



2006 STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY CONCERNS

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY VALUES THE SUPPORT OF THE NEW YORK CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION AND THE MANY INITIATIVES SPONSORED BY OUR REPRESENTATIVES AND SENATORS. THESE MEASURES REFLECT A DEEP AND ABIDING COMMITMENT TO ISSUES OF CONCERN TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. AS WE TAKE STOCK OF OUR MUTUAL CONCERNS AND PRIORITIES, WE ASK CONGRESS TO TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING ISSUES, SUPPORTED BY A BROAD CONSENSUS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND CONSIDERED TO BE HIGH ON OUR AGENDA.

INTERNATIONAL

HAMAS AND THE PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

The overwhelming success of Hamas in the Palestinian elections is a major setback to the hopes for peace and democracy in the Middle East. Hamas is on the U.S. State Department list of terrorist organizations and is similarly viewed by the European Union. Even after calls by the international community it has not altered in any way its clearly and repeatedly stated goal of destroying Israel nor has it renounced the use of violence. The United States, and other nations, must not recognize any Hamas-led government until it agrees to renounce and end terrorism and violence, dismantle its terrorist infrastructure, recognize Israel's right to exist and agree to conduct in good faith direct negotiations with Israel. This is in keeping with President Bush's statement that "a political party that articulates the destruction of Israel as a part of its platform is a party with which we will not deal." The ultimate responsibility now rests with the Palestinian Authority which is bound by its commitment to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure as the very first step in the roadmap. Any government dominated by a terrorist organization undermines efforts to achieve a lasting peace between the Palestinians and Israel. The JCRC applauds recent votes passed overwhelmingly in the House and a letter signed by three-quarters of the Senate making clear that Hamas' inclusion in the Palestinian government has serious implications for future U.S.-Palestinian relations. We support Secretary Rice's current effort to persuade U.S. allies and others to refrain from giving aid to a Palestinian Authority that includes terrorist organizations. U.S. policy supports the advancement of peace and works to counter terrorism. Regimes with antithetical goals do not warrant our assistance.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

By cutting the U.N. seals on its centrifuges, Iran has thumbed its nose at the world and taken another step closer to manufacturing nuclear weapons. We support the Administration's policy, as stated in the State of the Union address, "the nations of the world must not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons" and the warning that Iran's pursuit of atomic weapons poses "a grave threat to the security of the world." The JCRC

DOMESTIC

HOMELAND SECURITY

New York City remains the most symbolic and substantive target for many terrorists and Al Qaeda's leaders have specifically expressed their goal to harm Jews and Jewish institutions. The burden of defending New York has grown beyond merely a municipal responsibility. Consistent with our belief that the United States must maintain control of its borders and ports, we support a careful review of the effect of a transfer of the control of major port operations to a company controlled by a foreign government, especially one with citizens and institutions linked to September 11th.

The President, the Department of Homeland Security and many members of Congress have pushed to make grant allocations reflect the level of threat. Counter terrorism experts conclude that many Jewish institutions are at significant risk. The Jewish community is profoundly grateful that Congress, once again, allocated \$25 million to renew the counter terrorism grants program for high-risk nonprofits. The Administration should ensure that these grants are distributed on the basis of documented risk and vulnerability rather than politics.

FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES

Organizations rooted in the faith community have played an important role in the provision of social services in America. Such institutions should be able to qualify and compete for funding without experiencing discrimination. At the same time they should be held to the same standards of service and regulations as secular providers. Government has the responsibility to ensure that clients feel welcome and that no one is proselytized while seeking assistance or services at publicly funded programs. We support the prevailing United States Supreme Court decisions that bar the diversion of government aid to directly advance religion.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

While New York State has enacted such legislation, we urge Congress to adopt the Workplace Religious Freedom Act to require employers to make reasonable accommodations for employees' requests for religious observance unless such action would cause undue hardship in the workplace. We hope that legislation finally passes this year.

favors legislation, now pending, that would tighten sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic and permanently extend penalties on companies that invest in Iran's energy sector. We support divestment from such firms in order to choke off the funds available to assemble a nuclear arsenal and advocate providing assistance to pro-democracy forces in Iran. We urge all our elected officials to support and help pass this important legislation.

The JCRC applauds the U.S./European allies' rejection of a proposal by Iran to prolong negotiations over its pursuit of nuclear arms and calls on Russia to join our European allies in increasing international pressure on Iran. The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council have called on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to officially report Iran's violations to the Security Council as an important next step in the international effort to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons. We believe that the Security Council must make clear to Iran that the continued flouting of its non-proliferation obligations will be met with strong and decisive sanctions and Iran's further isolation. We agree with the EU-3 that the Security Council is the appropriate venue for dealing with the Iranian nuclear threat because economic and political sanctions on Iran can serve as a deterrent against its dangerous race to acquire nuclear weaponry.

Iran is recognized by the State Department as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, uses anti-Israelism, anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial as a cudgel. He seeks to undermine any chance of Arab-Israeli reconciliation and exerts his political influence beyond the Middle East. Iran as nuclear power and a potential nuclear proliferator to terrorists can wreak havoc upon the region and the world. JCRC urges world leaders to join in an exerted international effort, working collectively through multi-lateral organizations and as individual states to halt the Iranian threat before it's too late. Their leadership is critical in confronting this grave Iranian threat.

Foreign Aid

The JCRC applauds the overwhelming approval by the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate of fiscal year 2006 Foreign Aid Bill, which includes \$2.52 billion in economic and military assistance to Israel. By votes of 358 to 39 and 91 to 0, respectively, both chambers demonstrated the United States' unshakeable commitment to Israel's security by approving this critical assistance. This year's bill contains a variety of provisions

DOMESTIC ANTI-SEMITISM

The ADL's 2004 Annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents reports a 17% increase (1,821 incidents of all types) in the United States over the past year. Here in New York City the number of anti-Semitic hate crimes remained steady (83 incidents in 2005 compared to 80 in 2004). The New York City Police Department Hate Crimes Task Force should be held as a model for police forces worldwide. The investigators are specially trained to deal with hate crimes and take every incident seriously – as do the prosecutors.

Citizenship

Under most circumstances those aspiring to American citizenship should be required to demonstrate both a familiarity with American government and a level of proficiency in English. However some senior citizens — their love for the United States and their wish for citizenship unabated — find themselves unable to learn English. An alternative means of evaluation should be developed for such seniors so that their wish of citizenship can come true.

Voting Rights

The Voting Rights Act, which expires in 2007, reshaped the political landscape of the United States. The historic protections afforded therein significantly enhanced our democratic process and helped to maximize the number of American voters. It should be reauthorized.

Furthermore, Congress should take advantage of the reauthorization process to review certain provisions of the Act, including whether the current redistricting process, as applied, truly gives voters the opportunity to elect the candidate of their choice and whether the limited language assistance provisions in the act afford equal protection to all and reflect the ongoing diversity of our nation.

Nonprofit Advocacy and Governance

Legitimate charities share a concern about allegations of abuse and a genuine commitment to end such conduct. At the same time, charities are wary that lawmakers will take action that unnecessarily burdens nonprofits or restricts their right to engage with lawmakers. The Senate included an important package of charitable giving incentives and responsible reforms that will strengthen the nonprofit sector in its version of the tax reconciliation bill (H.R. 4297), but there are no similar provisions in the counterpart House version of the bill.

Proposals to prohibit or significantly restrict privately-funded travel by members of Congress, including educational and other legitimate trips charities have traditionally sponsored, would severely limit the ability of members to learn about issues important to the

important to the U.S. pro-Israel community, including oversight requirements to ensure that aid to the Palestinians is spent properly. As in prior years, funds allocated for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement are made contingent on the participation of Israel's Magen David Adom. Likewise, funds appropriated for the IAEA are dependent on Israeli inclusion.

This bill also includes the President's request for \$150 million in Palestinian aid. We would support proposals to limit indirect assistance to the PA until the president can certify that the PA is not controlled by a terrorist group and meets a series of other conditions, such as fighting terrorism and recognizing Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state.

Mideast Peace Process

Israel's historic disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank was a courageous and painful step on the road to peace and an opportunity for Palestinian leaders to effectively govern their own people. Letters were circulated in Congress in May of 2005 setting out essential prerequisites for moving the Middle East Peace Process forward, stressing that the Middle East peace process and Palestinian statehood can progress only if Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas suppresses terrorist groups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The JCRC gratefully acknowledges Congress' support for the roadmap and statements recognizing that the peace process will only succeed if the Palestinians take real steps to end terror and institute more reform. The change in the leadership of the Palestinian Authority does not alter these obligations.

PEACE, SECURITY AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION

Israel can only take the painful steps toward peace if its threshold security needs are met. We deeply appreciate the commitment of Congress to Israel's military and security needs. Peace and security are indivisible, rendering the pursuit of peace and the practice of violence and terrorism incompatible. We commend the unshakeable determination of the administration and Congress to strengthen the strategic partnership which is the core of the U.S./Israel relationship. This unique enterprise serves mutual interests in meeting the growing strategic threats to the Middle East and provides significant benefits to both United States and Israel.

We urge Congress to continue to encourage the development of measures that enhance U.S./Israel strategic cooperation which help guarantee Israel's qualitative military edge as it becomes more

Jewish community. Moreover, while transparency is important, any changes affecting reporting and grassroots lobbying should not hamper the capacity of nonprofits to legitimately advocate on issues of importance to their constituents.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Jewish tradition places great value upon human life. The potential to save and heal human lives is an integral part of dignifying human life from the traditional Jewish perspective. Leading experts conclude that embryonic stem cell research holds great promise for cures and the preservation of life and does not necessarily require or encourage the destruction of life in the process. It must be pursued. The Jewish community supports legislation that would open up additional stem lines for federally funded research with the provision for appropriate oversight to protect legitimate ethical concerns.

COMPENSATION FOR HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

While there can never be anything approaching justice for Holocaust victims, they or their heirs can be compensated for communal and private properties stolen from them during the war. The Administration and Congress should continue to apply pressure on countries in Eastern Europe, especially Poland, to arrange for appropriate restitution for Holocaust victims.

ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

International developments in the Middle East and South America continue to illuminate the need for reduction in our dependence on foreign oil. Energy independence is a key national security imperative. We support policies that encourage the effective management of the strategic petroleum reserve, energy diversification and alternative fuel sources.

UJA-Federation has identified the following legislative concerns which are important to meet the human service needs of the Jewish community:

SOCIAL SERVICE BLOCK GRANT, COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT AND THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT

The Administration's budget request for fiscal year 2007 recommends many important human service programs used by low-income households for dramatic spending cuts. These cuts are in addition to the spending reductions effected in Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income and other poverty programs in the budget reconciliation bill Congress just approved, and would come at a time when the number and percentage of Americans living in poverty has increased for four consecutive years. These proposed budget reductions will significantly affect the ability of UJA-Federation agencies to appropriately serve individuals and

difficult to maintain in the face of an alarming growth in the Iranian nuclear threat. We strongly support congressional initiatives urging strict review of Iran's nuclear proliferation activities including the Iran Freedom Support Act, which would strengthen sanctions on Iran for its development of nuclear weapons and its funding of international terrorism.

We continue to urge Congress to strengthen the U.S./Israel unique strategic partnership which includes bilateral strategic agreements on military planning, ballistic missile defense and counter-terrorism; joint development of weapons and technology; and the sharing of vital intelligence on terrorism, weapons proliferation and other threats. Israel serves as a major intelligence provider to the U.S. and is, in effect, its front line. As Israel continues to combat terrorism and face a burgeoning threat from Iran, we appreciate congressional support for continued expansion of this vital strategic relationship.

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED NATIONS

When Jean Ziegler, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, described Gaza as an "immense concentration camp" and compared Israelis to concentration camp guards, his remarks were quickly condemned by Congressional leaders and clearly disavowed by a spokesman for U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. The JCRC praises the congressional efforts to expose and condemn such anti-Israel sentiments in the United Nations.

This disconcerting episode occurred even as Israel's status dramatically improved at the United Nations. A Special Session of the General Assembly was called to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps in Europe. In the past, special sessions have been held very rarely and mostly for the purposes of condemning Israel. Another breakthrough occurred last month with the first International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. We hope that such events will be an impetus for rejecting Holocaust denial around the world and will encourage countries to develop educational programs about the horrors of genocide and battle against religious intolerance, incitement and violence based on ethnic or religious identification.

The election of the representative of Israel as a vice president of the General Assembly was another first, something not witnessed since Abba Eban held that post. The JCRC congratulates Ambassador Dan Gillerman of Israel on this outstanding achievement that brings honor to Israel and the Jewish people.

families seeking their assistance. The President's budget request terminates the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). Without congressional intervention, New York City will lose more than \$30 million in funding targeting the indigent, programs designed to empower low-income families and the communities in which they reside. CSBG funds are used to provide a vast array of services in New York including programs focusing on summer youth employment, domestic violence, after school activities, job training and substance abuse prevention. Many UJA-Federation agencies rely on this funding to provide basic services to members of their community.

The President's budget would also impose a 30 percent cut in funding to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). New York City and other localities would lose essential funds that it uses to pay for housing, day care and other important programs. The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development receives nearly 30 percent of its budget from the CDBG – the loss of this funding would significantly affect the city's ability to maintain its housing infrastructure.

The Social Service Block Grant (SSBG), which has been diminished by more than \$1 billion over the past six years, will be reduced in value by another 30 percent if the President's budget request is approved. The SSBG is an essential source of flexible funding for states delivered through countless agencies (including many in the UJA-Federation agency network) that prevent and remedy the neglect and abuse of children and adults, prevent child care and foster care services, as well as various services for the elderly, such as adult day care and Meals on Wheels.

We are greatly concerned that further losses in funding for these three core programs will affect the ability of our network agencies to serve the most frail and disadvantaged in our society. We ask Congress to ensure appropriate funding for these vital programs that help millions to live more stable and self-sufficient lives.

MEDICARE/MEDICAID

The President's budget would reduce the growth in Medicare spending by \$35.9 billion over five years, and by \$105 billion over 10 years. These cuts are on top of the \$6.4 billion Medicare reductions and \$4.7 billion Medicaid reductions passed by Congress as part of The 2005 Deficit Reduction Act. The budget cuts the growth in Medicaid spending by an additional \$14 billion over 5 years.

The Administration's FY 2007 budget includes a number of proposals reducing payments to hospitals and other providers. Many of the Medicare cuts reflect inflation

In another unprecedented action the Security Council condemned Hezbollah for attacking Israel near its northern border, marking the first time that the Security Council specifically reproached Hezbollah for attacks against Israel. The Security Council also censured the president of Iran's remarks against Israel and his subsequent denial of the Holocaust. In another positive development the General Assembly passed a resolution welcoming an Israeli initiative to combat desertification. While the JCRC enthusiastically welcomes these positive developments, we continue to deplore the anti-Israel resolutions that are adopted each year in the General Assembly and will continue to work to eradicate them.

UNITED NATIONS REFORM

Among the many aspects of the U.N. that both critics and supporters agree need reform, one of the most glaring failings is the U.N.'s profound bias against Israel. Israel remains the only U.N. member not permitted full membership in the regional grouping system, excluding it from important decision making processes and denying it critical rights and privileges that all other member nations enjoy, including the right to serve on a range of U.N. bodies. For years, the U.N. has focused only on Israel for censure and not on the far more egregious human rights violators and genocide perpetrators who are U.N. members. This includes many anti-Israel resolutions and agenda items annually.

We believe that the United States must play a leading role in reforming the U.N. The JCRC believes that one of the most important elements needed in U.N. reform are the elimination of three bodies in the U.N. structure devoted exclusively to attacking Israel, including the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, the Committee of the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinians, and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices.

The United States Mission to the United Nations has been very actively promoting all the efforts to help bring about U.N. reform. These efforts will be greatly enhanced by the fact that the United States has assumed the presidency of the Security Council. We applaud these efforts.

TERRORISM

The JCRC continues to support efforts to urge the Administration to place al-Manar, Hezbollah's official television station, on the Treasury Department's list of Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entities (SDGT). Congressional letters described Al-Manar as a mouthpiece for hatred and violence that promotes suicide attacks on

adjustments in payments to hospitals, nursing homes and home health care providers. Hospital payments would be cut by \$630 million nationally in 2007, and would reach nearly \$11.5 billion over five years. Further, proposals that reduce Medicare's market basket updates affecting inpatient and outpatient hospital payments would have an exceedingly harmful impact on New York's hospitals that have operated at negative margins for seven years. Over a five year period, the estimated impact on New York State's hospitals is a \$600 million loss. Skilled nursing facilities, inpatient rehabilitation providers and home health providers also face serious and damaging cuts.

Medicaid is the largest source of funding for medical and health-related services for people with limited income. In New York State, more than 3.4 million individuals are enrolled in Medicaid at a federal and state cost that exceeds \$36 billion. UJA-Federation of New York agencies receive more than \$600 million in Medicaid funding annually.

We are also very concerned about one of the President's proposed regulatory changes that would affect reimbursement for services claimed as rehabilitation services. An important benefit for children in the child welfare system is Medicaid's coverage of rehabilitative services. Reducing the amount of federal support for these very vulnerable children's medical and remedial treatments would compel states to make the drastic and dangerous choices of cutting treatment levels and the number of children served.

Affordable Housing - SECTION 202 SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY, SECTION 811 HOUSING FOR THE DISABLED AND SECTION 8 HOUSING VOUCHERS

The Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program provides direct loans to non profits for the development of critically needed supportive housing for the elderly and has become this nation's most enduring and successful housing program. Yet, despite demographic trends which indicate that the elderly are the fastest growing segment of the population and that they are in dire need of housing, the number of 202 units funded annually has declined from 20,000 in the late '70's to less than 6,000 in recent years. It is no surprise therefore, that the demand for this housing continues to explode as the need for affordable housing has reached crisis proportions and older people seek alternatives to costly (unaffordable) private "assisted living" and nursing home placements.

For this reason, UJA-Federation is concerned that the proposed Executive Budget for FFY 2007 reduces Section 202 Supportive Housing funding from \$735 million to \$545 million.

American and Israeli targets, spreads vicious anti-Semitic libel and encourages Iraqi insurgents to attack U.S. troops. The station is viewed via satellite throughout the Muslim world. Labeling al-Manar an SDGT would send a clear message that the United States is serious about confronting any organization that supports the violence carried out by terrorist groups.

Sudan/Darfur

We agree with the State Department that the inter-religious and inter-ethnic atrocities in Darfur, where an Arab Muslim government is sponsoring warfare against its own black Muslim citizens, are genocide. As violence in the region increases, humanitarian aid continues to dwindle and Darfurians suffer horribly at the hands of an abusive government. We appreciate the Administration's special budget request of \$500 million for Darfur, the call for a substantial increase in the number of international troops in the war-torn region and the expansion of NATO's presence. The JCRC urges Congress to continue to help focus the world's attention on Darfur and will work with our local coalition partners towards that end.

Divestment

The JCRC is deeply disturbed that even after disengagement and the success of Hamas, some national church bodies, campuses and other groups continue to discuss divesting investments in companies that do business with Israel. This proposed action is consistent with the cynical Palestinian public relations campaign to equate Israel with the apartheid regime of South Africa. These efforts are unbalanced and undermine both Israel and the chances to form a genuine and lasting peace. JCRC will continue our community to community outreach efforts to encourage dialogue about the complexities of Israel's struggle for peace and security.

Anti-Semitism

This past year saw a continuation of the trend of the escalation of attacks against Jewish individuals and Jewish property around the world. In the former Soviet Union, attacks by individuals in Russia and in many of the other republics were often met by appropriate investigations and public officials making statements decrying anti-Semitism. However, these officials must do more to counter the actions of nationalists who apparently think that anti-Semitic actions will be tolerated. In light of these incidents we urge officials to make clear that these crimes will be seriously investigated and prosecuted and to increase the security surrounding synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

The Section 811 Program assists some of the most vulnerable among us and for many disabled individuals it provides the only opportunity they will ever have to receive the support they need to live independently and with dignity. The President's budget would cut Section 811 in half, dropping funding down to \$120 million from its current level of \$238 million. More importantly, the budget proposes to completely eliminate all funding for new unit production in FY 2006 by zeroing out the capital advance/project-based side of the program. Instead, the President's FY 2006 budget proposes to direct the remaining \$120 million in the Section 811 program to renewal of existing rent subsidies (both tenant-based and project-based), with a small amount left to fund new tenant-based subsidies. We urge Congress to maintain funding at current levels.

The Section 8 housing voucher program is this country's primary form of federal housing assistance to low income households. Whereas in the mid to late 1970's the government provided housing assistance to as many as 360,000 new households annually, primarily in the form of project and tenant based Section 8, we are now at a point where despite growing need (only one-quarter of eligible households receive Section 8 because of funding constraints) no new families are being helped and tens of thousands are at risk of losing the assistance they currently receive. We are gratified to see that the President's budget request provides a modest increase in funding for existing tenant-based and project-based vouchers.

The need for housing assistance is enormous. A recent HUD analysis revealed that nearly five million low-income households who did not receive housing assistance paid more than half of their income for rent and utilities or else live in severely substandard rental housing. Most of these households were comprised of working families. It is imperative that Congress provide adequate funding to cover all vouchers currently in use. It is also essential that Congress support efforts to devise a rational plan to implement regulatory and legislative changes in the Section 8 program that restores stability to the program with the intent of paving the way for future growth.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

The Jewish Community has long supported a fair and generous immigration policy consistent with our American and Jewish values. Jewish teachings mandate that the stranger be welcomed and treated with respect. UJA-Federation reaffirms its commitment to a fair and generous immigration policy based on humanitarian rescue, family reunification, and strengthening the United States economy. We continue to believe that

We are disturbed by the official reactions to the brutal torture and murder of Ilan Halimi in France. He was kidnapped, beaten and dumped, barely alive and reportedly with burn marks all over his body. Incredibly, officials disallowed any anti-Semitic motives even before the evidence was collected. Finally, this week, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin noted that officials had decided to treat the case as a hate crime. Other anti-Semitic attacks, including physical assaults and swastikas painted on synagogues and gravestones, occurred in countries around the world including Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Canada, Chile and others. We will continue to urge Congress and the administration to exert their exemplary leadership on this issue and urge the Department of State to continue to monitor and report on acts of anti-Semitism around the world.

JERUSALEM

Under Israeli sovereignty, Jerusalem is open to followers of all faiths, with access to all holy places of worship ensured. Jerusalem is the eternal, undivided capital of Israel, having been the historic and spiritual center of the Jewish people for more than 3,000 years. The JCRC thanks Congress for its efforts to ensure that Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, remains united as the capital of the Jewish state. The JCRC reaffirms its endorsement of the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act of 1995.

ISRAEL MIA'S AND POW'S

We support and encourage the efforts of Congress, the administration and the international community to secure the release of all Israeli soldiers held captive, and to secure information of their whereabouts. In keeping with preserving the sanctity of human life, we value any and every humanitarian intervention on behalf of the missing soldiers: Ron Arad, Zachary Baumel (who is also an American citizen), Zvi Feldman, Yehuda Katz and Guy Chever. Twenty-four painful years have passed since Baumel, Feldman and Katz were taken captive – Arad disappeared in 1986 and Chever in 1997. We urge Congress to implement existing legislation mandating that the State Department raise the plight of these missing soldiers in all relevant Middle East discussions and report the findings to Congress. In an era of new possibilities for peace, we call upon Congress and the administration to intensify all efforts to secure their freedom. ■

immigrants benefit America and that in welcoming newcomers to our country we remain true to our core values of pluralism, freedom and opportunity.

The current system is inefficient, slow, arbitrary and in need of comprehensive reform that is humane, realistic, and practical. An effective immigration and naturalization system should address economic and security concerns and provide a timely and clear pathway for the undocumented, as appropriate, to participate in our society and to eventually obtain full citizenship.

In a post 9/11 world, we recognize more than ever the need to assure the security of our nation's borders and its citizens. We believe that security measures and controls can and must be effectively instituted while preserving basic civil liberties and due process embodied in our Constitution.

Elderly and Disabled Refugees

Thousands of elderly and disabled refugees have lost their access to the vital Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program because they have not been able to become naturalized citizens. Without legislative action, more than 20,000 refugees will lose SSI benefits by 2010.

Currently refugees are limited to 7 years of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits until they naturalize. However, the citizenship process is a lengthy one that can be arduous especially to the elderly or disabled. Processing backlogs alone can make the process take far longer than 7 years.

The seven-year limit on SSI eligibility is a result of the 1996 welfare law, which imposed severe restrictions on legal immigrants' access to public benefits, including the SSI program. Most federal programs, including food stamps, no longer link refugee benefit eligibility to the length of time they have resided in the United States.

We are delighted that the Administration's budget request for FY 2007 includes a one year extension for SSI eligibility for this population. We urge Congress to protect this extremely vulnerable population by removing the time limit on SSI. This program provides most of these individuals with their only income source. By definition, these individuals are elderly or disabled and generally unable to work. Most do not qualify for Social Security or other retirement benefits. For the majority of these refugees, loss of SSI and Medicaid will result in severe hardship and poverty.

Charitable Giving

UJA-Federation is very pleased that the Administration's

budget request for the next fiscal year includes tax-free withdrawals from IRAs for charitable contributions. We believe the IRA rollover provision would be enormously beneficial in encouraging transfers of wealth to philanthropies by removing the strong disincentives to contributing IRA assets to charities during an individual's lifetime. In essence, this provision would enable older Americans to transfer, tax-free, IRA assets to charitable organizations without penalties.

We are also pleased that the Senate version of the tax reconciliation package, S.2020, The Tax Relief Act of 2005, includes provision for the IRA rollover. We urge Congress to perfect and enact that section of the Tax Relief Act that includes this proposal as well as the "non-itemizer" deduction.

Analysis conducted by development professionals in the Jewish federation system indicate that the IRA charitable rollover proposal could increase endowment giving by as much as 25 percent in some communities, and collectively, by hundreds of millions of dollars for the federation system each year.

MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF SENIORS

It is crucial that primary care services include evaluation for the mental disorders of late life, which include anxiety disorders and depression, dementia, alcohol and substance abuse, and disturbances of sleep and sexual function. These and other mental health disorders cause significant distress and suffering for patients and family. Most elderly patients with these issues do not seek or find it difficult to gain access to specialty mental health services. Mental health care for older adults needs to be accessible and integrated within a system of comprehensive health services.

We are heartened to see The "Positive Aging Act" S.1116/H.R. 2629, sponsored by Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Representative Patrick J. Kennedy (D-RI) which intends to make mental health services an integral part of primary care services in community settings and would extend them to other settings where low income seniors reside. It would integrate mental health screening and services into primary care settings through demonstration projects that target urban and rural medically underserved areas. We believe its passage would reduce the number of missed opportunities to diagnose and treat mental illnesses that are taking such a huge toll on the elderly and increasing the burden on families and the health care system.

AUTISM RESEARCH AND INTERVENTION

Autism is considered the fastest growing developmental disorder in the United States, occurring in as many as 1 in every 166 births. However, despite the increasingly high prevalence of this disorder, autism research remains

one of the lowest funded areas of medical research in both the public and private sector. Significant progress has been made in recent years to increase the funding for autism research at the federal level, however, much more must be done to confront the challenges endured by an overwhelming number of American families.

Autism is a complex brain disorder that often inhibits a person's ability to communicate, respond to surroundings, and form relationships with others. The disorder affects people across all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. While some people with autism are mildly affected, most people with the condition require lifelong supervision and care and have significant language impairments. Experts agree that early intervention is important in addressing the symptoms associated with autism and can have dramatic effects in improving individual outcomes.

We support the Combating Autism Act of 2005, S. 843, sponsored by Rick Santorum (R-PA), which would authorize \$860 million over five years to combat autism through research, screening, intervention and education. It would also reauthorize the National Institutes of Health Centers of Excellence Program in autism, doubling the number of authorized centers. This bill would cut across federal agency lines to more effectively fund autism research and expand autism treatment and early diagnosis.

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