

IN THE NEWS

Hamas presents Cabinet to Abbas

Hamas presented its candidates for the new Palestinian Cabinet to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

The P.A.'s prime minister-designate, Ismail Haniyeh, named senior Hamas leaders Mahmoud Zahar to be foreign minister and Said Sayam as interior minister.

Nasser Eddin Shaer, 48, a relative moderate from Nablus and an Islamic studies professor, was tapped as Haniyeh's deputy and assigned the education portfolio.

The list was made up of 10 ministers from Gaza and 14 from the West Bank, and included a Christian and a woman.

Israel OKs bird flu aid

The Israeli government approved aid for poultry farmers whose stock was hit by bird flu.

On Sunday, Israel earmarked the equivalent of \$3.4 million for affected farmers, as hundreds of thousands of turkeys and chickens were slaughtered in an attempt to curb the virus.

Bird flu was confirmed last Friday at three kibbutzim and a moshav after some 11,000 turkeys died.

After the confirmation, the country's Health Ministry ordered the flocks of turkeys in all four communities destroyed. [Story, Pg. 3]

Jewish group meets Benedict XVI

A delegation from a U.S. Jewish group met the pope. Interfaith efforts were a focus of the March 16 discussions between Benedict XVI and the American Jewish Committee delegation at the Vatican.

Benedict has made interfaith dialogue a focus since he became pope in April 2005.

In a related development, the AJCommittee will mark its 100th anniversary with gala events in Jerusalem, Berlin and Washington.



WORLD REPORT

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After lengthy search for leader, Hillel chooses a youthful insider

By SUE FISHKOFF

OAKLAND, Calif. (JTA) — After a search of more than three years, the largest Jewish student organization in the world has a new president.

Wayne Firestone, 42, a former attorney, academic and longtime Jewish community professional who has been executive vice-president of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life since last September, was tapped last Friday to replace the group's interim president, Avraham Infeld.

The promotion, which was announced by the board of directors' nominating committee, will become official after a vote of the full board in two weeks. Firestone would take the helm of Hillel, which is represented on 500 college and university campuses around the world, on Sept 1.

So how is Firestone planning to celebrate? On Sunday morning he was to grab a hammer and some nails and hop a plane to Gulfport, Miss., to join 750 Hillel students spending their spring break helping to rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

"It's our largest alternative spring break project ever," Firestone said last Friday in a phone interview with JTA.

"It's the real manifestation of what" Infeld "came in to do, when he started speaking the language of tzedek," or social justice, Firestone said. "We've always been doing it in small pieces, but 9/11, and then the tsunami and Katrina, brought a different level of understanding that there are people out there who need our help and attention."

That energy, passion and focus on expressing Jewish identity through righteous

action are typical of what Firestone brings to an organization that has been aggressively repositioning itself on campus.

The organization's focus used to be getting Jews together, as represented by its old motto of "doing Jewish with other Jews."

Now the emphasis is more universal — on helping students develop Jewish identities within the context of their larger society — and non-Jews are welcome to participate.

Firestone doesn't shy away from criticizing himself or the organization. He says his greatest challenge will be "breaking through the stereotypes," such as the "student perception of clique-iness, a lack of openness" at Hillel.

"We need to be forthcoming about that and address it," he said.

Hillel needs to abandon "self-defeating attitudes," Firestone said, such as the assumption that religious and secular kids won't hang out together, to focus on finding common interests that students can rally around, while maintaining their diversity.

"We need to say, 'We're this colorful, loud, challenging, innovative place on campus, come be a part of us.' It's the exact opposite of when I was in college, when everyone was trying to look less Jewish, to assimilate," Firestone said.

"Today there's a desire to define yourself as you choose. This will be an important wave for us to ride as we reintroduce ourselves to the community and to young people."

Noting that today's college students, members of a group sociologists call "the millennials," are proud of their Jewish identity but leery of institutional affiliation or organizational life, Firestone pledged that Hillel

Continued on page 2

■ An attorney by training, Firestone has been with Hillel since 2002

Continued from page 1

would continue to evolve and experiment to meet their needs, rather than “impose an agenda” on the students.

“We’re not asking them to be a member of anything. We’re saying, ‘Here we are, ready to listen and be part of your lives,’ ” he said.

It’s all part of the group’s new five-year plan, which Firestone helped develop as staff director of the organization’s Strategic Planning Committee. Major goals are doubling the number of students Hillel reaches and creating a \$100-million endowment.

The selection committee felt Firestone’s work in planning Hillel’s future direction put him in a strong position to implement the new vision.

“We are thrilled to see Wayne assume the presidency of Hillel,” said Lynn Schusterman, a vice chairwoman of Hillel’s International Board of Governors. “He’s a talented administrator, a strong leader, a visionary and a real Hillel success story, having risen through the organization from student activist to top professional. He’ll do an outstanding job.”

Firestone joined Hillel in 2002 as executive director of the Israel on Campus Coalition, a partnership of Hillel and the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation. The ICC, formed at the height of the Palestinian intifada, was tasked with improving Israel’s image on college campuses and combating anti-Israel agitation.

Firestone’s on-campus Israel work is

one of his major strengths, observers say.

“Wayne has an instinctive feel for the Jewish community and its many organizations, and a very keen understanding of the Israel-Diaspora relationship,” said Jonathan Kessler, director of leadership development for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Kessler, who led missions to Israel for college students with Firestone, said Firestone was able to balance Israel education and advocacy.

“He just has a magnificent rapport with students,” Kessler said.

Dana Raucher, executive director of the Samuel Bron-

fman Foundation, who was on the board’s nominating committee, said: “Wayne reflects Jewish values in his life, family and his professional career. He knows how to lead with a grace and style that is very unique.”

An attorney by training, Firestone worked as a high-tech executive in Israel following a 1995-1998 stint as an administrator and lecturer at Haifa’s Technion—Israel Institute of Technology. He headed the Anti-Defamation League’s Israel office for a year before joining Hillel in 2002.

Firestone is lauded for his extensive experience in Jewish communal work, as well as his long history with Hillel, dating back to his days as a student activist at the University of Miami.

“He knows Hillel as well as anyone coming in, certainly better than the other candidates,” said mega-philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, a vice chairman of Hillel’s board. “He’s familiar with the system, he’s committed, intelligent, he’s attractive and he’s got great motivation to do the job.”

At the same time, Steinhardt said he is concerned about Firestone’s relative youth, saying the new position “is a major step up in responsibility and complexity. It’s a very public position.”

“I hope he has the breadth to do it,” Steinhardt said.

Firestone is stepping into the large shoes left by Hillel’s longtime former president, Richard Joel, who served from 1988 until 2003, when he left to become president of Yeshiva University.

Infeld, an Israeli and longtime Jewish educator and leader, took

over as interim president, a title that was extended in 2004 but still was known to be a temporary post.

In his first seven years, Joel virtually transformed Hillel, quadrupling its budget and getting new funding from the Schusterman and Steinhardt foundations, and securing Hillel’s independence from its parent organization, B’nai B’rith.

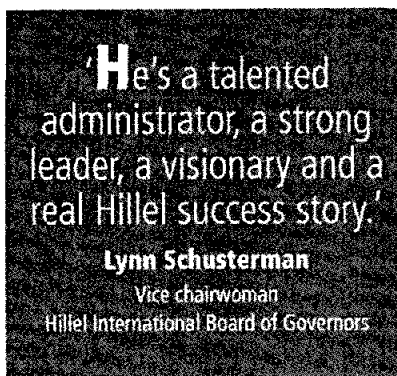
Firestone will be held up to that impressive yardstick.

Several top Jewish professionals turned down the job over the past few years, and the organization publicly relaunched its search last year.

Firestone’s expertise and experience lies more in programming than fund raising, but he says his appointment does not signal a turn away from the continued need for fund raising.

He’ll focus on “identifying new money,” Firestone said, appealing to a new generation of donors that hasn’t been giving heavily to Jewish causes.

(JTA Staff Writer Matthew E. Berger in Washington contributed to this report.)



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Chabad launches women’s site

NEW YORK (JTA) — Chabad.org has launched a Web site aimed at Jewish women. TheJewishWoman.org provides information about Jewish tradition, life-cycle events, money, relationships, medical questions, household issues and more “from a Jewish woman’s perspective,” ac-

ording to editor Sara Esther Crispe. Like other Chabad projects, the site is designed to serve unaffiliated and secular Jews as well as observant women. Chat rooms and discussion forums are planned for what Crispe hopes will become an online Jewish women’s community.

Israel hit with avian bird flu

By DAN BARON

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For once, terrorists are not the infiltrators most worrying Israelis.

The Jewish state joined the fraternity

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

■ The 2006 Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education's Assembly for Jewish Day School Education, in Boston, offers day school professionals, lay leaders, major donors and community leaders from across North America the opportunity to hear from top experts in the field, learn about best practices, exchange ideas and network.

TUESDAY

■ A one-day conference aimed at increasing U.S. investment in Israeli high-tech firms takes place in Newark, N.J. The US/Israel Venture Summit is focused on matching investors with Israeli start-up companies.

WEDNESDAY

■ The American Jewish Committee marks its 100th anniversary with gala events Wednesday in Jerusalem, Berlin and Washington. A charter plane will bring AJCommittee lay leaders and directors to Berlin from Israel, where they will attend a gala dinner and several public events exploring the history and current work of the group.

THURSDAY

■ Kosher World takes place in Anaheim, Calif. The show is believed to be the only kosher trade show on the West Coast.

■ An Israeli survivor of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre will give talks on U.S. college campuses. Dan Alon, a fencer at the 1972 games, will speak at Yale University in New Haven. Alon, who recently spoke at universities in England, will also speak at the University of Connecticut, Dartmouth and Princeton. Chabad on Campus is sponsoring Alon's tour.

FRIDAY

■ Judge T.S. Ellis III of the U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., is expected to deliver his decision on a motion to dismiss the government's classified information leak case against two former staffers at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman are facing trial for allegedly receiving and distributing classified information about Iran to an Israeli diplomat, a journalist and to fellow AIPAC staffers.

SATURDAY

■ FORUSA, a liberal interfaith group with strong ties to Palestinians and Israeli peace groups, starts its two-week interfaith "peace mission." Participants leave from New York and will travel through the West Bank and Israel.

of nations affected by avian flu over the weekend, when a contagion in the Negev prompted the mass sorting of poultry and quarantine of several farm personnel.

With less than two weeks to go before national elections, interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert moved fast to prevent panic.

"The fact that avian flu has been discovered warrants serious attention, but I recommend we stay calm to ensure this does not spread to humans," he told his Cabinet on Sunday.

Formally known as H5N1, avian flu has reached across Europe, Africa and parts of Asia since 2003, killing at least 100 people who caught it from infected fowl, and killing or forcing the slaughter of tens of millions of chickens and ducks across Asia.

Scientists fear it may mutate into a strain communicable between humans, triggering a global pandemic.

Although health officials did not immediately confirm that ailing turkeys discovered at four Negev farms had been the victims of H5N1, the government took no chances, ordering all poultry at the affected sites poisoned and buried.

Some \$3.4 million was earmarked to compensate farmers for their losses. Some 400,000 to 500,000 turkeys and chickens would be killed; Israeli farmers annually raise 200 million birds for food.

Four agricultural workers who showed signs of the flu were hospitalized. But tests revealed they were clean of H5N1.

Agriculture Minister Ze'ev Boim said closures had been imposed on the four Negev farms to prevent the avian flu pen-

etrating northward. He predicted that the outbreak would be eradicated within 45 days.

Officials have also played down media reports that some infected poultry may have already reached stores, noting that the meat could be consumed as usual if properly cooked.

"There is no lack of meat, and the public need not fear meat bought in recognized stores," Boim said.

Despite the ministry's assurances, poultry and egg sales dropped in Israel over the weekend, Ha'aretz reported. The Israeli daily quoted predictions from economists that more than 40 percent of

the businesses in the poultry, egg and meat sectors are in danger of going out of business as a result of the expected drop in sales.

In neighboring Egypt, a 30-year-old woman died of avian flu, stoking regional jitters. Israel has been cooperating closely


with Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, testing dead fowl found in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on behalf of their owners.

Despite the testing, Palestinian health officials buried alive hundreds of chickens on Saturday, saying they did not want to risk waiting for the results.

With Hamas on the verge of forming a government in the Palestinian Authority, a cutoff of diplomatic ties seems inevitable.

But one Israeli official voiced optimism that this would not affect efforts to keep avian flu at bay.

"I hope that the very close cooperation which we have with our neighbors will continue. Everybody has to eat," said Moshe Haimovitch of the Agriculture Ministry.



Poultry and egg sales dropped in Israel over the weekend.

Peres fumes at pot party

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Shimon Peres said he sees an electoral threat in an Israeli party that wants pot legalized.

"Green Leaf is our real and major foe in the elections," the elder statesman, second on the ruling Kadima Party's parliamentary candidate list, was quoted as telling party faithful over the weekend.

"They want to spread illusions. But we have no drugs and no illusions. We are a party with both feet on the ground." Polls suggest that Green Leaf could, for the first time, win a couple of Knesset seats in the March 28 vote. Kadima is widely expected to sweep to power with around 40 of the Knesset's 120 seats.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

UJC funding system replaced

The North American federation system has implemented a new system to determine overseas funding.

The Overseas Needs Assessment and Distribution Committee, known as ONAD, has been replaced by direct negotiations in New York between leaders of the federation system's overseas beneficiary groups, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Under the new two-year agreement, the Jewish Agency will continue to receive 75 percent of the UJC's undesignated overseas dollars and the JDC will receive 25 percent.

The ONAD process, which included a cross-section of federation leadership to determine allocations, was widely seen as hamstrung by bureaucracy and politics.

The new arrangement, arbitrated by UJC leadership, was hailed as a victory by both the JDC and JAFI. JAFI Chairman Zeev Bielski wrote in an email to the agency's board that the "agreement sets the stage for a new era of cooperation and partnership for fund raising and meeting critical needs."

But Steve Schwager, JDC's executive vice president, warned that success is contingent on maintaining current levels of overseas funding — some \$43 million in core funding for JDC and \$129 million for the Jewish Agency.

Study: Lobby influences Mideast policy

The pro-Israel lobby has turned America's Mideast policy against U.S. interests, according to a report by researchers at Harvard and the University of Chicago.

The analysis, distributed March 16 by Palestinian officials in Washington, said groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and other supporters of Israel have skewed U.S. policy, Ha'aretz reported.

The report, which utilized newspaper accounts and reports from the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, also suggests supporters of Israel pushed the United States into war with Iraq.

New York invests in Israeli high-tech

The state of New York's pension fund will invest \$100 million in Israeli high-tech companies.

New York's state comptroller, Alan Hevesi, made the announcement last week during a visit to Israel. The investment will bring the state's pension fund total investment in Israel to more than \$1 billion.

MIDDLE EAST

Mofaz seen keeping portfolio

Ehud Olmert reportedly plans to keep Shaul Mofaz as defense minister should their Kadima Party win Israeli elections.

Ma'ariv quoted senior political sources Sunday as saying that Olmert, the interim prime minister favored to win the March 28 vote, did not want to risk instability by switching defense ministers in the next government.

Mofaz and Olmert are not believed to be on the best of terms, and the inclusion of former Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter in the Kadima list has raised speculation that he could be tapped for the Defense Ministry.

The Labor Party, which is expected to join Kadima in a future coalition government, could also promote senior candidate Ami Ayalon, another former Shin Bet chief, for the key post.

Sharon's notes removed

Ariel Sharon's personal documents were removed from his Jerusalem office.

The notes to aides, political officials and ministers were moved to the prime minister's home, and the Sharon family hired an archivist to organize the notes and other documents from Sharon's five years as prime minister.

Sharon's personal effects are expected to be moved from the office in coming days, and official documents will be moved to the state archives later this month.

Sharon remains comatose after suffering a stroke in early January, and Israeli voters will elect a new prime minister later this month.

Haniyeh hopes for peace agreement

The Palestinian Authority's incoming prime minister said he could envision peace with Israel, provided Israel ceded eastern Jerusalem. Ismail Haniyeh told CBS News on March 16 that he hoped to sign a peace agreement with Israel, but said Hamas would not disarm or accept Israel's right to exist unless Israel "recognized a Palestinian state within the boundaries of Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem."

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said Haniyeh's comments were "verbal gymnastics and word games."

Fatah opts out of Palestinian Authority

The Fatah Party chose not to enter a Hamas-led Palestinian government.

The Central Committee of Fatah, which has dominated Palestinian politics for the past 40 years until Hamas' electoral victory in January, decided last Friday not to join the government, sources told Ha'aretz.

Hamas has sought to get several factions, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, to join the government.

WORLD

Jew beaten in France

A Jewish man was attacked in his car in the suburbs of Paris. Last week's attack was carried out by three men of African and North African origin, according to the Office of Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism.

The three forced the man to stop his car and forcibly removed him from the vehicle, allegedly calling him a Jew in Arabic. The man was thrown to the ground and beaten; his attackers fled when another car passed by.

The victim managed to get his attackers' license plate number and go to the police station to press charges. The three men were then located and arrested.

Belarus Reform community gets first megillah

The Reform community in Bobruisk, Belarus, celebrated Purim last week with its first Scroll of Esther.

The megillah, believed to be the first donated to a Reform congregation in Belarus, was sent by the Hendon Reform Synagogue in London and is for the use of the entire Belarus Progressive movement. Hendon is twinned with the Bobruisk congregation through Exodus 2000, which assists Progressive communities in the former Soviet Union.

The British congregation plans to bring young people still suffering from the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster to London next year.