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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Suicide bomber strikes in Gaza

In a suicide attack in the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian rode a bicycle to an Israel Defense Forces post and detonated explosives, killing himself and slightly wounding an Israeli army soldier.

Relatives of the 24-year-old Palestinian said he was affiliated with Islamic Jihad and said they were very proud of his actions. Israel's army commander in the area called the attack a "disgusting" example of the Palestinians' use of a young person, whose school bag was packed with a "sandwich and a bomb."

Israel rejects plan for U.N. troops

Israel rejected a call by the Palestinian observer to the United Nations that international forces be stationed in the territories to protect Palestinians.

An Israeli spokesman said the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be resolved through direct negotiations with mediation by a third party. U.N. Security Council representatives are due to hold "informal" talks on the Palestinian request.

Jewish group seeks U.N. help

Officials of the Simon Wiesenthal Center met with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Thursday to demand a reaction to the global spate of anti-Semitic incidents linked to violence in the Middle East.

"Not since the Nazi Kristallnacht in November 1938 have so many synagogues been attacked in so short a period of time, and frankly, U.N. resolutions have been a contributing factor," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean and founder of the center.

Several organs of the world body have recently passed resolutions that blamed Israel entirely for the Middle East bloodshed.

Answers sought on wartime pope

Roman Catholic and Jewish scholars still have unanswered questions regarding the role Pope Pius XII played during the Holocaust.

A panel studying the issue says it's confident the Vatican will supply them with documents to fill in the blanks. The group described the pope as a diplomat who fruitlessly attempted to use diplomacy with the Nazis as they were murdering Jews. But, said Eva Fleischner, a Catholic on the six-member team, "That simply didn't work when confronted with the Nazi machinery."

ELECTIONS 2000

Legislative hurdles expected no matter who controls Congress

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With the November elections just around the corner, Jewish observers and activists are predicting that no matter who wins control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, the Jewish communal agenda will encounter some of the same legislative hurdles it faced in the 106th session.

Many feel that even if the Democrats win back either the House or the Senate, the margin for the majority will be too slim to see significant movement to overcome those hurdles.

"Margins will determine the degree of work that gets done," said Diana Aviv, vice president of public policy for United Jewish Communities, the Jewish community's central fund-raising and social service agency.

Much would also depend on who wins the White House.

In the House, a net gain of six seats would give the Democrats a majority, while a net gain of five seats would change the leadership in the Senate.

Democrats are thought to have a good chance at winning the House and a more distant chance at winning the Senate.

A Democratic-controlled Congress would be different in style and approach, but there would be few major differences in the actual policies enacted, according to Norman Ornstein, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

"Neither side will have the troops to do what they want," he said.

As a result, Reva Price, Washington representative for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, expects the same kinds of logjams that occurred this past year on controversial domestic issues such as gun control and hate crimes.

"It will still be difficult to make things happen," she said.

The 106th Congress passed only a few pieces of legislation that had been pushed hard by Jewish groups.

Among them:

- a compromise bill, which provides religious liberty protections to prisoners and patients, and which eases restrictive zoning laws that block religious institutions from building;
- a bill that allows victims of terrorism and their families to collect damages against countries that sponsor terrorism; and
- the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which provides funding for domestic violence programs.

Legislation whose status remained unclear as Congress worked to conclude its session this week includes:

- national hate crimes legislation, which would expand federal protection to victims of crimes motivated by sexual orientation, gender or disability;
- certain gun control measures;
- a bill to exempt restitution payments to Holocaust survivors from income taxes;
- restoration of immigrant benefits that were cut by welfare reform legislation; and
- cutting off aid to the Palestinians if they unilaterally declare a state.

While there is division in the Jewish community over a number of issues, many Jewish groups band together on a range of issues.

Jewish organizations feel they were successful in quashing school voucher initiatives, a resolution that would have blamed Turkey for its early 20th-century

MIDEAST FOCUS

Sharon may still join government

Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon said he has not ruled out joining an emergency unity government with Prime Minister Ehud Barak despite sharp opposition to the idea in Sharon's Likud Party. At the same time, Sharon said he would move for new elections if any clause of a unity agreement were violated and would pull out of any partnership if Barak returned to peace talks.

In a related development, former Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said he is opposed to a return to politics by his successor as party leader, Benjamin Netanyahu. Shamir said a national unity government with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is preferable to reinstating Netanyahu to the party leadership. Shamir blamed Netanyahu for causing disunity in the party and said he would repeat the same mistakes. "The Arabs are the same Arabs, the sea is the same sea, and Netanyahu is the same Netanyahu," Shamir said.

Mordechai again denies charges

Former Israeli Cabinet minister Yitzhak Mordechai denied all charges against him during his trial in Jerusalem.

Mordechai has been charged with sexually harassing and committing forced indecent acts on three women over the course of eight years. Together, the charges against Mordechai carry a maximum sentence of 12 years in prison.

Tourists cancelling travel plans

Thousands of tourists have cancelled their plans to travel to Israel because of the ongoing violence with the Palestinians.

The Israel Hotel Association is projecting that the tourism industry will lose \$500 million to \$600 million during the winter months and that as a result some 10,000 employees will lose their jobs. Israel's national airline, El Al, this week reported a cancellation rate of 15 percent.

genocide against Armenians and a bill that would have outlawed "partial-birth" abortions.

But other issues not supported by most Jewish groups, such as charitable choice measures, were included in mental health and substance abuse legislation.

Charitable choice, passed in 1996 as part of welfare reform, allows religious institutions to bid for government social service contracts.

Though foreign aid is usually left to the very end of the legislative session, full U.S. aid for Israel — nearly \$3 billion — was expected to pass.

Some controversial issues would likely be treated differently with a change in congressional leadership, where these same leaders play a key role in determining the agenda.

It would likely be more difficult in a Democratic-controlled Congress, for example, to push through more charitable choice measures.

Many Jewish groups are concerned that charitable choice programs could violate the separation of church and state as well as the religious liberties and civil rights of program beneficiaries and employees of service providers.

Both presidential candidates, Al Gore and George W. Bush, support charitable choice measures.

"Anyone can hold up legislation," said Democratic pollster Mark Mellman. "There will be a lot of power in the hands of individuals."

Similarly, important committee leadership positions would change hands if Democrats gained control of Congress, though it's not always certain who would take charge of a committee.

If the Republicans lose control in the House after the election, Rep. Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.) would lose his chairmanship of the foreign operations appropriations subcommittee.

Callahan has been a thorn in the side of Jewish activists, and this year he tried to cut part of the foreign aid package to Israel to express his disagreement with a planned Israeli sale of advanced weaponry to China.

On the Senate side, the Foreign Relations Committee chairman, Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), also unsuccessfully attempted to place some restrictions on aid to send a message to Israel because of the China deal.

Israel ultimately ceded to U.S. pressure to cancel the deal.

If the Democrats should gain control of the Senate, Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), who is seen as more of a friend to the Jewish community than Helms, is the likely choice for committee chairman.

The House International Relations Committee, long presided over by the lone Jewish Republican, Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), would likely be turned over to Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D-Conn.), who is also Jewish. Both men are supportive of Israel issues.

The agenda for the next year is also set in large part by the president, and the race between Gore and Bush remains close.

Certainly whoever wins the presidency will have the leading role in deciding U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere.

With the region very volatile right now, either Gore or Bush will need congressional support for his plans there.

Likewise, either Gore or Bush could be pushed to take certain actions. For example if the Palestinians decide to unilaterally declare a state, Congress is likely to push to end economic aid to the Palestinians.

Though the chances of reviving the peace process now appear remote, a dramatic shift could mean the quest for more U.S. funds to bolster a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

With foreign aid in general always a battle on Capitol Hill, securing additional funding could be a problem, say analysts.

Pushing a financial package from the United States will be "problematic" no matter who is in control of Congress, Ornstein said.

Last year Jewish organizations had to fight hard for \$1.8 billion in special funding that was promised to Israel and the Palestinians when they reached an agreement at the 1998 Wye agreement. □



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JEWISH WORLD

ELECTIONS 2000

Congressional races to watch as Election Day draws closer

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Why do Jews watch certain congressional races more closely than others? Sometimes there's interest in a particular Jewish candidate.

The 106th Congress had 23 Jewish representatives and 11 Jewish senators. At least a dozen new Jewish candidates running for the U.S. House of Representatives, nearly all of them Democrats, could get elected next month, significantly boosting the Jewish presence in Congress.

Sometimes races are watched closely because the Jewish vote could make a difference. Sometimes a particular candidate's positions either turn on or turn off Jewish sensibilities. And sometimes close races are significant in terms of who would control Congress.

Among the key Senate races being monitored by Jewish political junkies:

- **The New York race** features Hillary Rodham Clinton, a Democrat, versus Rick Lazio, a Republican.

This race, which has garnered national attention from the outset, is close and likely to stay that way until Election Day. Analysts say the Jewish vote, which constitutes about 10 percent of the electorate, could be a major factor in the outcome. Both candidates are doing their best to gain ground in the Jewish community. But Clinton, the first lady, still carries baggage from her controversial kiss last year of Suha Arafat, the wife of the Palestinian Authority president; and Lazio, the U.S. representative from New York, was not well-known among Jewish voters until now.

- **The Michigan race** pits incumbent Spencer Abraham, a Republican, against Debbie Stabenow, the Democrat. Abraham, the only Arab American senator, was one of only two senators not to sign on to a recent letter to President Clinton condemning Yasser Arafat for failing to stop the violence. Michigan, a swing state in the presidential race, has more than 100,000 Jews and more than 300,000 Arab Americans.

- **In Nevada**, an open Democratic seat is being contested by Ed Bernstein, a Democrat, and John Ensign, a Republican. Bernstein, a well-known Jewish trial attorney, was down more than 30 points but recently pulled within four points of his opponent.

- **In New Jersey**, Jon Corzine, a Democrat, is competing against Bob Franks, a Republican, for the seat to replace the retiring Frank Lautenberg, a Jewish Democrat venerated by the Jewish community. Franks recently introduced a resolution admonishing the United States for not voting against the U.N. resolution that condemned Israel for the recent violence in the Middle East.

In the House of Representatives, key races to watch include:

- **In Florida's 22nd District**, incumbent Republican Clay Shaw is trying to stave off a challenge from Elaine Bloom, a Jewish Democrat. Shaw, a 20-year incumbent, is known for his work on welfare reform and he chairs the powerful Ways and Means subcommittee on Social Security. Bloom, a Jewish grandmother, might appeal to the more than 100,000 Jews in the South Florida district.

- **In Illinois' 10th District**, Lauren Beth Gash, a Jewish Democrat, is up against Mark Kirk, a Republican, for the seat of retiring Rep. John Porter. Gash is trying to appeal to the some 50,000 Jews in the North Shore area, near Chicago, where their vote could make a difference.

- **In Colorado's 6th District**, Ken Toltz, a Jewish Democrat, is vying against Republican incumbent Tom Tancredo. Toltz, a businessman, is considered the underdog, but Tancredo's conservatism may give him problems as gun control has become a major issue in this campaign. The district includes the town of Columbine, the scene last year of one of the worst school shootings in the United States.

- **In New Jersey's 3rd District**, Susan Bass Levin, a Jewish Democrat, is running against Jim Saxton, a 16-year Republican incumbent. Levin, the popular Jewish mayor of Cherry Hill, is running an effective campaign, say observers, and might succeed in getting the support of the district's some 30,000 Jews. □

State Dept. defends Gore

The U.S. State Department defended a 1995 pact that Vice President Al Gore negotiated with Moscow allowing Russia to sell conventional arms to Iran.

The State Department rejected Republican accusations that it skirted U.S. law. Democrats view the timing of Wednesday's hearing on the matter before a Senate subcommittee as a political tactic aimed at embarrassing Gore.

Center for Jewish archives opens

The Center for Jewish History in New York, a collection that includes 100 million archival materials and 500,000 books, officially opened on Thursday.

The Manhattan facility brings together the materials of five organizations: the American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and Yeshiva University Museum.

Work starts on new museum wing

A Jewish museum in New York broke ground Thursday for a \$60-million expansion that will more than triple its exhibition and teaching space and showcase survivor testimony compiled by Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust opened in downtown Manhattan in 1997 and depicts Jewish life before, during and after the Holocaust.

L.A.-area teachers get awards

Five Los Angeles-area Jewish day school teachers each received \$10,000 awards Thursday in recognition of their work.

The teaching awards, through the Milken Family Foundation and Bureau of Jewish Education, are believed to be the largest prizes in North America designated for honoring Jewish day school teachers.

Sukkah defaced, then burned

A sukkah in the Russian city of Kaliningrad was torched Oct. 18, one day after it was defaced with swastikas, according to the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League. The sukkah had been erected in a yard adjacent to the offices of the local Jewish community. Jewish officials there say a lack of funds is preventing them from setting up a security system.

Swimmer sets new world record

An Israeli swimmer set a new world record in the 100-meter free style at the Paralympics in Sydney, Australia. Keren Leibowitz swam the distance in 1:10.25. Israel has so far won four medals at the games, one gold, two silver and one bronze.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**Vienna Shoah memorial opens after long delay and controversy***By Edward Serrotta*

VIENNA (JTA) — For a country that has had more than a few problems facing its past, the decision to build Vienna's first Holocaust museum came almost easily.

It was the follow-through that was difficult, time-consuming and controversial.

Vienna's Holocaust Memorial in the inner city's Judenplatz was unveiled in a simple but moving ceremony Wednesday.

Among those attending the ceremony were Austrian President Thomas Klestil, and the leader of Austrian Jewry, Ariel Muzikant.

Klestil told the gathering of several hundred people that there is no place in Austria for racism or xenophobia of any kind.

The memorial, designed by British artist Rachel Whiteread, consists of a large, concrete cube. Three of its walls feature casts of books facing outward; the fourth, large double doors without handles.

Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal said that the books are important Jewish symbols. "Jewish monuments were seldom made of stone or metal. Our monuments were always books," he said, pointing out how enemies of the Jews have always burned books to try to eradicate their traditions.

The concrete platform on which the cube rests is engraved with the names of the Nazi concentration camps. The adjoining house provides access to the underground ruins of a synagogue dating back to the Middle Ages. A controversy over this ancient synagogue held up the memorial for years.

It started in December 1994 with an impassioned letter that Wiesenthal wrote to Vienna's mayor, Michael Hauepl.

Wiesenthal, who has lived in the city since the 1940s, stated that it was time for Vienna to construct a memorial to the 65,000 Viennese Jews deported and murdered during the Holocaust.

Hauepl immediately agreed, and the medieval Jewish quarter of Judenplatz was chosen as a logical location. It was expected that the memorial would be standing by 1996.

Neither Hauepl nor Wiesenthal knew then that before the memorial would open this week, it would take a total of six years, the \$2 million budget would spiral to four times the original estimate and the entire Jewish community would become embroiled in controversy.

Hauepl knew that digging a foundation on Judenplatz might open a Pandora's box. The city's archeological department had informed him that the remains of a synagogue built in the 13th century and burned in a pogrom in 1421 could very well lie beneath the pavement.

Construction for the memorial began in July 1995, and within weeks, workers reported that they had indeed found the remains of the synagogue's bimah. In the months that followed, careful digging unearthed still more of the original foundations.

Urusla Pasternak, head of Vienna's Department of Culture decided to incorporate the remains of the excavated synagogue's ruins into an underground exhibition and make it accessible to the public.

The problem was, as the digging unearthed the synagogue's remains and the foundations of a Jewish house of prayer slowly

took shape, people in the Jewish community began having doubts over whether it was appropriate to create a memorial to Jews killed in the 1940s on the site where Jews had been killed in the 1420s.

The original Vienna Gesera, an ancient community document that recounted the gruesome pogrom of 1421, was translated from Hebrew and circulated. Those who read it were horrified at the medieval story.

In autumn of 1421, the city's poorer Jews were packed onto rudderless barges on the Danube and sent down river while more than 100 wealthy Jews who refused to convert to Christianity were burned alive at the stake.

Another 80 hid in the synagogue to avoid the raging mob. There, they committed mass suicide. The synagogue was later burned and ripped apart. Its stones went to build the city's university.

The Jewish and non-Jewish communities debated whether the newly exposed ruins were enough of a memorial. The far-right Freedom Party complained about the spiraling costs, all of which were being absorbed by the city.

After the fall 1996 elections, Peter Marboe, who had previously served in the Austrian Embassy in Washington and then directed cultural programs for the Foreign Ministry, took Pasternak's job.

Marboe, who enjoyed good relations with the Jewish community, decided to keep the project on hold until a unified decision could be reached.

"The last thing we wanted was to erect a Holocaust memorial that the Jewish community wouldn't accept. But the community said it would not call a vote on it," said Boris Marte, who worked with Marboe.

All the while, Wiesenthal tirelessly lobbied politicians to start the construction again. For more than a year, the site remained a gaping hole in the center of the city. Finally, Vienna's Jewish Museum came into the picture. If the two pogroms of the 15th and 20th centuries were to be understood in an educational context, an accompanying museum and learning annex would have to be built to address these issues.

Conveniently, the building just next to the memorial was owned by a small Orthodox community — the Misrachis — who agreed to allow the construction of the museum in their shul's ground floor and basement in exchange for remodeling their synagogue on the second floor.

After all these negotiations, discussions and arguments, construction began again in early 1999. Everything was finished just this week.

Reflecting on this complex and at times bitter struggle to bring this project to life, Marte said, "The accepted interpretation of the Holocaust is that it is unique, incomparable and singular. In that interpretation, the Holocaust came like a bolt of lightning without precedence and struck Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

"This monument brings the Holocaust into its historical context, and I doubt that there is single place in Europe that encapsulates so much Jewish history all in one compact area."

Marte, a 30-something rising star in the Conservative People's Party, said, "People my age, we're not the ones responsible for what happened during the Holocaust. But we are responsible for explaining what happened. And in Vienna, this is the memorial and museum that does it exceptionally well." □

(Jim Glenn in Vienna contributed to this report.)