



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Judge scraps Florida vouchers

A Florida judge ruled the state's voucher law unconstitutional.

Throwing out the nation's first statewide program to help children in failing public schools attend private schools, the judge allowed 53 children attending private schools under a state voucher program to finish the school year, but ordered the state to take no further action to implement the law.

### Clinton signs Iran weapons act

President Clinton signed into law a bill targeting any foreign entity that shares technology related to missiles or weapons of mass destruction with Iran.

Countries that violate the Iran Nonproliferation Act will either face sanctions or the president will have to report to Congress his reasons for not taking action.

### Israel starts probe of WWII assets

A Knesset committee probing assets that Israeli banks and other institutions have kept from the heirs of Holocaust victims held its first meeting.

Tuesday's meeting dealt mostly with outlining the main issues and setting up the inquiry.

One committee member said it is as if "we are sitting in July 1995 in Switzerland," referring to Israel's delay in handling the issue and comparing it to similar charges that faced the Alpine nation.

### Barak reverses withdrawal plan

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak canceled plans to give up a West Bank village on Jerusalem's fringes to Palestinian control.

Barak's reversal came hours after the Israeli media reported that he intended to transfer control of Anata and two other villages near Jerusalem.

The reports prompted hard-liners, including Cabinet member Natan Sharansky, to flock to Jewish settlements to show their opposition to the plan.

### AJCongress backs papal speech

One Jewish group is making a point of not criticizing Pope John Paul II for not referring to the Holocaust in his apology Sunday for past church sins.

The American Jewish Congress said it prefers to focus instead on the "profound historic turning point in the church and its own perception of its role and responsibilities in the world."

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### With eye on November, candidates will target Jewish votes — and funds

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The day before Super Tuesday, Vice President Al Gore was in New York and Texas Gov. George W. Bush was in California, but both were out looking for the Jewish vote.

Now that each has all but sewn up his party's nomination, will the presidential candidates continue to seek Jewish support? Or were the visits to Jewish institutions merely attempts to lock up last-minute votes in states with large Jewish populations?

Jewish voters make up only a tiny percent of the American electorate, but have in the past been seen as providing a swing vote in certain key states that affected the outcome of the presidential election.

Further, despite the numbers, Jews have traditionally played a disproportionate role in American politics since they are politically and financially active.

Both campaigns say they will place a high priority on reaching out to Jews.

In fund raising, as in vote gathering, the campaigns follow two paths in their appeals to the Jewish community — Bush has to demonstrate his worthiness and Gore has to maintain his.

The Gore campaign says the vice president's meeting last week with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations was nothing out of the ordinary and Gore will continue his long-standing commitment to the Jewish community.

"The vice president's entire career has been marked by dialogue with the Jewish community," says Peter Ragone, a Gore spokesman.

Gore doesn't need to change his strategy to secure Jewish support for the general election in November, agrees Democratic pollster Mark Mellman, who says that Gore's record on Israel and domestic policies jibes with those of most Jewish voters.

In both 1992 and 1996, the Clinton-Gore team won about 80 percent of the Jewish vote.

Bush, on the other hand, faces a more uphill battle for Jewish support.

Jewish Republicans number an estimated 15 percent of the overall Jewish electorate, and many Republican candidates have trouble attracting Jewish supporters, who are traditionally liberal or moderate on social issues.

But the number of Jews who vote Republican can fluctuate a good deal depending on the candidate. Republicans received the highest percentage of Jewish votes in 1956, when 40 percent voted for Dwight Eisenhower; in 1980, Ronald Reagan won 39 percent.

Bush's speech at the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles last week may have been a signal to the Jewish community that he is reaching out.

"It was a first and important step," says Bush spokeswoman Mindy Tucker. "It sets the tone for the rest of the campaign."

Bush has been stressing the themes of religious tolerance and unity lately and may use this issue to attract more Jewish support.

Despite his lack of experience in foreign policy, Bush has tried to put forth some strong positions on issues relating to Israel. He has sought to portray as too aggressive — and a problem for Israel — the current administration's desire to conclude an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, despite the Israeli government's general support of the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Syria worried about Barak

Syria is concerned about what it sees as the weakness of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and his government, a British journalist considered close to Syrian leader Hafez Assad said this week.

Patrick Seale said Syria is worried about the Knesset's recent preliminary passage of a bill that would make it harder for a referendum on a peace deal to pass.

### Israel ordered to pay Palestinians

In a precedent-setting ruling, an Israeli court ordered the state to pay about \$169,000 in damages to five Palestinians injured by Israeli soldiers during the Palestinian uprising.

The judge said the state failed to prove the plaintiffs had thrown stones and even if it had, breaking fingers is not considered "reasonable force."

### Palestinians to teach Israeli Lit.

The Palestinian Authority said it plans to introduce Israeli literature in its schools.

"This decision is a response to the racist incitement campaign conducted by Israeli media and political forums" against the decision by Israeli Education Minister Yossi Sarid to include works by a Palestinian poet in Israeli schools, said the Palestinian culture minister, Yasser Abed Rabbo.

After Rabbo's announcement, Sarid told him in a phone conversation that they are "partners in the struggle against the people of yesterday."

### Missing taxi driver went to beach

An Israeli taxi driver reported missing after he said he was taking Palestinians to the West Bank was located in the Red Sea resort of Eilat.

Gideon Shabali said he was unaware of the concern over his whereabouts, adding that he had been having troubles at home and traveled to Eilat to "clear his head."

Clinton-Gore approach. Bush has also said that if elected, he would immediately begin work on moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But appealing to Jewish hawks and attacking Gore could be a tricky road for Bush, considering the small number of hawkish voters in the Jewish community and Gore's strong pro-Israel record.

Even drawing attention to his positions on Israel may be counterproductive, say some analysts, given his father's decreasing support among Jewish voters.

In 1988, the candidate's father, former President Bush, won more than 30 percent of the Jewish vote, but he only received 12 percent in his 1992 re-election bid. The decrease was seen in part as Jewish disapproval over the Bush administration's policies toward Israel.

Some Republicans fear the legacy of the older Bush will follow the younger. But others believe the Texas governor also has positions on domestic issues — such as education, taxes and the military — that will appeal to Jewish voters.

"We are optimistic we can make significant inroads," says Matthew Brooks, the executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition. "Gov. Bush has a positive message of inclusion."

Bush can reach out to a traditionally non-Republican constituency, Brooks says, and he will continue to aggressively court Jewish voters.

"He will not write off the Jewish vote," Brooks adds.

For their part, Democrats believe it is Gore who sits squarely in line with the Jewish community when it comes to policy — particularly health care, education, gun control and abortion rights.

"This campaign can be fought and won in the Jewish community purely on the issues," says David Harris, deputy executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

Nevertheless, Gore will actively pursue Jewish support and try to energize Jewish voters, according to Jewish Democrats.

"He won't take anything for granted," Harris says.

Bush, it seems, cannot even take the support of registered Jewish Republicans for granted, given that he was not the clear choice in some of the primaries while Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) was still in the race.

Jewish Republicans in New York, according to Voter News Service exit polls, overwhelmingly chose McCain over Bush, 58 percent to 28 percent, and in California, exit polls showed McCain with 21 percent and Bush with 4 percent of the Jewish vote.

As Bush embarks on the long stretch to November, one way he can reach out more to the Jewish community is to give a major speech to a prominent Jewish group, suggests Joseph Gildenhorn, the finance chairman for the Bush campaign in the Washington area.

"As Jews realize he is a centrist and he is inclusive, Jews will be attracted to him," Gildenhorn predicts.

In both campaigns, fund raising — even as campaign finance reform is shaping up to be a contentious election issue — will be a key objective in the weeks and months ahead.

Gildenhorn says that to raise more funds, the Bush campaign has to seek out new supporters and win over former McCain backers. Gildenhorn says he hopes to do that in the Jewish and non-Jewish world.

Raising funds for Gore in the Jewish community has never been a problem, says David Steiner, a past president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and a fund-raiser for the Gore campaign in New Jersey.

The fund raising for Gore as well as for the Democratic Party has been "overwhelmingly Jewish," according to Morris Amitay, a former executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, who currently runs Washington PAC, pro-Israel political action committee.

Campaign contributions translate into access, Amitay says, and for Jews that means they can bring their domestic agenda and issues concerning the Jewish state right to the candidate.

When it comes to seeking Jewish financial support, Steiner says, Gore will just "keep doing what he's doing." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### U.S. deports former Nazi

A former member of the Nazi SS who was deported after living in the United States for nearly 45 years arrived Tuesday in Austria. Ferdinand Hammer, 78, was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in 1996 for concealing his wartime activities.

Hammer faces no charges in Austria, according to officials in Vienna, whose comments drew criticism from the top U.S. Nazi hunter.

"It is dismaying that such an announcement was made before the Austrian government even investigated the case," said Eli Rosenbaum of the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations.

### Clergy to condemn gun violence

Religious leaders plan to join U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo on Wednesday in calling for an end to gun violence.

An interfaith letter of support, organized by the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, has gathered more than 100 signatures of religious leaders who say the number and severity of recent shootings is a "national epidemic."

### WJC to push Austria for assets

Austria is holding some \$10 billion in assets that belonged to Jews killed in the Holocaust, according to the secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress.

Israel Singer cited a declassified U.S. document showing that the Austrian government took possession of the money in 1953.

WJC officials say they plan to use the document to press Austria to pay compensation.

### Latvia probes WWII officer

The Australian Jewish community is welcoming reports that Latvia is investigating an Australian citizen who allegedly participated in the killing of thousands of Jews during World War II.

Australia's own investigation into Karlis Ozols, accused of being a senior officer in the wartime Latvian security police, was abandoned in 1992, when Australia closed its Special Investigations Unit.

### K.C. kosher wine gets the cork

A kosher food store in Kansas City, Kan., is now forbidden from selling wine to individuals unless they are "purchasing it on behalf of a church or religious organization."

The Kansas Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control previously allowed Jacobson's Strictly Kosher Foods, the only kosher store in the city, to sell wine for home use even though it lacks a liquor license.

But it recently reversed this policy, forcing many Jews to travel to Missouri for their Passover and Shabbat wine.

## Poll finds many Swiss do not believe their country need apologize to Jews

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK (JTA) — A large percentage of the Swiss are not troubled by their nation's treatment of Jews during World War II, according to a just-released poll.

The survey's results appear to indicate that despite several years of accusations about Switzerland's wartime record — as well as the critical findings of two highly respected commissions dealing with the issue — many Swiss stolidly adhere to the notion that their nation has nothing to be embarrassed about.

The survey, conducted for the American Jewish Committee and released Wednesday, found that 45 percent of the 1,210 Swiss interviewed in January agreed with the statement, "Switzerland has nothing to apologize about for its behavior toward Jews during World War II." Thirty-nine percent disagreed, and 16 percent didn't know.

Switzerland was a "natural" choice for the study because of all the focus on its wartime actions, according to AJCommittee spokesman Kenneth Bandler.

He said the AJCommittee plans to present the poll's findings to the Swiss Ministry of Education with the goal of having Holocaust studies included in school curricula.

Bandler said the survey pointed to a "schizophrenia" in Swiss attitudes toward their government's wartime behavior.

This "puzzling" attitude, he said, was borne out by one of the study's findings: Although 57 percent of the respondents agreed with the conclusion of a commission of historians last December that Switzerland turned away Jewish refugees who were in danger of being killed by the Nazis, 43 percent nonetheless felt that the Swiss admitted the "right amount of Jewish refugees" during the war. By comparison, 35 percent said "too few" and 4 percent said "too many."

The survey was conducted a month after the panel of historians, known as the Bergier Commission, concluded that Switzerland "declined to help people in mortal danger." Many of those turned away at the border were given directly to the Nazis, making Switzerland an accomplice in the Holocaust, the panel said.

A report also issued last December by another panel, known as the Volcker Commission, identified nearly 54,000 dormant accounts in Swiss banks that may have belonged to victims of the Nazis.

The Volcker panel's report lent credence to long-standing charges that the banks turned a deaf ear to the needs of Jewish depositors while snapping to the directives issued by officials in Nazi Germany.

Apparently a majority of the respondents were convinced by those findings, with 61 percent agreeing that the dormant accounts should be "transferred to Holocaust survivors or their heirs." Nine percent said the accounts should be "given to others," 8 percent that they should go to "Jewish organizations." Among some of the other responses given, 5 percent felt the accounts should be "kept by the banks."

At the same time, 65 percent of those interviewed adhered to the long-standing Swiss attitude that their government's behavior toward Nazi Germany was "justified, in order for Switzerland not to be invaded."

To the same multiple-response question, 42 percent said Switzerland "resisted the Nazis"; 27 percent that Switzerland "sympathized with the Nazis"; 26 percent that Switzerland acted "cowardly"; and 15 percent that Switzerland "zealously collaborated with the Nazis."

The poll was part of a broader series of surveys, dating back to 1992, that the AJCommittee carried out to probe awareness of Holocaust-related issues in various countries, including the United States, Britain, France, Australia, Germany, Austria, Poland and Russia. The poll also found:

- A solid majority favor keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive;
- Holocaust denial is rejected by nearly all of the respondents; and,
- The Swiss respondents ranked in the "middle of the scale" in terms of Holocaust awareness when compared to people in the other countries surveyed.

This last finding comes despite the fact that there has been a long succession of headline-making stories in Switzerland during the past several years about the Holocaust and the nation's wartime treatment of Jews. □

**AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD****Chechen captors target Jews for brutal treatment and death***By Lev Gorodetsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — A Jewish hostage was beaten to death by his Chechen captors several days ago in the latest report of brutality against kidnap victims in the North Caucasus.

Vyacheslav Izmailov, a retired Russian major who has arranged the release of dozens of hostages in Chechnya, told JTA he had recently tried to rescue Mikhail Kurnosov, 36, the son of a prominent Russian nuclear researcher. Kurnosov was kidnapped in January 1999 from a ski resort in the North Caucasus and held for ransom in Chechnya.

The Chechen guerrillas who have been fighting the Russian army are eager to get rid of their hostages, including several Jewish ones.

Anti-Semitism has been a feature throughout the Muslim fighters' campaign to break away from Russia.

"We are going to help the people of Dagestan overthrow the pro-Zionist Moscow regime," said one of the top Chechen warlords, Shamil Basayev, last August.

The same anti-Zionist rhetoric was used by Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov in speeches last summer in the Chechen capital of Grozny. Last summer was marked, according to the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League, by intensified anti-Semitic propaganda in Chechnya, including the mass distribution of leaflets and booklets such as the notorious tract "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

The materials were reportedly edited and printed in the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan.

In recent weeks, Russian Federal Security Bureau squads have been freeing more and more hostages, who are reporting the anti-Jewish bias of their Chechen captors.

"They treat Federal Security Service people and Jews the worst," said Alisher Orzaliyev, 22, an ethnic Khazakh from Central Asia, at a news conference in Moscow. Orzaliyev was held hostage for nearly a year in the basement of a house in the Chechen town of Urus-Martan.

In the same basement with Orzaliyev lived 15 prisoners from a variety of national and religious backgrounds, including two Polish female biologists, Zofia Fischer-Malanovska and Ewa Marchwinska-Wyrwal, who were kidnapped in Dagestan while observing rare species of mountain goats. The Poles were later transferred by the rebels to the town of Shatoy, where they were eventually freed later last month.

Oleg Yemelyantsev, 42, an Israeli citizen, was recently freed as well. Yemelyantsev, who came from Israel to sell his apartment, was kidnapped in April 1998 in southern Russia while driving his car. He was brought to the Chechen mountains, transferred from one gang to another and periodically beaten.

At least four armed gangs fought over him because Israeli hostages are expected to bring a hefty ransom.

"The treatment was very cruel and humiliating," said Yemelyantsev. "Once I was badly beaten on my back with sticks" and "my leg became paralyzed."

He added that a young Russian intelligence officer who stabbed one of the gang members during a mock funeral "was

stretched between the trees and had his head sawn off while alive. His head was then hoisted on a pole. We had to watch all that."

Yemelyantsev said this particular gang acts with extreme cruelty toward Jews. It's affiliated with the Wahabbites, a militant, Saudi-based Islamic sect active in Chechnya.

He considers himself relatively lucky. He only lost one finger, which was chopped off last August. The video of the "operation" was sent to his wife in Israel to support the ransom demands.

As Russian troops neared, the rebels collected their hostages and drove them deeper into the mountains.

"We had to walk in a canyon along a narrow path over a mountain river. Sometimes heavily loaded people slipped off and fell into the river and had to swim and walk in the ice-cold water. But we didn't want to die," said Yemelyantsev.

Even hostages who are freed can run into problems.

Roman Ashurov, 61, a Mountain Jew from the city of Nalchik, was released recently after having spent a year in captivity.

Weak and sick after being cruelly tortured by his captors, Ashurov was slowly making his way to Nalchik when he was detained by the Russian security officers and taken to the notorious detention camp of Chernokozovo.

There he met Andrei Babitsky, the journalist for the U.S.-funded Radio Liberty who was arrested in January by Russian troops — and disappeared for three weeks in a mysterious prisoner swap.

After learning about Ashurov's case, the journalist talked to the prison authorities. Only then was Ashurov released from the detention camp and allowed to return home.

Izmailov, who brokered Ashurov's original release, said there are more than 800 hostages, including several dozen Jews, still held in captivity in Chechnya.

"I don't think the kidnappings will stop soon. It has become too profitable of a business in Chechnya, and many police officers across Caucasus cooperate with the kidnappers," he says.

Ishaya Abramov, a leader of the Russian Jewish Congress, says the kidnappings "will not stop until all Jews leave" the Caucasus.

And the case of a Jewish businessman Savi Azaryev, who spent some time in the same basement with Oleg Yemelyantsev, shows that the plague of kidnappings is spreading outside the Caucasus and into other parts of Russia.

Azaryev was kidnapped in the city of Volgograd, several hundreds of miles away from the Caucasus and brought to Chechnya.

His brothers recently paid his ransom after receiving film of two of his fingers being cut off. □

**Feminist group returns for Purim**

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Jewish feminist group that sent out provocative Rosh Hashanah cards and advertisements last fall has resurfaced for Purim.

The New York-based Jewish Women Watching, which operates anonymously, is distributing to various Jewish agencies groggers bearing the slogan "drown out sexism."

The noisemakers are accompanied by a card that states Esther "spoke on behalf of the entire Jewish people," while contemporary U.S. Jewish women are underrepresented on boards of Jewish organizations and suffer from workplace sexual harassment. □