

IN THE NEWS

Netanyahu wins the Likud primary

Benjamin Netanyahu won a decisive victory in the Likud Party's leadership primary.

The former prime minister won 47 percent of the vote in Monday's primary, defeating Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who came in second with 32 percent, Israel's Channel 1 reported.

Netanyahu will lead the Likud in March 28 general elections, though the party has been running a distant third in polls.

Surveillance worries the Reform movement

The Reform movement expressed "great concern" over reports the Bush administration authorized domestic eavesdropping on American citizens without court approval.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, said Monday that the administration had circumvented safeguards designed to ensure civil liberties in times of national security.

"Throughout the centuries, Jewish communities have known the consequences of unchecked government power," Saperstein said. "For this reason, the Reform Jewish movement now calls on Congress to assert its role in the ingenious system of checks and balances established by our founding fathers through full and fair hearings on the administration's use of domestic spying."

Moscow residents rally against hate

An estimated 3,000 people marched Sunday through Moscow's city center to protest fascism.

The Moscow Without Fascists march was a response by Russian liberals to a rally last month by far-right nationalists against illegal immigrants.

The Nov. 4 march of 1,500 people outraged many in Russia with its openly xenophobic slogans and the participation of neo-Nazis.

This week's march attracted many Jewish residents.

JTA WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Not so silent on Capitol Hill as House OKs Christmas bill

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — First there was the congresswoman who saved Christmas. Then there was the congressman who rescued Chanukah, Kwanzaa and Ramadan. Then, somewhere in between, there was the complaint about elf tossing.

OK, Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.) was kidding about those elves, but last week's Great Congressional Debate about Christmas, Chanukah and just about everything else started out as very, very serious.

"Christmas has been declared politically incorrect," Rep. Jo Ann Davis (R-Va.) said on Dec. 14, introducing her resolution "expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that those who celebrate Christmas believe that the symbols and traditions of Christmas should be protected."

Davis' resolution was the latest salvo in the "Christmas wars," this year's cultural debate over how religious the holiday should be. It has played out on talk shows, in schools, in public squares and even at department stores; now it had come, inevitably, to Congress.

The resolution, H. Res. 579, "strongly disapproves of attempts to ban references to Christmas and expresses support for the use of these symbols and traditions."

"Any sign or even mention of Christmas in public can lead to complaints, litigation, protest and threats," Davis warned. "America's favorite holiday is being twisted beyond recognition."

"Did something happen when I was not looking?" asked Ackerman, known as one of Congress' quickest wits. "Did somebody mug Santa Claus? Is somebody engaging in elf tossing?"

More seriously, other Democrats accused Davis, a Virginian known for her closeness to the pro-Israel lobby, of trampling over the sensibilities of non-Christians.

"Our country has come simply to be tolerant of the fact that we are from many faiths, and we do not want to insult anybody," said Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.). "And I say to you that, far from references to Christmas needing to be supported, they are glorified, and we all know it."

Norton chided Davis to "understand how 'happy holidays' developed. It developed out of a country, first and foremost, where there was rampant anti-Semitism."

Two New York Jewish Democrats, Reps. Anthony Weiner and Steve Israel, asked Davis to amend the resolution to include Chanukah, Kwanzaa and Ramadan.

She said no, and Weiner waxed almost Shakespearean. Or maybe Seussian.

"The symbols of Chanukah are not valuable?" Weiner said. "Sure, they are, I think. The symbols of Kwanzaa are not valuable to some? Sure, they are. I cannot imagine why the gentlewoman who is the sponsor of this, who says that she speaks from a sense of inclusion, would not want to include those. Are those not worthy of being protected? What is the message that is being sent?"

Rep. Jon Porter, a Nevada Republican who moved to suspend the House rules so Davis' bill could come to the floor, interrupted Weiner.

"I am, again, not certain this is the time for the debate," Porter said.

That puzzled Weiner. "It is exactly the place to debate," he said. "We are on the floor

Continued on page 2

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Christmas gets some backing in a congressional vote

Continued from page 1
of the House of Representatives.”

In fact, just minutes earlier, helping to introduce the bill, Porter could hardly contain himself. “What is great about America is we can debate Christmas on the House floor,” Porter said.

Davis later told JTA that according to House rules, she could not amend a suspension resolution, one that suspends scheduled debate for a short period to pass legislation that is more symbolic than practical.

Rep. Steve Israel’s office said later that Israel had checked with the House parliamentarian, who reported that the bill’s lead sponsor — in this case Davis — was able to amend the bill.

Whatever the case, Davis said that adding other holidays was not the point — the threat was to Christmas, not the other holidays.

“Nothing says you have to call a menorah a holiday candle, like you call a Christmas tree a ‘friendship tree,’” she said. If Jews did feel Chanukah was under threat, she said, she would happily support a resolution.

Within two days, Rep. Israel was there for her: On Friday, he formally submitted H. Res. 615 which replicates Davis’ bill exactly, substituting Chanukah, Ramadan and Kwanzaa for Christmas. It has yet to come to the floor.

Davis seemed at a loss over the Jewish objections to the resolution — she said she had run the language by her close Jewish friend, Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) and he approved, with a small amendment, adding the phrase “those who celebrate Christmas” to the bill’s language to make it clear

the intent was not to force the holiday on those who did not celebrate.

“I thought I had settled whatever kind of controversy might upset my friends,” she said.

That’s not quite how Engel remembered it, although he warmly reciprocated Davis’ friendship.

Instead, Engel said, he suggested the modification only after he realized he could not persuade Davis to back away from the resolution.

“It would be better if we didn’t have this bill to vote on, it would be better to keep Congress out of religion, it would be better if it were to go on a voice vote,” Engel said, referring to Davis’ insistence on a roll call, a tactic used to embarrass lawmakers if they vote in the minority on a popular resolution.

On Dec. 15 at midday, he was still anguishing over which way to vote.

By the day’s end, the matter was settled: the resolution passed in a roll call, 401-22, with five others voting “present” and five not voting.

Some Jewish groups were not pleased. “To understand the pernicious nature of this resolution one must first understand that no such ban or attempted ban against Christmas exists,” the American Jewish Congress said in a statement. “Those who wish to marshal the power of government to tip the balance in favor of one side or the other do so in blatant disregard of our nation’s long established tradition of religious liberty.”

The Orthodox Union, which cultivates friends among devout Christians in Congress, did not endorse the bill but noted that — along with another resolution that passed this week calling for an American Jewish History Month — it was in keep-

ing with “recognition and support for religious and cultural diversity.”

Engel and Weiner were among 17 Jews who voted “Yea.” Why Weiner? Could it be because he and Davis are neighbors in terms of their offices in the Longworth building?

Ackerman was one of five Jews voting “Nay,” three — including Israel — voted “Present” and one, Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) was recorded as not voting.

But perhaps the last word was best left to Rep. John Dingell (D-Mich.) who just commemorated his 50th

anniversary in the House. He composed a poem in anticipation of Davis’ bill.

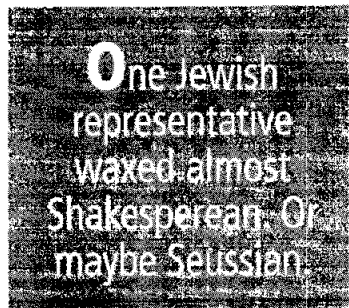
“T’was the week before Christmas and all through the House, no bills were passed ‘bout which Fox News could grouse. Wait, we need a distraction, something divisive and wily, a fabrication straight from the mouth of O’Reilly. We will pretend Christmas is under attack, hold a vote to save it, then pat ourselves on the back.”

Dingell, by the way, voted “Yea.”
(Jewish representatives voting “Yea” on H. Res. 579: Berman (D-Calif.), Davis (D-Calif.), Filner (D-Calif.), Lantos (D-Calif.), Schiff (D-Calif.), Sherman (D-Calif.), Waxman (D-Calif.), Cardin (D-Md.), Frank (D-Mass.), Levin (D-Mich.), Berkley (D-Nev.), Rothman (D-N.J.), Engel (D-N.Y.), Nadler (D-N.Y.), Weiner (D-N.Y.), Cantor (R-Va.), Sanders (I-Vt.).

Jewish representatives voting “Nay” on H. Res. 579: Harman (D-Calif.), Wexler (D-Fla.), Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), Schakowsky (D-Ill.), Ackerman (D-N.Y.).

Jewish representatives voting “Present” on H. Res. 579: Israel (D-N.Y.), Lowey (D-N.Y.), Schwartz (D-Pa.).

Jewish representatives who did not cast a vote on H. Res. 579: Emanuel (D-Ill.).



JTA
WORLD
REPORT

Daniel J. Krifcher
President

Mark J. Joffe
Executive Editor and Publisher

Lisa Hostein
Editor

Michael S. Arnold
Managing Editor

Lenore A. Silverstein
Finance and Administration Director

Noa Artzi-Weill
Marketing Director

JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
© JTA. Reproduction only with permission.

Jewish charity never got Abramoff gift

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A charity for Jewish children with learning disabilities says it never received a \$300,000 gift claimed as a tax exemption by a Jewish lobbyist at the center of a burgeoning scandal.

“We’ve never received a \$300,000 gift, not in our 28 years,” Rabbi Burton Jaffa,

P’tach’s national director, told the Austin American-Statesman in its Dec. 15 edition.

The gift was reported in 2002, the newspaper reported. Abramoff faces a multitude of investigations, some of them checking allegations that he laundered political gifts through charities.

Congress weighs in on Israel-U.S. differences

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Differences between Israel and the Bush administration over Hamas and border crossings recently returned to familiar playing fields: Congress and various factions in the pro-Israel community.

Backers of dueling initiatives in the U.S. House of Representatives claimed success last week.

Last Friday, a resolution passed overwhelmingly that opposes Hamas participation in Palestinian legislative elections next month and warns of funding consequences if the terrorist group joins the Palestinian government. Congress exercises oversight over \$250 million budgeted for the Palestinians this year, and could block funding.

Also on Friday, a bipartisan slate of 108 members of Congress backed a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urging a greater U.S. role in pushing for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

There was considerable overlap between the vote and the letter, even though sponsors of the anti-Hamas resolution criticized the State Department, while the letter praised Rice for brokering an Israeli-Palestinian deal on border crossings.

The twin messages reflected tensions between Israel and the United States over how tough to act over the Palestinian Authority's failure to dismantle Hamas and other terrorist groups.

In an extremely rare statement, Israel's ambassador to the United States praised the substance of the anti-Hamas resolution before the vote was to take place.

"Israel strongly objects to the participation of Hamas in the Palestinian elections," Daniel Ayalon said Dec. 14 in a statement to the media. "The participation of a terrorist organization in elections contradicts the basic principles of democracy and the rule of law."

The statement did not explicitly mention the congressional resolution, but its intent, hours before the first vote on the resolution, was unmistakable.

The Dec. 14 vote was delayed, but when the resolution did come to a vote last Friday, it passed overwhelmingly. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which lobbied for it, declared victory.

"Terrorists have no place in a democratic society," AIPAC, which had lobbied for the resolution, said in a statement.

"Hamas and other terrorist groups pose a direct threat to the emergence of a peaceful, stable, prosperous Palestinian state capable of living in peace with the Jewish state of Israel."

Americans for Peace Now led the lobbying for the congressional letter, which urged a level of U.S. involvement that Israel's government may find uncomfortable.

The group said the letter's 108 signatories showed renewed congressional commitment to the peace process.

"The letter is a remarkable achievement for legislators looking to play a positive role in the peace process and to encourage the administration to continue to be actively involved in trying to end the conflict," Lewis Roth, the group's assistant executive director, told JTA. The group had lobbied against the anti-Hamas resolution.

Congressional intrusions into the peace process were routine during the Clinton administration, but Republican control of both houses of Congress has meant that blunt expressions of unhappiness have been rare since President Bush was elected.

That ended with House Resolution 575, which warned that the inclusion of Hamas in a Palestinian Authority government "will potentially undermine the ability of the United States to have a constructive relationship with, or provide further assistance to, the Palestinian Authority."

The measure passed 397-17.

In a Capitol Hill news conference, sponsors of the resolution said it "sends a clear message to our own State Department that the U.S. Congress will not be taking part" in funding a government that includes Hamas, said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), chairwoman of the House's Middle East subcommittee.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas says he wants to wait until after Jan. 25 legislative elections to fulfill his obligation under the "road map" peace plan to disarm Hamas and other terrorist groups. The State Department repeatedly has made clear that it's not happy with Hamas' participation in the elections, but says the matter is best left to the Palestinians.

"The timetable in which they deal with that issue is one for the Palestinian people to decide upon," Sean McCormack, Rice's spokesman, said last month after Rice met with Saeb Erekat, the top P.A. negotiator.

The same thinking applies to the possibility of Hamas entering the P.A. government. It's not a prospect that the Bush ad-

ministration anticipates with pleasure, but the United States already deals with a government in Lebanon that includes a terrorist group, Hezbollah, and with a government in Iraq that likely will include armed groups that have terrorized civilians.

U.S. officials say that, as in Lebanon, they won't deal with officials or ministers from the terrorist group, but will stop short of banning all contact with the government.

Ayalon's rare intervention in the congressional vote reflected the escalation of Israel-U.S. tension since Rice spent an unplanned extra day in the region last month to make sure that Israel and the Palestinians came to an agreement giving the Palestinians control, for the first time ever, over an international border crossing.

Israeli officials resented Rice's intervention on the Gaza Strip-Egypt border, believing the Palestinians were not doing enough to keep out arms smugglers and terrorists.

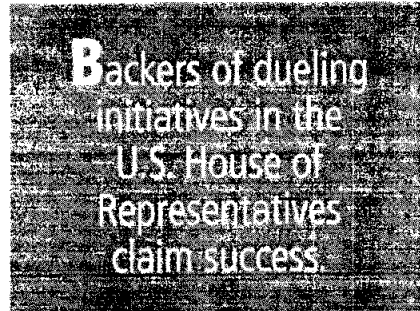
Following a suicide bombing last week, Israel threatened to suspend planned convoys between Gaza and the West Bank, an ancillary part of the agreement.

By mid-week, however, Israel once again conceded under U.S. pressure, and the convoys were due to start this week.

The congressional letter, initiated by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), chairman of the House International Relations Committee, and Rep. Lois Capps (D-Calif.), encouraged the Bush administration to maintain its level of involvement.

"Your role in the achievement of this accord, and the subsequent successful opening of the Gaza crossing point, clearly demonstrate the value of robust, hands-on U.S. diplomatic engagement with Israel and the Palestinians," it said.

AIPAC was silent on the letter. The Zionist Organization of America lobbied against it.



NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Survivors to get more compensation

Holocaust survivors in former Eastern Bloc countries that are now members of the European Union will get increased compensation.

The payments, negotiated by the Claims Conference, will increase from \$162 per month to \$210 per month starting Jan. 1.

The increase, which the Claims Conference had been seeking for several years, reflects the dramatic increase in the cost of living in the region since the original settlement was agreed to in 1998 under the Claims Conference Central and Eastern European Fund.

About 17,000 people are recipients of the money.

Torah center dedicated in Germany

Dancing with a Torah in the streets of Leipzig, Germany, students and members of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation dedicated a new center for Jewish learning.

The Torah was presented Sunday by the Rogosnitzky family of London. Ceremonies were attended by Rabbi Chanoch Ehrentreu, head of the Rabbinical Court of London; George Ban, executive vice president of the Lauder Foundation; and Kuf Kaufmann, head of the local Jewish community, among others.

German leader to visit Israel

Germany's chancellor will visit Israel next month. German officials said Monday that Angela Merkel would visit the Jewish state sometime in late January.

According to Israeli media, the visit is meant to show solidarity following Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent calls to "wipe Israel off the map" and his statements denying the Holocaust.

Before her election in September, Merkel vowed to press the fight against anti-Semitism and vowed that Germany would continue to be committed to Israel's security.

Slovak acquitted of Nazi atrocity

A Slovak suspected of a Nazi-era atrocity was acquitted.

A Munich court cleared Ladislav Niznansky on Monday on charges of ordering the execution of 164 civilians, including 18 Jews, in Slovakia in 1945 as part of his collaboration with Nazi Germany.

Niznansky, 88, had been convicted in absentia by a Czechoslovak court in 1962, when he was already living in West Germany.

NORTH AMERICA

Bush sends Chanukah greetings

President Bush sent his annual greetings for Chanukah.

"As Jewish Americans prepare to light the Chanukah candles this year, we give thanks for God's many blessings and His watch and care over our Nation," Bush said in a statement. "We remember our many military families and ask God's special blessing on those who have lost loved ones in freedom's cause. We are grateful for the courage and commitment of America's men and women in uniform and pray for their safety as they serve around the world to spread peace and liberty."

Hadassah seeks violence act

Hadassah called on President Bush to sign the Violence Against Women Act.

Congress on Saturday reauthorized the legislation, which creates grant programs and other initiatives to help victims of domestic violence, and the measure awaits the president's signature.

"Since this groundbreaking legislation first passed, violence against women has dropped; domestic violence is down by 50 percent; murder by an abusive partner is down 22 percent; and now

more than half of rape victims report the crime," said June Walker, Hadassah's president. "We urge President Bush to sign this VAWA legislation at his earliest convenience."

MIDDLE EAST

Israel thwarts three attacks

Israeli security forces foiled three attempted Palestinian terrorist attacks.

Troops arrested a Palestinian on Monday who tried to cross the boundary fence from the northern Gaza Strip into Israel; the man was wearing an explosives belt of the kind used by suicide bombers.

Outside Jerusalem, soldiers intercepted two Palestinians who tried to sneak into the Har Homa neighborhood with knives, Molotov cocktails and a Hamas flag.

In the West Bank, two knife-wielding Palestinians were caught attempting to cut through the fence protecting a Jordan Valley settlement.

On Sunday, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Israeli Cabinet that the intelligence services had received dozens of alerts of impending terrorist attacks.

Foreign workers' children recognized in Israel

Israel recognized 10 children of foreign workers as permanent residents.

Resident identity cards were granted Monday to the 10 candidates, all of whom were born in Israel, and to 12 of their first-degree relatives in line with a government decision to formalize the status of long-term foreign workers.

Under the new law, those born to legal foreign workers, and over age 10, can apply for permanent citizenship and avoid deportation.

Civil-liberties groups said the criteria were too narrow to deal with thousands of foreign workers who consider Israel their home even after their visas expire.

Amir's brother barred from army

A brother of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin was barred from mandatory military service in Israel.

Amitai Amir, whose elder brother Yigal is serving a life sentence for shooting the Israeli prime minister in 1995, was to have been conscripted this winter for the standard three years of national service, but he was blacklisted by the military after making radical comments, security sources said Monday.

During the recent 10th anniversary of the Rabin assassination, Amitai Amir was shown on Israeli television making light of the slaying and of Jewish terrorist attacks against Arabs.

Another of Amir's younger brothers, Sagiv, successfully completed military service as an infantry sniper.

European Jews pledge support for 'peace zone'

European Jewish leaders told Jordan's King Abdullah II they are willing to help develop an economic "peace zone" in the Mideast.

The pledge by European Jewish Congress officials came in a meeting Sunday with Abdullah in Amman, Jordan.

During the meeting, Abdullah emphasized the need for a dialogue among Muslims, Christians and Jews in the region, the group said in a news release.

Russian American Jews visit Israel

A delegation of Russian American leaders left for Israel on Sunday. The Jewish Agency for Israel is sponsoring the trip by Russian American Jews for Israel.

On Tuesday, the officials will visit the Nativ program in which Israeli soldiers from the former Soviet Union learn about Judaism.