

Congress Celebrates Jewish-American Heritage Month

By Judy Berger

On May 17, hundreds gathered in the historic, marble-columned Kennedy Caucus Room of the Russell Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. for a 'Tribute to American Jewry.' This annual kosher Congressional luncheon, commemorates Jewish-American Heritage Month, officially proclaimed by U.S. presidents since 2006. Thirteen senators and five representatives praised the community and the U.S.-Israel relationship and vowed to fight antisemitism.

Declaring the first celebration in 2006, President George W. Bush wrote: "Jewish citizens have contributed their knowledge and skills to every field of endeavor, including education, business, industry, science, and the arts. Their names are permanently etched in America's history books, and the Jewish community's rich heritage and culture pervade all aspects of American society."



President Biden's Jewish Liaison Chanan Weissman brings greetings from the White House.

Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC), opened the program. Oregon's Sen. Ron Wyden recalled Sen. Joseph Lieberman calling him the first "Minyan Man," as the 10th Jewish senator at that time. Nevada's Sen. Jacky Rosen, the first shul president ever elected U.S. Senator, claimed, "the synagogue election was much tougher than running for the Senate."



Community leaders and government officials gather in the Russell Senate Office Building to honor Jewish-American Heritage Month 2022.



Utah Sen. Michael Lee (standing) addressing luncheon participants with honoree Abraham Foxman (left) looking on.

Inspiring his strong support of Jewish Americans and Israel, said Sen. Michael Lee (R-UT), is Mormon Elder Orson Hyde's Dedicatory Prayer, written in Jerusalem in 1841: "Let them know that it is Thy good pleasure to restore the kingdom unto Israel. Raise up Jerusalem as its capital and constitute her people a distinct nation and government."



Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey provides 22-second Hebrew-filled bracha for guests.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) welcomed partners in the Abraham Accords. He was at the historic signing in President Trump's White House in September 2020, and he recalled how the representatives of the UAE and Bahrain told him: "It's clear that America stands unequivocally with Israel. We want to be friends with America. Therefore, we will be friends with Israel."



North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis (left) presenting award to Rabbi Moshe Margaretten, leader of the Tzedek Association.

First-time participant Colorado's freshman Sen. John Hickenlooper, recognized Denver's Jewish leadership for revitalizing his city during his terms as mayor of Denver and then Colorado governor. Another new VIP guest, Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, was recently confirmed as the State Department's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism. Senators Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) also offered greetings and presented awards.

The intentionally shortest remarks lasted 22 seconds, as New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker shouted "Yasher koach and be'ezrat Hashem, next year we'll see a nation with less hate and more love."

House members participating included Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (D-FL), who helped initiate this annual governmental recognition, following the 350th anniversary of Jews arriving in 1654. Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY) said, "In our home district in Queens, every month is Jewish Heritage Month." Congressman Brad Schneider (D-IL) mentioned placing mezuzahs on his House office doorposts.

On the lighter side, Virginia's Sen. Tim Kaine referenced an unusual menu item. "I'll be a little immodest, as the only person in U.S. history to have been a mayor, a governor, a U.S. Senator and chairman of a national party, but I never got my face on a candy bar!" These candy bar wrappers featured photos of the day's honorees. Chanan Weissman, the Jewish-American liaison in President Biden's Office of Public Engagement, claimed he was "more nervous" speaking here than at his bar mitzvah.

The event honored former Anti-Defamation League National Director Abe Foxman, philanthropists Tzili Charney and Rabbi Moshe Margaretten and Bukharian Chief Rabbi Itzhak Yehoshua.

Foxman served 50 years with the Anti-Defamation League, 28 as national di-

rector, until retiring in 2015. He then became vice chairman of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York.

In 2018, honoree Rabbi Margaretten established the nonprofit Tzedek Association, focusing on humanitarian aid and criminal justice reform through legislation and inmate advocacy. According to his biography, "A young Moshe Margaretten visited prisons, seeing how incarceration devastates individuals and families." He championed the First Steps Act. In recognition, he lit the menorah at the 2019 White House Chanukah reception.

Just last month, he received the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Medal of Valor, alongside their Medal of Freedom honoree, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Tzedek recently purchased 30 ambulances for those affected by the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Honoring Tzili Charney, widow of Camp David Accords hero Leon Charney, Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) praised "Tzili's important work across many disciplines to promote education, conflict resolution and peace."

Adorned in his black and gold silk robe, Rabbi Yehoshua, chief rabbi of 65,000 Bukharian Jews in the United States, was honored for leadership integrating his followers into growing American communities.



JAHM Luncheon candy bar wrapper featuring luncheon honorees.

Emcee Greg Rosenbaum, the ex-chairman of Empire Kosher Poultry and co-owner of the Dayton Dragons baseball team, co-chaired the tribute with former child actor Brock Pierce, an expert on cryptocurrency. Washington's Chabad Rabbi Levi Shemtov offered a closing d'var Torah on combatting antisemitism.

Following the luncheon, select attendees crossed Capitol Hill for a roundtable discussion on the Abraham Accords. Chairman Robert Rehnitz, members of Congress, Jewish leaders and ambassadors and diplomats of Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Slovakia, and Morocco shared ideas on the Accords' success, progress and expansion.

Both events were coordinated by Ezra Friedlander's Friedlander Group.