



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Aid bill excludes Wye money

The U.S. Senate narrowly passed a \$12.6 billion foreign aid bill on Wednesday by a vote of 51-49, with four Republicans joining all Democrats in opposing the measure.

With a similarly close vote in the U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday, the bill, which includes nearly \$3 billion in economic and military assistance to Israel, now heads to President Clinton. The Clinton administration has said the president will veto the bill because it provides nearly \$2 billion less than what he requested, including no funds for Israel and the Palestinians to implement last year's Wye accord.

### Slave labor talks resume

Representatives of Holocaust survivors and German companies began two days of talks Wednesday in Washington aimed at resolving Nazi-era slave labor claims. But the German firms delayed discussion about the size of a compensation fund until Thursday.

The German companies were reportedly prepared to offer up to \$3.8 billion to settle claims, but lawyers for Holocaust survivors, who initially sought payments in excess of \$20 billion, have said that amount is far too little.

Although a final settlement is not likely to be reached this week, both German and Jewish negotiators expressed optimism about achieving a framework for an agreement.

### Pope may cancel Iraq trip

Pope John Paul II's planned trip to Iraq in December may not take place, according to Vatican officials.

The pope was reportedly angered by a letter written by a group of Iraqi intellectuals and published last week by the Iraqi News Agency that accused him of planning to use the pilgrimage to Abraham's birthplace to persuade Christians to forgive Jews for "atrocities" that included the killing of Jesus.

### Conviction in Miss World rape

An Israeli travel agent was convicted Wednesday of raping Israeli model Linor Abargil at knifepoint and trying to choke her with a rope and a plastic bag.

The assault by Egyptian-born Shlomo Nour took place last year near Milan, seven weeks before Abargil was crowned Miss World.

## Bored students, bad teachers: Can the 'whipping boy' be saved?

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — The teachers are incompetent and uninspired. The students are bored and badly behaved. The parents think their responsibility ends with car-pool duty.

You've heard the complaints a thousand times about supplemental — also known as Hebrew or congregational — schools.

These institutions — which struggle in just a few hours a week to impart the basics of Jewish tradition to youngsters — have earned the contempt of generations of American Jews.

### Rethinking Hebrew School Part 1 of a Series

And in the past decade, as Jewish day schools — in which children learn Judaic and general studies under one roof — have snagged headlines, increased enrollment and philanthropic dollars for their apparent contributions to Jewish continuity, Hebrew schools have become something of a communal whipping boy.

Many still resemble the above complaints.

But around the country at individual synagogues, at central agencies for Jewish education and at a handful of foundations, efforts are under way to dramatically improve the much-maligned schools.

Some schools are switching to a more hands-on approach, bringing in problem-solving, independent learning and computers.

Others are keeping the classroom pretty much the same, but adding parents to the equation.

Enhanced training for teachers is another area being addressed.

In Los Angeles, for example, the Bureau of Jewish Education is encouraging schools to do soul-searching and standard-setting through a voluntary accreditation process.

A number of congregations and communities are taking a more holistic approach, in which they are urging that the entire synagogue change to make the role of education more central.

The issue is also getting some national attention.

The Jewish Education Service of North America, together with the Association of Directors of Central Agencies of Jewish Education, is expected to release a task force report on Hebrew schools this fall, highlighting some success stories and making recommendations for how other schools might improve.

And a session on "Re-envisioning Supplemental Schools" drew one of the largest crowds at a conference this summer of the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education.

Experts say the new focus on re-envisioning congregational schools is partly a reaction to the recent spotlight on other venues of Jewish education, like day schools and camps.

But the re-envisioning discussions come also because — despite their bad reputation and declining share of the overall student pool — Hebrew schools are still where more than half of Jewish kids can be found.

Sixty-one percent of the estimated 470,000 American children enrolled in some form of Jewish education are in supplemental schools.

Among non-Orthodox Jews, the percentage is much higher, and the majority of

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Israel may review ties to Austria

Israel may have to review its relations with Austria if the far-right party led by Jorg Haider becomes part of the next government, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy warned Wednesday.

Regional Development Minister Shimon Peres canceled his participation at an international conference in Vienna next week, saying it was inappropriate for him to visit there after Haider's Freedom Party placed second in Austria's elections Sunday.

Meanwhile, the European Jewish Congress called on Austria's political parties not to form a government with the Freedom Party.

The group said the party's strong electoral showing should send a "serious warning to Austria."

### Russia warned against zone

Israeli military analysts are warning Russia not to carve out a security zone in Chechnya as part of Moscow's ongoing battle against Islamic guerrillas in the region.

"This is a prescription for endless war that you cannot win," said retired Gen. Avraham Rotem.

He cited Israel's own experience in the southern Lebanon security zone, which it carved out in 1985 and from which it is still trying to extricate itself.

"Very soon it will be exactly like our place, a low intensity war with a regular army with tanks and planes and artillery that are useless against guerrillas fighting a dirty war."

### Casino proposal protested

Israel's religious parties protested a proposal by the Finance Ministry to legalize casino gambling in the Negev. Perhaps next "we'll encourage prostitution and tax that business" as well, Health Minister Shlomo Benizri said Wednesday.

The Finance Ministry made the proposal a day earlier to provide tax revenues and create jobs in the economically depressed Negev.

Jewish education policy-makers agree that — while day school enrollment is increasing — a mass exodus from supplemental schools is unlikely to occur anytime soon.

"If we were to have our druthers, all our students would be enrolled in a more intensive environment, but the reality is that the majority won't, ergo we need to invest significant resources into re-envisioning and re-engineering congregational schools," said Chaim Botwinick, executive vice president of the Center for Jewish Education in Baltimore and a member of the JESNA task force on supplemental schools.

"When you close the doors, these are kids who will not opt for a day school," said Botwinick, who, with JESNA, is seeking funding for a national effort to monitor, evaluate and spread the word about new models for congregational schools. "They will opt for nothing."

Some day school advocates — most notably Chicago-area businessman and national day school champion George Hanus — believe that greater scholarship funds could vastly increase the number of American Jewish children who are attending day schools.

An experiment conducted by the Avi Chai Foundation, a philanthropy primarily supporting Jewish day schools, is currently exploring — among other things — to what extent that assumption is true.

The experiment offers four years of day-school tuition vouchers for \$3,000 each year in Atlanta and Cleveland for all Jewish students in grades 2 to 8 who have not previously enrolled in day school.

By limiting the vouchers to second grade and up, the experiment is designed to draw in families that would not otherwise have chosen a day school.

Approximately 250 families have taken the vouchers, but the reasons for choosing — or not choosing — a day school are more complicated than the money, say the researchers.

"My sense so far, based on data collected and focus groups is that price is no doubt one of the issues, but it's only one of the issues," said Leonard Saxe, director of Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and one of the researchers studying the Avi Chai project.

He said that just as significant "are the feelings about whether or not a day school will segregate your child from the larger American community."

Another piece of it, he said, "has to do with your Jewish identity and to what extent is Jewish ritual and identity central to who you are."

Parents interviewed around the country seemed to echo Saxe's findings, with many noting their commitment to public school and multiculturalism.

Abby Stamelman Hocky, a parent at Beth Am Israel Congregation in suburban Philadelphia, said she had considered day school for her children but opted instead for public school.

Stamelman Hocky, who works professionally in the local Jewish community and is the chair of her synagogue's education committee, said she and her husband are "philosophically committed to public education and all that represents, and to raising children in a world that is diverse."

Anne Whitehouse, a parent at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York, also noted a commitment to diversity in her decision to send her daughter to public school.

"Multiculturalism is one of the strengths of New York and one of the things I like about public school."

Another factor for Whitehouse was the fact that her husband is not Jewish and although he had agreed to raise their daughter Jewish, he might not "be comfortable sending her to a day school," she said.

Ultimately, say advocates for congregational schools, these schools need attention because unlike day schools, which generally reach an already committed Jewish family, Hebrew schools can make the critical difference for the Jewishly ambivalent, people for whom Judaism competes with other priorities.

"Kids get exposed to a whole lot of critical information" at Hebrew school and "it makes or breaks whether they will stay involved afterwards," said Elizabeth Greenstein, program associate at the Nathan Cummings Foundation, which funds congregational schools. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Hungary sued for looted art

An elderly Jewish woman is suing Hungary for the return of Nazi-looted masterpieces now held by Budapest museums.

"The Hungarian government has reneged on all their promises to right this wrong," said Martha Nierenberg.

"They seem to believe that they can detain my family's works of art, which have become the last prisoners of World War II."

She filed the suit Tuesday in Budapest, seeking the return of a collection valued at between \$10 million and \$20 million.

### Nixon took more swipes at Jews

Just-released tapes of former President Richard Nixon show him lashing out repeatedly at "the Jews," whom he accused of being at the root of all his problems.

Nixon complained to top aides that "Jews are all over the government."

He also said they needed to be brought under control by putting non-Jews in charge of federal agencies, according to documents released Tuesday by the National Archives.

### Holocaust panel gets new funds

The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously approved legislation to extend by one year the mandate of a presidential commission examining the fate of Holocaust assets in the United States.

Monday's action sets a new December 2000 deadline by which the commission's final report is due and authorizes an additional \$2.5 million for the commission's work.

The commission is searching for gold, art and other assets turned over to state governments following World War II.

### Deutsche Bank faces lawsuit

A Jewish group filed a class-action lawsuit against Germany's largest bank for participating in, and profiting from, the destruction of Jewish communal properties in Eastern Europe during World War II.

"Deutsche Bank has to acknowledge and take responsibility for its participation in Nazi atrocities," the World Council of Orthodox Jewish Communities said when the suit was filed Tuesday.

### Synagogue gets Ford grant

The world's largest lesbian and gay synagogue received a \$250,000 grant from the Ford Foundation.

In awarding the grant to New York's Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, the foundation cited the synagogue's history of theological innovation and the achievements of its leader, Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum.

## Response to Birthright Israel overwhelming among students

By Julie Wiener and Julia Goldman

NEW YORK (JTA) — Just weeks after launching a national marketing blitz informing North American Jewish college students of free trips to Israel this winter, Birthright Israel has far more would-be travelers than available spots.

And despite the fact that thousands will have to be turned away for this round of trips, the advertisements — primarily on radio stations and in campus newspapers — are continuing in order to set the stage for future efforts, according to Birthright officials. Birthright Israel, a \$300 million initiative of mega-funders Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt, is offering 6,000 free 10-day trips in December and January to Jewish college students who have never been to Israel.

A number of studies have found Israel experiences to have a positive influence on young people's Jewish identities.

The overwhelming response to the college offer comes as Birthright Israel is working to define its future funding structure.

Originally, Birthright Israel was envisioned as a three-way partnership among philanthropists, the government of Israel and Jewish communities worldwide.

But a belated formal invitation to Jewish communities left many of them unsure how they would be able to cover the anticipated costs of sponsoring trips for local residents. Birthright is now making a more "federation-friendly approach," a source close to the issue said.

And recently the Jewish Agency for Israel — which for decades has been the primary provider of educational trips to Israel — began clamoring for a larger programmatic role in the Birthright initiative.

One solution being discussed among the Jewish Agency, Israeli government officials — including Prime Minister Ehud Barak — and Birthright is to bring the agency in as a funding partner.

The outcome of those discussions may affect the timing of Birthright's future offerings. The initiative was expected to launch trips for high school students in 2001.

To date Birthright Israel North America reports that it has signed up 10,000 hopefuls to take part in the college trips this winter.

The trips will be under the auspices of 12 Jewish organizations, including Hillel: The Foundation for Campus Jewish Life and the Jewish Community Centers Associations of North America.

Hillel, the group slated to take the largest number of students this winter, reports that over 6,000 people have applied for the 3,000 spots it is offering.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to get to know more students and give activists boosts to their Jewish identity and Jewish education," said Jeff Rubin, national director of communications for Hillel. "It's really energizing the campuses."

Spokespersons for other providers — including the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies and the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations — reported that they received more than twice as many calls as they had slots available.

Most organizations said they would choose who goes on the basis of a lottery or a combination of lottery and first-come, first-serve. Some lotteries were expected to take place as early as this week.

Ivy Abrams, vice president of marketing for Birthright Israel, said the number of calls to Birthright Israel itself have increased tenfold since the marketing campaign — totaling more than \$1 million and consisting primarily of radio spots and advertisements in campus newspapers — began Sept. 6.

Although the effort is generating a surge of interest among students, some of the providers privately expressed doubts about its efficacy.

Several people, all of whom asked that their names not be used, expressed skepticism that a large 10-day trip would have a meaningful impact.

Steinhardt defended the trips: "The cliché is that the trip that really counts is the second trip, but in order to have a second trip you have to get to the first trip." □

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES****Christian Coalition weakening, but could gear up for elections**

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As the Christian Coalition faithful gathered here for their annual "Road to Victory" conference, Republican presidential hopefuls took to the dais one by one.

With the exception of Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who declined an invitation to speak, each of the candidates took a turn courting votes from the nation's largest and most powerful group of religious conservatives.

Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson came close to endorsing Texas Gov. George W. Bush's presidential bid, telling reporters he is "completely comfortable" with Bush and believes he is "worthy of the support of the coalition."

The extent to which that support matters, however, is an entirely different story.

There is no question that the power of the conservative Christian lobby has waned in recent years.

After establishing itself as a potent electoral force that has helped rally voters behind conservative Republican candidates in every election since 1990, the group is entering the 2000 election cycle with its reputation badly battered.

Financial problems, disarray in the ranks of its leadership, loss of staff and revelations that it inflated its membership numbers have beset the organization in the past year.

These setbacks came on the heels of the defeats many of its candidates suffered in the last election.

The coalition also suffered a devastating blow when the IRS denied the group tax-exempt status, concluding that its political activities are too partisan.

Although the organization claimed a victory in a federal judge's decision that cleared the coalition of wrongdoing alleged by the Federal Election Commission in advocating the election of Republican candidates, the group has nonetheless found itself struggling to regain its credibility.

For the group's ideological opponents, including most Jewish groups, that has come as a welcome development.

Still, experts who monitor the political activity of the religious right emphasize that it would be a mistake to write off the Christian Coalition and the religious right as a political force.

Religious conservatives still account for about 17 percent of the general population, according to William Martin, a professor of sociology at Rice University and the author of "With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America."

"That's not a juggernaut, but it's not a fringe in American life," Martin said.

"They are not a majority, but their commitment to voting gives them a strength beyond their numbers."

Robertson, for his part, has acknowledged that the coalition is battling a lack of enthusiasm among members — and that its fundraising goals have not been reached.

"It hasn't been easy. Let's face it," he told CNN's "Evans, Novak, Hunt & Shields."

The religious right leader added that his organization has been in a state of transition since Ralph Reed departed as executive director.

"But we're coming back. And this weekend to me was a major turning point."

Speaking at last week's conference, Robertson predicted "a powerful religious revival" leading up to next year's election.

Although many of the coalition's critics say the group continues to overstate its influence, most caution against dismissing it as a political force.

"I certainly think it's still got the possibility of getting a second wind," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

"In the past, it's been easy to declare these far-right religious movements dead before they were actually interred."

At the same time, he said, the group is clearly "falling into a deep sleep."

The real test of the organization's strength will be its ability to mobilize its grass roots, Lynn added.

"The strength of the coalition lies in its ability to get its local activists in conjunction with local churches to distribute voting guides that support their candidates," he said.

"If the grass-roots troops wither away, there's no real power in the Christian Coalition."

After seeing last week's conference, Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said, "It's hard, frankly, not to be impressed with the parade of Republican candidates who still feel that it's important for them to come and appear before the group."

Bush's speech to the conference, however, was noteworthy for what he did not say.

Unlike his rivals, the GOP presidential front-runner did not touch on many of the core concerns of religious conservatives, including school prayer and gay rights.

He made only a passing reference to abortion.

For the most part, he delivered his standard stump speech — a move that some political observers said reflected both his large lead in the polls and the fact that the coalition no longer appears to have the same hold over candidates it once did.

Meanwhile, Jewish activists who have countered the coalition in battles ranging from abortion rights to school prayer, say they plan to monitor the group's activity vigilantly in both the electoral and legislative arenas.

"One of our real changes and one we're committed to," Pelavin said, "is to meet them head-on and help policy-makers, whether in Washington or elsewhere in the country, understand that they don't represent the only religious voice on issues of concern." □

**Home Depot settles claim**

NEW YORK (JTA) -- Home Depot has paid \$50,000 to settle a claim by a Seattle-area man who said he was fired from one of the home improvement chain's stores because he is Jewish.

The man said a fellow employee at a Home Depot in the state of Washington subjected him to a series of anti-Semitic slurs and that he was fired when he registered a complaint with his supervisors.

The California-based chain also agreed to a number of terms set forward by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future. □