

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

*A top Democratic foreign policy staffer reflects on 14 years on Capitol Hill; The Instagram community connecting Jewish women experiencing infertility; Blake Bailey's complaint; Gabrielle Bluestone is out to get internet scammers; Kyrsten Sinema's independent streak runs deep:*

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## A top Democratic foreign policy staffer reflects on 14 years on Capitol Hill

*Daniel Silverberg, who recently stepped down as Steny Hoyer's national security advisor, talks to Jewish Insider about the Iran deal and why the U.S.-Israel relationship will remain bipartisan*

By Gabby Deutch

As a Shabbat-observant Jew and one of Capitol Hill's most senior national security officials, Daniel Silverberg long ago figured out that the best way to travel internationally was to fly out Saturday night, spend every minute of the trip either in meetings or sleeping on planes, and get home by sundown the following Friday.

But sometimes being away over Shabbat could not be avoided. Silverberg, who recently stepped down as House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer's (D-MD) national security advisor after 14 years on the Hill, recalled the time he went to a small kiddush in Sen. Joe Lieberman's (I-CT) hotel room during the Munich Security Conference. "As any Sabbath-observant traveler knows, you always find the other similar travelers," Silverberg observed. "We didn't have a minyan, but there certainly was a healthy crowd of shomer Shabbat

participants to give us that gratifying sense of professional fulfillment of being in the epicenter of European foreign policy that weekend. And also that feeling of shabbas kodesh," the holiness of Shabbat.

Silverberg took a break from his first day of private sector work in nearly 20 years to speak with *Jewish Insider* about U.S. policy on Israel and Iran, his tenure working for four prominent pro-Israel Democrats, and why — despite all the partisanship and animosity — he still thinks working on Capitol Hill is the best political job a young person can have.

"What I'm going to miss most is the entrepreneurship, the idealism and the ability to be focused on the entire world. I had a global focus; everything that happened around the world fell into my portfolio," said Silverberg, 47. "I could tell you what I won't miss, and that is the increasing dysfunction and the likes

of [Republican Rep.] Marjorie Taylor Greene, who just continue to poison the democratic process and poison how members do their business."

In his new role at Capstone LLC, a company that describes itself as a "global policy and regulatory due diligence firm," Silverberg will "explain Washington and legislative oversight, rule changes [and] developments" to corporations, he told *Ji*. "Over the last number of years, particularly in the sanctions space, foreign policy has become far more of a regulatory space where rules the State Department or Commerce or Treasury Departments are making directly impact business decisions of U.S. companies."

For the last 14 years, Silverberg was a Democratic staffer on the Hill, working most recently as Hoyer's national security advisor. "I was primarily his eyes and ears on what was happening in the Democratic caucus

and in Washington generally, and then around the world on any major national security or foreign policy issue that would be of interest to him and be of interest to Democrats in Congress,” Silverberg explained, noting that he was not speaking as a representative of Hoyer’s office.

Silverberg often traveled internationally with Hoyer, and told JI that he frequently required a translator to explain the tefillin he carried with him to security personnel. “It would be no problem, but just the look [they had] of utter confusion, that clearly, they were somewhat puzzled by my tefillin,” he recalled. He knew that on some trips, he would be surveilled, and he tried to find the humor in it: “I would often use the placement of my tefillin bag as kind of a marker of what was happening in my hotel room when I wasn’t there. I would always leave my tefillin in the exact same place, and so when I would see my bag moved in a way that just didn’t look like the hotel cleaner had come but someone had been rifling through my bags, that was always the signal to me,” he said.

Before joining Hoyer’s office in 2014, Silverberg worked for the House Foreign Affairs Committee under three of the most prominent Jewish Democrats to ever serve in Washington: Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA), the Budapest-born Holocaust survivor who represented the Bay Area for 27 years until his death from esophageal cancer in 2008; Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA), who represented parts of Los Angeles for 30 years before losing to fellow Democrat Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA) in 2012 after redistricting; and Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), whose 16-term tenure ended in a primary defeat last year.

“I feel grateful that I have all of those members’ brands as a part of me, and that through them I got to work on the most, I think, important, sensitive, challenging issues of interest to the Jewish community, and do so in a way that was totally compelling,” Silverberg stated. “Where Howard Berman stood, and where Steny Hoyer and these other members stood on Iran and Israel issues generally — man, it doesn’t get better.”

Politics didn’t play an important role in

Silverberg’s upbringing in suburban Los Angeles. But as a Jewish kid growing up in the 1980s, he learned about the Soviet Jewry movement, advocating for Jews in what was then the USSR to be able to emigrate and practice their religion. That activism sparked his interest in both politics and foreign affairs. “I’m right now staring at a picture of my father and I at the 1987 Soviet Jewry rally in Washington, D.C.,” Silverberg told JI. “That was one of the first catalysts for me. We took an overnight trip to join the L.A. delegation to D.C., and I just got totally jazzed up at a really young age.”

He interned at the State Department after his junior year at Harvard. Before beginning law school, he worked for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for a year in Warsaw as a grassroots organizer in Poland’s Jewish community, not long after the fall of the Soviet Union. “I didn’t have a specific sense of what I wanted to do, but I just knew that I wanted to be doing something international and global,” Silverberg noted.

After graduating from Stanford Law School, Silverberg spent a couple years in private practice before joining the Department of Defense as an attorney in 2005. He moved over to the Hill in early 2007 after Democrats regained control of the House following the 2006 elections. However, the majority of his time in Congress was spent in the minority, with Republicans controlling the House from 2011 to 2019. “My standard of success was not seeing how quickly things moved, or if we even got bills done. It was, were we able to influence the overall policy conversation? Congress still serves that function,” he said. But now, in a more partisan era, “it is no question more challenging to do so in a bipartisan fashion.”

Still, Silverberg pointed out, “there are some key issues that could serve as balms, in some way, for the bipartisan relationship. One of those is democracy and human rights... And another one is Israel,” he argued. “I’d like to think that with Trump gone, Republicans will take a step back from so blatantly exploiting Israel for their immediate political benefit.”

“Support for Israel remains strong. It remains bipartisan. We will weather whatever immediate storms,” Silverberg

said. But, he added, “Bibi’s visit in 2015 was cataclysmic, in my view, for the U.S.-Israel relationship,” referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s decision to address a joint session of Congress in 2015 after receiving an invitation from Republican House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH), which was widely viewed by Democrats as a snub to then-President Barack Obama, who was not made aware of the invitation beforehand.

“It was an event from which we still have not recovered. It made Democrats overall more wary of the Israeli government’s intentions, particularly with respect to Iran. It emboldened Republicans in a way that I still think is reverberating on the Hill. And it harmed the Israeli government’s relationships with key constituencies within the Democratic Caucus, particularly the Congressional Black Caucus, which took his actions as a direct affront to the first African-American president,” Silverberg explained.

At the same time, Democrats — particularly those in leadership positions like Hoyer — have had to contend with rising numbers of progressive members who are challenging pro-Israel orthodoxies in Washington. Some have, at times, ventured into antisemitic tropes, most notably when Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) tweeted, “It’s all about the Benjamins baby,” in reference to U.S. support for Israel. Silverberg maintained that despite a few dissenters, Democratic support for Israel remains strong.

“Attention gets focused on members who are the loudest and will sometimes say the most unhelpful things. Unfortunately, they wind up tarring the overall Democratic brand. ‘The Squad’ is not representative,” Silverberg said, referring to a group of progressive lawmakers composed of Omar and Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Ayanna Pressley (D-MA).

His former boss echoed this sentiment in a speech at AIPAC’s March 2019 conference: “By the way, there are 62 freshman Democrats. You hear me? Sixty-two. Not three,” Hoyer told conference attendees, in what was widely assumed to be a reference to members of the Squad. (He later attempted to walk the ad-libbed comment back, and also noted that the 2019 freshman class actually had 63 Democrats.)

“Progressives have some positive momentum,” Silverberg conceded. “But it is so critical for the pro-Israel community to understand that the loudest voices in the caucus are not representative of where the caucus actually is. If you look at who got us to the majority and allowed us to keep it in this past year, it wasn’t progressive members. It was our block of what we call ‘frontline members,’ the members from particularly Republican districts, and our moderates. That’s the heart of the caucus.”

“I think that a majority of the Democratic caucus remains strong on Israel, and votes [with] what the pro-Israel community would say is the right way to vote, and believes it,” he said. For years, Silverberg has seen scores of members react to seeing and learning about Israel for the first time on trips organized for freshman representatives by the American Israel Education Foundation, an AIPAC-affiliated group. “I’ve been part of the last three AIEF trips to Israel and I see members’ reactions,” Silverberg explained. “When they’re in the Old City, and when they are touring in the Galilee, they are moved, they get it.”

Although House Democrats don’t always agree on how to tackle major policy challenges, on most party priorities — the recent stimulus bill, economic inequality, women’s rights, fighting racism — they do agree, at least in principle, on what matters to the party. “Common wisdom is Democrats agree on 95% of things,” Silverberg said, but “that 5% is extraordinarily contentious, and Israel-related issues, in my view, tend to dominate, or suck a lot of oxygen on that 5%, and the JCPOA just so exacerbated, or highlighted, that dynamic,” Silverberg

said, referring to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Many groups viewed as the pro-Israel establishment, including AIPAC, opposed the deal. Twenty-five Democratic members of Congress voted against the deal when it came up for a vote, but the party’s leadership — including then-Minority Whip Hoyer — uniformly supported it. “He went on to reaching the decision he did just because he felt like if it’s a sea of bad decisions, bad options, this is the least bad option,” Silverberg said of his then-boss’s decision-making process. “And not joining it, not approving it once the administration had already negotiated it, would be far worse than supporting it, but no question, he was skeptical.”

In recent weeks, numerous letters have circulated on Capitol Hill — some from Republicans, some from progressive Democrats, some with bipartisan support — directed at the Biden administration as it weighs whether to reenter the JCPOA. And in Silverberg’s view, this administration is doing a better job of informing Congress about progress on the nuclear deal. “I think this administration is really doing positively so far, and taking lessons from the last round in 2015 [in] being quite open and fairly aggressive about keeping Congress and critics in the loop on what they are doing, which so far has been easy to do, because there’s not all that much to report,” Silverberg said. But, he added, “I think that dynamic might change once the U.S. is actually sitting in the room with Iran, and for obvious reasons, would want to take a more discreet approach.”

Silverberg says the Biden administration’s actions so far indicate that it is taking rapprochement with Iran seriously, and doesn’t view reentering the deal as an item to quickly cross off its checklist: “I’d like to think that the Biden administration has disabused JCPOA opponents of the idea that they are going to rush headfirst into reentering the deal. It’s clear that is not happening,” Silverberg said.

On all issues, including Iran, Israel and foreign policy, Silverberg has seen partisanship deepen since he first got to the Hill. The partisan divide has only grown worse since the Jan. 6 insurrection attempt at the Capitol: “Democrats still look at the Republican caucus with a major divide in mind: those who voted the right way on January 6” — referring to those who voted to certify the Electoral College results — “and those who cravenly caved to the Trump disinformation campaign... that permeates every single issue,” he said.

But despite it all, Silverberg maintains there is no better place for a young person looking to get started in politics.

“Perhaps naively, I am still just as encouraging, if not more so, for young people to come to the Hill as I was when I started 14 years ago. The Hill ultimately — as dysfunctional and sclerotic as it can be — is a massive platform of influence,” Silverberg noted. “There is no other institution in which a young person can be one degree removed from a constitutional officer and have a direct impact on the most critical national security issues of the day, be it Russia sanctions, Iran policy, human rights in China, countering Chinese disinformation [or] protecting Israel.” ♦

# The Instagram community connecting Jewish women experiencing infertility

*Former pediatrician Aimee Friedman Baron created @IWasSupposedToHaveABaby to ensure no one feels alone in their moments of invisible agony*

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By Gabby Deutch

**O**n the day Aimee Friedman Baron had scheduled a cesarean section to give birth to twins seven years ago, she sent her three older children to school, putting them on the bus without telling them that they would have two new siblings by the time they got home. Later that day, “we had the school administrator bring them down to the school office, and we told each of them,” Baron recalled.

Her children knew she was pregnant — by that point, she couldn’t hide it — but after four successive miscarriages (and another that had occurred after she had her first child), Baron lived in fear that the twins would not survive delivery. She and her husband did not tell anyone, including close family members, that they were pregnant with two babies and not one. “I just couldn’t bring myself to share it. I was a hermit. I hardly went anywhere. If I did, and people asked me, ‘Oh, when are you due?’ My answer was always, ‘When the baby comes,’” Baron recounted. “It was a horrible, horrible, horrible time.”

As she went through the series of second-trimester miscarriages, Baron quit her job as a pediatrician. “I could not keep taking care of other people’s healthy babies while struggling to have my own, even though I had three kids at home. It was just too painful,” she said. After her twins were born, “I spent two years with them at home, trying to dig myself out of this PTSD of everything that I had been through.”

Around that two-year mark, she was asked to speak in her community in New York about her struggles with fertility, ultimately sparking a journey

that would lead her to create I Was Supposed to Have a Baby (IWSTHAB), a nonprofit and online community geared toward Jewish women experiencing infertility. The organization runs virtual support groups and offers one-on-one support sessions, and in February, it was an organizer of the First Annual Jewish Fertility Summit. But the main way IWSTHAB reaches people is on Instagram, where it has amassed 8,800 followers — Jewish and not — who gather virtually to be around other women (and the occasional man) who understand the invisible agony of infertility and miscarriage.

“It is meant to be a supportive space for anyone in the Jewish community struggling to have a child, and really, it’s whatever that means,” Baron told Jewish Insider in a phone interview. Some people find her page after experiencing a miscarriage, while others are struggling to conceive, searching for a surrogate or considering adoption. “But frankly, those definitions are very limited. It’s really about anyone along this path who thinks they belong here. [If] they’re struggling, they belong.” That might be people who cannot consider pregnancy because of other medical or mental health issues, or those who cannot undergo fertility treatments due to a lack of financial resources. “If you are struggling and you do not have the family that you hoped for... this is the place.”

Ten to 20% of known pregnancies end in miscarriage, according to data from the Mayo Clinic, although the actual number is likely higher due to women who miscarry before they even know they are pregnant.

“It is happening to someone you know, they just might not be telling you about it,” Baron said. But until “it becomes personal, it’s harder to get people to care.” Her Instagram community serves as a safe space for women who might feel unable to discuss fertility issues with people in their lives, or who feel stigmatized.

Baron answers every single message that comes through the account; with that heavy load, she said her page growth has slowed. She wants to continue to make her social media presence feel personal. “My intention with this account was always to have it be a slow-growing account,” she explained. “I’m not taking any promotional material, because I’m not seeking these, like, big collaborations which are going to flood me with followers. I’m not interested in that. I’m interested in the people who want to be there and who are going to be a real part of this community.” She often hears from women who read her posts but do not follow her account, fearing judgment from friends or family members who might see.

IWSTHAB’s posts are warm and supportive, sometimes highlighting one woman’s experience and other times featuring an inspirational quote or graphic. One recent post included a first-person account from a woman who had felt her miscarriage beginning during her synagogue’s Megillah reading on Purim. “I internally patted myself on the back for choosing a Purim costume that called for black tights — Ruth Bader Ginsberg, in all her dissent-collared glory — which would mask the heavy bleeding,” the post’s caption read. Another post had a black-and-white cartoon that read, “Which mask are you putting on today?” and showed a woman looking at carnival-esque masks,



each labeled with an emotion: happy, funny, calm. A caption, written by Baron, reflected on the way that women hide their grief or shame when experiencing infertility issues.

The real community-building takes place in the comments of the posts, or in responses that Baron receives to open-ended prompts she posts on the page's Instagram story, a feature in the app that allows users to post photos and videos that are automatically deleted 24 hours later. One recent prompt asked, "What worked and what didn't this holiday season?" Some comments came from Christian women reflecting on Easter and Christmas, but most were from Jewish women, writing about the difficulty of being joyous or hosting large family gatherings during Passover.

"I was with my in-laws pretending all the time I was happy and nothing was going on," read one comment that Baron reposted to the account's followers. "But inside me I was devastated. I got another negative [pregnancy test] the first day of chol hamoed [the middle four days of Passover]. And being with my pregnant sisters-in-law made it harder."

Before creating IWSTHAB, Baron worked at NechamaComfort, an organization providing support to Jewish families who experienced pregnancy loss. She occasionally managed the group's social media presence. Although the posts were mainly promoting upcoming events or support groups, "I started fielding all sorts of phone calls and emails from lots of different people in the community: 'My daughter needs to have a surrogate, who can you recommend, who can I talk to, what organization, which people have gone through this?' 'I need a doctor for this,' 'I need someone to help me with that,' it was the whole gamut of anyone struggling with any area along this continuum," Baron recalled. "I also, at the same time, really saw the emergence of what social media could do for people in this community — the fertility community, not the Jewish community."

Fertility accounts seemed to be popping up all over Instagram, but Baron could not find any catering directly to the Jewish community. "There were and are so many Jewish organizations that do this work, but nobody was utilizing social media in a supportive way, the way I saw so many

of these other accounts doing," she said. Instagram's younger demographic perfectly aligned with the women aged 20-40 she hoped to reach. She started IWSTHAB in the summer of 2019.

IWSTHAB is unapologetically Jewish; it describes itself as "a supportive space for anyone in the Jewish community struggling to have a child." The issues discussed on the page affect all women, and many who are not Jewish follow the page as a source of comfort. "If you feel comfortable by the fact that, you know, we might be discussing Rosh Hashanah at some point, welcome," Baron said.

Infertility affects women of all backgrounds, but everyone experiences it differently, and Jewish women — particularly Orthodox women — face unique challenges. Rachel, 30, a lawyer who is now pregnant with her second child after a miscarriage and infertility followed the birth of her first child, said that her non-religious friends and doctors do not understand her concerns. (She asked that JI not use her last name for privacy reasons.)

"When I started going to my reproductive endocrinologist, or even my OB after my miscarriages, they were like, 'You're so young, you're 30.' And I was like, 'Well, it's nice that you think I'm young, but compared to my friends, who are also 30 and have three or four kids, I feel very behind,'" Rachel said. She has expressed this feeling to law school friends who are not religious, most of whom are far from even considering pregnancy: "It's hard to understand that if all your friends are starting to have their first kids at, like, 36. But if all your friends are having their first kids at 20, it makes more sense."

Rachel is now in her third trimester with her second child, and the three-plus-year gap between the pregnancies feels large for her community. "There's people around you constantly that are having babies and getting pregnant, and people tend to expect you to get pregnant very quickly, and expect that you're going to be pregnant every time they see you. It's stuff like that, that all of the Jewish holidays are communal," she noted.

Another place Orthodox women uniquely feel the challenges of infertility is at the mikvah, the ritual bath Jewish women visit monthly at the beginning of their menstrual cycle. "It's hard to explain

to someone who doesn't go to the mikvah what that monthly endeavor is like. It rips my heart apart," Rachel explained. For women hoping to conceive, that moment of getting a period and realizing there is no pregnancy can be devastating. "But this is such a moment, and it takes up a whole night," Rachel said.

After her miscarriage, Rachel had tried to talk to her therapist. "All of the things that you're not supposed to say that someone who has miscarried or has infertility, she said, like, 'Don't worry, when you get pregnant again, it'll all feel better.'" But, Rachel wanted to know, what about feeling better now? She then found Baron's Instagram, and joined one of IWSTHAB's virtual support groups. "I was just really in a low place, and speaking to people who could understand where I was coming from was just so immensely helpful," Rachel recalled.

Although the account's intended audience is women and their partners who are struggling with infertility, Baron hopes that its message can begin to reach deeper into the Jewish community. Ultimately, her goal is not only education about infertility. It's "universal messages of love and caring and support for anyone who's going through anything," she explained.

"I don't even view this as only infertility or loss," Baron said. "People struggle with lots of different things in their life, and we as a community try to be sensitive to all the downtrodden, right? The widows, the orphans, the people who are poor, the people who don't have jobs, the people who are going through cancer, alcoholics and mental illness — we do all of those things as a Jewish community. So this is another group." ♦

# Blake Bailey's complaint

*The author of a new biography of Philip Roth pushes back against critics who say he was too pro-Roth, and takes on the matter of the great novelist's Jewishness*

By Matthew Kassel

When Philip Roth summoned biographer Blake Bailey to his Upper West Side apartment in the spring of 2012 for what was essentially a job interview, he had one pressing question: How was a gentile from Oklahoma equipped to write about a Jew from Newark?

It was a reasonable concern, if also a somewhat comical one. From the start of his protean literary career, Roth established himself as the preeminent sociologist of Jewish-American neurosis — and as he searched for his own personal Boswell, he must have wondered whether Bailey would understand exactly where he was coming from.

Bailey, the author of a trio of well-received biographies on the novelists John Cheever, Richard Yates and Charles Jackson, had a clever response. “I’m not a bisexual alcoholic with an ancient Puritan lineage,” he told Roth, “but I managed to write a biography of John Cheever.” Bailey got the gig.

Now nearly a decade later, Bailey, 57, is ready to reveal the product of his labor. At nearly a thousand pages, *Philip Roth: The Biography* — released today by W. W. Norton & Company — is an exhaustive door-stopper of a book that, Bailey argues, lives up to the mandate given to him by his subject: “I don’t want you to rehabilitate me. Just make me interesting.”

For the biographer, that was no small task since Roth was a prolific philanderer who, as Bailey put it, “didn’t have a monogamous bone in his body.” In 1996, Roth’s ex-wife, the actress Claire Bloom, published a damning

account of their relationship, *Leaving a Doll’s House: A Memoir* — a major impetus behind his desire to find an authorized biographer who would tell his story. But Roth was a careful, almost tyrannical custodian of his image, and he had already butted heads with — and abandoned — a previous biographer by the time Bailey came around.

“He knew that there were certain things that he could not filter out of his biography,” Bailey told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. “That didn’t mean he couldn’t do his damndest, and he bombarded me with hundreds, possibly thousands, of pages of memos, telling me how I ought to think about every single nook and cranny of his life. The idea for Philip was, essentially, to write his biography by proxy, and that’s not what he got in my book.”

Roth, who died in 2018 at 85, isn’t around to see the final product, but Bailey believes he would have approved. Still, as the reviews have come in, Bailey has been surprised to find that some critics regard his portrait as overly forgiving and even exculpatory. “Philip hurt a lot of people in his life,” Bailey acknowledged. “But to say that I’m sympathetic and even complicit with his worst behavior is baffling to me. I don’t know how anyone can read my book in good faith and reach that conclusion. That is astonishing to me.”

In the interview with *Ji*, he discussed his subject’s complicated legacy, the critical response to the book and why he may hold off on publishing a memoir he has already written about his experience working with Roth.

*The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

**Jewish Insider:** What do you think Philip Roth would have made of the book now that it’s finally out in the world?

**Blake Bailey:** What he would have made of the book itself or what he would have made of certain responses to the book?

**Ji:** The book itself, but we can also talk about the responses.

**Bailey:** Sure. Well, as I quote in my epigraph, Philip said, “I don’t want you to rehabilitate me. Just make me interesting,” and I took him at his word. I think that I certainly emphasize his considerable flaws, as well as his better qualities, and I think he would have generally approved of that. Philip affected a sort of Olympian detachment from the world’s perception of him. He never publicly answered Claire Bloom’s memoir, *Leaving a Doll’s House*, et cetera. But that was very deceptive. Philip was a very vulnerable, sensitive person, and very obsessive — and he brooded and brooded and brooded. Hardly an hour passed that he didn’t brood about *Leaving a Doll’s House*. He knew that there were certain things that he could not filter out of his biography. That didn’t mean he couldn’t do his damndest, and he bombarded me with hundreds, possibly thousands, of pages of memos, telling me how I ought to think about every single nook and cranny of his life. The idea for Philip

was, essentially, to write his biography by proxy, and that's not what he got in my book. Because I emphasize his more darling qualities — and they were considerable — but along with some really mortifying stuff, I think he would see that it sort of all came out in a wash and that his humanity comes through. That's what he admired about my Cheever book — that I show the worst of Cheever, but the reader never entirely loses sympathy with him.

**JJ:** You mentioned the responses. Cynthia Ozick wrote a pretty glowing appraisal in the *Times Book Review*, but there have also been some more critical appraisals centering on Roth's dealings with women and your treatment of that, most notably in *The New Republic*. That kind of analysis wasn't new to Roth; what's your reaction?

**Bailey:** I think it's regrettable that there's been so much cultural pontification about Philip and his messy private life. Certainly, there's a place for that. Philip hurt a lot of people in his life. But to say that I'm sympathetic and even complicit with his worst behavior is baffling to me. I don't know how anyone can read my book in good faith and reach that conclusion. That is astonishing to me. And at the same time, I would ask you to remember that David Remnick and James Parker and many other people say the opposite — the opposite — that I am uncowed, that I have let the repellent in on Philip, as a result showing the whole man. And then comes Cynthia Ozick, who finally contends with Philip as a human being and as an artist of massive cultural importance. Thank you, Cynthia Ozick.

**JJ:** Do you feel any sense of validation, given her stature in the Jewish-American literary pantheon, that Ozick has given your book a sort of critical imprimatur? You mention in the acknowledgments section of the biography that when you first sat down with Roth, he wanted to know how a gentile from Oklahoma could possibly capture a Jew from Newark.

**Bailey:** Do I feel like I pulled it off? I do. And there have been some nice comments about how I evoke the milieu of the early- and mid-century Jewish cultural ethos with some nicety. I'm happy about that. I think what Philip wanted was not to be assessed through a Jewish lens — a Jewish moral lens and a Jewish critical lens. That was something he tried to escape all his life, consistently saying, I am not a Jewish-American writer, I'm an American writer who happens to be a Jew. And that is not to say that Philip had a problem with his own Jewishness. He loved being a Jew. He loved living with Jews. He is now dead and buried at Bard [College] so he could be buried with Jews [the university has a small cemetery on its campus in Dutchess County, N.Y.]. So he didn't have a problem with the Jews. But he thought that his cultural importance transcended that, and I don't blame him, frankly.

**JJ:** You say he didn't have a problem with the Jews, but from the start of his literary career, the Jews had a problem with him, to put it mildly.

**Bailey:** They had a problem with him because, look, it's 1959 when he published *Goodbye, Columbus*; Leon Uris had just published *Exodus*. Elie Wiesel's *Night* was just being published, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was being staged on Broadway, and a consciousness of the Holocaust was dominant in the lives of American Jews. Not only the tragic dimension of the Holocaust, but the shame of it, the shame of almost being eradicated as a population because you were viewed as lower than animals. And to have one of your own glibly making fun of these parvenu vulgarians in Short Hills trying to pretend like they're country-club Americans — they didn't take kindly to that. But that was Philip's sensibility as a sardonic and rather gifted and condescending young man, and it's a wonderful book. And people nowadays reading *Goodbye, Columbus*, I don't think they find it so shocking as people did in 1959, 14 years after the Holocaust.

**JJ:** Sure. To jump a decade or so later to Portnoy's Complaint, which was extremely controversial for its time, I didn't personally find it that shocking when I read it in the late aughts. It was shocking at the time of its publication in 1969, of course, but it read, to me, more like a cultural artifact of Jewish neuroses.

**Bailey:** Remember what Alfred Kazin said. Kazin didn't particularly like the book because he thought it was shallow. But he and all Jews of that second and third generation had that shock of recognition — that, yeah, that's what it's like, that's what it's like to be a son in a Jewish home and have that constant care, care, care and torturing with guilt and 'I gave you everything' and 'Where are my grandchildren?' That's not me talking. That's Kazin and critics of his magnitude talking.

**JJ:** And Gershom Scholem somewhat famously wrote that Portnoy was worse than "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." That kind of criticism bothered Roth throughout his life, it seems.

**Bailey:** It was a constant refrain that "if I had to do it all over again, I would have never published Portnoy's Complaint," which means he would have never become a millionaire and an international celebrity. But not only the fact that he was regarded as a self-hating Jew, but he was regarded as unserious. People were always focusing on his sort of transgressive side, and Philip thought, certainly toward the end of his career, that he deserved a measure of respect, and he never got as much as he wanted from the so-called cultural journalism, especially the newspaper of record [*The New York Times*], which was a *bête noire* of Philip's.

**JJ:** Do you think he really meant it, that he wouldn't have published Portnoy's Complaint?

**Bailey:** Yes, I do. I mean, I think he liked not having to worry about money. He liked his lovely place in Connecticut

and all of that kind of stuff. But being perceived as this unserious jerk-off artist was nothing that appealed to him even remotely.

**JJ:** You say in the acknowledgments that at some point you might write about your experience of interviewing Roth. Have you given any more thought to that? Is that something that you might get to eventually?

**Bailey:** You mean, write a sort of memoir about working with Philip? I've already written it, actually. Whether I will publish it or not is another question. The reaction to the biography from certain quarters has been so disturbing that I don't want to really throw kerosene on the fire. At the very least, I will wait a few years.

**JJ:** When did you finish the memoir?

**Bailey:** To be exact, I finished it in Colorado this summer, where I was doing a fellowship in Green Mountain Falls.

**JJ:** It seems appropriate that you've written an unpublished memoir about working with Roth, given that he seems to have written so many unreleased memoirs, like *Notes for My Biographer* and *Notes on a Slander-Monger*.

**Bailey:** Well, look, *Notes on a Slander-Monger* was never, ever meant for publication, and it's incoherent and repetitive. But *Notes for My Biographer* was copy-edited professionally and listed on Amazon, so we missed that one coming out into the wider world by kind of a hair's breadth.

**JJ:** Do you think it's unfortunate that Roth's papers may never be released to the public — and may even someday be destroyed by his literary executors?

**Bailey:** If they do so, it will be in accord with whatever Philip's final wishes were, and I think that's his prerogative.

**JJ:** You must feel somewhat privileged to have been privy to all these documents as you worked on the book.

**Bailey:** I was enormously privileged in that respect. Philip did not want there to be a lot of biographies. He wanted one to be essentially accurate. So he gave everything to me, and then he said, "After that, that's that." I don't know of a precedent for that with a major literary figure like Philip, so I feel enormously fortunate. I'm sorry it's at other people's expense, if that's how they see it, but obviously, I'm happy with it.

**JJ:** Did you expect to receive some blowback for this book? Philip Roth does seem to be kind of the third rail of American literature these days.

**Bailey:** Right. The third rail. That's well put. That's how David Daley put in a consoling note he wrote me yesterday. Did I expect it? Yes, I expected it, but I did not expect it to be as bad as it has been. You're not going to please everybody with a biography of Philip Roth. But to sort of make this a moment, a sort of moratorium on proper conduct, it's reductive, at least where Philip is concerned — because Philip had enormously noble qualities, as Lisa Halliday, for one, and any number of other former friends and lovers will tell you — a generous, darling man — but he also had these other things. I mean, I'm not denying his worse qualities. They're in my book.

**JJ:** Did you approach the project with any sense of weariness or anxiety, given the grudges that Roth held throughout his life, particularly his falling-out with a previous biographer, Ross Miller?

**Bailey:** I think I would have been pretty damn stupid not to. He told me about Ross Miller's shortcomings as a would-be biographer, and these were certainly borne out by what I discovered going over the materials he gave me — the taped interviews that Ross did and so on and so forth. But what I told Phil very firmly, at the beginning, was, "You

and Ross were best friends. I'm very fond of you, Philip, but I'm not your best friend, I'm your biographer, and I'm going to give you the same deal that I had with the estates of my previous subjects, which is you have to give me everything, and you have to give me complete independence. And you will be able to check my manuscript for factual accuracy, but not interpretive content, and that's the deal. Are you willing to accept the deal?" And he was.

**JJ:** Of course, he died before the book came out.

**Bailey:** He was already terminally sedated, but I said goodbye to him on his deathbed. The only person I've ever watched dying is Philip Roth, which was actually a surprisingly enriching experience because Philip made it look very natural to die. I was sad on a human level. Nobody who ever got even a little close to Philip wouldn't feel his absence keenly, and I do. But certainly, as a biographer — and this is a very compartmental distinction — I breathed a little easier.

**JJ:** Do you feel as if there are any parallels — thematically, stylistically — between Roth and your previous subjects?

**Bailey:** A writer's work either engages you or it doesn't, and I was crazy about Philip's work from a very young age. Why was that? Well, to me it's like, what's not to like? Though, of course, there's plenty not to like: *Our Gang* and *The Breast* and *The Great American Novel*. You're going to write some dogs. But I loved his work. There are five or six books that I will re-read till the day of my death. I think what Philip has in common with my other subjects is the excellence of his work, his cultural importance and sort of the dilemma between the person who lives the inner life, the person who lives inside of himself all the time, and the sort of precarious persona that that person formulates to meet the world. I don't think I'm putting that very well,



but it's kind of fascinating to me.

**JJ:** Do you think Roth deserved a Nobel?

**Bailey:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, the *London Telegraph* actually said that if the Swedish Academy continues to deny Philip Roth the Nobel Prize, they will lose all credibility. That's the *Telegraph* talking, not me. So, yes, he deserved it.

**JJ:** Roth was known for examining Jewish identity and documenting the Jewish-American experience, but he really didn't seem to know that much or care that much about Judaism itself. Did you talk to him about that?

**Bailey:** Well, Arnold Eisen, who was the chancellor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, said that Philip Roth is the greatest sociologist of American Jewish life alive, when he was alive. I certainly think he was concerned with the social predicament of American Jews — and Israeli Jews, for that matter — and the political predicament. But he was not — at all — interested in sort of the mystical and ethnic ritual and esoterica. That just didn't engage him on any level. Philip just didn't have a religious bone in his body, just like he didn't have a monogamous

bone in his body.

I think that Philip had a very pronounced and Jewish sense of filial piety. The first thing that occurred to him, at his happiest moments in life — when he got finally the validation of the Jewish cultural establishment with his degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary, when he was celebrated in Newark for his 80th birthday, when they had Philip Roth Day in Newark in 2005, these happy, happy occasions — he always wished, above all, that his parents were there.

**JJ:** What did his parents think of Portnoy?

**Bailey:** Oh, you know, Herman's praise of his son's accomplishment was always, "I'm busting my buttons!" And Bess, she kept scrapbooks of every mention of her son in the press — bad, good or in-between. She was just proud. She revered her son.

**JJ:** Is Roth still in your head, now that you're done with the book?

**Bailey:** Yeah, and it's a nice presence. I was just doing Chris Lydon's Open Source, and he was playing, as part of our show, his old interviews with Philip, and listening

to Philip hold forth. Philip, in his maestro persona, spoke with such effortless elegance and wryness. That's fun to hear again.

**JJ:** You spent so much time with him, and in such an intimate manner — including hearing the stream of his urine from a bathroom in his Connecticut home, as you note in your book. Is there anything that you left on the cutting-room floor you want to mention?

**Bailey:** There's something I left on the cutting-room floor that I don't want to mention. That's why I left it on the cutting-room floor. I mean, just to generalize, I had enough sordid anecdotes; I didn't need anymore. Let me just hasten to clarify. When I say sordid, I don't mean anything illegal. I don't mean anything coercive. That's not the nature of Philip's sins, such as they are, and I want to make that very clear that it's nothing ominous like that. It's just embarrassing. ♦

# Gabrielle Bluestone is out to get internet scammers

*The law-student-turned-journalist talks about her new book on the rise of internet scam artists*

By Matthew Kassel

It took Gabrielle Bluestone just a few minutes to conclude that the heavily-hyped Fyre Festival was not what it claimed to be. It was 2017, and Bluestone, working as a journalist at Vice, had only been peripherally aware of the now-infamous music festival — fraudulently billed as an elite getaway on a Bahamian island and promoted by scores of influencers — until she noticed on Instagram that a former high school classmate was going. She clicked through to the website to see what the fuss was all about.

“What I found there made no sense,” Bluestone, 32, recounts in her first book, *Hype: How Scammers, Grifters, and Con Artists Are Taking Over the Internet — and Why We’re Following*. “The site was offering \$250,000 ticket packages with yachts and private chefs, yet it looked like it had been designed in a high-school coding class.”

Bluestone smelled a scam, and soon enough her intuition proved correct as attendees — who had paid exorbitant amounts of money for the privilege of mingling with social media celebrities and taking in a Blink-182 set — arrived at the festival site only to find that they had been marooned at what turned out to be a modern-day Potemkin village whose bare-bones accommodations included disaster-relief tents and cheese sandwiches.

Thanks to her early sense of suspicion, Bluestone was quickly out with the first reported story on the overhyped event masterminded by the notorious con man Billy McFarland, who is now serving a six-year sentence in federal prison for fraud. Bluestone, for her part, went on to serve as an

executive producer on the Netflix documentary “Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened.” But she was also convinced that the festival blowup was only one particularly egregious example in a larger pattern of online hucksterism.

So, using her experience as a former law student as well as reporting stints at *Gawker*, *Jezebel* and *Vice*, Bluestone, who lives in New York, set out to examine such schemes — and the reasons we fall for them — in her new book, released this week by Hanover Square Press. “Con artists have presumably been around since prehistoric times,” she writes. “But there was something new here at play, a tech-assisted accelerant, that enabled McFarland to subvert our hyperconnected society, which, given all these technological advancements, should have spotlighted him from miles away.”

In a recent interview with *Jewish Insider*, Bluestone discussed her background in law, how she came to report on McFarland’s scam and why she believes there will, without a doubt, be another sort of Fyre Festival in the not so distant future. “Definitely,” she said. “No equivocation.”

*The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

**Jewish Insider:** You studied to be an attorney and then went on to work at several different online publications before producing the documentary about the Fyre Festival and writing this book. Can you describe your trajectory and how you came

to journalism?

**Gabrielle Bluestone:** I was in my second year of law school and a dedicated reader of *Gawker*, and I happen to notice that they were advertising for a weekend writer. I was a journalism major undergrad, didn’t really know that was a sustainable career that you could still have at that point, so I kind of applied just to see what would happen, somehow got that job, and that just changed everything. I finished out law school, passed the bar, but I really liked writing, and the thought that that could be a career was, you know, mind-blowing at that point. So I worked at *Gawker* until it shut down in 2016, which, having some legal understanding of what was going on, certainly helped — not that it alleviated anything.

Then I moved to *Jezebel* and *Vice*, and that was where I first came across the Fyre Festival story. That turned into the documentary, which then led to the book, so it’s just been kind of a wild ride through the various ways of writing. I write a lot about scam artists and crime, and so having a legal background is certainly very helpful. It’s very helpful doing legal research and trying to dig up old case files, and so I found that the two really complement each other. I’ve been really lucky to kind of get to focus on all of my interests in that way.

**JJ:** What kind of lawyer did you want to be?

**Bluestone:** I had been very interested in criminal law. I interned for the Brooklyn DA’s office. If I had ended up going into law as a full-time attorney, it would have been focused on criminal law. ♦

**JJ:** In the introduction, you note that getting the go-ahead to report on the Fyre Festival from your editors at Vice was not unlike trying to convert to Judaism. You had to pitch the story, you wrote, “three times before the editorial beit din saw the now-legendary cheese sandwich photos on social media and decided it was go time.” That’s a funny description.

**Bluestone:** It’s just seemed an apt metaphor, honestly.

**JJ:** Can you describe the process by which you intuited that the Fyre Festival was a scam and then decided to look into it more deeply?

**Bluestone:** I saw the campaign unfold on Instagram, like I think many people in my age cohort did, and it didn’t really strike me much at the time. Then I saw someone I knew was going, and I was like, “Oh, what is this?” So I looked it up, and the website looked like something someone would do as a class project. There was nothing professional or elite or luxurious about it. The product they were presenting was so far from the marketing, that, you know, that “Spidey sense” was kind of activated. I was like, “There’s something going on here.” The more I looked into it, the more all of their claims were falling apart. In real time, you could see people trying to figure out their flights that they paid thousands of dollars for, on Twitter, on social media. But for some reason, the media wasn’t responding in that way. I think The Wall Street Journal had one article about how artists hadn’t been paid. But Vogue and Vanity Fair and all these publications were hyping it up and just taking the marketing at face value. Because all these influencers signed on, it seemed real. So that was kind of where that all started, and then obviously it melted down in spectacular fashion on social media as people arrived and saw what they had paid for.

**JJ:** When did you realize that you had enough material to expand on some of the larger themes you address in your book?

**Bluestone:** There was so much more about what went into the planning and

how he got away with it that, even with two documentaries, it was almost impossible to cover that much stuff. So it really seemed to me that there was an interesting book in that. But then, the more that I thought about it — all the ways in which his scheme was enabled, whether it was by the media, by the influencers and social media, by the ticket buyers themselves and that emotional reaction that you have to what you see on your screen — I realized that it was happening over and over in so many different areas that it went way beyond Fyre Festival and said much more about our culture today.

**JJ:** Why do you think people fell so hard for the Fyre Festival when you were able to discern it was a scam just from a cursory examination of its website?

**Bluestone:** The people that were buying tickets weren’t the people that could afford the \$250,000 yacht package. They were kids that could scrape together enough money maybe to buy a \$1,500 ticket believing that would grant them entree into this kind of lifestyle that they’d been following on social media. So I think the short answer to why they fell for it is because they wanted to. They wanted to believe that it would be that easy to hang out on a beach with Kendall Jenner or Bella Hadid. All you had to do was buy this ticket, and that’s what [McFarland] was promising. I don’t think people got as far as looking at the website. I think they saw all the influencers and the influencer campaign and just bought in based off of that.

**JJ:** Scams and hype obviously aren’t new by any measure, but the sort of snake oil you describe in your book feels distinctly of the 21st century.

**Bluestone:** It’s funny you say that because there was actually a Fyre Festival in the early 1800s, I think — there was this guy Gregor MacGregor who sold bank bonds to a country that didn’t exist and then sent boats of settlers there, and I think they all perished. But it’s accelerated by technology and by social media and the emotions that are wrapped up in it without us even realizing. I think the reason people trust influencers is because they follow them, they see them

as friends, we’re invited into every aspect of their life — or at least we appear to be — so you know where they live, where they go out, who they hang out with, what kind of makeup they use. It’s like things that you would know about a friend, and so, I think, on a psychological level, you really start to trust them — until that trust is ripped away as the Fyre Festival revealed.

**JJ:** And how do you feel this sense of credulity expands more broadly? Do you think we can tie it into the election of former President Donald Trump, for example?

**Bluestone:** Part of it is definitely marketing. Donald Trump was very good at marketing. He was very good at social media. I think the parallels between him and the Fyre Festival are numerous and apt.

**JJ:** And what about the broader culture?

**Bluestone:** I think meme culture and FOMO plays into it. I think you saw that with GameStop and people who get into QAnon as a joke before they’re pulled in for real. I think you see it playing out in similar patterns in a vast variety of industries.

**JJ:** Were there any surprise discoveries you made while working on the book?

**Bluestone:** Definitely. This is a little bit separate from what we’ve been talking about, but I spoke to a very famous, renowned plastic surgeon who is behind a lot of the famous faces that you see on Instagram, and he was telling me that there is a massive problem with doctors photoshopping their results. You can’t really trust a lot of what you’re seeing, and beyond that, to speak to the marketing, a lot of doctors end up getting pressured into buying machines that are ineffective or that they have no interest in using because they’re marketed so well on social media that clients call them up demanding it.

**JJ:** You seem to have a pretty strong sensitivity to scams, but have you ever been duped yourself?

**Bluestone:** I fall for Instagram ads and products all the time. Even writing a book,

I'm shocked at how much I still fall for that kind of thing. One of the chapters in the book details my experience with Danielle Bernstein, who is a designer who's been accused of stealing a lot of her designs. When I first started talking with her, I didn't know any of that, and so to compare what I learned about her versus what my impression of her was just based off of the internet, I think, was definitely one of those moments.

**JJ:** Do you think there will be another sort of Fyre Festival?

**Bluestone:** Definitely. Yeah. 100%. No equivocation.

**JJ:** Do you hope that your book will help offset that possibility?

**Bluestone:** I hope it'll get people thinking because a large element of this is, you kind of have to want — not want to be tricked — but there is an element of self-delusion in there that you believe something that seems too good to be true is true. So I hope it makes people think more critically about how they're consuming the news, consuming social media and, emotionally, how we're letting it affect us. I think that's a really important conversation we should be having.

**JJ:** Can you talk a bit about Billy McFarland? His whole story seems distinctly American in the P.T. Barnum sense, perhaps going on up to Trump.

**Bluestone:** I mean, he's a terrible businessman, but he is an incredible

storyteller. He knows how to sell people what they want, and he knows how to do that without necessarily having the product that he's promising. But, you know, he's a brilliant marketer, and I think that aligns with Trump as well. Yeah, it is like a distinctly American type of con artist. And once he gets out of prison, I don't think this is the last we've heard from him. I'm sure he'll be back with some new exciting venture for people to buy into, and I'm curious to see how people react to that.

**JJ:** You address COVID a bit in your book. How do you feel like the themes you explore tie into the pandemic?

**Bluestone:** I think the pandemic really laid bare how much your own opinion goes into what facts we choose to believe or don't. The fact that you have half the country denying that COVID is real — or whatever the actual ratio is — but you have, let's say, a large swath of the country denying that this is a real thing — it really lays bare how bad things have gotten. And I think the algorithm plays into that. It's not that we're reading the same news story and disagreeing on it; we're reading totally different news stories. It's completely separate realities. I don't know what the solution is, but the problem is certainly obvious.

**JJ:** Are you yourself active on social media?

**Bluestone:** I don't post a lot, but I definitely use it a lot.

**JJ:** Do you think there's any platform that's better for disseminating accurate

information?

**Bluestone:** I don't know, but one thing I've realized is I feel like, especially in media, you hear people talking about what a hell site Twitter and Instagram are, and I realized it's a hell site because we make it a hell site. What you're seeing is what you've chosen to follow. So, obviously, people are spreading disinformation — I don't think that there should be a platform for that — but a lot of it comes down to what you want to see; you're seeing what you opt into. So one thing I actually did during quarantine was I unfollowed all the influencers or all the opinion people that I had been following and just followed like nice stuff or interesting stuff. I'm learning how to cook now. I changed the way that I interact with it, and I found it to be a much more positive and enjoyable experience.

**JJ:** Any good recipes to share?

**Bluestone:** Recipes, not so much, but my favorite follow, I have to check the actual handle for you, I think it's like, "men with a pot" or something, and it's this account that goes out into the woods — this, like, beautiful mossy clearing in the woods — and just cooks things over the fire. They make jelly doughnuts over a fire. It's the most peaceful, lovely thing you can ever watch. I highly recommend it.

**JJ:** Are you working on anything new at the *moment*?

**Bluestone:** The usual, covering scams and crime. They never stop happening. It's a great beat. ♦



# Kyrsten Sinema's independent streak runs deep

*After getting her start in politics in anti-war activism, Sinema has come to be viewed as a friend of the pro-Israel community*

By Gabby Deutch

When Republican Sen. John McCain cast a tie-breaking vote against a GOP effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act in 2017, he signaled his opposition with a dramatic thumbs down on the Senate floor. Three and a half years later, another Arizona senator, Democrat Kyrsten Sinema, appeared to use the same bucking-the-party playbook last month when she offered a thumbs down to raising the federal minimum wage.

For Washington observers, Sinema's opposition to a key Democratic priority came as a surprise, and signaled that — along with Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) — Sinema could be an unpredictable, make-or-break vote for Senate Democrats, who hold the thinnest possible majority in the chamber as they try to enact their legislative priorities.

But to Arizonans, Sinema's vote against her party was not a shock; since she was first elected to the Arizona House of Representatives in 2004, kicking off a legislative career that would take her to the state Senate, Congress and finally the U.S. Senate, Sinema has gained a reputation in the Grand Canyon State as an independent-minded politician.

Interviews with Jewish community leaders and activists in Arizona reveal a respect for the senator's political savvy and her willingness to chart her own course in a state that prides itself on independence and self-sufficiency, even if her current views are dramatically different from the beliefs she once held as a young anti-war activist. Independence is lauded in the state: Nearly a third of registered voters are

not affiliated with a party.

Sinema had first tried — unsuccessfully — to run for office as a member of the Green Party following years of grassroots anti-war activism, but found she could not win with that third-party affiliation. "Everybody knew that as she made her way through the Arizona political system here that she would roll back [her views]. In order to be elected, she certainly had to have a moderate position," said Civia Tamarkin, president of the Arizona chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women. "Everybody who knew her as an Arizona legislator knew that she was a centrist, that she worked both sides of the aisle," Tamarkin noted.

Sinema's opponents have tried to use her past against her. But now, in her fourth elected post, Arizona insiders say Sinema's former activism is acknowledged as simply part of who she is. She has tried to preempt any such criticism — successfully, given her defeat of Republican Martha McSally in 2018. When she ran for Senate that year, "she went and planted her flag right in the middle," said Mike Noble, an Arizona pollster and political analyst. "She didn't even use the words Republican, Democrat or any of that stuff. She was talking, 'Hey, I want to represent Arizonans.' So she talked very much to the center, and she made no bones about it." Meanwhile, Noble said, McSally "ran as Trump but made zero effort to move to the middle."

Seeking a middle ground and avoiding intense partisanship are important in the Jewish community, too. "Most Jewish folks here are kind of

uncomfortable with the radicalization of the political divide and the polarization that's taking place," said Larry Bell, a historian and the executive director of the Arizona Jewish Historical Society.

American Jews vote overwhelmingly for Democrats, and Bell says that while this is generally true in Arizona, the state also has a long history of prominent Jewish Republicans. "There's a strong history of Republican Jewish activity here, especially in Phoenix. They've never been the majority of the community, but they're important people in the community," Bell explained, pointing to Harry Rosenzweig, Barry Goldwater's childhood best friend who managed his 1964 presidential campaign.

Bell doesn't entirely buy Sinema's shift in positions, though he says she has widespread support in the community. "It doesn't quite add up," he said, noting that "she's very popular in the Jewish community." Bell added, "I'd say she's one of the more popular politicians actually."

Since running for Senate, Sinema has cultivated a relationship with Arizona's Jewish community. Carlos Galindo-Elvira, who served as Arizona director of the Anti-Defamation League until last January, told *Jewish Insider* that members of Sinema's staff reached out in October 2018 following the mass shooting at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue. "I remember very clearly, while I did not get a call from her personally, she ensured that her staff called and checked in, to ensure, you know, are we OK? And just wanting to check in on us," Galindo-Elvira said, adding that he did not often receive calls from the likes of a U.S. senator

[though Sinema was still a candidate at the time]. “Because of the gravity of the growing level of antisemitism that was happening throughout the country, it was a call that reinforced, at least in my thinking, that she understood that this is a problem,” he said.

Although Sinema got her start in politics in left-wing activism, affiliated with anti-war groups like CODEPINK that have taken stances sharply criticizing Israel, there is no record of Sinema ever expressing such views herself. She has become a reliable “yes” vote on pro-Israel legislation. As a member of Congress, she voted against the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, a position adopted by a large swath of Jewish leadership. She has spoken at AIPAC-affiliated events in Arizona and the AIPAC policy conference; after her 2019 speech, CODEPINK tweeted its disapproval, writing, “Once upon a time, @SenatorSinema participated in CODEPINK protests and stood firmly against Apartheid Israel and @AIPAC. Could it be...all about the Benjamins baby?”

CNN’s KFILE reported in 2018 that in the early 2000s, at the start of the Iraq War, Sinema ran a group called Local to Global Justice that criticized “U.S. terror” in flyers from 2003; Sinema’s office told CNN she had no role in creating the flyers.

A spokesperson for Sinema told JI that the senator is unapologetic about her changing positions: “Senator Sinema prides herself on being a lifelong learner and believes a sign of maturity is an interest in learning and growing. For her, that means listening to a variety of opinions — even from people with whom she disagrees — and doing so in a way that’s open enough to be able to learn and sometimes change her views. That’s not a popular notion in today’s politics.”

Despite her earlier alliances with groups critical of U.S. foreign policy, people involved in the pro-Israel community in Arizona do not doubt her current support for the U.S.-Israel relationship. “She and her staff

have had an ongoing dialogue with the community, and her knowledge level over time has increased exponentially,” said Ron Ober, who co-founded a bipartisan political consulting firm in the state.

After surprising Democrats by voting against the minimum wage increase, Washington now understands that a moderate like Sinema holds remarkable sway for President Joe Biden’s agenda — and it’s a muscle she has already begun to flex. Sinema told *The Wall Street Journal* yesterday that she does not intend to abolish the filibuster, which progressive Democrats see as the only way to pass voting rights legislation and gun reform bills. “When you have a place that’s broken and not working, and many would say that’s the Senate today, I don’t think the solution is to erode the rules,” she said. “I think the solution is for senators to change their behavior and begin to work together, which is what the country wants us to do.”

Another area where her vote will soon matter is on the confirmation of Colin Kahl as under secretary of defense for policy, a Biden pick who has come under scrutiny for past comments he has made about Israel and about the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. A spokesperson for Sinema told JI that the senator remains undecided on Kahl’s nomination: “Senator Sinema is carefully considering this nomination,” the spokesperson said. “She evaluates all presidential nominees based on whether they are professionally qualified, whether they believe in the missions of their agencies and whether they can be trusted to faithfully execute and uphold the law.”

Not all of Sinema’s supporters are proud of her independent streak, or what some see as a betrayal of her principles. “We understand the pragmatism of her strategy, and when the votes are throwaways” — as when Sinema voted for certain Trump judicial nominees who were guaranteed to be confirmed in a Republican-controlled

Senate — “we understand. It doesn’t necessarily make one happy and supportive, but it’s understandable,” said Tamarkin of NCJW. “But the disappointment is that there are certain fundamental issues, and minimum wage is one of them.”

Polling that Noble’s firm conducted after Sinema’s minimum wage vote showed that she had lost support with Democrats, with just 50% of Arizona Democrats holding a favorable view of her, compared to 68% who have a favorable view of Mark Kelly, her fellow Democratic senator from Arizona. Notably, despite her highly cultivated image as an independent, just 36% of self-identified independents view Sinema favorably, compared to 49% who view Kelly favorably.

“She really didn’t get much of a gain, if anything, with independents, but really lost support among liberals or among her base support,” Noble told JI. “Most people are saying, ‘Oh, that’s terrible.’ It’s like, well, is it? Because she’s not up for [reelection for] four years...I think it is a bold but smart play long-term.”

Although Arizona is now represented by two Democratic senators in Washington, and though Biden flipped the state from red to blue at the national level, locals caution that the state is not a reliably blue state yet. “I think in Arizona in general, what happened in the last election cycle is that people got so uncomfortable with the radicalism of Trump that the state went Democrat because the Democrats were offering the more moderate positions, but I don’t think Arizona is necessarily changed into a Democratic state,” said A.J.H.S.’s Bell.

Still, the tenuous state of Arizona politics might present an opening for an independent, even if the polling doesn’t yet show it: “If you look historically at Arizona elected officials that have gone to Washington, D.C., many have displayed a great level of independence, and it’s been applauded back home,” said Galindo-Elvira. ♦