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Third In a Four - Part Series

## American Jewish Life in 50 Years Politics, The Presidency and Israel

*"I believe in the survival of American Jewry. I believe in its organic membership in the pattern of American civilization. American Jewry is not something grafted onto the existing structure of an American nation, but is simultaneous with its birth and growth, and totally inseparable from its destiny."*

—Israeli UN Ambassador Abba Eban,

When President Dan Goldwin, a Democrat, announced that he was not going to seek a second term in 2044, he didn't expect the national reaction he received. Millions of signatures on petitions to draft the president came flooding in from all corners of the country. Behind the effort, a coalition of African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American organizations, representing half of the 380 million Americans.

Goldwin, like many of the 50 Jewish members of Congress (there are 33 now), got his political feet wet in the late 20th century by either involvement with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in college or through the *Panim el Panim*: High School in

scape into the 21st century have more to do with American society than with internal Jewish dynamics. Even so, "the commitment of Jews to social justice will not diminish," says Lynn Lyss, chairperson of the National Jewish Community Relations Council (NJCRAC), an umbrella group that advocates on a wide array of public policy issues.

While the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that the population is expected to grow by 68 percent in the next 50 years, the American Jewish community is expected to shrink. American Jews will comprise between 1 and 1 1/2 percent of the U.S. population, as opposed to today's 2.7 percent. "In 50 years, coalition-building will be even more paramount," says Lyss. American

Since the establishment of peace between the Jewish state and the neighboring Arab countries, Israel has been a minor political issue for American Jews. (Unless, of course, the U.S. has not developed alternative energy sources and has become even more dependent upon Arab oil and natural gas. The U.S. currently has gas and oil reserves for another 55 years, while the Middle East has natural reserves for another 100 years.)

The evolution of the political consciousness of American Jewry from an Israel-centric focus to a domestic focus will enable a healthy rethinking of the Israel-Diaspora relationship. "Because we have been living crisis to crisis with Israel for so many years, we have not had an

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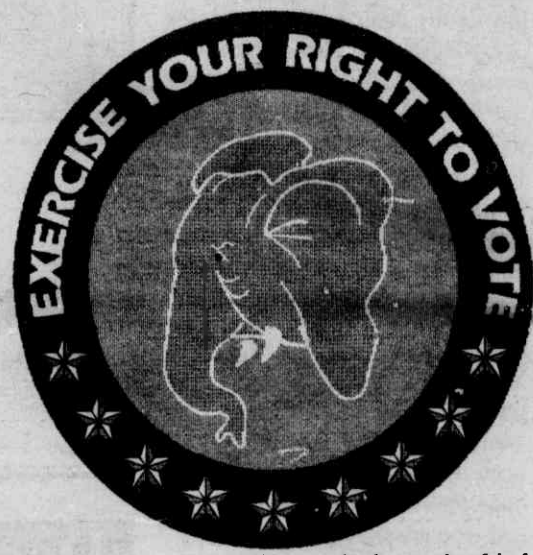
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Washington program. A moderate who learned early the value of coalition-building in a pluralistic political landscape made up of Republicans, Democrats, Independents and Christian Coalition parties, Goldwin's first term was characterized by an unusual calm. White Americans, who make up about half the country (down from 83% in 1995) but are a relatively affluent block of voters, were at odds with the coalition of ethnic groups that had dominated local and congressional politics for several years. Goldwin, an ethnic American but also white, was the compromise candidate that brought calm to a divided nation.

The Jewish community, however, was divided about the draft Goldwin initiative, many resentful at the higher tariffs he imposed on selective Israeli super-technology products. Others countered that due to his personal sponsorship of the U.S.- Israel Feed The World Program (FTWP), which utilized Israeli technology to feed the planet's 12 billion people (today there are 5.5 billion), Goldwin has good pro-Israel credentials. Whether one favored Goldwin or not (most did because they still belonged to the Democratic Party), the ascension of American Jewry, from powerlessness in 1945 to the Oval Office in 100 years, was breathtaking.

The trends shaping the American Jewish political land-

Jewry, however, "will continue to be wealthier, healthier and better educated than the rest of the population," according to Barbara Skolnick Hoenig, a planning consultant to CJF. "Jewish men and women will continue entering into the professions and executive positions, but in some areas they will be unequally represented, such as in law, medicine, engineering, science and as executives." In her study *Jewish Environmental Scan Toward the Year 2000*, Hoenig also predicts



that anti-Semitism will continue to decline and that "As Jewish civic involvement remains comparatively high, Jewish participation in the political process through activity and fund raising will grow. Jews will continue to vote in large numbers, and they will vote to support human rights causes and Israel."

While JFK had to contend with a 184 year-old tradition of electing Protestants to the U.S. presidency, he never had the heavy cloud of dual loyalty hang over his head. And neither has Goldwin.

opportunity to ask about what kind of relationship we ideally want with the Jewish state," says Rabbi Susan Silverman, who has lived in Israel and in the U.S. "With the possibility of peace, hopefully we can start talking about the Jewish character of Israel."

Rabbi Sidney Schwarz, president of the Washington Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values believes that "Israel could be a very exciting place in 50 years, Jewishly and for the world. It can be a light unto the nations. We could have a spiritual nation emerge. Israel sits on that legacy, it's just not aware what's under it's rump. I think that we are going to see peace in a decade, not 50 years, and we can already see interesting models of regional cooperation emerging.

"For 50 years Israel has put the political Zionist agenda over its spiritual Zionist agenda. With the onset of peace with the Arabs, they better pull that spiritual handbook out of the attic. A regional peace will create many more economic, cultural and inter-personal ties between Israel and the Arabs and that's going to make Israel even more Middle Eastern and less Western. That's why Israel needs that Jewish dimension, otherwise you can forget the missions because Israel will be incompatible with progressive Jewish values and American sensibilities."