

Community News

J Street Conference, "A Clear Choice for a Better Future"

By David deGroot

J Street is the political home for pro-Israel, pro-Peace Americans supporting U.S. diplomatic leadership towards a two-state solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. With support from the Jewish Federation, I attended the J Street conference in March. Three thousand people attended the conference, including 1,100 campus activists representing J Street U (the University arm of J Street), giving the event a young and dynamic character. These

young people were more than participants, they were full partners in planning and running the event. Significantly, 30 campus Hillels signed on as participating organizations at the conference. The conference, named "A Clear Choice For A Better Future," focused on the responsibility of the American Jewish community to make choices in light of the stagnating peace process and constant threat of violence in the region.

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin addressed the conference by

recorded video message. He acknowledged the disagreements between J Street and other Jewish organizations, reminding us that "in the Jewish tradition, arguments are a sign of strength, not weakness." He welcomes open and honest debate about Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic country.

Student leader Amna Farooqi, a Muslim of Pakistani origin, spoke at a plenary session. Growing up in Potomac, MD, she quipped, made her "culturally Jewish," and as someone who wants to contribute to ending the conflict, "knew that I needed to understand all sides." Her coursework in college led her to observe that, "Zionism is about the Jewish people taking control of their future. I fell in love with Zionism because Zionism became about taking ownership over the story of one's people." She called on the American Jewish establishment to go beyond "watered-down Zionism" and play their part in taking responsibility for a peaceful future, with a "strong Israel and an independent Palestinian state."

Stav Shaffir, a member of the Zionist Union party, at 29 years old, is the youngest ever female Knesset member. Her plenary speech described the choice between the politics of hope and the politics of despair. "We cannot afford the despair," she proclaimed, that is fostered by policies designed to maintain the status quo. She opposed the pessimism expressed by other parties that "Is-

raelis should stop believing in rosy dreams" and that "managing the conflict with a continuing cycle of violence and terror is the best that we can do." Calling for social justice, she explained how, as a member of the Knesset finance committee she had witnessed government money that was diverted from underserved areas in Israel to settlements beyond the Green Line. Her emphasis on minority rights provided an alternative Israeli narrative to Prime Minister Netanyahu's election-day warning about Israel's Arab citizens "turning out in droves" to vote. She alluded to his recent address to Congress when she cautioned Israeli politicians against placing American Jews in a situation where they are asked to choose between their love of Israel and their loyalty to the US. While some members of the Israeli government oppose same-sex marriage, Shaffir painted a different picture of Israel and provided conference attendees with other choices. Turning to security concerns and the threats facing Israel, she emphasized the importance of diplomacy and peace based on a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "not because we are oblivious to these threats, but because we take them seriously."

Head Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat claimed that no one stands to gain more from peace or lose more from its absence than

the Palestinians. Despite his recent inflammatory statements, he reaffirmed the Palestinian Authority's rejection of violence and its recognition of Israel's right to exist, living in peace within secure borders. Looking to the future he stated "I do not want my sons to be like your children - physicians, musicians, soccer players, writers and teachers." He sees the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as political, not religious, and that "the world should not be divided between people who are pro-Palestinian and those who are pro-Israel, but between those who are pro-peace and those who are against peace."

The J Street conference was a platform for an important conversation in the American Jewish community. Israeli political leaders provided a different and hopeful vision for Israel's future, and American activists asked: what is our responsibility in helping to realize that vision? You can see recordings of the conference sessions by clicking the link on the jstreet.org web site, including speeches by White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, former Secretary of State James Baker and the President of the Union for Reform Judaism Rabbi Rick Jacobs. ☆



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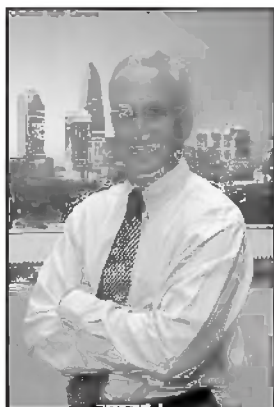
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**Legacy
Profile**



**Paula and Richard
Klein**



By Richard Klein

Paula and I first met in 1963 at a Bar Mitzvah in Danville, VA. We met again a few years later at High Holy Day services in Greensboro, where she was a student. There was special meaning in those two Jewish encounters. We were married, two years later, in 1968.

Paula grew up in Hampton, VA, and attended a very traditional synagogue. A Charlotte native, I attended Temple Beth El, although my grandfather often took me to Shabbat services at Temple Israel. We were both raised with a strong connection to Judaism, our local synagogues, and the Jewish Federation. Giving back was important and we have passed along those same teachings to our four children, who all became B'nai Mitzvah at Temple Israel. Paula was Sisterhood President at Temple Israel while I served on congregational boards and was President of the Jewish Federation. I was also active with UJA (later, The Jewish Federations of North America) on a national level. When I retired, after 30 years in the family business, I was invited to join JFNA professionally serving unaffiliated communities throughout the country.

Over the years, Paula and I have contributed to numerous local Jewish institutions because of their

impact in our lives. Our hope is for our children and grandchildren to continue similar practices of giving. Our decision to create a legacy gift, and perpetuate our giving, was made in consultation with our children since it would impact their inheritance. They did not hesitate for a second and encouraged us to make tzedakah part of our legacy.

Judaism teaches us the importance of passing down values and stories from one generation to the next. We were reminded of this by our grandson, Adlai Martin, following the passing of my mother, Elizabeth Goodman Klein on March 1, at the age of 89. He was seven years old. Our grandson was concerned that his parents' anniversary would be "bittersweet" since it is a day before my mom's birthday. He was saddened that Grandma Elizabeth wouldn't be able to celebrate and equally determined that she would not be forgotten.

"On her birthday we should do something generous because she was a generous person. That would make her happy," said Adlai. And so began the plan to collect canned goods for Jewish Family Services to help feed the hungry.

My mother inspired us and taught us all to give back. ☆