflects the actual mood in any democratic nation.

The mood in Israel now is plainly far less enthusiastic over the peace process than it was a year ago. And in a parliamentary democracy, the public mood can seep into the Knesset chamber and ultimately erode the numbers that hold sway there.

In Labor's own ranks there are Knesset members whose views on the peace process are clearly hardening, and who may not be reliable in a Knesset showdown over further peace moves.

Even if Rabin proves able to navigate the political shoals, his ability to steer his ship of state toward further diplomatic breakthroughs may be irredeemably crippled by Shas' decision.

Progress on the peace front, in the best of circumstances, requires bold decisionmaking, which in turn requires solid public backing.

Rabin will need this public backing when he begins to withdraw Israeli troops from the West Bank in the context of the negotiations with the Palestinians.

And on the Syrian negotiating track — assuming President Hafez Assad is prepared to return to the bargaining table soon — Rabin will require similar backing if he attempts a withdrawal from the Golan in exchange for a full peace with Damascus.

The significance of Rabbi Yosef's moral and political support for Rabin had extended far beyond the Shas electorate.

It is exactly that type of support that Rabin will need to take him through the difficult weeks and months that lie ahead. □