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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

NAACP blasts racist comment

The NAACP may suspend the president of its Dallas branch because of anti-Semitic comments he made about Joseph Lieberman, Al Gore's running mate.

"I think we need to be very suspicious of any kind of partnerships between the Jews at that kind of level because we know that their interest primarily has to do with money and these kind of things," Lee Alcorn said on a radio talk show.

Kweisi Mfume, national president of the NAACP, condemned the remarks as "repulsive, anti-Semitic, anti-NAACP and anti-American."

Lieberman: Faith won't be issue

Democratic vice presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman said he believes Americans will not vote for or against him based on his faith and that there has not been too much focus on his religion.

Appearing on NBC's "Today" show, Lieberman, an observant Jew, also said his observance of Shabbat would not interfere with his duties as vice president.

Wiesenthal gets high medal

Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal was among 15 people who received the highest U.S. civilian honor. Praising his "relentless pursuit of justice," President Clinton awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom at a White House ceremony Wednesday.

In a statement, Wiesenthal, who has worked on over a thousand cases involving Nazi war criminals, said he accepted the medal "not as a personal honor, but as a custodian of those in whose memory I have dedicated my life."

Russian anti-Semitism rising

Anti-Semitic threats and hate crimes increased dramatically across Russia and became institutionalized in several regions during 1998 and 1999, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews says.

The group charges that the Communist Party has revived anti-Semitism on a national level and Jews cannot count on the police for protection.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, Aug. 11.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

The Democratic Party's convention will also be one big Jewish shindig

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The story goes that a young man gets an entry-level job with the Democratic National Committee in the nation's capital and for his first assignment is told by his boss to buy Christmas decorations for the upcoming office party.

"I'm not sure whether I'm the right person," protests the young man. "You see, I'm Jewish."

"So is everybody else," says the boss. "Get the decorations."

The story is slightly exaggerated, of course.

When the Democrats meet for their national convention Aug. 14-17, an estimated 10 percent of the delegates will be Jewish.

But the curve rises sharply among party leaders, and even more steeply among big financial contributors.

The choice of Sen. Joseph Lieberman as Al Gore's running mate has instantly raised the emotional stakes of Jewish delegates and voters in the November elections.

Besides offering party politics and political parties, the convention will bring together many of America's most influential Jews for the first time since the unsuccessful Camp David negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

"They'll have plenty to talk about," says well-connected activist Donna Bojarsky.

The chain starts with venture capitalist Eli Broad and music mogul David Geffen, two of the three-man team that brought the Democratic convention to Los Angeles.

Co-chairs of the convention are California's two Jewish senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. Guiding much of the proceedings will be Democratic Party Chairman Edward Rendell, the former mayor of Philadelphia.

Among Al Gore's closest advisors is Leon Fuerth, the presumptive nominee's longtime national security aide, who is considered a sure bet to become national security adviser if Gore becomes president. Influential foreign policy advisers are Los Angeles attorney Mel Levine and Marc Ginsburg, who co-chaired Gore's Middle East advisory committee, and Joan Spero, an expert on international economic policy. Veteran publicist Steve Rabinowitz is a Gore consultant.

Key campaign strategists at the Democratic National Committee in Washington and Gore headquarters in Nashville include general election campaign chairman John Giesser, Josh Wachs, Laurie Moskowitz, Eric Kleinfeld, Deborah Mohile and research director David Ginsberg.

Contributing, or raising, the big bucks on the West Coast are the DreamWorks film trio of Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and Geffen, ex-MCA chief Lew Wasserman and TV mogul Haim Saban. On the East Coast, some heavy hitters are David Steiner of New Jersey, New Yorkers John Tisch and Steve Ratner, Oren Kramer and Jack Rosen, president of the American Jewish Congress.

Patrolling the Jewish beat for the party is the National Jewish Democratic Council, whose executive director, Ira Forman, believes that 75 to 80 percent of Jewish voters will mark their ballots for Gore in November.

The council's deputy executive director, David Harris, sees a Jewish edge for the party on three main issues: Israel — "George W. has no record on Israel and Dick Cheney has a poor record," he says — on church-state separation and abortion rights.

Closer to election time, NJDC plans to mail up to 500,000 voter guides to Jewish

MIDEAST FOCUS

Barak denies offer was made

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Office dismissed as "speculation" comments by a Palestinian Authority official that at the Camp David summit Israel proposed evacuating all the Jews from Hebron.

Netanyahu looks for support

Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with heads of opposition parties to ask if they would back him for prime minister, Israel Radio reported.

A poll in the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot predicted he would garner more support than incumbent Ehud Barak if elections were held today.

Lebanese force avoids border

A force of 1,000 Lebanese police and soldiers deployed in southern Lebanon. The force did not take up positions along the Israeli-Lebanese border, which Lebanon says it will not defend.

Palestinian drowns saving Israeli

A Palestinian drowned after he saved a 6-year-old Israeli boy in the Sea of Galilee.

Omri Jadda, himself an inexperienced swimmer, dove in when he saw the boy struggling, and kept his head above water until rescuers came. Israeli legislators promised to help his pregnant wife and two children.

Egypt blasts rabbi's comments

Egypt's foreign minister blasted the spiritual leader of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party for calling Arabs "snakes" during his weekly sermon.

Ovadia Yosef's comments are "an expression of a racist outlook and represent an insult to the Arabs as a race and nation," Amre Moussa said Wednesday. "On the basis of these statements one can interpret a lot about Israeli political behavior toward the peace process and other issues."



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households, targeting some 35 districts with competitive House and Senate races.

Jewish activists were also strongly involved in the deliberations of the platform committee, among them Howard Welinsky, chairman of Democrats for Israel. His amendment to the Middle East plank, warning against "a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood," was adopted.

Parties are a Los Angeles specialty and Jewish hosts aim to hold their own.

The largest blowout will be on Aug. 13, the day before the convention opens, when more than 1,000 people will celebrate at Sony Pictures Studios.

The affair will be co-hosted by the NJDC; the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC; the United Jewish Communities, representing all Jewish federation in the United States; and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles.

"This is the first time we've had such across-the-board sponsorship," says AIPAC spokesman Kenneth Bricker. "It's a great way to express Jewish unity on Israel."

Promising the most fun is the Shadow Convention, conceived by feisty columnist Arianna Huffington, which is scheduling interludes for satire and humor at their daily sessions.

The serious part of the agenda, spotlighting "the corrupting influence of money in politics, poverty and growing inequalities between poor and rich, and the failed war on drugs," is attracting a considerable contingent of liberal Jews.

Stanley Sheinbaum, a longtime Democratic stalwart and donor, will bypass his old comrades in favor of the Shadow Convention.

So will Rita Lowenthal, who is incensed at the jailing of nonviolent drug users, and Ralph Fertig, a civil rights activist of the 1960s, who is particularly concerned about the widening gap between rich and poor. He will also march in a demonstration drawing attention to the plight of Kurds in the Middle East.

The Arbeiter Ring/Workmen's Circle, Sholem and Progressive Jewish Alliance will participate in a rally in the garment district to protest worker exploitation in sweatshops, an issue that is drawing heavy Jewish support.

Police and public officials are predicting that some 50,000 protesters will descend on downtown Los Angeles. Spokesmen for the protest movements say these estimates are vastly exaggerated, mainly because organized labor, which provided most of the bodies for the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, is staying on the sidelines in Los Angeles.

The loose coordinating body for the convention protests is D2KLA, whose main march on Aug. 14 will proceed under the slogan "Human Need, Not Corporate Greed," says spokeswoman Margaret Prescod.

Another major protest force will be the Berkeley, Calif.-based Ruckus Society — as in raising a ruckus — which has been training its adherents in civil disobedience tactics and nonviolent resistance.

Prescod and Ruckus program director Han Chan agree that between 10 to 20 percent of their adherents are Jewish, with a somewhat higher percentage in the leadership ranks.

That's well below Jewish participation in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War protest movements of the 1950s and '60s, which frequently ran as high as 30 to 40 percent, and considerably higher among the leadership of such organizations as the Students for a Democratic Society.

"I think the difference is not that there are fewer Jewish protesters than in the past, but proportionately they are less significant because of the upsurge of other activists, mainly Latinos and Asian Americans, who were largely absent in the 1960s," says James Lafferty, executive director of the National Lawyers Guild, the legal support group for the Los Angeles protesters.

Tom Hayden, a leader of the street protests that almost paralyzed the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago and now a California state senator, detects another difference between Jewish activists then and now.

Hayden, who is of Irish descent, believes that "the Jewish kids active in the 1960s, though they may have been alienated from their parents, were consciously Jewish in their approach to politics, citing scripture and Jewish social tradition to explain their activism. This kind of underpinning didn't surface during this year's Seattle protests and I see little of it now." □

JEWISH WORLD

Jesse Jackson lauds V.P. choice

Al Gore's selection of Joseph Lieberman as his running mate will further break down the barriers of religion and race, the Rev. Jesse Jackson said.

"Let the nation rejoice. The tent is getting bigger and better," the black civil rights leader said Tuesday. "Another barrier falls and another opportunity arises. A political risk, a moral certainty."

Envoy backtracks on Jerusalem

Germany's future ambassador to Israel backed off remarks calling for Jerusalem to become an international city.

Rudolf Dressler, who will take his post Sept. 1 and was roundly criticized in the German media for his original stance, said Wednesday that "this is not a matter for an ambassador" to discuss.

In an editorial, the mass circulation Bild wrote, "Should this diplomatic dilettante really represent Germany?"

In another development, the Vatican renewed its call for international guarantees for sacred sites in the Holy Land.

The Vatican also reaffirmed its support for the rights of the Palestinians after talks between its foreign minister, Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, and Nabil Sha'ath, the Palestinian Authority's planning minister.

ADL presses Czech government

The Anti-Defamation League called on the Czech government to take a firm stand against racist behavior as attacks against Gypsies, or Roma, increase.

"The insulting and inhuman behavior of skin-head and right-extremist groups does a disservice to the reputation of the Czech Republic," the ADL said in a letter to the Czech government.

Lieberman offered kosher food

An Orthodox rabbinical council in California is offering to help vice presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman with his kosher food needs during next week's Democratic convention in Los Angeles.

An aide to the Connecticut senator — selected by Al Gore to be his running mate in November's election — welcomed the offer by the Rabbinical Council of California and asked for a list of local kosher restaurants and catering services, said Rabbi Meyer May, the council's president.

Lieberman book moving up charts

Democratic vice presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman's recent book, "In Praise of Public Life," has reportedly skyrocketed to No. 28 on the bestseller list of Amazon.com, the giant online retailer.

Lieberman's Orthodox Judaism becomes the news flavor of the day

By Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jews aren't particularly comfortable with their faith being splashed across the nation's headlines.

But with Sen. Joseph Lieberman, an observant Jew, running for vice president, U.S. Jews better get used to it.

Discussions of Lieberman's Judaism formed much of the coverage of Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore's choice of the Connecticut senator.

Most Jews expressed pride and joy that a Jew could be just a heartbeat away from the White House.

"Is he Democrat or Republican?" asked Moshe Koot of Miami Beach, who was quoted in the Miami Herald. "A Democrat? Then I'm a Democrat."

Koot's comments came in an article that emphasized the pride of South Florida's Jews in the selection.

But a different reaction came from Beth Farber in a Chicago Tribune article that also tracked the Jewish response.

"People don't want to say they are anti-Semitic, but we don't know what goes through people's heads when they vote," Farber was quoted as saying during a break from a Torah session.

Many of the Jews quoted in the Chicago Tribune article said they were surprised to hear about Lieberman's selection.

The Miami Herald article also mentioned the unease reported by the president of the Arab American Institute, who said he had received anxious phone calls.

"People are very sensitive. People are nervous. People want to know that we are not going to be locked out," said James Zogby.

Zogby said, however, that Lieberman has worked to increase the participation of Arab Americans in the Democratic Party.

In one of its articles, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution took a different tack — one that also appeared in several U.S. newspapers — of dismissing any potential conflicts between Lieberman's job tasks and his religious observance.

"In the Senate, he has cast votes on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, although he has worked to adhere to restrictions on using cars on the Sabbath," wrote Mark Sherman in an article headlined, "Religion no conflict with job, senator says."

Many of the congratulatory editorials in U.S. newspapers on Lieberman's selection mentioned the centrist vision and strong moral voice he has made his hallmark.

Many also called his announcement a breakthrough for the United States — and for Jews. "Yes, Mr. Lieberman's Judaism will bother some less enlightened voters. But the country has changed since 1960, when John Kennedy had to overcome the notion that a Catholic could not run the country," said the Dallas Morning News.

But today, the paper added, "politics is dominated by baby boomers who were shaped by the civil rights revolution, which should make Sen. Lieberman's faith less of a make-or-break issue."

On the Internet, the Anti-Defamation League reported that anti-Semitic messages are sprouting on the Internet following Gore's selection of Lieberman.

The ADL, which monitors hate speech on the Internet, said such messages are appearing on message boards, discussion groups and e-mail lists.

"Why didn't Gore pick a religious black man or a devout Hispanic or white ethnic Catholic to be his running mate?" asked one person on the Jewish community message board on America Online. "You know why, Jewish money supports, and Jews run, the Democratic Party!"

But some messages on this board were less incendiary.

"This man must be on call 24/7. Sorry I can't see that he can do that," read one posting.

"Well, he and his rabbi can. Orthodox Jewish doctors are on call 24/7," read a response. □

(JTA intern Brian Seidman in New York contributed to this report.)

Hadassah Lieberman is known for hard work and volunteerism

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Minutes after the official announcement that her husband would be the first Jewish vice presidential candidate on a major ticket, Hadassah Lieberman stepped on to the national stage.

"Here I am the daughter of survivors from the Holocaust, the most horrendous thing that happened," she said Tuesday, standing with Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore, and his wife, Tipper, and her own husband, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, at a World War II memorial in Nashville.

"And here I am in the place that commemorates the American heroes, the soldiers who actually liberated my mother in Dachau and Auschwitz."

She immediately added her gratitude for being an American and said, "Whether you and your family immigrated from Europe, Africa, Mexico, Latin America or Asia, I am standing here for you. This country is our country!"

Born Hadassah Freilich in postwar Czechoslovakia, Lieberman is the daughter of two Holocaust survivors.

Her mother, Ella, survived both Auschwitz and Dachau and her father, Samuel, survived a Nazi labor camp.

The family immigrated to the United States in the early 1950s, when she was 3 years old.

Lieberman, 52, grew up in Gardner, Mass., where her father served as a congregational rabbi.

A graduate of Boston University, Lieberman has spent most of her career doing public relations on health-related issues. Until recently, she worked for the National Research Council, working to involve American corporations in mathematics and science education reform.

She has also worked with the Hospital of Saint Raphael in New Haven, Conn., and for Pfizer, the pharmaceutical giant.

The Liebermans met in 1982, a meeting once-divorced Joseph Lieberman described in his book, "In Praise of Public Life," as "chemistry at first conversation and later that day, love at first sight."

Lieberman's first husband, Rabbi Gordon Tucker, is a former rabbinical school dean at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and now a congregational rabbi in suburban New York.

Her son from that marriage, Ethan, is a third-year rabbinical student and doctoral candidate at JTS.

Known in Washington for her volunteerism, Lieberman has been particularly active as a board member in the nondenominational Jewish day school from which the Liebermans' 12-year-old daughter, Hana, recently graduated.

Susan Koss, head of the Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital, said the Liebermans "truly are wonderful people, nonpretentious and honest.

"She's willing to work. She doesn't just sit and have her name on stationery, but puts forth effort. She doesn't undertake jobs she won't fulfill."

Lieberman has also volunteered with the American Committee for Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem, organizing a delegation to Israel for a U.S.-Israel conference on women's health

issues, and creating an advisory network on women's health.

The Liebermans have also supported the Chabad Lubavitch movement, one of the country's largest and most visible Chasidic streams.

Rabbi Levi Shemtov, director of the Washington office of American Friends of Lubavitch, said Hadassah Lieberman "has probably personally touched hundreds if not thousands of lives in Washington, D.C." and "exudes warmth and a caring that comes across as very real."

"Her greatest passion is to take people that have been divided and unite them," he said.

The rabbi noted that Lieberman strives to bring together Jews of different streams.

Maybe Hadassah Lieberman's "whole life is a revenge on Hitler," Shemtov said.

"Here we have two people who according to Hitler's ugly plan should have been annihilated, but actually survived to produce half a team that is in line to lead the United States." □

A year after JCC shooting, case has not gone to trial

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — It's been a year since Buford Furrow Jr. allegedly burst into the North Valley Jewish Community Center here and started shooting, and the case against him is still slowly winding its way through the legal system.

Furrow, 38, is accused of wounding three young boys, a teenage counselor and a receptionist at the Jewish center on Aug. 10, 1999, with 70 bullets from a semiautomatic assault weapon. He is also accused of killing U.S. mail carrier Joseph Iletto on the same day.

The decision to seek the death penalty, approved by U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, brought into play numerous legal moves by the prosecution and defense, which automatically delayed the beginning of the trial.

Originally set to start Nov. 14, the trial date was postponed to Feb. 6 of next year by U.S. District Judge Nora Manella to give Furrow's lawyer additional time to prepare.

The judge noted that 5,000 pages of documents had already been turned over to the defense— and there could be more.

Although Furrow doesn't have enough money to hire his own lawyers, he is assured legal representation by the federal public defender's office, which has assigned two of its top attorneys to the case.

The public defenders representing Furrow must tell the court by Aug. 18 whether they plan to invoke an insanity plea for their client, who has spent time in a mental hospital in the state of Washington.

Furrow, a white supremacist and member of the Aryan Nations, turned himself in to the FBI office in Las Vegas the day after the shooting rampage and allegedly told agents that his attack on the Jewish center was "a wake-up call to Americans to kill Jews."

Should Furrow be sentenced to death, it is questionable whether the sentence would be carried out.

There has not been a single federal execution in the United States in nearly 40 years. □