

IN THE NEWS
Hoyer wins leadership

U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), one of the pro-Israel community's closest friends in the U.S. House of Representatives, was elected majority leader.

The secret vote Thursday was one of only two contested votes for the new leadership of the Democratic Party after it wrested control of the House from the Republicans in last week's elections. Hoyer has made a point of promoting bipartisan support of Israel and has isolated Democrats who have been strongly critical of the Jewish state.

Nobel economist Friedman dies at 94

Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman died at 94.

He succumbed to heart failure in San Francisco on Thursday. Born in New York City to Jewish immigrants from what is now Ukraine, Friedman was the youngest of four children. He developed some of his early economic theories while working for President Roosevelt's New Deal.

Friedman helped found the Chicago school of economics, which believed that government should have a reduced role in the economy, outside of regulating the monetary supply to control inflation. His work earned him the Nobel Prize in economics in 1976.

Israel rejects European peace plan

Israel rejected a peace proposal drafted by Spain, France and Italy, said Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. The Associated Press quoted Livni on Thursday as telling Spanish counterpart Miguel Angel Moratinos that it was unacceptable for such an initiative to be launched without the Jewish state's coordination.

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero announced the plan Thursday in Madrid. The countries are planning to launch the initiative next month at the European Union leaders summit in Finland.

WORLD REPORT

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Israeli Ambassador Daniel Ayalon in his Washington office.

Larry Luxner

In parting interview, ambassador says Israel must build more bridges

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — After more than four years representing Israel's interests in Washington, Daniel Ayalon says the short-term picture for his successor as ambassador is rosy: U.S. support for Israel transcends party affiliation and remains rock solid.

Longer term, however, he sees challenges for Israel in reaching the shifting communities that make up the American fabric.

"When we look decades ahead, beyond the relationship with Congress and this administration — and those are truly important — we must also connect with the communities," Ayalon said recently at his final briefing for the Hebrew-speaking press. "America is a great puzzle, it is a nation that reinvents itself."

Ayalon leaves this month after serving

four turbulent years that included part of the intifada, the launching of the U.S.-driven "road map" peace plan, the isolating of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, the Columbia shuttle tragedy, Iran's burgeoning nuclear program, President Bush's recognition of an Israeli claim to some West Bank settlements, the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and this summer's war with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Succeeding him is Sallai Meridor, a former chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Ayalon saw challenges for Israel in terms of decades, not just the coming years.

Relations with the evangelical community are strong, he said, but outreach is needed in other areas. He cited African Americans, Asians and Roman Catholics — a community he believes will signifi-

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**BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES**

■ *Ayalon says Israel must solidify its ties with ethnic groups — including the American Jews*

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cantly expand with the rise of immigration from Latin America — and even the Jewish community.

"We take the Jewish community for granted, which is a mistake," he said, adding that Israel must seek new ways to engage the younger generation of Jews who did not live through some of its most trying wars.

"They are an educated and curious community," he said.

It also is important to reach out to blacks, he said, noting with pride the friendship he cultivated with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the civil rights leader who has had fraught relations with American Jews in the past.

"He's an asset," Ayalon said of Jackson. The problems that afflicted the black-Jewish relationship are in the past, he said: From the black perspective, Israel's relationship with apartheid South Africa ended when democracy came to that country, and affirmative action is no longer the hot button issue it once was.

For their part, Ayalon said, Jews should accept Jackson's apologies for his past jibes against Jews, including his 1984 reference to New York as "Hymietown." He noted that Jackson has tried to intervene on behalf of Israelis held hostage in Arab countries and dismissed a reporter's comment that such interventions are self-serving.

"The principle is his involvement," Ayalon said.

"Relations with the black community

are very fraught, complex, and they did not have to get to that stage," he said. "We must never neglect the black community. There are those who tell me 'they have not advanced, others like the Asians have overtaken them' — that's just not correct."

Such challenges become apparent only when Israeli envoys get beyond the Beltway, Ayalon said, something he would recommend to his successor.

He noted that in 2004 he discounted the conventional wisdom in Washington in the final weeks of the presidential election — that Bush would be ousted — only because of his chats with ordinary Americans in cities such as Cincinnati and San Diego.

"Washington is the bubble," he said. "You leave the Beltway and you discover whole other worlds."

Ayalon spoke a week before the congressional midterm elections — which the Democrats ended up sweeping — but said he didn't think the outcome would affect U.S.-Israel relations ahead of the 2008 presidential election.

Deadlock between Congress and the White House "will influence domestic policy, immigration, health care, taxes, social policies, the Supreme Court — it won't influence foreign policy, with the possible exception of Iraq. For sure, not the U.S.-Israel relationship," he said.

He cited the bipartisan wall of support for Israel in Congress, but added that Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice are determined not to force an Israeli-Palestinian peace process until the conditions are ripe. That's certainly not the case now, he said, with the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority refusing to renounce terrorism or recognize Israel.

"I can promise you from my personal knowledge of Bush and Condi, they will not do artificial things, they won't bang their heads against the wall," Ayalon said. "If they don't see an internal Palestinian process that reveals a real partner, one that gives and takes with the Israeli government, it will be more of the same."

The U.S. backing for democratization in the Middle East also helps protect Israel, he said: As the region's pre-eminent

democracy, Israel serves as a model. Additionally, Israel and the United States share concerns about terrorism and the need to contain Iran.

"There will be no coercion, there will be cooperation," Ayalon predicted.

He described a determination in the Bush administration to confront Iran over its nuclear program, which international inspectors believe is a precursor to the manufacture of weapons. He predicted U.N. sanctions in place by December unless Iran relents.

Ayalon clearly enjoyed his personal relationships with the powerful, and spoke of long conversations about Brahms with Rice, a trained concert pianist.

"That is, she talked and I mostly nodded," he said.

Such friendly personal relations are key to relations between nations, he said. Bush's friendship

with then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon helped bring about the April 2004 U.S. recognition of Israel's claims in the West Bank, he said, likening Bush's letter of assurances to Britain's 1917 Balfour Declaration envisioning Jewish statehood, as well as Bush's unprecedented backing for Israel during this summer's war in Lebanon.

The first career diplomat to take the Washington job — others have been political appointees — Ayalon is retiring from the foreign service in January at age 51. After the top job, he has nowhere to go.

He says he has job offers, including a run for mayor of his hometown, Hod Hasharon, but will not even comment on them until Jan. 1, when he is no longer employed by Israel's government.

Before ending the interview, Ayalon had one final recommendation for Meridor: Tear down the ambassador's residence in northwest Washington and build a new one. The house, built in the 1940s, is small and falling apart.

Furthermore, its size led to tensions between Ayalon's wife, Anne, and domestic staff, which played out in the Israeli tabloids.

"It should be a dignified house," he said. "Not fancy, but comfortable." ■

'Relations with the black community are very fraught, complex, and they did not have to get to that stage.'

Daniel Ayalon

Israeli ambassador to U.S.

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Gates on Iran — cause for concern?

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Bush's nomination of Robert Gates as defense secretary has anxious pro-Israel and Israeli leaders looking East, trying to gauge whether Gates' past conciliatory noises on Iran herald a change in U.S. policy.

As a result, Bush administration officials have been gently guiding their gaze back West — to Texas, where Gates, in his current role as president of Texas A&M University, is very much part of an establishment noted more for its loyalty to the Bush family than to any foreign policy outlook.

In other words, Gates was selected less for his views and more for his history of willingness to carry out administration policy, however it's shaped after the Democrats swept Congress and the deeply unpopular Donald Rumsfeld was ousted as defense secretary.

"It's not really where he goes, it's where the president goes," Mara Rudman, a Clinton administration member of the National Security Council, said of Gates last week at an Israel Policy Forum function in Washington.

Pro-Israel officials were taken aback by the selection, especially because Gates' only recent public policy statement, in 2004, recommended accommodation of Iran.

"The current lack of sustained engagement with Iran harms U.S. interests in a critical region of the world," Gates said in a 2004 Council on Foreign Relations paper coauthored with Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security adviser. "Direct dialogue with Tehran on specific areas of mutual concern should be pursued."

Within a day, the remarks were widely distributed by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a pro-Israel think tank. They set off alarm bells for a pro-Israel community closely watching how Bush deals with domestic pressure to tamp down violence in Iraq after Democrats won both houses of Congress by campaigning against Bush's handling of the war.

A congressionally mandated commission on Iraq co-chaired by James Baker, Bush's father's secretary of state, and Lee Hamilton, a former Democratic congressman, is set to recommend greater engagement with Iran because of its influence with Iraq's Shi'ite majority.

Not only is Gates a member of the commission, his closest professional friendship is with Brent Scowcroft, the elder Bush's national security adviser. Scowcroft and Baker guided that administration's pressure on Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians.

Gates is firmly in the "realist" community, which has clashed with neoconservatives, said Tom Neumann, executive director of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs. But that's not why Gates was hired, Neumann said, adding that Gates was appointed more because he has a record of doing what he's told.

"There's nothing good or bad about Gates," Neumann said. "They wanted someone who doesn't make waves."

That seemed to be Bush's emphasis last week in announcing the nomination of Gates, who led the Central Intelligence Agency from 1991-93, during Bush's father's term.

"He knows that the challenge of protecting our country is larger than any political party, and he has a record of working with leaders of both sides of the aisle to strengthen our national security," Bush said.

Gates, 62, was CIA director during the first Persian Gulf War. The first President Bush named the veteran agent to the post after a prior attempt by President Reagan to elevate Gates to the post failed in 1987.

Gates withdrew from the 1987 battle because at the time he appeared implicated in the Iran-Contra affair, the secret, illegal dealings in which Reagan administration officials attempted to simultaneously bolster right-wing Central American insurgents and pay Iran in arms to release U.S. hostages in Lebanon. Gates was never charged with any crime in the affair.

The elder Bush's appointment was an example of the famed Bush family loyalty to those who are loyal to the Bushes: Gates had assiduously courted Bush when he was vice president to Reagan.

In an echo of current Iraq war controversies, a Congressional Quarterly review of Gates' CIA career found that in the



Paul Morse/White House

Robert Gates speaks to the media in the Oval Office, Nov. 8.

1980s, colleagues in the agency accused him of "fixing" intelligence to please his political bosses. One example: He said the Soviets were encouraging the Palestine Liberation Organization to carry out terrorist acts, though there was some intelligence suggesting the opposite.

Gates' most notorious quality is perhaps his micromanagement: According to Texas Monthly magazine, Gates fired five top food managers at Texas A&M and replaced them with staff from Stanford University in California in order to expose A&M's prickly traditionalists to different cultures.

Neumann of JINSA said that however Gates turned out, Rumsfeld — known for his closeness to Israel — would be missed. He cited a recent revelation by Colin Powell that some State Department staff referred to Rumsfeld and his staff as the "JINSA crowd."

"The administration today was stronger on Israel than any administration in my life," Neumann said.

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

'It's not really where he goes, it's where the president goes.'

Mara Rudman

National Security Council, Clinton administration

Election aftermath: Time for a U.S. Kadima

By DAVID BOROWICH

NEW YORK (JTA) — There's a subtle, unspoken message in the Democratic Party's overwhelming victory in recent midterm congressional elections: The political pendulum that alternates between liberal and conservative camps has exposed an American desire for a centrist party.

The pendulum effect has been felt most acutely in the executive office but can be observed throughout the political landscape. From Presidents Carter to Reagan and then Clinton to Bush, the American political system has shown an ability to reverse course, all the while maintaining its eye on the center line. It essentially is a corrective force that enables democracy, like an unwieldy ship, to maintain a central course.

The founding fathers developed a system of government with checks and balances designed to be responsive to the general population, but also to rein in short-term, extremist thinking. What they perhaps did not envision was a bulky, two-party political system, in which the will of the majority would be dictated largely by the more active, extremist elements in these parties.

Examples abound, through tactics like gerrymandering of congressional districts or implementing arcane nominating procedures throughout the parties.

This type of extreme swing has been especially pronounced in Israel, which recently experienced the emergence of a new political reality. While far from a proven or sustained phenomenon, the establishment last year of Kadima, Israel's centrist ruling party, was a long-sought remedy to Israel's own pendulum.

The Kadima Party purportedly represents what the majority of Israelis seek — a moderate force that gives voice to the desires of Israel's center. The creation of Kadima rallied the center, not only with its optimistic exhortation for "forward" progress but with its ability to siphon moderate elements from each of the two more established parties.

Moderates from both Likud and Labor were able to join forces — and it turns out that many of them had far more in common with their former political competitors than they did with former compatriots.

In creating this new party, former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon recognized that the

left of the right and the right of the left were better off strengthening each other than constantly being pulled apart by their parties' more extremist elements.

Perhaps this model can pave the way for a reorganization of politics in America. As world issues become more complex and not as easily broken down into "blue" (Democratic) and "red" (Republican), it may be time for a new, centrist political party in America.

Such a party would not just speak of bipartisanship but would be a consensus unto itself. It would be a party that honors the sacred principles on which this country was founded but can still articulate a vision for the 21st century.

It could be a party of centrist leaders like Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and current Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and others.

Whether called "Democans" or "Republicrats" or something like "Libertans" (from the Liberty party), such a party would need significant funding and big names to carry its banner.

Such a movement could usher in a new age of effectiveness and restore civility to government. More importantly, it would reflect the American people's dormant desire for balance. And it would be a vehicle to re-engage the many disenfranchised voters who are tired of limited and lesser-of-two-evil choices.

The results in Connecticut speak volumes about the possibilities and demand for a centrist party in America. Ousted in the primary by the vocal and active liberal wing of Connecticut's Democratic party, incumbent Sen. Joseph Lieberman opted to stay in the general election, running as an independent. His belief was that the Democratic party's primary outcome did not reflect the views of most voters in his state.

Lieberman is a well-respected moderate voice in the Senate who has served with distinction for three terms — but the Democratic establishment opted to support his challenger. Yet Ned Lamont still lost, despite overwhelming national and celebrity endorsements and strong support from the



David Borowich

Democratic machine.

The Connecticut election was not a referendum on the war in Iraq. It was the voice of moderates and centrists who wanted to vote for a candidate who reflects the middle.

The challenge is that the middle does not often run for office. It's a paradox accentuated by the fact that, on average, moderates don't mobilize.

In the rallies for public opinion, it's usually one extreme voice

challenging the opposing extreme voice for the hearts and minds of the vast and largely unengaged, moderate middle. A new party would give expression to that moderate voice and provide a legitimate vehicle and base for moderate candidates to run for office.

Regardless of its success in Israel, perhaps the time is right for a "Kadima-like" party to emerge in America.

(David Borowich is a finance professional with the RAI Group, the founder of Dor Chadash and worked for Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.), Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and on the Bush 2004 campaign.)

OP-ED

A centrist American party would not just speak of bipartisanship but would be a consensus unto itself.

Election aftermath: Bush peace push needed

By DAVID M. ELCOTT

NEW YORK (JTA) — After six years of Republican control of both houses of the U.S. Congress and the executive branch, analysts see the Democratic victory in midterm elections as a repudiation of the way the Iraq war has been waged, unhappiness over the Bush administration's social agenda and a larger sense that negative politics are bad politics.

In spite of a concerted effort by the Republican Party to convince Jews that Republicans will better defend Israel, 88 percent of Jews voted Democratic, the highest percentage in a generation.

As a minority, Jews grow concerned when the moral values of the majority become the litmus test for public policy. And an October 2006 study by the American Jewish Committee showed that, by a 2-to-1 margin, American Jews do not support the war in Iraq.

Most Jews do not vote solely on one issue — even those passionately committed to the security of the State of Israel — so no one was surprised at the overwhelming Democratic Jewish vote.

When it comes to Israel, Democrats and Republicans are pretty much indistinguishable. If there are members of Congress who are truly antagonistic toward Israel, they keep their views secret.

There's great consensus that the United States must continue to stand solidly with Israel when it's attacked, protect it with generous foreign aid and provide a veto at the United Nations when patently anti-Israel resolutions are proposed in the Security Council.

This stance reflects the will of the majority of Americans who, poll after poll, identify with and strongly support the State of Israel.

The problem is, after six years of suicide bombs and rocket attacks, emboldened terrorists and a looming nuclear threat from Iran, few can claim that Israel is better off, despite such powerful support from the White House and Congress.

The White House could not protect Israel from Palestinian suicide attacks and congressional votes could not stop Hezbollah rockets from this summer hitting Israeli cities that never had been attacked in the state's history.

The only possible antidote to the violence and the suffering is a comprehensive, two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a position that has been promoted by the last three Israeli governments.

As my Israel Policy Forum colleague M.J. Rosenberg reflected on this week's election, "Unfortunately, the default position on Israel has not helped move Israel and the Palestinians closer to peace. On the contrary, it helps solidify a status quo that grows deadlier every day."

If members of Congress think that maintaining the status quo on the Arab-Israeli conflict reflects Jewish attitudes, they're wrong. The same AJCommittee survey published after this summer's war showed that despite their doubts about Arab intentions, a solid majority of American Jews still support a two-state solution.

With such a clear mandate from the Jewish community, one would think Congress and the White House would be pressing full-steam ahead to find a way to end a conflict that causes unbearable pain to Israelis and Palestinians, and undermines America's security as well. In fact, the opposite has been the case.

Six years of a Republican administration and Congress posed dilemmas for Jewish leaders. Access to the White House and the ability to pull weight in Congress — critical goals for a small minority — meant that many Jewish organizations were careful about challenging the administration.

It's to the credit of many Jewish leaders and organizations that they held fast on many issues of Jewish concern, from immigration reform to racial profiling, from affirmative action to church-state separation.

In the search for an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, however, the public voice of the Jewish community and the will of the majority of Jews were not always in harmony.

This may explain why Congress and even the White House see no benefit in engaging in a concerted and unrelenting diplomatic effort to help Israel find a peaceful solution to the threats that surround it. That should now change.

Based on the clear mandate for a differ-



David Elcott

ent direction in the Middle East and with a new balance of power in Washington, we can hope for better. With no more elections to face, the Bush administration will be focused on its legacy.

The new Congress was voted in by constituents who want it to promote policies that will avoid a war of civilizations with the Muslim world. The State Department needs support in moving the Arab-Israeli conflict back to the front burner, where it should have been during these past six years.

This election confirms once again that Jews play a crucial role in the American democratic process. Based on what's good for America and for Israel, and what the majority of American Jews and all Americans want, Jewish leaders will be expected to deliver on the most important issue of the moment — using their political strength to end the Arab-Israeli conflict by supporting the establishment of a viable Palestinian state living next door to a secure, Jewish State of Israel.

Accomplish this, and President Bush, the 110th Congress and American Jewish leaders will boast the greatest of legacies. ■

(David Elcott is executive director of the Israel Policy Forum.)

OP-ED

After six years of terrorist attacks and a looming nuclear threat from Iran, few can claim that Israel is better off.

Hillel starts on new foot

By JACOB BERKMAN

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — While most other heads of major Jewish organizations were downtown at the Los Angeles Convention Center, hobnobbing in suits before the opening plenary of the North American federation system's annual gathering, the president of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life was in jeans and a T-shirt, very much on the other side of the tracks.

Wayne Firestone spent much of Sunday afternoon with Jewish college students dispersed around the city, engaged in various social action projects as part of Hillel's "Just for a Day" program.

The event drew some 1,000 students — roughly 700 from colleges in the Southern California-Arizona corridor and 300 who were delegates to the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly from Hillel outposts across North America.

The students spent the afternoon working at one of six social service agencies including the Midnight Mission, where they cooked food for the homeless; Heal the Bay, where they cleaned up a beach in Santa Monica; and Project Angel Food, where they delivered food to homebound AIDS patients.

After a discussion and debriefing in the evening, the students attended a private concert by pop bands Guster and the Lee-Wees.

As his peers were getting ready for the G.A.'s inaugural event, Firestone — who took over as Hillel president in September after a year as the organization's executive vice president — was overseeing what his organization sees as the first step in a strategic overhaul.

Two years in the making, Hillel issued a plan last May to double the 120,000 Jewish students that have "meaningful experiences" through the organization's 500-plus outposts each year, and to double its roughly \$70 million budget.

The basis of the plan is changing the image that "Hillel is not as welcoming as it should be. It's viewed as a place for the already seriously affiliated," Firestone told JTA at the Los Angeles Food Bank in L.A.'s warehouse district.

Roughly 150 students were repackaging unsalable foodstuffs at the food bank, to be distributed to homeless shelters and soup

kitchens throughout L.A. County.

Hillel's plan seems to draw on the successes of grass-roots organizations such as the American Jewish World Service, which draw in young people by giving them social-service opportunities through a Jewish lens.

And it plays on the findings of studies such as Reboot's "OMG: How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era," which show that young people prefer to relate to their religion through cultural experiences.

Firestone also said Hillel must reach students where they are — most often, dispersed among non-Jewish students — so it wants campus chapters to engage in cross-cultural dialogues, as Heeb Magazine and Jewish music producer J-Dub do when they hold social events.

Hillel employed J-Dub to coordinate Sunday night's concert at The Henry Fonda Theater in Hollywood, JDub President and CEO Aaron Bisman told JTA at the food bank, where the band Guster showed up to help students with their volunteer work.

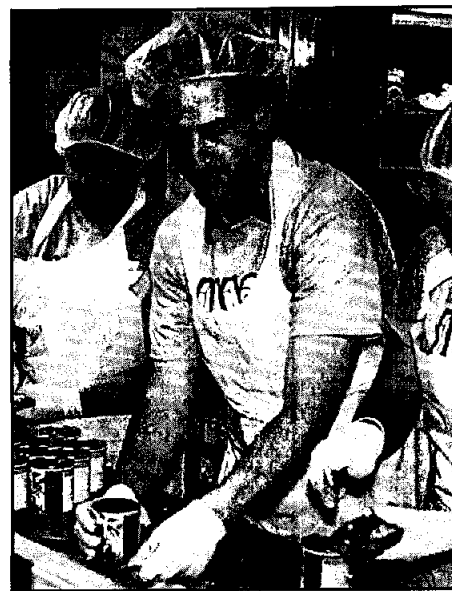
The perception that Hillel mainly reaches students who already are affiliated is accurate, said Len Saxe, director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, which recently wrote a case study on Hillel.

Typically, Saxe told JTA, when Hillel centers open they include kosher dining halls. Those halls attract students who keep kosher — primarily Orthodox students — and by default become the meeting place for the more religiously observant segments among Jews on campus.

Changing that perception will be difficult, Saxe said. Hillel will have to give individual campuses more autonomy in figuring out how to attract students.

Firestone said Hillel is trying to find new and different entry points into Jewish involvement. The organization has charged staffers with providing more meaningful content.

"Getting 150 students to a Shabbat dinner does not necessarily mean that Hillel is being successful," he said.



Hillel

University of Arizona Hillel students help prepare a meal at the Los Angeles Midnight Mission.

That's why the Hillel chapter at Washington University in St. Louis, for example, is organizing a performance by Israeli world music performer Idan Raichel that is meant to draw a multicultural audience, chapter president Alex Friedman, a Washington U. senior, told JTA.

While fewer young Jews belong to synagogues, 85 percent to 90 percent of Jews go to college, giving campuses a higher concentration of Jews than almost any other institution. That makes them the most effective venue to find Jews and engage them, Firestone said.

The trick is finding the proper entry points.

The federation system remains Hillel's main financial sponsor, but it was no accident that Firestone and the student delegates missed the G.A.'s opening sessions Sunday. One reason was so that G.A. delegates would take note that Hillel is trying to engage students in ways it never has before — and that it will need the community's help to do so.

"This is the opening salvo," Firestone said. ■

Hillel is not as welcoming as it should be. It's viewed as a place for the already seriously affiliated.

Wayne Firestone

President, Hillel

ARTS & CULTURE

Muslim TV launches interfaith show

By JACOB BERKMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — A rabbi, a priest and an imam walk onto a set at a Muslim television station to film the rabbi's show — and it's not a joke. It's the platform for a new talk show being aired on the American Muslim television network, Bridges.

The show, "Building Bridges: Abrahamic Perspectives on the World Today," provides a platform for American Jews, Muslims and Christians to clear the air on many of today's burning topics.

Each week for the next 18 weeks, show creator Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, vice president of CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, will sit down with a Muslim and a Christian religious leader to discuss topics ranging from God in the American public sphere to abortion to Jerusalem.

Hirschfield is a constant on the show, along with moderator Ahmed Soliman, who is an anchor on Bridges TV News.

Imams from a variety of ethnic backgrounds will appear on the show, along with a diverse number of Christian clergy.

"In a world of absolutisms that seem to come from extremists in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the question is, can we get past the absolutes to the nuance and to the richness and sophistication in all of our traditions?" Hirschfield said, explaining what "Building Bridges" is about.

Mo Hassan and his wife, Aasyia Zubair, started Bridges Television in 2001 in response to what they considered prevalent anti-Muslim rhetoric on AM radio. There are other Muslim networks aired via satellite and cable television, but Bridges is the first such network in English.

The network, which Zubair said reaches 2 million homes, is "not liberal or conservative. It's lifestyles television. Some American Muslims are very conservative, while some are very liberal. We just feel that we are showing what American Muslims are and the way we live."

There were some tense moments during filming, Hirschfield said. But ultimately the show wasn't about the religions agreeing on everything, he said; it's about understanding that even when they don't agree, they can each respect each other's positions. ■

Unpacking 'Hana's Suitcase'

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Fumiko Ishioka carefully opened a large, cardboard box mailed to her in Tokyo from the Auschwitz museum in Poland. Among the contents were a child's shoe, a can that once contained Zyklon B poison gas and a worn, brown suitcase with white letters painted on its side that read: "Hanna Brady, born May 16, 1931."

Who was this young girl, wondered Ishioka, who at the time had been setting up an exhibit on children and the Holocaust at a small museum called the Tokyo Holocaust Center. That question grew louder in her mind as the Japanese schoolchildren who came to see the exhibit peppered her with questions: What happened to the suitcase's owner? What did she look like? Did she live or die?

"I wanted to know about how happy she was before the war so that our kids could understand what was really lost. If they could really appreciate that one little life was lost, I hoped they might understand that there were 1.5 million other children just like Hana," who were also killed by the Nazis. "So I needed to put a human face on this ordinary suitcase."

Her quest for information on Hana (whose name had been spelled incorrectly on the suitcase) led her to Terezin where Hana was interned for two years before being deported to Auschwitz at the age of 13. There she was sent to the gas chambers.

Ishioka later traveled to Toronto after tracking down Hana's brother George, the only member of the immediate Brady family to survive the war.

Ishioka's journey to learn more about Hana and the story of Hana's life became the subjects of a children's book entitled "Hana's Suitcase" by Karen Levine.

Last week, Ishioka and George Brady were in Jerusalem to attend a Yad Vashem ceremony in which the book won a prize for Children's Holocaust Literature.

The book, published in 33 languages, has chapters recounting Hana's childhood in the Czechoslovakian town of Nove Mesto

in Moravia, where she was an avid cross-country skier and skater. It follows Hana through her eventual deportation along with her older brother, George. Further chapters describe Ishioka's quest to uncover Hana's identity.

Ishioka, who says that Holocaust education in Japan is a new concept — decided to travel to Auschwitz soon after beginning work for the Holocaust museum in Tokyo.

It was during that visit in 1999 that she requested artifacts related to children from the Auschwitz museum for the exhibit she was putting together. The suitcase and other items arrived about a year later.

When Ishioka, now 36, found out that Hana had been to Terezin, she traveled there and found her first trace of Hana at a museum in Prague: several

drawings she had done in art classes there. She then poured over stacks of typed deportation lists until she found Hana's name and deportation date of Oct. 23, 1944.

She also noticed another Brady on the list. A box was drawn by the name to signify that George Brady had survived.

She eventually tracked Brady down in Toronto, where he'd moved soon after the war. There he had become a successful businessman, parlaying the trade of plumbing he learned in Terezin into a large mechanical contracting business in Canada.

"I had to continue the search, I really wanted to see her face," Ishioka said.

For Brady, 78, the contact with Ishioka was a life-altering encounter. Both of his parents were killed by the Nazis and he had always felt haunted by guilt for not having been able to save his younger sister.

"I felt responsible for her. I wanted to bring her home and I could not do anything," he said. The connection with Ishioka and the subsequent book has led to a strong bond between the two.

Speaking of his sister, whom he remembers as vivacious and athletic, he said, "She wanted to be a teacher in a small town and she ended up being a teacher to the world."

Ishioka now visits about 200 schools a year in Japan and tells the story of Hana's suitcase. To date, she has reached about 60,000 school children. ■

'I had to continue the search, I really wanted to see her face.'

Fumiko Ishioka
Tokyo Holocaust Center

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Israel to compensate Arab riot families

Israel is to compensate 11 Arab families whose members died during riots in 2000.

The Justice Ministry revealed the deal Thursday in which the families of the victims, who were killed by Israeli forces during Israeli Arab protests in Oct. 2000, would be compensated with an unspecified amount. The agreement was reached in response to a lawsuit filed by the families in September 2005.

Twelve Israeli Arabs and a Palestinian died in the riots, demonstrations of solidarity with Palestinians during the early days of the intifada.

Israel bombs 5 terrorists' homes

Israel bombed the empty homes of five Palestinian terrorists in the Gaza Strip. The air force struck the buildings late Wednesday after military officials warned occupants to leave.

The airstrikes appeared to be the beginning of Israel's retaliation for a Palestinian rocket salvo from Gaza that killed a woman in Sderot earlier on Wednesday.

Two of the houses belonged to Hamas commanders, one to an Islamic Jihad fugitive, one to a Fatah militiaman and the fifth to a local leader of the Popular Resistance Committees. Military officials said the buildings were used to either store weapons or convene terrorists.

Zahar: Iran gave Hamas \$120 million

Iran gave the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority \$120 million, said the P.A. foreign minister.

Mahmoud Zahar made the comments Thursday to reporters in Tehran. He said that the Islamic republic had given the cash-strapped militant group \$120 million, and had promised more.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has denied Israel's right to exist, and promised Hamas \$50 million in April, when the West cut off aid to the group.

Hamas: Shalit talks stalled

Hamas said negotiations with Israel on the return of a captive soldier were stalled. The governing Palestinian Authority faction, whose gunmen were involved in the June 25 abduction of Cpl. Gilad Shalit on the Gaza Strip border, said Thursday that Egyptian-mediated efforts to secure his release broke down two weeks ago.

According to Hamas, Israel rejected demands that it free some 1,400 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Shalit. Israel has publicly ruled out any such swap, though it has sent emissaries to the Cairo talks.

Olmert hints Gaza sweep unlikely

Ehud Olmert hinted that a massive Israeli sweep for Palestinian rocket crews in the Gaza Strip is unlikely. The Israeli prime minister was asked Thursday whether a recent spate of deadly salvos from Gaza warranted a military operation that could include taking over swaths of Palestinian Authority territory.

"I do not think you can stop Kassams in one fell swoop. There is not one single action that can be taken that would stop them," Olmert told reporters en route home from his U.S. tour.

NORTH AMERICA

Lobbyists' hearing scheduled

A hearing was scheduled Thursday in the case of two former AIPAC lobbyists. Judge T.S. Ellis is expected to set a trial date at the

hearings scheduled to be held in Virginia in the classified information case against Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman.

Rosen, AIPAC's former foreign policy chief, and Weissman, its former top Iran analyst, were indicted in August 2005, a year after their offices were raided.

Three other trial launch dates — in January, April and August of this year — have all lapsed. Sources close to the defense now say they don't expect a trial date before April 2007.

Emanuel to leadership

The new Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives elected Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) to a leadership position.

Emanuel, who is Jewish and who ran the midterm elections that won the House back from the Republicans after 12 years, was unanimously elected Thursday as chairman of the Democratic caucus.

That would rank him fourth, after speaker, majority leader and whip.

U.S.: Israel focus undermining U.N. body

The U.N. Human Rights Council's obsession with Israel is undermining its credibility, the United States said.

The State Department issued a statement noting that Wednesday marked the third time in less than six months that the council had a special session focusing on Israel alone.

"The Council's persistence in focusing on Israel, while failing to address serious human rights violations taking place in other countries and regions, including Sudan, Burma, North Korea and Cuba, undermines its credibility and its ability to defend human rights around the world," the statement said.

It called on democratic members of the council to "work to redirect its course." Otherwise, "the legitimacy of the body will be called into question."

The council Wednesday established a fact-finding mission to assess the situation in Beit Hanoun, where 19 Palestinians were killed last week by Israeli artillery.

Pentagon hands back clearance to bomb expert

The Pentagon resumed security clearance for a bomb expert after withdrawing it because of his Israel ties.

The Pentagon restored the clearance to Joseph Baum, an expert in protecting structures from bomb attacks, at the behest of U.S. Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.). Van Hollen and the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington said Wednesday in a news release that Baum "has conducted protective vulnerability assessments for many key federal building and national landmarks, including the U.S. Capitol, House and Senate Office buildings, the Library of Congress and the Statue of Liberty" and has had clearance since 1983.

The Pentagon's secretive security clearance review board had withdrawn the clearance, apparently because Baum's two sisters and elderly mother are citizens of Israel, and he has visited the country frequently.

Baum is Van Hollen's constituent.

ADL calls for investigation of French murder

Anti-Defamation League National Director Abraham Foxman called on the French Interior Ministry to investigate the police handling of the murder of Ilan Halimi, a French Jew abducted and murdered by a Muslim gang earlier this year.

With Halimi's mother, Ruth, at his side, Foxman said many questions about the case remained unanswered.

Halimi was found near death in February after having been tortured for three weeks. He died en route to the hospital.