



Daily News Bulletin

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84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Gunfire after Israel-P.A. meeting

Israeli and Palestinian security officials met in Israel late Wednesday night in an effort to reduce tensions between the two sides.

Hours later, Israeli troops fired at a convoy in the Gaza Strip that was carrying the Palestinian officials back from the talks.

Israel said the soldiers returned fire Thursday after shots were fired from the lead car in the Palestinian convoy. The Palestinians said the Israelis fired first.

Groups want U.S. to give rewards

Jewish organizations are concerned about a U.S. State Department report released last week that said the United States still will not offer rewards for information about American citizens killed by Palestinian terrorists.

In the semiannual report, the State Department said its international program offering rewards for information leading to the arrest or conviction of terrorists who have hurt U.S. citizens does not apply to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Museum head asked to quit

Eighteen current and former members of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council called on the council's chairman, Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, to resign over his role in President Clinton's pardon of fugitive Marc Rich.

In the letter, Greenberg's critics said that by writing to Clinton on Holocaust museum stationery asking that he pardon the financier, Greenberg embroiled the Holocaust museum in a controversy that has damaged its reputation, according to the New York Jewish Week.

Terrorist killed by phone bomb

A member of Islamic Jihad was killed Thursday when a booby-trapped public telephone blew up while he was using it in the West Bank city of Jenin.

Iyad al-Hardan was responsible for numerous terror attacks on Israeli targets, Israel Radio reported.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, April 9 or Tuesday, April 10.

Months after HUC resignation, Zimmerman hired by Birthright

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — A rabbi recently suspended from the Reform movement's rabbinic organization because of sexual impropriety has been hired to a top position by a program that sends thousands of young Jews on free trips to Israel.

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, who resigned as president of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in December, will become executive vice president of Birthright Israel USA, Inc., based in New York.

He was recruited for the position by Michael Steinhardt, the hedge fund manager-turned-philanthropist who co-founded the Birthright program.

Zimmerman's hire is raising some eyebrows in the Jewish community, though many leading figures praised the appointment. Steinhardt, for example, said he is "extraordinarily thrilled" to have Zimmerman on staff.

Charles Bronfman, another major philanthropist and Birthright co-founder, called Zimmerman a "terrific, terrific catch for Birthright.

"He is a dynamic educator and leader whose talents will be a great blessing for Birthright Israel," Bronfman said.

Others in the Jewish community feel less blessed.

Susan Weidman Schneider, editor of the feminist Jewish magazine *Lilith*, said, "Although the specific nature of Zimmerman's actions have not been made public," his hire "seems to repeat a pattern in Jewish life where male rabbis known to have transgressive behaviors in their past have not often suffered professionally for it."

The appointment comes on the heels of another controversy surrounding the program: the fact that two of Birthright's top lay leaders, including Steinhardt, wrote pardon letters on behalf of financier Marc Rich, who gave \$5 million to Birthright.

It also comes at a time when rabbis and Jewish professionals are in sharp demand.

Zimmerman led the HUC from 1996 until last December, when he resigned after being suspended for a minimum of two years from the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis on the recommendation of its ethics committee.

The CCAR never disclosed full details of the case leading to Zimmerman's suspension, under which he is not permitted to serve as a congregational rabbi.

However, officials said it had to do with "personal relationships" before Zimmerman became president of the HUC that violated guidelines concerning "sexual ethics and sexual boundaries." His resignation shocked many in the Reform world, where Zimmerman was a popular and respected leader known for his abilities as a spokesman, educator and administrator.

According to several sources — including Birthright Israel officials — it is believed that Zimmerman had an extramarital affair with a congregant more than 15 years ago, while he was rabbi of Central Synagogue in New York.

However, CCAR officials who reviewed the case, which was spurred by a complaint from an individual, have refused to confirm or deny the reports.

Zimmerman refused to be interviewed for this story. He issued a statement Thursday thanking Bronfman and Birthright for their support.

Rabbi Paul Menitoff, the CCAR's executive vice president and a member of the ethics committee that recommended Zimmerman's suspension, declined to discuss the case, saying only that Zimmerman is "very talented, and he'll contribute significantly to the development" of Birthright.

Despite Zimmerman's high profile and the notoriety of his suspension — it made the front page of *The New York Times* — Birthright aggressively recruited him for the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Rice berates Egypt over Arafat

U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice had a heated exchange with Egypt's foreign minister this week, according to Israel Radio.

Rice told Amre Moussa that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is responsible for terror attacks, adding that Egyptian officials have not done enough to convey to Arafat the danger of his actions.

Israel to expand settlements

Israel announced that it plans to allow some 700 homes to be built in two West Bank settlements.

Making the announcement regarding Ma'aleh Adumim and Alfei Menashe, Housing Minister Natan Sharansky said Thursday the ongoing Palestinian violence has shown "how important it is to lend a hand to and strengthen the citizens" living in the West Bank.

Israel eases closure

Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer announced an easing of the closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

He said Thursday that 3,200 Palestinians will now be allowed to return to their jobs in Israel, according to Army Radio.

TWA customers file lawsuit

Frustrated TWA customers filed a class action lawsuit against the bankrupt airline for suspending its New York-Israel route just before Passover.

The lawsuit, filed Wednesday in Brooklyn, seeks unspecified compensatory damages.

Australia accepts SLA members

Australia agreed to allow some members of the South Lebanon Army, Israel's former militia allies, to immigrate and join members of their extended families. The decision came despite protests from the PLO representative in Australia and members of the local Muslim community.

job. Steinhardt, who first approached Zimmerman, said he knows Zimmerman from his days at Central Synagogue, where Steinhardt was a member.

Steinhardt said he is "not in the slightest" concerned about the fact that the CCAR suspended Zimmerman for sexual misconduct.

"From all that I knew, it seemed like a remarkably harsh response to an event that occurred more than 15 years ago," Steinhardt said.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations and an executive committee member of the CCAR, said Zimmerman "is a good choice for Birthright, and I think he'll do an excellent job."

"On the one hand, I'm supportive of the CCAR and their process and have every reason to believe they've handled it appropriately, but I'm not prepared to jump from that to assume that therefore Rabbi Zimmerman, who's an enormously talented individual, should not be able to contribute elsewhere in the Jewish world," Yoffie said.

Yoffie recently criticized Birthright for accepting money from Rich. The UAHC is one of many groups that send young people to Israel under Birthright's auspices.

Richard Joel, president and international director of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, which is Birthright's largest trip provider, said he supports the appointment as long as Zimmerman doesn't present himself as a rabbinic role model.

"I don't think his appointment to this position is making any kind of statement mitigating any kind of improper acts," Joel said. "He has an option to say, because of the adverse publicity, 'I'm going to disappear from the public scene and find work that will keep me as a private citizen.' Is that the only course open to someone like Shelly Zimmerman, who's young and talented? Or are there appropriate positions where he can really add value to the Jewish public sphere without necessarily proffering himself as a role model of everything?"

Joel headed an independent commission last year investigating the Orthodox Union's handling of allegations that a high-ranking rabbi employed with its youth group had sexually harassed and molested scores of teenagers. No one considers Zimmerman's alleged misconduct to be of the same gravity, Joel said.

"He's not ministering to a congregation and not speaking on behalf of any particular movement, dogma or sense of principles," Joel said. "He's dealing with one of the most basic of issues — using Israel as a trigger for promoting Jewish identity."

Marlene Post, Birthright's North American chair, said Zimmerman was selected for his academic, administrative and leadership credentials, and will not be in direct contact with Birthright participants.

"The other issues — whatever they are — were things that we felt would not directly affect Birthright," Post said.

Rabbi Shira Stern, a former co-coordinator of the CCAR's Women's Rabbinic Network, said she does not have a problem with Zimmerman's new role.

"He needs to do his own teshuvah," she said, using the Hebrew term for repentance. "But preventing him from working is not a solution. I fully believe that people need to make restitution to those they've harmed, but I don't believe in any respect that his appointment to Birthright would be inappropriate."

Weidman Schneider of Lilith rejected the notion that a professional at Birthright Israel should be held to a laxer moral standard than the president of HUC or a congregational rabbi.

"Since the goal of Birthright is to introduce young people to the highest and most complete participation in Jewish life, it's obvious that the same high moral standards should apply for those leaders as well," she said.

Rabbi Arthur Gross Schaefer, a law professor and spiritual leader of two synagogues in Santa Barbara, Calif., has written extensively on rabbinic misconduct. He declined to comment on Zimmerman's specific case, but said the demands of a new high-profile job can prevent a rabbi guilty of misconduct from doing the soul-searching necessary for repentance.

"As Rambam put it, sometimes you have to earn a new name," Gross Schaefer said. "And you don't earn a new name overnight."

Marcia Cohn Spiegel, who also has written on rabbinic sexual misconduct, said she is friends with Zimmerman and is uncertain about his alleged misconduct.

However, she said, it "would have been more appropriate for him to back off for a while. To put him in this position so quickly is indiscreet." □



Daily News Bulletin

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JEWISH WORLD

British media called biased

Biased British media coverage of the Middle East crisis is contributing to an increase in anti-Semitic attacks in Britain, the director general of Britain's Board of Deputies warned.

Writing in the latest edition of the quarterly *Journalist's Handbook*, Neville Nagler said the British media "must realize the danger of unbalanced, biased news coverage."

Coalition takes on religious right

A coalition bringing together Jewish and Christian groups in the United States is mounting a challenge to the religious right on issues such as abortion and welfare reform.

The Progressive Religious Partnership says clergy and lay leaders should play a more powerful role in the ongoing national dialogue about morality and politics.

Kalejs ordered to appear in court

An Australian court ordered an alleged Nazi war criminal to attend his extradition hearing next month, despite his ill health.

Konrad Kalejs' lawyer had told the court his client was suffering from health problems, including prostate cancer and dementia.

Latvia has asked for the extradition of Kalejs, who allegedly was involved in the deaths of up to 30,000 Jews during World War II.

Passover sex gets the shank

Some Jews may have to give up more than bread during Passover after Israeli health officials said the anti-impotence drug Viagra is not kosher for Passover.

The *Jerusalem Post* quoted a doctor who said some women may welcome the news, because they are so tired from Passover preparations that they have little energy for sex.

KKK cleaned out of program

One month after the U.S. Supreme Court ordered Missouri officials to allow the Ku Klux Klan to take part in an Adopt-A-Highway cleanup program, the state removed the group from the program.

The officials said the KKK had failed to collect roadside litter.

Man sentenced for shul attack

A German court jailed a Moroccan-born man for more than two years for an arson attack on a synagogue last October.

A lawyer for Khalid Zaouaghi, a German resident, said Wednesday his client "lost his self-control" after watching a television report about the death of a Palestinian youth in the Middle East conflict.

Budapest faces matzah shortage days before the start of Passover

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST (JTA) — Members of the Jewish community here have been spending the days before Passover on long lines in an attempt to get small amounts of matzah.

"It's unbelievable! This is the first time in my life that I cannot make matzah cake for my family, because I could not get enough matzah," said an elderly woman who was lined up this week in front of the Jewish community headquarters.

"Even during the Communist regime, I always used to get as much as I wanted, and now I had to queue up for a half-day for only" two pounds of matzah.

When the first shipment of the imported matzah arrived from Israel three weeks ago, there were no lines in front of the Jewish community headquarters — but that soon changed.

The community, with the help of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's Budapest office, had ordered some 22,000 pounds of matzah from Israel.

It sold out within a few days when news spread that it was available.

The crunch also affected local stores, which sold out their supplies of matzah the week before the start of Passover.

Approximately 100,000 Jews live in Hungary — almost all of them in the country's capital, Budapest.

Peter Tordai, president of the Budapest Jewish community, said the Jewish leadership thought it had ordered enough imported matzah based on the amount that had been produced last year by a local factory.

"It was our mistake," said Tordai. "This will be a real matzah crisis."

When making their calculations, he said, the leadership had failed to take into account that the local factory had closed recently.

Explaining the closing, the owners said it was no longer profitable.

But Laszlo Herczog, deputy leader of Hungary's Orthodox Jewish Community, told JTA he believed that the owners, who are not Jewish, decided to sell the factory because the land it was on was more valuable than the business itself.

Compounding the problem, said another community leader, local hotels and restaurants bought large quantities of the imported matzah.

Tordai, meanwhile, is thinking ahead to next year. The solution, Tordai said, is that "we try to restart matzah production in Hungary." □

Australian Jews petition court to enforce order against denier

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY (JTA) — Australian Jewish leaders have petitioned a court to order a Holocaust denier to remove revisionist material from his Internet site.

The leaders of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry argued this week before Australia's Federal Court that Frederick Toben has not complied with an order issued last October calling on him to remove the material and apologize to the Jewish community.

The October ruling by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission found that Toben's activities were illegal under Australia's Racial Hatred Act.

Toben refused to follow the directive of the commission, which does not have the power to enforce its orders.

Toben was slated to participate last month in a Holocaust denial conference in Beirut.

But the meeting was canceled at the last minute by the Lebanese government.

In the April issue of *The Review*, the monthly magazine of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, Toben claimed that Jews "should like me. I've freed them from the Holocaust. I've proved it never happened."

Toben once served a prison term in Germany for Holocaust denial.

Toben has been informed that if he returns to Germany, he will face charges under that nation's anti-racism legislation for the contents of his Internet site. □

Presidents Conference narrows field to three finalists for chairman

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — Finalists are emerging in the race to head a powerful American Jewish organization whose leader is seen in many parts of the world as the “king of the Jews.”

Candidates to replace Ronald Lauder as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations — an umbrella organization of 54 groups — reportedly were whittled from eight to three after interviews this week.

Lauder, a cosmetics magnate, philanthropist and former U.S. ambassador to Austria, finishes his two-year term in June.

The eight candidates were Howard Berkowitz, the past chairman of the Anti-Defamation League; Leonard Cole, the chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs; Richard Heideman, the president of B'nai B'rith International; Irwin Hochberg, the national campaign chairman of Israel Bonds; Lonny Kaplan, the past president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee; Philip Meltzer, the president of ARZA/World Union; Stephen Wolnek, the president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism; and Morton Zuckerman, the honorary president of the American-Israel Friendship League.

The identity of the three finalists is being kept secret, but a number of Conference members and outside observers told JTA that Zuckerman — a real estate magnate and the publisher of U.S. News & World Report and New York Daily News — is the favorite. Elections must be held by June 1, and the new chairman will take office in July.

The Presidents Conference and pro-Israel AIPAC lobby are viewed by the White House and State Department as the leading voices of American Jewry. The Presidents Conference has even greater clout abroad, where many people believe the Jewish community has vast power and influence.

Such a perception can work in the Jews' favor, as nations trying to curry favor with the United States view the Conference as a central address on the road to improved relations with Washington. Nevertheless, the Conference is relatively unknown among American Jews.

According to a recent poll of 1,002 American Jews, only 20 percent were familiar with the Conference. Meanwhile, 95 percent were familiar with Hadassah: The Women's Zionist Organization of America, and 94 percent with the Anti-Defamation League.

Still, the Conference does little to discourage the impression that its chairman speaks for American Jewry.

Founded in 1955, the Conference's stated mission is “to strengthen the U.S.-Israel alliance and to protect and enhance the security and dignity of Jews abroad.”

In an effort to project U.S. Jewish consensus, Conference membership spans the religious and political spectrum.

Those involved say myriad factors go into the selection of a chairman, ranging from the candidate's ideology to his or her political access. Also important is the size of the group he or she represents and how long it has been since that group held the chairmanship.

But observers assert that one factor outweighs the others: the personal preference of the Conference's executive vice chairman, Malcolm Hoenlein, who runs the organization on a day-to-day basis. Admirers and detractors alike credit Hoenlein with greatly raising the Conference's profile during his 14 years as executive

vice chairman. His critics — most of whom are unwilling to speak on the record for fear of antagonizing Hoenlein — note the enormous power Hoenlein has accumulated, his rightward-leaning views on Israel and his influence on Conference positions.

Hoenlein also has helped shape a chairman selection process that critics say is not free and fair. Candidates for the chairmanship are proposed by member organizations, then interviewed by a seven-member nominating committee.

The incumbent chair appoints the nominating committee members, with input from Hoenlein, observers say. Once the committee has settled on a choice for chairman, the candidate is presented to the full Conference for a vote by a show of hands.

“It is ironic that a Jewish community that is so in love with democracy generally chooses its leaders by such essentially undemocratic means,” one Conference member said.

In this case, observers say, Hoenlein's choice is Zuckerman.

Hoenlein, who has no vote in the selection, said he does not have a favorite among the candidates and denied that he runs the show. “There is no one person or group that can control this process,” he told JTA. “The committee by its structure is diverse and independent, and its discussions are very intense.”

Observers say Zuckerman is conservative, wealthy and well-known within Washington circles — a plus for a Conference chairman. Yet his candidacy may be problematic.

Zuckerman has been a front-runner for chairman in the past, but essentially was disqualified when it was learned he was married to a non-Jew. Traditional groups in the Conference say it is one thing for a Jew married to a Gentile to lead an individual organization, but not an umbrella organization that purports to represent all American Jewry.

Since then, Zuckerman has split from his wife.

Still, the circumstances of Zuckerman's private life may still play a role, said Julius Berman, a former Conference chairman and honorary president of the Orthodox Union.

If the end of Zuckerman's marriage “reflects a change of attitude toward intermarriage, that issue would be totally eliminated from his candidacy,” said Berman, who is not on the nominating committee but is a respected voice in the Conference. “But if it is just a breakdown in relations and his attitude toward intermarriage remains the same, that might still be a problem.”

Zuckerman could not be reached for comment.

The second critical issue is Zuckerman's political outlook.

Zuckerman often devotes his weekly political column in the U.S. News magazine to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A cardinal rule of the Presidents Conference is to pledge full support to any democratically elected government in Israel.

Lauder seemed to run afoul of that rule in January. Despite resistance from left-leaning Conference members, Lauder spoke “as an individual” at a rally for a united Jerusalem.

The media identified Lauder as Conference chairman and depicted the rally as opposing the policies of Ehud Barak, Israel's then-prime minister.

Some observers now wonder what would happen if, say, Zuckerman disagreed with a resumption of peace talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, or if he disagreed with concessions Sharon offered. Would Zuckerman voice those opinions in his column? If the Daily News editorials expressed them, would people see Zuckerman's fingerprints?

“These are all issues the nominating committee has or will address,” Hoenlein said. □