

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ADDRESS COMMUNITY SECURITY ISSUES AT AGUDAH LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

By Boruch Shubert

A number of officials representing the United States government at key levels of influence addressed several hundred communal leaders at the Second Annual Legislative Breakfast of Agudath Israel of America earlier at the Downtown Association in Lower Manhattan. Speaking to the event's theme of "Safety and Security in Our Communities," the officials outlined a variety of areas in which government agencies are acting vigorously to ensure the physical well-being of the greater Jewish community both domestically and overseas.

Loretta E. Lynch, US Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, delivered the Keynote Address. She was introduced by breakfast chair, Joseph Zelmanovitz. Ms. Lynch noted that – with New York City continuing to be a major target for potential terrorists – her office has expanded its focus from the aggressive pursuit of terrorist prosecutions to include an emphasis on the prevention of terrorist acts. "We work closely with the FBI and the New York Police Department to immediately investigate any threats of terrorism," Lynch asserted, highlighting multiple recent cases wherein potential attacks on public transportation and other largely populated areas were thwarted. Detailing specific concerns in this regard, the US Attorney informed the audience that the authorities are on the lookout for Al-Qaeda-mobilized single, "lone-wolf" individuals who may attempt to commit acts of terror on their own; homegrown United

States-based terrorists; and global terror cells that gain strength and adherents through strategic communications via the Internet. Noting that more than 400 terrorists have been convicted in this country over the decade since the 9/11 attacks, Lynch strongly stated her belief that "our federal court system is a proven and effective method for prosecuting terrorists." Ms. Lynch was joined at the breakfast by Marshall Miller, who has served as the deputy chief of the criminal unit and today was named criminal division chief.

The audience was also treated to Special Greetings from Jarrod Bernstein, President Obama's recently appointed Director of Jewish Outreach, who was making his first public appearance in his new role. Bernstein was introduced by Rabbi David Zwiebel, Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel, who recounted how – just two days before this past Yom Kippur – he received word that a large shipment of *lulavim* was being held up at the airport due to security-related bureaucratic red tape, thereby causing numerous Jews to potentially be unable to fulfill the vital mitzvah of *arba minim* on the impending Sukkos holiday. After a quick phone call to Bernstein – who was then an official at the Department of Homeland Security – the *lulavim* were released in a few hours.

Speaking on behalf of the president, Bernstein stated that the administration is "working daily to ensure Israel's security." Elaborating on this point, he noted that President Obama

has requested from Congress "the largest-ever amount of funding for military assistance for Israel"; spoke at the United Nations resolutely on behalf of the vitality of Israel; and spends a significant amount of time advocating for increased sanctions against Iran.

Reprising his appearance at last year's Legislative Breakfast, Senator Charles Schumer reiterated Congress' firm support for the security of Israel, specifically with regard to planned attempts to further cut off Iran's banking powers and to fully fund Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system. Turning to the domestic front, Schumer stated that "Agudath Israel does an amazing job caring for people in need with its social services," and he asserted that – particularly with regard to education and job training programs – "we must cut our budgets carefully" so as not to endanger these vital services. "I have obtained many grants for the security of the community's shuls and yeshivas," the senator concluded, reaffirming his continuing close relationship with Agudath Israel.

The large audience – which included such dignitaries as NYC Fire Commissioner Sal Cassano, NY State Senator Daniel Squadron, NY State Assemblymen Alec Brook-Krasny and Rory Lancman, and New York City Councilmen Lew Fidler and Brad Lander – heard important remarks from several members of Congress with close ties to the Jewish community. Newly elected Congressman Robert (Bob) Turner spoke about his appointments to the crucial Foreign Affairs and Homeland Security Committees, and criticized both the United Nations and Iran for their anti-Israel stances. "We have to work hard to get regime change in Iran," Turner declared. Avowing Congress' strong backing of Israel, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney recalled the unusually enthusiastic response from the entire membership of Congress when it was addressed by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Commenting on the dismal economy, Congressman Jerrold Nadler spoke against the idea of massive spending cuts by the government, noting that "the community needs hous-

ing and food assistance now more than ever." Separately, Nadler called on President Obama to criticize Palestinian President Abbas for refusing to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, and insisted that "there is no greater danger in the world today than Iran" due to its nuclear intentions, Nadler concluded.

The audience also heard from community activist Abe Eisner, who read a message of support for Agudath Israel from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo; Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer; New York City Controller John Liu; and Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, Agudath Israel's Vice President for Community Services, who highlighted the organization's many valuable social programs. "Agudath Israel of America sponsors a broad range of communal social services affecting the lives of young and old throughout the New York City metropolitan area," he explained. "Agudath Israel of America's projects include job placement, vocational training and counseling services, housing and neighborhood preservation initiatives, as well as a host of senior citizen and children's welfare projects - including a variety of initiatives specifically directed toward enhancing security and safety." The Legislative Breakfast was chaired by Joseph Zelmanovitz, Esq, Partner in Stahl and Zelmanovitz, and was graciously sponsored by Health Plus, and Med Review and coordinated by the Friedlander group.

Many participants expressed positive sentiments on the very high level of discussion and the broad range of issues the various speakers broached. A venerable Who's Who of influential legislative leaders made the effort on an early Monday morning to affirm the prominent role and political position the Orthodox Jewish community and Agudath Israel holds in the halls of government. One respected community leader seemed to sum up the feelings of those in attendance. "It is important to interact and dialogue with our government officials. That they clearly recognize and admire the importance of our community and Agudath Israel's wide reach is even more impressive."



Rabbi Zwiebel, Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel of America, speaking.



Congressman Bob Turner addressing the breakfast.



Jarrold Bernstein, White House Jewish Liaison, addressing the breakfast.



Ezra Friedlander CEO of the Friedlander Group; Chaskel Bennett, Board of Trustees of Agudath Israel of America; Jarrod Bernstein, White House Jewish Liaison, Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, ESQ, Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel of America; Joseph B. Stamm, President and CEO of Med Review, Event Sponsor; Joseph Zelmanovitz, Breakfast Chairman and Partner at Stahl & Zelmanovitz; Congressman Bob Turner, Abe Eisner, Mr. Leon Goldenberg, and Shlomo Werdiger who are members of the Agudath Israel of America leadership.



U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer addressing the Agudath Israel of America Legislative Breakfast. Left to Right: Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz Agudath Israel of America's Vice President for Community Services, Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, ESQ, Executive Vice President, Mr. Gedaliah Weinberger, Chairman of the Board; Joseph Zelmanovitz, Breakfast Chairman and Partner at Stahl & Zelmanovitz; Joseph B. Stamm, President and CEO of Med Review, Event Sponsor; Jonathan Zalisky, Senior Community Relations Coordinator of Health Plus, Event Sponsor, and Chaskel Bennett, Board of Trustees of Agudath Israel of America.