

Jewish Heritage Month: 6 Jews Honored By Lawmakers

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In honor of Jewish Heritage Month, lawmakers gathered on Capitol Hill this past Wednesday in the ornate LBJ Room located just off the Senate floor to celebrate the accomplishments of six Jews who were recognized for their contributions to the “360 year tradition of furthering American ideals”.

Lawmakers who took part in this event were Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, Representatives Peter King, and Ileana-Ros Lehinton, who heads the powerful Homeland Security and International Relations committees, along with Democratic National Committee Chair Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, Members of Congress Congressman Bob Turner of NY, Congressman Louie Gohmert of Texas, as well as Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming.

Personalities honored in Jewish life were Rabbi Simcha Scholar, executive vice president of the world renowned Chai Lifeline, Rabbi Abe Friedman, a Chasidic community leader from the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, Alyza Lewin, Esq. who has helped numerous individuals who have been denied a security clearance and government employees because of their religion,

Rabbi Elie Abadie, a practicing physician, founding rabbi of the Edmond J. Safra Synagogue and director of the Jacob E. Safra Institute of Sephardic Studies at Yeshiva University, Phil Friedman, founder of Computer Generated Solutions, a multinational company and Ari Scharf, director of Project Mesorah which is committed to educating Jewish youth about their heritage.

“It is important that we acknowledged Jewish community leaders in a venue as high profile as the U.S. Capitol, giving our representatives in congress the opportunity to recognize them during May, Jewish American Heritage Month,” said Ezra Friedlander, CEO of The Friedlander Group, the coordinator of the event.

More than 100 guests from New York took part in the event.

The celebration of May as Jewish Heritage Month came about as a result of the efforts of the aforementioned Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz who urged then President George W. Bush to proclaim May as Jewish Heritage Month. President Bush complied with the request and the annual tradition is continued today by President Obama.

Average Rate On 30-Year Mortgage Rate Falls To Record 3.79 Pct.

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Average U.S. rates for 30-year and 15-year fixed mortgages fell to record lows for the third straight week. The steady decline has made home-buying and refinancing more affordable than ever for those who can qualify.

Mortgage buyer Freddie Mac says the rate on the 30-year loan dipped to 3.79 percent. That’s down from 3.83 percent last week and the lowest since long-term mortgages began in the 1950s.

The 15-year mortgage, a popular option for refinancing, declined to 3.04 percent. That’s down from last week’s previous record of 3.05 percent.

Rates on the 30-year loan have been below 4 percent since early December. But so far, those cheap rates haven’t been enough to ignite home sales.

While sales of previously occupied homes picked up in January and February, they fell again in March and remain well below healthy levels.

Low mortgage rates have helped boost builder confidence, which rose in May to a five-year high. And home construction has improved in the past six months, a reflection of that increase in confidence.

Builders broke ground in April at a seasonally adjusted annual pace of 717,000 homes, the government reported Wednesday. That nearly matches January’s pace, the best since October 2008.

Construction rose for both single-family homes and apartments. And builders requested more permits to build single-family homes, a sign they expect more demand in the coming months.

Still, many would-be buyers can’t qualify for loans or afford higher down payments required by banks. Home prices in many cities continue to fall. That has made those who can afford to buy uneasy about entering the market. And for those who are willing to brave the troubled market, many have already taken advantage of lower rates - mortgage rates have been below 5 percent for more than a year now.

Mortgage rates are lower because they tend to track the yield on the 10-year Treasury note. Slower U.S. job growth and uncertainty about how Europe will resolve its debt crisis have led investors to buy more Treasuries, which are considered safe investments. As demand for Treasuries increases, the yield falls.

Autopsy Results: Marijuana In Trayvon Martin’s Blood

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Trayvon Martin’s autopsy shows he had marijuana in his system the night he was killed by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, and a gunshot to his chest came from close range, according to nearly 200 pages of previously undisclosed documents released Thursday.

At least one investigator wanted to charge Zimmerman with manslaughter but was overruled, according to the documents, which are shedding new light on a case that has raised questions about racial profiling and “stand your ground” laws. The investigator, who was on the scene after the shooting, wrote on March 13 that the confrontation should have been avoided. That report came nearly a month before Zimmerman was arrested.

The documents, photos and video were turned over by prosecutors to defense attorneys earlier this week before they were released to the media. Included in the many witness interviews were accounts by an acquaintance of Zimmerman’s who said he’s racist and a co-worker who said Zimmerman bullied him and mocked him with an exaggerated Middle Eastern accent.

The autopsy says medical examiners found THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, when they tested Martin’s blood and urine. A police report shows the 17-year-old had been shot once in the chest and had been pronounced dead at the scene. The autopsy says the fatal shot was fired from no more than 18 inches away.

Also in the package is a photo showing Zimmerman with a bloody nose on the night of the fight. A paramedic report says Zimmerman had a 1-inch laceration on his head and forehead abrasion.

“Bleeding tenderness to his nose, and a small laceration to the back of his head. All injuries have minor bleeding,” paramedic Michael Brandy wrote about Zimmerman’s injuries in the report.

Whether Zimmerman was injured in the Feb. 26 altercation with Martin has been a key question. The 28-year-old Zimmerman has claimed self-defense and said he only fired because the unarmed teenager attacked him.

Zimmerman was not arrested for weeks because he invoked the Florida’s law that does not require a person to retreat in the face of a serious threat. He was released on bail and is in hiding while he awaits trial on a second-degree murder charge. He has pleaded not guilty.

The investigator who called for Zimmerman’s arrest, Christopher Serino, told prosecutors in March that the fight could have been avoided if Zimmerman had remained in his vehicle and awaited the arrival of law enforcement. He said Zimmerman, after leaving his vehicle, could have identified himself to Martin as a concerned citizen and talked to him instead of confronting him.

He said there is no evidence Martin was involved in any criminal activity.

The lawyer for Martin’s parents seized on the investigator’s recommendation.

“The police concluded that none of this would have happened if George Zimmerman hadn’t gotten out of his car,” said attorney Ben Crump. “If George Zimmerman hadn’t gotten out of his car, they say it was completely avoidable. That is the headline.”

A separate report written by Serino at the crime scene says Martin had \$40.15, Skittles candy, a red lighter, headphones and a photo pin in his pocket. A single 9mm shell casing was found near Martin’s body.

New witness accounts also emerged Thursday. A witness, whose name is redacted, told investigators he saw “a black male, wearing a dark colored hoodie,” on top of a white or Hispanic male who was yelling for help.

The witness, who was looking out the sliding glass door at his home about 30 feet away, said he saw the black male throwing punches “MMA (mixed martial arts) style.”

He said he told the fighters he was calling the police. He said that as he was making the call, he heard a shot. He looked outside and saw the person who had been on top laid out on the grass as if he had been shot. He said the other fighter was standing on the sidewalk, talking to another person with a flashlight.

The case has become a national racial flashpoint because the Martin family and supporters contend Zimmerman singled Martin out because he was black.

Two acquaintances paint an unflattering picture of Zimmerman in police interviews.

A distraught woman tells an investigator that she stays away from Zimmerman because he’s racist and because of things he’s done to her in the past, but she didn’t elaborate on what happened between them.

“I don’t at all know who this kid was or anything else. But I know George, and I know that he does not like black people. He would start something. He’s very confrontational. It’s in his blood. We’ll just say that,” the unidentified woman says in an audio recording.

A man whose name was deleted from the audio told investigators that he worked with Zimmerman in 2008 for a few months. It wasn’t clear which company it was.

The man, who described his heritage as “Middle Eastern,” said that when he first started many employees didn’t like him. Zimmerman seized on this, the employee said, and bullied him.

Zimmerman wanted to “get in” with the clique at work so he exaggerated a Middle Eastern accent when talking about the employee, the man said. The employee told investigators that Zimmerman made reference to terrorists and bombings when talking about him.

“It was so immature,” said the employee, who ended up writing a letter to management about Zimmerman.