



WHO SPEAKS FOR THE JEWS?



CHASKEL BENNETT ACTIVIST, BUSINESS OWNER

CHASKEL BENNETT IS AN ACTIVIST WHO SERVES THE COMMUNITY BOTH AS AN ADVOCATE THROUGH AGUDATH ISRAEL AND INDIVIDUALLY. HE'S BEEN PARTICULARLY ACTIVE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN NEW YORK CITY, INCLUDING IN RECENT ELECTIONS. AT 40, HE IS THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE AGUDAH'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES. MR. BENNETT IS A BUSINESS OWNER AND LIVES IN FLATBUSH.

ON HIS ROLE IN ADVOCACY AND HOW HE GOT STARTED:

I am an 18-year mispallel at Rav Shimon Sherer's shul. I said publicly at the Agudah convention (where I was chairman

last year) that I literally have a shiur in askanus with my rav almost every day, sometimes every few hours. I discuss everything that comes up with him. I'm not on my own.

I'm a relatively young guy. Most accomplished askanim are a lot older than me. It's a tremendous privilege to be able to work with some of them on major communal issues including religious rights, Israel, homeland security, school choice, Rubashkin and Pollard. I started actively with

Agudath Israel about 11 years ago.

I've been a Hatzolah member for close to 20 years. That was really how my askanus career started. The truth is that when you're a Hatzolah member you see that you can move mountains every day. When you have the interest, determination and time and are surrounded by the right chevrah, you can accomplish the impossible.

Also, being in Rabbi Sherer's shul, you really get a feeling of what it means to be an askan. There are very few people in

BY YOSSI KRAUSZ

This year, the Jewish community engaged with government on a massive scale. The US presidential elections, a war in Israel and a hurricane that devastated a number of Jewish communities—all these events increased interest and focus on our community's interaction with the outside world.

But the question arises: Who speaks for our community? There is a small army of askanim and advocates of various sorts who are trying to express and promote our needs to government leaders and officials. But who are these people? What are their beliefs about advocacy? What level of communication with gedolei Yisrael do they have before taking action? And do we have enough of them?

We recently interviewed an eclectic assortment of American Jewish advocates for the Orthodox community, working both locally and at the

national level, ranging from top-level members of major Jewish organizations to private individuals.

We were interested in both their philosophical and practical viewpoints. How did they become involved in advocacy? What is their particular style? What have they accomplished? What are they working on now? And what do they think about the future of advocacy?

Not only are the answers to these questions important due to our need to know who is representing us, but also this discussion can show our youth, from whom the next generation of advocates will arise, the many ways to become involved in advocacy, and the various techniques used by responsible advocates.

my generation who know as much about Rabbi Moshe Sherer's accomplishments as I do, through his son, my rav. It's part and parcel of being there. Rabbi Moshe Sherer was probably the most successful askan that American frum Jewry ever had, so that is a very high bar for any askan to aspire to. There are a lot of lessons to be learned.

As far as askanus is concerned, I consider myself a talmid of Reb Shimshon Sherer, a talmid of Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel and Rabbi Shmuel Bloom.

ON THE FOCUS OF HIS ASKANUS:

The last several years have brought me several opportunities—local, national and even international—in terms of activism on behalf of Eretz Yisrael and interacting with government officials, certainly during times of crisis. I've been to Washington, DC with fellow askanim—people like Leon Goldenberg, who is a great friend and tireless advocate. We share similar goals and have a lot of common ground and interests. We've been to Albany and Washing-

ton numerous times together.

You have to understand that to be an effective askan you need patience. I've learned that you can't always solve every problem this minute, but working hard gets us closer to a solution. A lot of my efforts have been focused on tuition and education assistance. In my estimation, tuition is the most pressing domestic issue facing our community today. In the last few years, I was on the ground floor of the TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) effort, working through my local contacts to carry the ball forward. Baruch Hashem, we were matzliach beyond our wildest dreams. I truly believe that TAP for rabbinical colleges is a continuation of the work Rabbi Moshe Sherer did for Pell grants over 30 years ago. He worked tirelessly for many years to obtain aid for parochial schools. He was instrumental in establishing AARTS accreditation in order to get federal aid through Pell grants for yeshivah colleges. On the New York State level, our yeshivos didn't qualify because of a quirk in the law. Over the course of a decade, Agudath Israel

(Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, Shea Ostreicher and others) worked together with government officials and was finally able to see a breakthrough. TAP for yeshivos is finally a reality and it will help our community in very meaningful ways. I'm proud to have played a role.

By the way, an important component in askanus is to work as a team. It's never just one person. The contacts and abilities of each person can be mixed together to create one effective unit. But one-on-one interaction is sometimes more important. Both have their place.

ON HIS REPRESENTATION OF AGUDATH ISRAEL:

Local issues do not require me to be a card-carrying member of Agudah; sometimes acting as a concerned local citizen is enough. I'm also on the board of COJO of Flatbush, which does significant government advocacy on many levels.

Being part of Agudath Israel doesn't always mean you're advocating for Agudah. It means that you have the resources of a

large, capable organization to work toward communal goals. In fact, last year a certain organization that does a lot of good work for kids-at-risk was in a very bad financial matzav, and through Agudah's contacts we were able to help them in a very meaningful way even though they aren't really affiliated with Agudah. Baruch Hashem, we've been able to use our resources to help other groups that may not have the right contacts on a high level.

ON HIS STYLE OF ADVOCACY:

I mentioned before that one of my mentors is Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zweibel. He's one of the most temimusdike people we have in klal Yisrael. He's an eved ne'eman of the gedolei Yisrael. He's a soft-spoken person. Very rarely will you hear a harsh word from him. I'm proud to say that I've tried my best to learn from him, even though our personalities are at opposite

sitting in the room with him. [Agudah general counsel] Mordechai Biser gave a very lawyerly and intellectually sound presentation on why this bill was the wrong approach, and it was very well received. Then I gave a passionate—more my style—statement saying that we were very sympathetic to his feelings and that saving a life is as important to us as it is to him, but that we can't force people to do something that goes against religious principles just because it's well-intentioned. You could see his eyes soften as we told him that we understood where he was coming from and explained our view in a moral and scholarly way. By the end of the conversation he agreed to take the bill off the table, and said he would work with us to fashion a different one that would take into account the sensitivities of the Orthodox Jewish community. At that moment, I knew why I wanted to be in askanus—to

stay involved, that can result in increased benefits for our community—whether police presence, religious protections, help for yeshivos or anti-discrimination efforts. More young people have to understand that they can make a difference. The need for effective advocates for our community has increased, not decreased. There's a whole new group of younger guys in Queens and Flatbush and Boro Park coming into their own now.

ON CONSULTING DAAS TORAH:

You asked when I feel the need to consult daas Torah. Being part of Agudah has given me access to many of today's gedolim who are experienced in answering high-level klal askanus shailos, clearly and unambiguously giving over the daas Tora on the spot. That takes pressure off people like me.

YOU COULD SEE HIS EYES SOFTEN AS WE TOLD HIM THAT WE UNDERSTOOD WHERE HE WAS COMING FROM AND EXPLAINED OUR VIEW IN A MORAL AND SCHOLARLY WAY.

ends of the Earth. But there is value in using the soft approach sometimes.

ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ASKANUS BACKFIRING:

When you're acting on behalf of the tzibur, you have to think 10 times before you speak. When you're wearing a yarmulke, you're viewed differently. I've learned from others how to do it, and how not to. Sometimes, before a meeting in Albany, we'll have a conference call or meeting to discuss strategy and how to approach a certain inyan. An example: A year and a half ago, a New York assemblyman was proposing a mandatory organ donation bill for driver's licenses that would force people to donate their organs by default. We met with him in Assemblyman Dov Hikind's office in Albany. The opportunity to advocate literally came to us. This person was a secular Jew, and he was actually well-meaning. His motivation was that his own daughter had needed a transplant and they couldn't find an organ. It was personal to him.

I'll never forget how 20 or 30 of us were

able to present the views, opinions and traditions of the Orthodox Jewish community in a responsible and appropriate manner, not through screaming, yelling and threatening but working in a personal setting to change minds and help people understand us. Anything I've learned in that regard has come from Rabbi Zwiebel and Agudath Israel.

ON THE FUTURE OF ADVOCACY AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY:

We've spent an enormous amount of time and effort trying to get people to vote and showing them how important their vote is.

Most people know that I was heavily involved in the Bob Turner race. I saw the energy and excitement in the Orthodox community. There's certainly a growing level of knowledge about politics. How does that translate?

If people get excited about their candidate but the excitement dissipates the day after the election, that's not good. If people

With my rav's encouragement I've gone to the Novominsker Rebbe, Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky and Rav Dovid Feinstein, among others, for guidance on specific cases. I don't go to them on every issue, though, only when my rav or I feel it rises to the level of a difficult halachic or hashkafic shailah. You have to use seichel.

I don't have a blanket endorsement from anyone. Who does? We try to be cognizant of our role as Torah shtadlanim. Are we infallible? Who's infallible? I'm sure we make mistakes. But I can say with confidence that we are trying 100% to do it right.

A FINAL THOUGHT:

Being involved in askanus can sometimes create tension with people in your community who differ in opinion and approach. For me personally, the goal is not to win at all costs. I hate machlokes and want desperately to create achdus amongst Yidden. Call me old-fashioned, but I truly believe that this approach is still the core mission of Agudas Yisrael.

RABBI ABBA COHEN

VICE PRESIDENT OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
AFFAIRS AND WASHINGTON DIRECTOR OF
AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA



ON HIS START IN ADVOCACY:

I grew up in Washington, in a home where, in addition to my parents' regular jobs, they were both deeply involved in askanus on the national and local levels. Also, I went to Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, which stresses not only excellence in learning, but also in service to the community. In both places, I was taught by example.

I directed my secular education toward that, as well. I received a master's degree from Columbia University in international affairs and a law degree from Georgetown University.

I was fortunate that my first professional opportunities were in working for the community. I spent several years working with the Anti-Defamation League on issues relating to Israel and the safety of endangered Jewish communities around the world. During the years I was in law school and for a little while after that, I worked for noted attorney Nathan Lewin in Washington DC, where he asked me to join in on many of his Jewish religious liberty-related cases.

Agudah opened its Washington office in 1988. I was ready to join the workforce in the area I had prepared myself for, and I was recommended to the Agudah by Mr. Lewin and Rabbi Naftali Neuberger. It was the type of position I had hoped for and prepared myself for, and I was fortunate to be hired by Rabbi Sherer. I've been working at the Agudah for the past 23-plus rewarding years.

ON RECENT AREAS OF HIS ADVOCACY:

As a general rule, the largest chunk of my work relates to schooling. That includes expanding funding opportunities and maintaining the autonomy and religious character of our schools. With major education and budget legislation on the horizon, we have been focusing on better and more services for our school in programs like

remedial education and education for the disabled. In light of recent events, we have also been concentrating more on security issues and disaster relief for our schools, and other issues. School-related matters, such as kashrus concerns in school and summer feeding programs have also been on our recent agenda. During the current fiscal negotiations, we have devoted much time to fighting threats to Pell Grants, which is critical to yeshivos and to the "charitable deduction," which is a big help to all of our schools.

Religious liberty and accommodation is, of course, another key area. In health care, for example, there are aspects of Medicare and other programs that, over the years, have put in question the halachic and moral acceptability of how we treat patients in very serious and "end of life" medical situations. We've been having discussions with the White House on these issues. In regard to "marriage" and family issues, we have been vigilant in working to protect the religious rights of our rabbis, our laymen and our institutions. And, it is interesting that, despite the significant progress we have made over the decades, we are still confronting recurring problems in the workplace.

Finally, now and on an ongoing basis, we are concerned about the safety and well-being of Israel. This has especially been the case in recent months with the heightened Iranian threat and the hostilities with Gaza. We are facing critical months ahead.

ON COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR ONE CANDIDATE AND ADVOCACY:

That's an extremely important issue. Far be it from me to tell anybody who they should or shouldn't vote for. Everyone has the right to decide whom to support. My only concern is when the level of rhetoric goes over the line and political

discourse is not carried on in a respectable fashion. Then it is harmful to the whole community.

But I'm often asked, "How can you work with so-and-so? He's so against what we stand for!" The answer I give is that we can find areas that we can work on with everyone, whether they're Republicans or Democrats, whether they are liberals or conservatives. There are always presidents, senators and congressmen with whom we share values and can work together on those values and in those areas. We must concentrate on the needs, interests and values of our community, and where we can find common ground. Helping the community has to be our driving force.

We know, for example, that there are areas like school vouchers where we can't work with certain elected officials. But there may be—and often are—a hundred other goals we can work together on.

I've worked with four presidents and we've had fruitful relationships with all four in many areas. If we keep that perspective, we can accomplish a lot for the community.

So, any person in the community has the right to support or align himself or herself with particular candidates or parties. And there may be many benefits to that. But as a community advocate, it is within our interests to work with both sides of the aisle. Leaving aside the legal issues governing a non-profit, it would not be in our interest or to our benefit to align ourselves with any particular party or candidate. After all, we are not driven by political ideology. We're driven by a Torah ideology and by the inter-

ests of our community. Sometimes that will land us within the Republican platform and sometimes it will land us within the Democrat platform.

ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF DAAS TORAH TO HIS ADVOCACY:

Agudah was established to be a daas Torah-driven organization and that's why our policies are determined by prominent roshei yeshiva and admorim who comprise our Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah and Nesius. That doesn't mean that our lay leadership or staff have no role. Many times our rabbinic leadership will look to us for input or information. But our policies are determined by the rabbinic leadership.

The process works well. When dealing with clear halachic issues—for example, assisted suicide or abortion—these are issues for the Moetzes and the Nesius. On some other issues, for example, funding for schools, the Moetzes gives us general guidelines for our work and it is the staff's responsibility to work within those parameters. Of course, we don't go to the Moetzes with pieces of legislation and ask for guidance on minutiae. They declare our policies or give us general guidelines and it is up to the professionals to make sure that the details conform to those policies or guidelines.

We'll also sometimes go to the Moetzes

on what I call strategic issues. An example of this concerns "coalitions." Much of what is done in Washington now is done by forming coalitions with other groups as it often leads to more effective advocacy. But forming coalitions with certain other groups—Jewish or non-Jewish—might raise issues that don't sit comfortably with our Torah and we bring these questions regarding coalition-building to the Moetzes for resolution. We ask about when we can make coalitions and with whom. The Moetzes has given us general guidelines, but, even so, we sometimes have to consult with them on a case-by-case basis.

Sometimes questions revolve around the best way to go about getting our policies put into the public arena and into the political process. Even that is guided by the Moetzes. So the Moetzes plays a key role both in terms of positions and in how we go about doing what we do.

ON THE AGUDAH'S MOVE TO WASHINGTON:

The Agudah was the first Orthodox organization to open up a full-time presence in Washington. It was the realization of Rabbi Sherer's dream. He understood that if you want to be most effective in the political and legislative arena, you really need a full-time presence. And we weren't coming in a vacuum. We were fortunate enough to be

able to build on relationships that Rabbi Sherer and others had already started. I think there were many organizations inside and outside the Jewish world that were looking on to see if we'd be successful. They wondered whether the Orthodox community had the political "culture" or sophistication to go forward into the belly of the political structure in Washington or whether we would fall on our face. Personally, after almost 25 years in Washington, I would like to think that we've proven our worth and answered that question positively.

I also think it was an important move because shortly thereafter Lubavitch and the OU opened their offices in Washington. I think our foray into Washington, and our success, encouraged others and made them more comfortable in taking that step. We've all found a place here and have been accepted with open arms and respect. As a result, the Orthodox community has become a more potent political force.

In practical terms, whether it's on Capitol Hill or in the White House, government leaders know that the Orthodox community is a segment of the Jewish community that needs to be considered and reckoned with. That was why opening our office was such an important step. It gave the Orthodox community a seat at the table. And now it is a permanent seat.



NATHAN DIAMANT

DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS OF THE UNION OF ORTHODOX JEWISH CONGREGATIONS OF AMERICA

HOW HE GOT INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ADVOCACY:

Prior to this job, I worked for a law firm. Before that, I clerked for a federal judge in New York.

When I was in law school, I spent one summer in Washington working for Nathan Lewin's law firm. Through that experience and because of my general interest in com-

munity issues, I did some pro bono work on behalf of the OU and some other things. Additionally, I was involved in putting together a conference at Yeshiva University with various rabbanim, academics and communal leaders to discuss political advocacy and public activism from a Torah perspective. That's when I met some of the leaders of the OU. Subsequently, when they were

looking to bring someone in to do this job, they thought of me.

HIS AREA OF ADVOCACY:

I spend most of my time on federal policy issues here in Washington. Our department works on all levels, expanding our efforts at the state level in 18 states.

A good example is what I'm in the midst of working on right now, which is talking with senior leaders in the Department of Homeland Security, under whose umbrella is FEMA, regarding institutions in our community that were damaged and almost destroyed by Sandy. Specifically, we're working with them on the issue of how shuls that were damaged can be ruled eligible to receive federal funds to rebuild, when they're not explicitly covered by the statutes. I've been in intensive discussions with officials about how they can be covered.

More broadly, we work as part of the pro-Israel coalition with the big organizations, like AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations. On domestic issues, we work on pretty much any issue that can affect religious freedoms.

HIS METHODS OF ADVOCACY:

I would say it's a combination of relationship-building and mobilization. We try to develop relationships with senators and congressmen, and with White House officials and their staff members. We develop direct relationships, part of which involves working

with them on issues of concern for us, and also, when appropriate, supporting their initiatives. But it's also mobilization. In the past year, a lot of the OU's expansion has entailed having more staff people on the ground in key states like New York, New Jersey and Florida, working with rabbanim and lay-people to help get the community active in engaging with local officials and helping us mobilize them in support of our initiatives.

ON THE RABBINIC ROLE IN OU ADVOCACY:

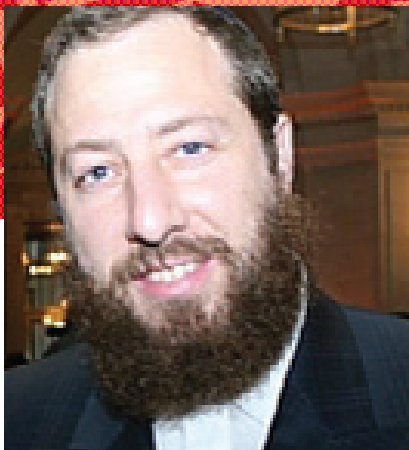
The OU's approach is not quite the same as Agudah. We don't have a moetzes like they do. But certainly, on issues with a halachic dimension, the OU leadership will consult with rabbanim for halachic guidance and input. A good example that goes back a number of years was when the issue came up concerning whether the government should fund stem cell research. That was a big issue on the state and national level, and it was something the OU had never really dealt with before. We put together a group of rabbanim who had experience and knowledge with regard to bioethics issues. We also had some Orthodox scientists in the group who were familiar with the actual research, and we had some other community leaders. As a group, they spent several months going through both the halachah and the science. Eventually, they reached a consensus that stem cell research of the kind that was being discussed—not for reproduction but for cures—was not only

permissible but commendable, and the OU should support it and government funding for the research. That recommendation was brought to the board of the OU, which approved it.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR ONE CANDIDATE:

We're collecting election returns numbers from precincts with large Orthodox Jewish populations, and in communities like Teaneck or Miami or Wickliffe, Ohio, where there's a large population of Orthodox Jews, and you see the trend of Romney having done better. At the same time, it indicates that Obama got some support in the Orthodox community. Like every other community, we're not monolithic.

Our job is to find the points of commonality on which we can agree. I'll give you an example: A piece of legislation we've started working on involves a grant program to be created by the Department of Energy for nonprofit organizations, including religious ones, to make their buildings more energy-efficient. That's an example of an issue that there's some support for on the liberal Democratic side in particular, even though liberals don't support school vouchers or other ways to give funds to religious schools, because this isn't about supporting private schools. It's about improving energy efficiency and reducing harmful impacts on the environment and other goals that folks on the more liberal side approve of. It's all about finding points of common interest.



EZRA FRIEDLANDER

CEO OF THE FRIEDLANDER GROUP, A LOBBYING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM BASED IN NYC

WHO REPRESENTS THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?

That reminds me of a question the White House had in the early '50s, when they complained that a lot of people came to them with issues related to Israel and each one represented a different group and a different viewpoint. The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations was established to clarify one viewpoint for the Jewish people. It's an umbrella and con-

sensus group that by and large represents the Jewish community and speaks in a unified voice to the White House. Then you have AIPAC, which does that for Congress. This doesn't mean that Jewish groups won't speak for themselves sometimes.

In regards to a local issue, it really depends on who has the votes. If a community identifies itself as a cohesive group and

goes to an elected official and says, "We represent X number of votes," that particular group can claim to represent that portion of the community. For example, the Simon Wiesenthal Center can say, "We represent 100,000 Jews who pay dues to us." Agudah and the OU, or any membership-driven organization, can claim to speak for however many dues-paying members they have. Can anyone say "I represent all the Jews"? No. That would be incorrect.

HIS ROLE ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY:

I view my role more as an ambassadorial one. I bring a particular point of view to elected officials and tell them that these are the issues that concern the Jewish community, and that if they wish to serve them

and get their support, they need to address those issues. I don't say that I represent anyone. I'm more like someone who gives advice to people who aspire to public office. Nine out of 10 times, I tell them not to put on a yarmulke and dance Hava Nagilah for us. That would be a nice photo op, but it wouldn't garner any support in the community.

DOES COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR ONE CANDIDATE UNDERMINE ADVOCACY?

It's certainly the American tradition to be able to publicly support one candidate over another. As long as your advocacy is responsible, it's okay. Responsibility means not spreading conspiracy theories about what one candidate might do if they win.

If you have legitimate reasons to support a particular candidate, then supporting him is commendable. In fact, the community should be vocal in its support for its preferred candidates.

CONFRONTATION IN ADVOCACY:

There's a time and place for everything. You need to be professional, to represent the American approach. You need to be courteous. You need to bring facts to the table. But there also has to be an understanding that the community won't think twice about organizing and demonstrating and ruffling feathers when we need to—within legal means, of course.



RABBI ABRAHAM FRIEDMAN BUSINESS OWNER AND ASKAN

BOTH A BUSINESS OWNER AND COMMUNITY ACTIVIST, RABBI FRIEDMAN SERVES AS A CHAPLAIN FOR SEVERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES IN NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY AND IN THE CORRECTIONS SYSTEM ON A VOLUNTEER BASIS.

HIS TYPE OF ASKANUS:

Let's talk for a minute about the hurricane [Sandy] and you'll automatically understand my role. One of the heaviest hit areas was Sea Gate. Sea Gate has been overlooked for years because it's its own little village, so to speak. They have their own police department and public operations. They were hardly mentioned anywhere. Because of the hurricane, over 100 houses will never be lived in again. They were too badly damaged to be fixed.

A few days after the storm, Sea Gate hadn't gotten any attention whatsoever. They called a lot of agencies and were totally ignored because they hadn't been on the news at all. I got

a phone call from one of the askanim there. He was telling me that I should try to come down to see what's going on in order to make a big tumult in the political world. Even the people who were left with something were being looted every night. The police department was swept away in the water. Most of the police cars were damaged, and those that weren't damaged had no gas. It was really chaos.

They came to me because they know that after so many years of working for the klal I've gained the respect of law enforcement and elected officials. They know that when I call them, I'm never asking for anything personal. I'm not an organization that advocates for funds. I only call when a member of klal Yisrael needs help.

I went down there and saw the devastation. I was touched and heartbroken by the horrific scenes. I saw families standing on the street with mamash nothing. Thankfully, the Shomrim from Boro Park and Williamsburg went to patrol the area. They set up a command post so people could come to charge

their phones and grab a sandwich. It was a kiddush Hashem, because they helped many non-Jews too. They helped everyone alike.

When I saw what was going on, I immediately sent an email to a host of elected officials. I reached out to Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, [Public Advocate] Bill de Blasio and my close friend State Senator Eric Adams, who made a lot of phone calls to make sure that a lot of people came down to visit, because just hearing what I had to say was not the same as seeing it for yourself. That same day, they were given a tour of the neighborhood and they couldn't believe that there was no command post, no FEMA, no Red Cross—no chesed organization either besides Shomrim. No one even knew about Sea Gate. So they started to make a commotion in the political world.

I also involved a good friend of mine, Hakeem Jeffries, who was just elected to Congress and represents the Sea Gate area. He came and couldn't believe what he saw. Jerry Nadler, who used to represent the district, came with him.

Because so many elected officials came down, each of them brought different assistance to the area. For example, Senator Schumer's office made sure that FEMA responded immediately. The next day, Friday, FEMA set up a command post on Surf Avenue, right near the entrance gate, so that people who had lost everything could fill out an application for immediate assistance. Hakeem Jeffries' office made sure that the Red Cross and other organizations came right away, especially the National Guard, which had to inspect the entire area. De Blasio called Commissioner Kelly and asked him to send cops, especially for Shabbos, when Shomrim couldn't patrol. Kelly promised to do so, and the officers arrived before Shabbos and were there for the entire Shabbos patrolling the area. I think that's what started making people aware of the devastation there.

I got a beautiful letter from some local residents thanking me for raising public awareness and getting them assistance. I don't need any thanks. I was happy to be the good shliach. The real thanks goes to Hatzolah and Shomrim and to the people who came from all over to help. Cheskel Bennet came down and made calls to organizations to donate food and clothes. Those people deserve the credit and thanks.

HOW HE GOT INVOLVED IN ASKANUS:

It started with my father, a"h. I grew up in a house that was full of chesed. My father

was one of the first Hatzolah members in Kiryas Yoel. He invented the idea of a Bikur Cholim room in a hospital 25 years ago. There was no such thing before that. That's the environment I grew up in. Every Shabbos and Yom Tov we had a dozen, two dozen guests—people who had nowhere else to go. I think that when you grow up with a father like that, continuing what he did is a big thing for his neshamah. He passed away at a young age, but the things he did for others endure. I'm also very fortunate to have a good relationship with other askanim. I have a lot of respect for older and more experienced askanim, and use their judgment as an example. I think that allows me to build a team rather than work alone. Every askan has a unique way of helping the community. One individual cannot have all the contacts and knowledge. Working together with other askanim, we can accomplish much more for klal Yisrael.

CAN SUPPORT FOR A LOSING CANDIDATE MAKE ADVOCACY DIFFICULT LATER ON?

Working together rather than against a candidate can only help you. The Obama administration, at least on the issues I was involved in, was genuinely trying to help the community. They were extremely helpful with homeland security, law enforcement and other issues for which I advocated. The White House Jewish liaison is Jarrod Bernstein, and there is no better person for the

job. I believed that we shouldn't ruin the relationship by supporting another candidate, so I supported [Obama].

If they hadn't had an open-door policy to us, I would have been the first person to say we should deal with the election differently. But because I know that I was able to help the community in many ways because they were helpful to me and there's such a thing as hakaras hatov, I felt that he was the way to go.

THE FUTURE OF ASKANUS AND THE MERITS OF PRIVATE VERSUS ORGANIZATIONAL ASKANUS:

Elected officials have come to realize that although organizations are very important and represent a large sector of the community, they also know they have to respect individual askanim who work tirelessly on behalf of the klal. Elected officials cannot mandate that everything has to go through organizations and that if you need something you have to go through them. There are askanim working on behalf of the community with absolutely no agenda other than the good of the klal. If your heart is in the right place, the official will see that you mean it and will respect you and have an open dialogue with you.

The organizations will continue to advocate, and if they're smart enough they'll include [individual] askanim, because each askan brings a unique way to help klal Yisrael.

RABBI AARON KOTLER

CEO OF BMG, COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

RABBI AARON KOTLER OF BETH MEDRASH GOVOHA IN LAKEWOOD HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN COMMUNAL ADVOCACY FOR THE PAST 16 YEARS.

ON HIS START IN ADVOCACY:

My grandfather Rav Aharon, ztz"l, established the model for the American Orthodox community of constant shtadlanus, advocacy and engagement with all aspects of government. Despite the immense pressing responsibilities that he faced from all segments of the klal, he was always person-

ally involved even in the most mundane details of advocacy. My father continued this mehalech, and my earliest memories include visits by governors and senators. They believed that achrayus for our communities entails becoming involved and not sitting back.



ON HIS DIFFERENT HATS:

Institutions have very clear rules about what they are allowed to do and are not allowed to do both in terms of elections and advocacy. The Lakewood community has a group of private citizens who represent the community and advocate on its behalf. Although some of them, including myself, also hold positions in non-profit institutions, their work is on behalf of the general public and not as representatives of their institutions. This holds true for the types of issues that come up, which tend toward general economic and social issues, and assisting individuals in need.

ON THE INGREDIENTS OF ADVOCACY:

There are a few ingredients that are key. The first one is education. Education involves knowing the facts and being able to make a reasonable case for fairness and equity as the basis for the policy that you are advocating. If you are able to marshal the facts, gather the information and make an equitable argument for government to do something, government will often listen. If we advocate to remedy a disparity or unfair situation, we will generally find a listening air. But that entails that you are able to educate the government officials so that they can have the full picture. That's probably the most important part of advocacy.

Relationships are obviously critical. Those are not one-time things; you develop long-term relationships, in which officials will rely on you as much as you will rely on them. They may rely on you because you can help them in their goals, which are to govern and to govern well. They want to govern well because they want to serve and do a good job, and for the vast majority of them, they really want to do the right thing, and they're not just focused on reelection or reappointment.

In order for them to serve, they need to know what is going on in their communities. There is no firewall, where someone sits in an office and makes policy without knowing what the people want in regard to those policies. So if anyone is elected to any level of public office and they are serious about making a difference, the most important thing for them is to have good relationships with people in the communities who can help them explore what the needs are,

distill the issues and have a trusting relationship where the person is not going to skew the facts and try to just push the result their way, but instead really be a resource for them to figure out what needs to be done.

The rule in the recent national health-care reform that children can remain on their parents' insurance plans until age 26, even if married, was something we worked hard on together with a number of other national advocates. As the bill was being written, there was a provision in the bill that said that if you are under age 26, you are allowed to stay on your parents' plan. Until then, insurance companies could do as they wished; now they were going to be mandated to allow those under 26 to stay on their parents' plan.

But that bill specifically said that if you were married, you would not be able to stay on your parents' plan. As the bill was being written, we were watching how its various provisions would affect the Orthodox Jewish community in the United States. There were hundreds and hundreds of different things going on in the bill, and this was one of them.

Because we had long-term relationships with some of those who were writing the bill, without having to take a position on whether we liked the bill or not—that was irrelevant, because it would either pass or fail on its own merits—in speaking with those who were writing it, we could say, "Let's discuss how this will impact the Orthodox Jewish community and other religious communities that may get married earlier than the general public."

In the typical population, people tend to get married after age 26, so it would not be a hot-button issue in their communities. We said, "Look, in our community, people may get married at ages 20, 21, 22."

We appealed to conservatives and liberals with a set of arguments that appealed to each of them. We said to the conservatives that specifically excluding those married would create what is called a "marriage penalty," which conservatives always oppose. Anything in the federal code or tax code that is detrimental to a married couple as opposed to a single person, conservatives dislike, because they want to encourage more marriage and more stable family units, rather than fewer.

We explained that if the bill would

exclude married people, they might discourage marriage. If it will cost a couple \$16,000 a year, and they don't have that money yet at the beginning of their earning cycle, they might decide to push off marriage a year or two. It's not so common in our community to push off marriage because of financial reasons, but it is very common in the general public. Conservatives agreed on the importance of amending this "under 26 even if married provision," even though they opposed the healthcare bill in general.

Liberals wanted to expand the pool of mandated coverage, because they were looking to cover as many people as possible under the provisions of the bill. That was something very important to them. So we said, "Why would you arbitrarily exclude this married person?"

We became spokesmen for this, because no one else cared as much about it. Technically, other religious groups would have cared about it, but they had so many other issues they were interested in, it wasn't on their agenda. While we had many religious concerns about the bill—for example, right-to-life and end-of-life issues—when it came to the financial aspects of the bill, this was one of the most important and doable issues for us.

ON THE ROLE OF DAASTORAH IN ADVOCACY:

All the time, not on an occasional basis, you have hashkafah issues about how to deal with something. It may be on something that you would expect, such as "end-of-life" matters, and other times it is on something out of the blue. For example, here is something that actually happened: We were asked to support a gun-control bill by an elected official. Now that idea is obviously very much in the public arena after the tragic shooting in Newtown, but at the time it wasn't on the radar and is not something that was high on the priority list of our community. We were asked to support that bill because we had asked elected officials for help on something else. One of them said, "This is what I need help on. If you help me with gun control, I'll help you with this." It was completely unrelated; it came from nowhere and the question was whether to expend our community voice on something unrelated to us. We had to ask whether this

was something we should be involved with or should not be involved with.

Another question that came up, much more recently, is how to relate in elections to politicians who are more liberal than those with whom we have more empathy on social and moral issues. That's something we most recently spoke with in detail with Maran Hagaon Rav Aharon Leib [Steinman] about; in the past we spoke with Rav Avraham Chaim Levine and many others on. We also have a clear mesorah from my father, ztz'l, and others. We consult on daas Torah issues regularly with roshei yeshivah, whose opinions are valued and followed by many, and with rabbonim. The key to asking is to not have a pre-determined outcome and to recognize that you will always come across issues where there is a hashkafah perspective. Even in a more limited way, there is the question of what we should expend our energies on. Everyone has only a limited amount of time, energy and resources, so we need to know what we should spend those on.

ON COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR ONE CANDIDATE AND ADVOCACY:

We have a clear mesorah in Lakewood,

which we recognize with respect that not everyone will always agree with. Our mesorah has always been one of hakaras hatov. We've always said to elected officials that if they work with us, listen to our point of view, represent us fairly (and that's all we ask for, fairness), and give our community the attention we deserve by virtue of being citizens in their district or state, and they do so in a respectful way, the community will recognize that and support them. We're a highly informed electorate, and people will be aware of quality representation. You go to shul, and everyone has a point of view and is engaged, which is the way it should be. Our philosophy of hakaras hatov has been that we will turn out en masse for such an official and that we care.

The American system of governance really forces consensus-building between different factions and sides. There is very little winner-takes-all in the American system. When you think of the two large political parties, they themselves are conglomerations of different interests. By the time a person gets into office, they are the product of many different forces and voices, and they have to do the best job they can juggling the different points of view for the common good. We're not the sole voice.

So you may have a new person who comes up and takes one issue and says, "I will change policy on this issue," which may seem attractive to the frum community. But we might say that that's unbelievably appreciated and if they are elected, we hope they do that, but that might not change the feelings of hakaras hatov we have to someone who has taken the time to understand our communities, build relationships, allowed us to advocate for our communities and then enacted policies that are beneficial, overall, for the frum community. You may not agree with everything someone says, but you may still feel that they are worthy of your support.

A FINAL NOTE ABOUT ADVOCACY:

Probably the most important thing to know is that it is a lot of work. It's not a fun and glamorous game. But though it's a lot of work, it has a lot of toes.

For those who are less active on a daily basis, the most important thing that they can do is vote and show that they care about the public issues. By doing that, they strengthen the hands of any advocate involved in any area.

RABBI MOSHE DUVID NIEDERMAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS OF WILLIAMSBURG,

A DIRECT SERVICE PROVIDER AND THE UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION FOR HUNDREDS OF RELIGIOUS AND CIVIC GROUPS IN WILLIAMSBURG SINCE 1986. HE IS ALSO EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE RAV TOV INTERNATIONAL JEWISH RESCUE ORGANIZATION AND SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CENTRAL RABBINICAL CONGRESS, HISACHDUS HARABONIM. HIS ADVOCACY FOR THE COMMUNITY IS PERFORMED IN ALL OF THESE CAPACITIES AS WELL AS IN MANY OTHERS.



ON GETTING INVOLVED WITH KLAL WORK:

I began 40 years ago, at the behest of the Satmar Rebbe, ztz'l.

Basically, the Rebbe wanted to create an organization to assist Yidden abroad, in Russia and other places. At the time, he created Rav Tov. That's when I got involved.

The Voideslover Rav, ztz'l, was the yosheiv

rosh of the Hisachdus Harabonim and the yosheiv rosh of the Vaad Harabonim of Rav Tuv. So I've been working with the Hisachdus Harabonim from the beginning.

Dealing with Russian Jews led to a lot of halachic shailos and naturally necessitated the guidance of rabbanim. This eventually led me to Russia in 1987 to arrange a harsha'ah on a get because the husband

stayed there and wouldn't leave.

ON WHAT ADVOCACY INVOLVES:

It involves two things: The first is to be

a proud, ehrliche Yid and to explain very clearly to government that we are grateful that Hashem sent us after the big churban to amalchus shel chesed, where people are able to enjoy freedom of religion and not deviate from our mesorah. It is necessary to tell them what you stand for and that you will not accept anything less.

In order to accomplish that, you have to do a few things. You have to explain what our requirements are. Explain the concept of being shomer Torah u'mitzvos. Explain that being chasidic doesn't mean going back to the Middle Ages. You can give them examples of people who have been leaders in their fields while being chasidish shomrei Torah u'mitzvos. Also, you need to explain that our distinct religious way of life is not about living in isolation or showing any kind of disrespect or distrust. Rather, our religious traditions prevent us from participating in certain social activities with the greater community. There are many issues on which we need to join together with the community at large and work in tandem. G-d created man in His image, and we need to respect mankind and work together. For example, our religious values require us to have the separation of genders in our own communities, even with close friends, and there are other things we do to raise our children as civilized, law-abiding citizens. And they succeed despite not having a formal education.

The system has proven that our final product isn't only law-abiding citizens, but

also civic-minded people who are concerned with issues that affect the broader society as a whole. Look at the hurricane and the response of the Jewish community to help everyone! Look at Masbia, Met Council and its 26 affiliated JCCs, headed by its indefatigable CEO Willie Rapfogel and so on.

Our experience is that most of the time—yes, there are exceptions—elected officials are receptive. If they see sincerity and consistency and persistence, you can bring about social, housing and policy changes and other needed services for the Jewish community.

ON WHETHER HE FINDS HIMSELF ADVOCATING DIFFERENT POSITIONS THAN OTHER JEWISH GROUPS:

One hundred percent. That's true on an ongoing basis. Of course, that makes it difficult. But the government understands that there are always multiple voices on any issue, and I am sure that they encounter that a lot. By law, the government has to respect our sincere religious beliefs and positions, regardless of what another group says.

ON COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR A SPECIFIC CANDIDATE:

I can tell you that if a person supports a candidate in an individual capacity, he can encourage people to go out and vote for that candidate, but it has to be done in a respectful manner. Responsible elected officials understand that there is a differ-

ence between elections and governance. We are obligated to daven for the success of our officials, and in turn they're supposed to represent all people—even those who didn't vote for them. But if someone attacks an official and calls him an anti-Semite, that backfires and has no place.

There is a clear rule that you should never change your support from someone who has helped you. This is al pi Torah and al pi mentchlichkeit and practicality. You don't jump off the wagon, because then no official will ever trust you to support him in the future. You never double-cross someone who helped you. Don't be afraid to lose an election. If you stood up for what's right—you won! If someone else comes in, he'll respect that.

A FINAL NOTE ON WHAT PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ADVOCACY:

It's very important that people listen to others who have been there. As it says in Chovos Halevavos, don't think your parents didn't know what you know today! There are people older than you with knowledge and experience, and you should work with them and not against them. We have always had great rabbanim and leaders whom younger people can emulate and look up to. In the next generation, you'll be the old askan, and the younger askanim will look up to you for guidance!



GERSHON SCHLESINGER

CEO OF UJ CARE HEALTHCARE,

A HEALTHCARE COMPANY BASED IN WILLIAMSBURG. HE ALSO IS THE HEAD OF AD-MAS KODESH, AN ORGANIZATION WHICH WORKS TO PRESERVE JEWISH CEMETERIES WORLDWIDE. MR. SCHLESINGER ALSO SERVES AS AN ASKAN ON POLITICAL ISSUES FOR THE SATMAR COMMUNITY LED BY RAV AHARON TEITELBAUM, SHLIT" A.

ON HIS START IN ASKANUS:

My father, a" h, whose name was Rav Yitzchak Schlesinger, was born before the

war. After the war, he learned in Vodkert, Hungary, and left to America in 1956. He was always involved with the Jewish ceme-

teries. The highlight of his life was when in the 90s, he and the Satmar rosh hakahal, Rav Sender Deutsch, decided to buy the cemetery in Ujhely. The old cemetery in Ujhely, where the Yismach Moshe is buried, was smack in the middle of town, and the city decided to use it as real estate. So they took it upon themselves, with the blessing of the Satmar Rebbe at the time, the Beirach Moshe, to buy the cemetery. In the baishachaim you can see a plaque thanking my father for saving it.

When I grew up, my father was always making phone calls from home to try to preserve bais hachaims. He passed away in 2001, and I decided to continue with what he had done. I met many times with my rebbe, Rav Aharon Teitelbaum, and he encouraged me to continue on

involved in the preservation of another cemetery with special importance to Satmar when we bought the cemetery in Sighet.

Because of my interest in politics, I became involved in issues closer to home as well, and became active in local politics.

My first campaign in Williamsburg was with a young state senator named Daniel Squadron. He walked into the UJCare office and asked us to support him. He was 28 years old, and the incumbent was Martin Connor, who had been an incumbent for 31 years. We had a meeting to look into whether he had a chance to win, and the more we delved into it, we saw that yes, he did. That was our first successful local campaign, in 2008.

The last campaign we did successfully

Speaking about Congresswoman Velazquez, we've probably had 10 immigration cases over the past year that she's helped us on. One was a chasan who was having trouble getting into the country right before his chasunah. If you are close with a congressperson, it is a tremendous help for askanim.

ON THE FUTURE OF ASKANUS:

Recently there was an article in a secular newspaper that said that if both Satmar communities vote together as a bloc, we would have 10,000 votes in Williamsburg, and that if politicians knew that, they would do a lot more for the community than they do when they are split. I do believe, as an askan, that if we vote together, we could do a lot more

THERE IS A WHOLE NEW GENERATION OF ASKANIM WHO HAVE CAPABILITIES AND A KNACK FOR POLITICS AND ASKANUS. WORKING TOGETHER WILL BE FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL.

and open up an organization.

In 2005, the Rebbe called me. He had come from London, where he had met with Rav Elyakim Schlesinger, who had complained to the Rebbe that he didn't have enough help in preserving cemeteries. So the Rebbe asked me to take a couple of askanim to meet with Rav Schlesinger. So I took Rav Yitzchak Fleischer from Bobov as a partner and flew to Rav Schlesinger. Since then, I don't think that a week has gone by without us speaking to him about bais hachaim issues.

We've met every single consul general or ambassador here in America from countries in Europe that have large Jewish cemeteries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Spain and many others. We preserved cemeteries in dozens of countries, including the ancient cemetery in Toledo, Spain, and many others.

In that capacity, I was able to be

was a campaign for Congress, for Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez. She had the whole Brooklyn machine against her. We were successful and she won. Although she had been a congresswoman for 20 years, she was redistricted and is now part of Williamsburg. I meet with her once a week to keep her updated on Jewish issues.

One recent issue was the plight of Jacob Ostreicher. Because of her Hispanic background, I thought she would be a good person to go down to Bolivia to help Jacob. We had heard that Congressman Chris Smith from New Jersey was involved, so we made the connection. Since she was down there a few weeks ago, things were on a fast track. Jacob Ostreicher, in his interview with the Associated Press this week, thanked her as one of the people who had come down and worked hard. A congresswoman with 20 years seniority wasn't someone the Bolivians could ignore.

for the community. Right now, there are 5,000 voting for one candidate, and 5,000 voting for another, and we cancel one another out. That makes no sense. If we could work together, that would be a major change for the better.

I feel also that there should be a vaad of askanim that gets together a few times a year, so that even those who are working individually will be able to share what they are doing with everyone. The old model of askanim would never let a young askan near the politicians that they were dealing with, perhaps because they felt they would no longer be relevant. That's just not the case. I feel that everyone has to share information with other askanim. There is a whole new generation of askanim who have capabilities and a knack for politics and askanus. Working together will be for the benefit of all. The mentality of the younger askanim is more open, and I think that is helpful.



RABBI LEVI SHEMTOV

DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN FRIENDS OF LUBAVITCH, BASED IN WASHINGTON, DC

HIS START IN ADVOCACY:

I started when I was younger by helping my father and learning from him [the famed askan and shliach, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov], then I went on to develop the projects he started and add some more, trying to respond to the needs of Lubavitch and the general Jewish community. My colleagues know that they can ask me for anything and I will do it for them, just as I hope they would do the same for me.

RECENT PROJECTS:

Recently, about a year ago, we worked to preserve support for the mosdos that were in danger of being minimized by cuts. Working together with others we identified who needed to be approached, and we approached them.

We are busy every single day. We have [Chabad] branches in 48 states and 80 countries, and there's always something needed by somebody somewhere.

LOCAL ADVOCACY:

One of my classic stories was when they were worried that changing the clock for Daylight Savings Time would make the earliest zman tefillah in Detroit around 8 a.m., which would mean that for a few weeks a lot of Jews wouldn't be able to get to work on time. We negotiated with a lot of people. The airline industry was involved because all their

flights were scheduled for Daylight Savings Time, so we had an ally there. The chairman of the Daylight Savings Commission was from New Mexico, and we had the head shliach there go talk to him about how important the issue was even for his own city. In the end they worked out a compromise: Instead of two months it was one month, and instead of a whole month it was two weeks on one end and two on the other end. Their goal to preserve energy was met, but not at the expense of our kehillah.

THE EFFECTS OF PARTISANSHIP ON HIS ADVOCACY:

I think that everyone in Washington knows that I am equally accessible to both sides. That's why, when we have our annual dinner, we have top Democrats and top Republicans together. When we honored [Republican] Speaker of the House John Boehner last year, he was given his award by [Democratic Representative] Steny Hoyer. When we had an event last year honoring the Rebbe, two of our main speakers were [Republican House Majority Leader] Eric Cantor and [Democratic Representative] Debbie Wasserman-Schultz. They don't usually mingle. When I was at the vice president's house for a Rosh Hashanah reception, I told Cantor that Wasserman-Schultz was to his right. He said, "Debbie Wasserman is never to my right!" He turned and saw her and said, "Hi, Debbie." Then I asked them for a nice, nonpartisan photo in honor of Rosh Hashanah, and they took a picture together.

The fact that the community votes one way doesn't necessarily affect me. I'm not partisan, so it doesn't affect me.

BEING A SHLIACH AND AN ADVOCATE:

A shliach is by definition an advocate. I advocate for Yiddishkeit and for Hakadosh

Boruch Hu, and for the practical gashmiyus needs of every Yid wherever he may be. In addition, I have the zchus to advocate for the needs of my fellow shluchim and their communities. If you want, you can say that I advocate for the advocates. I'm proud of that.

THE NEED FOR ADVOCATES TO CONSULT HALACHIC ADVISORS:

If you get invited by a Muslim ambassador to an iftar [Muslim celebration], are you allowed to go? In some cases the answer is yes, and sometimes no. It depends on which eid [holiday] they are celebrating. One eid celebrates the end of fasting and teshuvah, and that is similar to what we do and we can go. But another eid marks the passing of Yishmael and Mohammed, and that's against our Torah and we aren't allowed to go. I would say that 99 percent of frum Jews don't even know that there is such a shaaloh. There are other interactions, and pidyon shvuyim and other very sensitive cases, and for that I consult rabbanim who size up the situation and tell me what I need to know.

THE FUTURE OF ORGANIZATIONAL ADVOCACY AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE:

There's no doubt that many young people in the frum community are becoming interested in the political process, and motivated to get involved. The problem, though, is that some of them believe that they are the overarching voice of frum Jews everywhere. That can be a problem, because when there are too many of those it's just noise. So far, those who represent the major groups have at least managed to inform each other about what they're doing, so that those we speak to aren't hearing a contradictory voice.

I see young people showing up at various events related to the political process, like AIPAC and the conventions. They're involved in campaigns, even working in offices. Then you have the superstars like [New York City Councilman] David Greenfield and [New York State Senator] Simcha Felder, who are

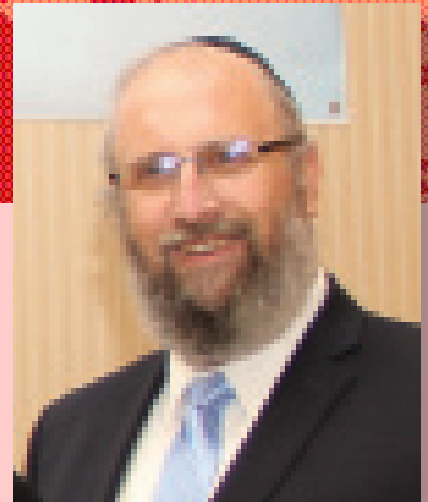
establishing a new paradigm in Jewish communal life—that of the completely frum advocate for the frum community in a totally secular government as elected representatives. I get a lot of nachas from Greenfield. He used to be a student here in Georgetown. Then there's the man behind it all, Ezra Friedlander.

FINAL NOTE

The most important thing is to be open, honest, respectful and diligent. When you are those things, you can be quite effective. I've seen that the razzle-dazzle doesn't shine like the truth does.

YERUCHIM SILBER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE
BROOKLYN COMMUNITY COUNCIL



HIS START IN ASKANUS:

Basically, my entire career has been community work since I left kollel. I worked for a couple of yeshivos, then I had a business servicing not-for-profits and yeshivos, helping them raise money. Back in 2001, when Bill de Blasio originally ran for City Council, he was running in my neighborhood and I got involved in his campaign. When he won, I joined his staff on a part-time basis, so I got into government and moved on from there. I've been involved in government and community activities for the past 25 years.

PRESENT ADVOCACY:

We service people to help them access government benefits. We're really here to represent the community in Boro Park, advocate for their needs, get them benefits like food stamps and Medicaid and help with employment issues.

EDUCATION AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING IN ADVOCACY:

It's all a single package. As you build relationships, you're educating people. It's two sides of the same coin. I've been fortunate to work with numerous government officials who'd had little prior exposure to our community. And educating them about us is paying dividends till today. They're amazed when you bring them for the first time to see all the chesed organizations like Hatzolah and Chaverim. I remember taking Brad Lander to Yad Efraim when he was first running for City Council. We were watch-

ing 50 or 60 people putting together food packages for a hospital on a Thursday night. There's nothing like it in the outside world. That's probably the most incredible thing they see when they become acquainted with our community. The other thing that amazes them is our fully self-contained and self-sustained yeshivah education system.

THE POSSIBILITY OF ADVOCACY BACKFIRING:

Obviously, you don't always get everything you want. But I think that the efforts of people who advocate properly and I sheim shamayim won't backfire. When people advocate improperly and not as part of a group, it can and has backfired. The main thing is to do it respectfully. We may not agree with everyone's lifestyle and politics, but you have to show respect for the person and for the office. Never forget that it's a medinah shel chesed, and it's a tremendous chesed that we have the power to advocate. We have to respect the government for that.

DOES COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR ONE CANDIDATE UNDERMINE ADVOCACY?

I'm only concerned when it stoops to a certain level that's unbecoming, like when people make silly comments. We have a right to support candidates. That's the American way. But it has to be done respectfully, without stooping to personal attacks. Unfortunately, there are people who do that and it's unhelpful. Hopefully, responsible elected officials can look beyond that. It is a matter of concern when people

besmirsch politicians on a personal level. But everyone has a right to his own political view.

One would hope that any elected official has the best interests of his constituents in mind. There are just different views as to what those best interests are.

THE FUTURE OF ADVOCACY:

I think it helps to advocate as part of an organization because it makes you more effective. Young people should get involved. I have seen some of that. It's important. I think our voting has really improved, although we still need more. But the situation is getting better, for presidential elections at least. People see that they can make a difference.

FINAL WORDS:

Voting is very important. If you don't vote, don't complain.

Always be respectful and mindful of kidush Hashem. Remember that you represent klal Yisrael.

Always avoid personal attacks. Only criticize on a policy level rather than on a personal level.