

IN THE NEWS

Grossman leaves Howard Dean camp

Steve Grossman left Howard Dean's presidential campaign.

Dean, the former Vermont governor, made the announcement Monday after media reports said Grossman, Dean's national co-chairman, would support Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) if Dean lost Tuesday's Wisconsin primary.

Grossman, a former chairman of the Democratic National Committee and president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, gave Dean national credibility in the early days of his White House bid, and served as a key liaison to the Jewish community when e-mails exaggerated anti-Israel statements from Dean.

Mel Gibson: Anti-Semitism a 'sin'

Mel Gibson denied he is anti-Semitic and insisted his new movie does not blame the Jews for Jesus' crucifixion. In an interview with Diane Sawyer on the ABC News show "Primetime Special Edition," which was set to air Monday night, Gibson said "The Passion of the Christ" echoes his belief that "we all" are responsible for the death of Jesus.

"To be anti-Semitic is a sin," he told Sawyer. "To be anti-Semitic is to be un-Christian, and I'm not." Gibson's movie is slated to open in theaters Feb. 25.

Some Jewish leaders have warned the movie will fuel anti-Jewish attitudes because it asserts the Jews pushed the Romans to kill Jesus. Gibson denied that, saying the movie is "not about pointing the fingers."

Palestinian killed in Gaza Strip clash

A Palestinian was killed in a clash with Israeli soldiers.

Witnesses said the man was shot as he stood outside his home in southern Gaza on Tuesday. The army confirmed its troops fired on the area after being shot at by Palestinian gunmen.

WORLD REPORT

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U.S. Jewish fund raising shifts to support, not unseat, incumbents

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It was a big deal two years ago, when Jewish money helped unseat two incumbent Democratic lawmakers viewed as anti-Israel.

This year, Jewish fund-raisers in the United States expect business to go back to normal.

This year, the Jewish community will focus on supporting incumbents viewed as pro-Israel, including several facing tough challenges.

While most of America is watching the presidential primaries play out, hundreds of lawmakers are seeking to maintain their congressional seats in the November 2004 elections and are quietly raising money toward that goal.

Jews are expected to play a large role in that fund-raising effort, with Jews engaged in some key races around the country, including Florida, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

One-third of the senators are up for reelection, as are all House members. But only a few of those hundreds of seats are considered "in play," or up for grabs.

Jewish backing for challengers of incumbents in Democratic primaries made national news in 2002, when Jewish support for Denise Majette in Georgia and Artur Davis in Alabama helped unseat U.S. Reps. Cynthia McKinney and Earl Hilliard respectively.

The Jewish community won respect for its role in pushing aside anti-Israel legislators.

But a race in which Jews mobilize to unseat an incumbent only happens once every decade, a senior Jewish political analyst said.

Now facing their first election as incumbents, both Majette and Davis are expected to receive continued donations from Jewish supporters.

McKinney has yet to take public steps that indicate a run for office, but her father has suggested that his daughter may challenge Majette, which likely would increase Jewish contributions to Majette's campaign.

Also this time around, Jewish activists had hoped to target Rep. James Moran (D-Va.), a seven-term incumbent who made headlines last year by suggesting Jewish support was a catalyst for U.S. war plans against Iraq.

Moran himself suggested at the time that the Jewish community would play a role in a primary challenge, citing his comments and voting record.

Since then, the oust-Moran initiative among Jews has waned.

Much hope had been riding on Kate Hanley, a former chairwoman of the board of supervisors of Fairfax County, but she decided not to challenge Moran in the primary in Virginia.

Andy Rosenberg, a Jewish attorney who is taking on Moran, is expected to get some Jewish support but has not created much of a buzz elsewhere.

"Andy Rosenberg still has time to show he's a credible candidate," said Morris Amity, founder of the pro-Israel Washington

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DECIDES
2004**

■ *In 2004, U.S. Jewish fund raising shifts to supporting incumbents*

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PAC, noting that the primary is not until June 8.

Meanwhile, Moran is actively seeking money from the Arab American community. The Network of Arab American Professionals is holding a fund-raiser for him later this month in a Washington suburb.

Amitay said some Jews considered targeting Sen. Pat Leahy (D-Vt.), a powerful senator who rarely supports pro-Israel letters or other actions.

But Leahy is not expected to face a tough challenge.

"We'd love to knock off Pat Leahy, but he's utterly safe," Amitay said. "He's basically unfriendly on Israel issues."

However, Leahy, ranking minority member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, is considered an advocate for domestic issues that many Jews tout, including church-state separation, the appointment of more liberal federal judges and other issues.

Amitay also listed Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), who is facing a challenge from a Jewish Democratic state senator, Burt Cohen. But he said there has not been much excitement in that race, as Gregg is not seen as vulnerable.

Jewish fund-raisers have switched their attention to assisting friendly incumbents.

Rep. Martin Frost (D-Texas) is seen as being in the most trouble.

Because of redistricting in Texas, Frost will need to face off against in-

cumbent Rep. Jeff Sessions (R-Texas) in a redrawn district mostly made up of Sessions' constituents.

Frost, who is Jewish, recently raised \$100,000 in Jewish money at a Houston fund-raiser. He is seen as a leader on Israel issues and is the former chairman of the Democratic Caucus.

One political analyst said Frost has some chance in the new district, because it is more than 50 percent minority voters, and Frost is a proficient fund-raiser.

Meanwhile, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) is facing off against a House member, Rep. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.) in a Republican primary.

While both men are seen as pro-Israel, Jewish supporters are much more likely to back Specter, both because he is the incumbent and because he is Jewish, one of only two Jewish Republicans currently in the U.S. Senate.

The winner of the Republican primary also will face a formidable challenge in November from Rep. Joseph Hoeffel (D-Pa.).

Allyson Schwartz, a Jewish state senator, is seeking Hoeffel's seat.

Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), a Holocaust survivor and ranking Democrat of the House International Relations Committee, is facing two opponents from the left in next month's primary, and Lantos is expected to get strong Jewish support.

Lantos is one of Congress' most pro-Israel members.

One of the challengers, Maad Abu-Ghazalah, is a Palestinian-American businessman who got 7 percent of the vote against Lantos in the 2002 general election while running as a Libertarian.

In Florida, Jan Schneider is once again challenging Rep. Katherine Harris (R-Fla.) in Florida's 13th district.

Harris is seen by many Democrats as partially responsible for President Bush's victory in Florida in the 2000 presidential election, when Harris was Florida's secretary of state, and many Jews may be inclined to support the Jewish challenger.

Also in Florida, Debbie Wasserman-

Schultz is vying for the open seat vacated by Rep. Peter Deutsch (D-Fla.), who is running for Senate. A state senator, Wasserman-Schultz is

a founding member of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

Jewish fund-raisers said they also are watching to see if several other incumbents need help. They include Sen. Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), the Senate minority leader, Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Ala.).

Experts also are watching Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), a lawmaker who has handily defeated opponents in the recent past but is being challenged this year by conservative talk-show host Chuck Morse. Jewish fund-raisers believe Frank's seat is not in jeopardy.

In addition, Jewish support may galvanize behind Deutsch, an observant Jew who is seeking the Democratic nomination for the seat Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.) is vacating. It's expected to be a tough race all around, with both Democratic and Republican contenders likely to put up a good fight.

Few other Israel supporters are seen as vulnerable. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) will receive large amounts of Jewish money, but it is unclear whether she will face a viable challenger.

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) will also get Jewish money in his state. He is a heavy favorite for re-election.

Matthew Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said that Jewish Republicans are, right now, focusing their attention on raising money for President Bush's re-election.

But he said he anticipates strong support for John Thune, a former congressman challenging Daschle in South Dakota; Rep. Richard Burr (R-N.C.), seeking an open Senate seat, and for incumbents Murkowski and Sen. Kit Bond (R-Mo.).

One-third of the senators are up for re-election, as are all House members. But only a few of those hundreds of seats are considered 'in play,' or up for grabs.

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THIS WEEK

TUESDAY

■ The Wisconsin primary could spell the end of former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean's presidential hopes. The former front-runner has yet to win a state, and has suggested he would leave the race if he does not win Wisconsin. Dean's faltering campaign took another hit Monday, when Steve Grossman, Dean's national co-chairman, left the campaign. Grossman, a former chairman of the Democratic National Committee and president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, gave Dean national credibility in the early days of his White House bid, and served as a key liaison to the Jewish community when e-mails exaggerated anti-Israel statements from Dean.

THURSDAY

■ The European Commission is holding a meeting to discuss the problem of anti-Semitism in Europe. The meeting in Brussels is taking place under the auspices of the the European Jewish Congress and the Congress of European Rabbis. Following an a letter published in January in a British newspaper by the World Jewish Congress' president, Edgar Bronfman, and the president of the EJC, Cobi Benatoff, accusing the European Commission of anti-Semitism, the commission's president, Romano Prodi, temporarily canceled the meeting. But it was soon rescheduled.

SATURDAY

■ The Jewish Council for Public Affairs Plenum will begin in Boston with a discussion of Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ," and its impact on interfaith relations. The conference runs through Tuesday and will also tackle Israel's security fence and the Jewish role in the 2004 presidential elections. The delegates are expected to debate two different resolutions on Israel — one that supports Israeli defensive measures and expresses concerns about provocations, and a more general resolution, backing the Jewish state.

SUNDAY

■ The Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors will convene for a four-day meeting at the Dead Sea. The group, which meets three times a year, will review the organization's three-year old strategic plan. The plan is based on four pillars: aliyah, rescue and absorption; Jewish peoplehood, unity and tolerance; the role of Israel in enhancing Jewish identity; and strengthening the State of Israel. The group's specific plans include increasing aliyah from the West, namely North America and Western Europe; building programs for youth at risk and vulnerable populations in Israel, developing Israel's Negev and Galilee regions and Israel-Diaspora educational programs.

Conservative rabbis OK fence, but want to minimize its harm

By DINA KRAFT

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Conservative rabbis from around the world have taken a stand in support of Israel's West Bank security barrier — while urging that it be built in a humane and ethical way.

A resolution in support of the fence passed with an overwhelming majority Feb. 12 at the close of the Conservative movement's annual Rabbinical Assembly, held this year in Jerusalem.

The fence had been the most controversial item at the conference — not usually known for taking up political hot potatoes — and a revised version of the resolution passed only after a debate over its language.

The rabbis say that in their home congregations they must deal with the controversy almost daily, as the security fence dominates conversations around Shabbat dinner tables, in sermons and in synagogue hallways.

The version of the resolution that ultimately passed stresses Israel's right to self-defense while cautioning that Israel should do all it can to "avoid unnecessary hardships to innocent Palestinians" and maintain "the Jewish and democratic character of the state."

Israel has been excoriated internationally for constructing the fence by critics who say it strangles Palestinian freedom of movement and cements Israel's grip on the West Bank, harming future prospects for peace.

Some 200 of the 350 rabbis who attended the assembly went to see a section of the fence south of Jerusalem on Tuesday on an organized tour led by the Israel Defense Forces spokesman's office.

Many more wanted to go, but there wasn't enough room on the buses to accommodate everyone, conference organizers said.

In some areas, the fence is being built roughly along the pre-1967 boundary between Israel and the West Bank but

in other places swings out to include swathes of West Bank land.

Most of the barrier is a network of hi-tech wire fences ringed with barbed wire and lined with security roads. In a few areas, it consists of cement walls as high as 28 feet.

The fence is designed to keep out suicide bombers and other terrorists trying to enter Israel from the West Bank.

"We wanted to emphasize that Israel has the right and obligation to protect its citizens with a fence," said Rabbi Tsvi Weinstein, chairman of Rabbis for Human Rights.

But, he added, "the route should not adversely affect innocent Palestinians."

Rabbi Reuven Hammer, outgoing president of the Rabbinical Assembly, said his colleagues were trying to take a stand not as a political statement but as "an ethical value."

"It's a question of saving Jewish lives," he said.

Among the small handful of dissenters voting

against the resolution was Rabbi Mauricio Balter.

Originally from Uruguay, Balter leads a congregation in the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Bialik.

"I'm against the security fence because I'm concerned it will turn into a permanent answer, which I think will only extend the problem," Balter told JTA.

"Perhaps the fence will stop a suicide bomber here or there, but it will also create a new generation of suicide bombers, a larger group than we know now."

Leonard Cahan, a rabbi from Creve Coeur, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis, said he accepts the fence but has reservations.

"I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that there are no alternatives to the fence, but it has to be done sensitively and carefully to the extent that is possible," Cahan said. ■

The route of the fence 'should not adversely affect innocent Palestinians.'

Rabbi Tsvi Weinstein
Rabbis for Human Rights

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

MIA's declared dead

Israel plans to declare dead three tank crewmen missing since the 1982 Lebanon War.

The families of Zecharia Baumel, Yehuda Katz and Zvi Feldman reacted with dismay at Monday's news, accusing the Israel Defense Forces of not doing enough to find evidence of their sons' fate. Baumel's father, Yona, said he believed the three were transferred to Syria after being captured in the battle of Sultan Yakoub valley in June 1982.

Erez stampede

A Palestinian laborer died in a stampede at a major crossing point into Israel.

Medical reports differed on whether the man was crushed to death or suffered a heart attack in Monday's rush of 6,000 Palestinians at Erez crossing, situated on the Gaza-Israel boundary. Ten other laborers were injured in the incident during the morning rush to the laborers' jobs in Israel.

The army, which has stepped up security at Erez since a Palestinian suicide bomber killed four Israelis there last month, said it is investigating the incident.

Gilad Sharon to appeal ruling

An Israeli court ordered Ariel Sharon's son to hand over documents and tapes related to two different investigations.

On Monday, Tel Aviv District Court ordered Gilad Sharon to hand over the information related to an incident in which he allegedly was paid to help a businessman friend of his father's purchase a Greek resort island, and an incident in which a family friend in South Africa loaned Gilad Sharon \$1.5 million.

The lawyer for Gilad Sharon said he would appeal the decision to Israel's High Court of Justice.

Olmert on the fence in Russia

Israeli Cabinet minister Ehud Olmert discussed Israel's security barrier with his Russian counterpart. Olmert visited Russia late last week, less than two weeks before a scheduled hearing on the fence Israel is building in the West Bank, at the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

Like the United States and the European Union, Russia opposes the Feb. 23 hearing, although it has reservations about the fence.

Katsav worried by anti-Semitism

Israeli President Moshe Katsav said he is worried by anti-Semitism in France.

In an interview published in *Le Monde* on Saturday, Katsav said he is "concerned that Jews don't feel free to walk in the street solely because they are Jews."

However, he said he is "able to see the determination of French authorities" to fight anti-Semitism.

Katsav begins a four-day state visit to France on Monday, the first by an Israeli president in 18 years.

Israel's ambassador in Paris said France was the only European country that is serious about fighting anti-Semitism.

Saddam gone, so are gas masks

Israelis are losing their gas masks.

The call to return the masks, originally distributed before the 1991 Gulf War, came after an Israeli commission concluded that Israel no longer faces the risk of chemical or biological attacks in the wake of Saddam Hussein's downfall in Iraq.

Terror down, but crime up

Terror declined in Israel, but crime is on the rise. According to police findings issued Sunday, there was a 4.2 percent increase in crime in 2003.

Larceny and offenses by minors were notably higher in the statistics, which Israeli media described as the worst in six years.

Palestinian protest

Palestinian journalists held a sit-in for freedom of the press. About 100 members of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate refused to leave the Palestinian Authority Parliament building in Gaza City on Sunday, demanding that the Palestinian Authority apprehend those responsible for a spate of recent attacks on local correspondents.

At least one Gaza journalist has been beaten up in recent weeks, and property belonging to two others was vandalized.

NORTH AMERICA

Gay, lesbian students rally

Gay and lesbian Jewish college students rallied for more inclusion in the Jewish community. Many of the 50 or so students who demonstrated over the weekend as part of the annual conference of the National Union of Jewish LGBTIQ Students — lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and questioning Jews — said they wanted to apply to rabbinical school but did not want to hide their sexual identities. The protests were aimed at the Conservative movement, which does not ordain gay rabbis.

Group blasts campus forum

The American Jewish Committee is calling on Wesleyan University to condemn anti-Semitic intimidation on campus. The call came after a conference seen as anti-Semitic was held on the Connecticut campus.

Activism 102, sponsored by several pro-Palestinian groups, included divestiture and anti-Israel boycott strategies. In addition, anti-Semitic articles and a fake dollar bill containing swastikas were handed out, the group said.

Columbus Jewish leader dead at 75

Irving Schottenstein, a former president of the Jewish federation of Columbus, Ohio, died at 75. Schottenstein, who died Feb. 11, served as president of the Columbus federation from 1984 to 1991, the longest-serving president in the federation's history.

WORLD

Jewish film scores at Berlin

Daniel Burman's film "El Abrazo Partido," or Lost Embrace, earned second prize Saturday at the Berlin film festival. Daniel Hender also won a Silver Bear as best actor for his portrayal of Ariel, a Jewish Argentine searching for the truth about his father.

Vet degrees restored

A German veterinary school posthumously restored degrees stripped by the Nazis from two Jews. The president of the Hanover school of Veterinary Medicine restored the degrees to the families of Hermann Cussell and Paul Stern on Sunday.

Hate fined in S. Africa

A South African man was awarded more than \$500 in damages for being victimized by hate speech. When Donell Tarloff complained that his car was not repaired correctly, he was met with anti-Jewish slurs, the *Die Burger* newspaper reported.