

**IN THE NEWS**
**Funding restored for birthright Israel**

A new matching grant will allow birthright Israel to more than double enrollment for its summer programs.

The free trip to Israel for young adults who never have been on a peer tour to the Jewish state notified its trip providers Sunday that it had secured funding for more than 8,200 spots for its summer programs. [Story, pg. 3]

**U.S. officials travel to Israel**

Three top U.S. officials are traveling to Israel this week to discuss Israel's plan for a Gaza withdrawal.

Steve Hadley, the deputy national security adviser; Elliott Abrams, President Bush's top Middle East adviser; and William Burns, the top envoy to the region, will consult with their Israeli counterparts Wednesday and Thursday on how to carry out Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's withdrawal plan.

The Americans reportedly want Israel to adjust its West Bank security barrier as part of the deal, rerouting it to avoid cutting too deeply into the West Bank.

Top Israeli officials will arrive in Washington next week to develop the plan further, and Bush and Sharon plan to meet in March to discuss it in its final form.

**Morocco cool on 'right of return'**

Morocco's foreign minister said it is "impossible" for Palestinian refugees to return to Israel.

Speaking in Rabat on Monday to a visiting delegation of U.S. Jews from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Taib Fassi Fihri said Arab countries have to be realistic in their demands for a "right of return" for Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

Fihri also said that he hopes Morocco and Israel could re-establish ties soon.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Jewish figure in Dean campaign looks to support likely nominee

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — In the beginning, he was the link to respectability, the known entity in a campaign touting its outsider status.

When times got tough, he was the one doing damage control, using his clout in the Jewish community to calm fears and reassure the hesitant.

And now, with the end in sight, he is one of the first to go, the first to read the handwriting on the wall.

Throughout the primary process, Steve Grossman has maintained his image as an influential leader of the Democratic Party, shepherding Howard Dean, a little-known candidate, to the top of the polls, and suffering little damage when the same candidate failed to win a single primary.

At the same time, he has shown his influence within the Jewish community. At Grossman's urging, leaders of several prominent Jewish organizations came to Dean's defense as he was being pegged as anti-Israel in an anonymous e-mail campaign.

Grossman announced Monday that he would leave Dean's struggling presidential campaign, which he served as national co-chairman, if Dean did not win Tuesday's Wisconsin primary. He told The New York Times that he would support Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), the likely nominee.

Later in the day, after the story became public, Dean announced that Grossman was no longer with the campaign, telling reporters in Wisconsin on Monday, "I absolutely don't feel betrayed by Grossman. I consider

him to be a friend."

Grossman and Kerry have been friends for more than 30 years, and Grossman chaired Kerry's 1996 re-election campaign for the Senate.

However, the relationship has been strained since Kerry did not back Grossman's bid for Massachusetts governor in 2002.

Insiders say Grossman's announcement had little to do with his personal views and more to do with his role as a leader of the Democratic Party.

Alan Solomont, a key Kerry fund-raiser with ties to the Jewish community, said he had been in consultation with his friend for several weeks about moving to back Kerry.

"Steve wants to beat George W. Bush as much as anyone," Solomont said. In taking this step, Grossman was "thinking about his own role in electing a Democrat as president."

Others said that the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee was trying to send a signal that no matter what Dean decides to do after Wisconsin, Grossman and others want to differentiate between a viable campaign and one that is being prolonged to send a message to the party establishment.

Dean has suggested that he may continue his campaign beyond the Wisconsin primary, in part out of loyalty to those who have backed his candidacy.

Grossman and others worry that Dean will be a distraction, and will hurt efforts of the Democratic Party to rally around Kerry.

Because Dean, the early front-runner in polls, had amassed a number of significant

*Continued on page 2*

**AMERICA  
DECIDES  
2004**

## ■ Key Jewish figure in Dean campaign looks toward supporting likely nominee

*Continued from page 1*

endorsement from Democratic leaders, including former Vice President Al Gore and former Sen. Bill Bradley, his continued candidacy would likely stand in the way of party unity.

Grossman was crafting a path for other Democratic luminaries to back out of their endorsements while saving face, insiders say.

"Grossman threw himself in front of the train to make it easier for others to follow," said one knowledgeable source.

Grossman is well-known in American Jewish and Democratic circles for being able to "take one for the team" from time to time, putting aside, for instance, his own political aspirations in 1992 to become president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

He left that post to chair the DNC in 1997, at a time when ethics investigations hung like a cloud over the Democratic Party. He resigned 22 months later, saying he needed to spend more time with his family.

Grossman, who turned 58 on Tuesday, is the president of the Massachusetts Envelope Company, a family business started by his grandfather.

Grossman surprised many in 2002 when he announced he would serve as Dean's co-chair, even though Kerry was going to run as well.

Grossman was one of the first prominent Democrats to back Dean, then a little-known Vermont governor seen as too much of an outsider to amass any mo-

mentum in the Democratic primaries.

But through grass-roots organization and Internet-based fund raising, Dean's campaign took off.

And at nearly the same time, Dean needed to do damage control in the Jewish community.

Dean was quoted in September as calling for an "even-handed" policy toward the Middle East, a comment taken by many in the Jewish community as a call against current U.S. policies toward Israel and the conflict with the Palestinians.

The antidote to the problem was showcasing Grossman.

"There are certain organizations that we all turn to to know where candidates of all stripes stand," said Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. "AIPAC is one of those and he wears the AIPAC hat."

He was quickly dispatched to meet with Jewish leaders and assure them that Dean supported the U.S.-Israeli relationship. He also tutored the candidate on what could and could not be said on the Middle East.

In the middle of a key foreign policy speech in California last December, Dean joked: "I've discovered that 'even-handedly' is a code word to certain people who think that is being unfair, and I don't want to ever repeat that word again."

Later that year, anonymous e-mails highlighted and exaggerated Dean's remarks about Israel, and Grossman stepped up his Jewish outreach.

"It took a great deal of time, but I was willing to put that time and effort into it because I believed in him and I still believe in him," Grossman told JTA on Monday.

"Steve was in a unique position because of his longstanding activist work on behalf of Israel his entire life to make the case that the e-mails weren't true," said Matthew Dorf, the Dean campaign liaison to the Jewish community, who accompanied Grossman on his trips to visit Jewish leaders.

Campaign officials would use Grossman, his ties to AIPAC and other Jewish causes, as the key piece of evidence in making their case that Dean was not anti-Israel. If the e-mails and rumors were

true, Dean advisers would say, Grossman wouldn't be there.

"When Dean had his problems with the Jewish community, Steve was the key guy," said Ira Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council. "He gave the Dean campaign all the credibility they could get."

Grossman was able to get the Anti-Defamation League to officially rebuke the anonymous e-mails on its Web site, and many other Jewish

leaders lauded Dean for his views on the Middle East after meetings with Grossman and Dorf.

Despite Grossman's presence, Dean's campaign was not a hit with many Jewish organizational officials. Some suggested he was out of touch on other domestic issues, like gun control, and his fierce opposition to the U.S. war against Iraq was not in step with an organized Jewish community that supported the ouster of a leader that could potentially threaten Israel.

But Grossman and other Dean backers often noted that the candidate had received strong support from ordinary Jews around the country, even if they were not the Jews who were leading major American Jewish organizations.

Grossman said he believed that if Dean had gotten the nomination, he would have gotten 70 percent of the Jewish vote.

Meanwhile, for Grossman, his latest move will likely once again endear him to establishment members of the Democratic Party for being one of the first to move away from Dean.

For his part, Grossman said, "I've always felt comfortable being an activist in the Jewish community, bringing my values as a Jewish leader into the Democratic Party."

"I don't see it as being two distinct parts of my life. I see them as merging into a totality."

And Jewish officials say that having such a strong player on the national political scene as a key member of their community can only help, no matter who winds up in the White House.

"It reminds the activists at large how involved we are on all different issues," Rosenthal said.

Grossman 'gave the Dean campaign all the credibility they could get.'

Ira Forman

National Jewish Democratic Council

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# Avi Chai rescues birthright with \$7 million gift

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — A new grant of \$7 million to birthright israel is breathing new life into the cash-strapped program, allowing birthright to more than double the number of slots available for this summer's tours.

The future of birthright — which provides free trips to Israel for Diaspora young adults — was thrown into question recently as it became clear that its sponsors were not going to meet their financial commitments to the organization for 2004.

The major drop in funding came from the Israeli government, which reduced its funding for birthright to a token amount for 2004 due to budget constraints. That prompted birthright to reduce its available slots this summer to 3,500.

Now, with a new "challenge grant" of \$7 million from the Avi Chai Foundation, birthright and Avi Chai are hoping the group of 14 Jewish philanthropists who helped launch birthright will match the Avi Chai grant.

Already, the group has notified its trip providers that it will now be able to bring 8,200 young Jews to Israel this summer.

Avi Chai said foundation members felt compelled to contribute the money to make up for the Israeli government's drastic slash in birthright funding.

We "believed it was unfortunate for the program to have to suffer a significant re-

duction in the number of participants just as birthright was reaching full strength," the foundation said in a news statement.

Birthright officials reacted to the announcement with delight.

"We are extraordinarily grateful to Avi Chai, in whom we have great respect," said philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, one of birthright's founders and principal funders.

Steinhardt said the foundation agreed to become a birthright philanthropic partner and is planning to give an additional \$1 million per year for each of the next five years of the program.

When birthright was launched, the three major sponsors of the program — the Israeli government, a group of Jewish philanthropists and the North American Jewish federation system — agreed to divide evenly the funding for the \$210 million, five-year program.

Each party originally committed to contributing \$70 million for the first five years. However, citing severe budget constraints, Israel cut its funding this year to \$400,000, from \$9 million the previous year.

Compounding birthright's financial woes, the federation system now plans to pay a total of only \$35 million, of which it is currently short \$4 to \$5 million, officials say. As a result, the Jewish Agency for Israel, the overseas partner of the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella

group, has increased its contribution to the program to make up for the shortfall.

The ambitious program — which has brought some 60,000 Diaspora youth to Israel for free 10-day guided trips of the country — has been hailed as a revolutionary way to infuse Diaspora Jews with a strong Jewish identity and a sense of connection to Israel.

Before Tuesday's announcement of the \$7 million grant, birthright's future seemed uncertain.

Although birthright took 10,000 young Jews to Israel this winter, including 8,000 from North America, the program was forced to turn away thousands more who were eligible because of a funding crunch, program officials said.

In its statement, Avi Chai said it wants to be a partner with the philanthropists backing birthright israel for the next five years and said it was awaiting word from the Israeli government on future commitment to the program.

Avi Chai also said foundation members hoped that the Jewish federations in North America and Europe would fulfill their pledge to provide one-third of the program's funding.

Avi Chai is a private foundation that funds educational programs and describes itself as "committed to the perpetuation of the Jewish people, Judaism, and the centrality of the State of Israel to the Jewish people."

## Israeli officials in Russia promote Israel's stand on fence

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russia may not be Israel's closest ally when it comes to Arab-Israeli relations.

But Russia recently earned Israel's praise when it sided with the United States, European Union members and other nations in opposing upcoming hearings on the legality of Israel's West Bank security barrier at The Hague's International Court of Justice.

With the Feb. 23 hearings around the corner, Israeli Cabinet minister Ehud Olmert visited Moscow last week to discuss Russia's positions on Middle East issues and explain Israel's position on the security fence and its value in preventing terrorist attacks.

"We talked about the fence and spent over two hours in a broad discussion," Olmert told reporters last Friday after meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.

"I was encouraged by his repeated attitude about the fence: that the issue of the fence is not a legal issue but a political issue," Olmert said. "The Russian position as it was sent to the Interna-

tional Court is closer to the Israeli position than it was before."

Olmert said Russia's stance on the hearings was encouraging.

Observers say Moscow's position on The Hague hearings on the fence reflect a longtime split between the Kremlin and the Foreign Ministry on Middle East-related issues.

"Many here recognize that the Kremlin is generally much more pro-Israel than the Foreign Ministry," said Grigoriy Melamedov, a Moscow-based expert on the Middle East.

Moscow may have decided to side with Israel on the issue of The Hague hearings to make up for earlier moves perceived as pro-Palestinian — including Russia's votes against Israel's interests at the United Nations, Melamedov said.

Furthermore, Melamedov noted, "Moscow has general dislike toward European international institutes" — which have been critical of Russia for its handling of the situation in Chechnya.

The visit by Olmert — minister of trade and industry — also was aimed at boosting economic ties between Israel and Russia. Trade volume between the two topped \$1 billion in 2003.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## WORLD

### Russian Jewish cemetery attacked

The vandalism Sunday of Jewish graves in St. Petersburg is linked to a recent spate of xenophobic acts, Russian Jewish leaders said.

Vandals desecrated about 50 graves, most of them Jewish, in the Victims of the Jan. 9 Memorial Cemetery, which has a large Jewish section.

Local Jews said they were impressed to find that municipal workers cleaned up many of the defaced tombstones before representatives of the Jewish community arrived at the site.

### Foxman presses Vatican on film

Abraham Foxman wants the Vatican to take a stand on Mel Gibson's controversial film on Jesus. Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, met with Vatican officials Tuesday.

He urged Vatican officials to tell bishops around the world to inform Catholics that the movie, "The Passion of the Christ," is Gibson's interpretation of the Gospels, and not a factual record.

### France, ADL make up

France is taking "significant measures" to protect its Jews, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

The ADL commended French President Jacques Chirac in a letter on Tuesday for his government's "efforts to protect France's Jewish community and its actions to combat the increased anti-Semitism that has spread in France in the past few years." The letter ends the recent heated exchange between the ADL and Chirac about allegations that France was not doing enough to stem anti-Jewish attacks.

### Amnesty for Nazi opposed

The Simon Wiesenthal Center joined Italian Jewish leaders in protesting attempts to win amnesty for a Nazi war criminal.

Erich Priebke, 90, filed a request for amnesty last fall, and there have been calls for his release because of his age and ill health. In a letter to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the Wiesenthal Center urged Italian authorities "to take all necessary measures in order that justice not be aborted or hijacked for political agendas."

Priebke was sentenced to life for his role in the Ardeatine Caves massacre, in which 335 men, 75 of them Jews, were shot in the back of the head on the outskirts of Rome in 1944.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Women at the wall

Construction began on a prayer site for mixed-gender services at Jerusalem's Western Wall.

The construction next to Robinson's Arch comes before an April deadline set by Israel's High Court of Justice to create such a space. The project, which is expected to be completed before then, has an estimated cost of \$400,000 to \$500,000.

### Sharon survives no-confidence votes

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon survived no-confidence votes in his government.

On Monday, the Israeli Knesset voted 53-45 against the measures, which were sparked by opposition to Sharon's social and economic policies. Meanwhile, rabbis affiliated with Israel's settler movement compared Sharon's plan to the policy of appeasement used vis-a-vis the Nazis in the late 1930s. "The sin and crime of dismantling and destroying Jewish communities" is a "crime against the Jewish people of all generations, and it cannot be excused or forgiven," Rabbi David Hacohen said Tuesday.

### Planned protest at fence hearing protested

Dutch politicians are concerned over plans to bring a bombed-out Israeli bus to hearings on Israel's West Bank security barrier. Zaka, the Israeli organization that collects victims' body parts after terrorist attacks, is bringing the bus to The Hague for the International Court of Justice's Feb. 23 hearing on the fence.

International groups on both sides of the issue are planning to come to The Hague on the day of the hearing, and the Dutch organization Christians for Israel is organizing a "silent march" that day to support Israel.

"I think it is sick to make a bus where innocent people were killed the subject of a legal dispute," a city council member at The Hague said.

### Rajoub boosts Sharon

Ariel Sharon's peacemaking potential got a boost — from Yasser Arafat's security adviser.

"Sharon is the only Israeli leader who can bring about peace if he is really sincere about it," Jibril Rajoub told Israeli reporters Tuesday, adding that he was skeptical whether the Israeli prime minister's plan to disengage unilaterally from the Palestinians could work.

Rajoub also said Hamas will not take over in the Gaza Strip if Israel withdraws from it.

### Tannenbaum to be freed?

An Israeli businessman suspected of giving up state secrets while in Hezbollah captivity is unlikely to be prosecuted, his lawyer said.

Elhanan Tannenbaum, who has been under Shin Bet questioning since being repatriated in a prisoner swap with the Lebanese militia last month, had his remand extended on Tuesday by another 10 days. He appeared in Petach Tikva Magistrate's Court speechless and looking dazed.

### No-show no good?

Israel's justice minister opposed Israel's decision to abstain from The Hague's hearings on the West Bank security barrier.

"This is basically a worldwide tribunal where your opinions should be broadcast and reported everywhere in the world," Yosef "Tommy" Lapid told Reuters on Tuesday, referring to hearings at the International Court of Justice set to begin Feb. 23. "If you do not put up an argument, you will not have publicity for your views."

Israel has decided to sit out the hearings at The Hague after filing an affidavit describing the fence as a counterterrorist measure and challenging the authority of the court to rule on the fence's legality.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Swastikas out in Windows font

Microsoft is removing swastikas and the Star of David from one of its Windows fonts.

Officials with the company are calling the inclusion of the swastikas in the "Bookshelf Symbol 7" font a mistake.

The Star of David was removed because it was so close to the swastika in the font set, a Microsoft official told PC Magazine.

The Star of David is available in other fonts, the official said.

### Web site aimed at observant Jewish homes

There's a new Web site aimed at observant Jewish homebuyers. HeimishHome.com offers information on the proximity of houses to synagogues and mikvahs.

The site also features guest editorials from leaders of local Jewish communities.