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Welcome to The Tell, the week's Jewish news from Washington by Ron Kampeas, JTA's Washington Bureau Chief.

The Day After and the Months Ahead

A Jew wave

Democrats on Tuesday decisively took back the U.S. House of Representatives, flipping as many as 35 seats — they needed at least 23.

As many as seven of the flipped seats were won by a diverse collection of Jewish candidates, including two military veterans, Elaine Luria in Virginia and Max Rose in New York. The others are Mike Levin, an environmentalist, in California; Susan Wild, an attorney, in Pennsylvania; Kim Schrier, a physician, in Washington state; Elissa Slotkin, a former CIA analyst, in Michigan; and Dean Phillips, a gelato entrepreneur and the grandson of the original Dear Abby, in Minnesota.

Should that number hold — Levin appears to have won in Southern California's 49th District, but the votes are still being counted — the number of Jewish House members will rise to 28.

Jacky Rosen, a congresswoman in Nevada, will bring the Senate Jewish caucus to eight, having wrested the seat from incumbent Republican Dean Heller. (Department of Trivia: Some include Colorado Democrat Michael Bennet, whose mother is the daughter of Holocaust survivors. We do not: Although Bennet has said his grandparents' experience helped shape him, he does not identify as Jewish.)

Democrats, identifying President Donald Trump's isolationism and behavior toward women among its targets, recruited national security professionals and women to run. My colleague Josefina Dolsten reviews the 11 Jewish women who were elected or reelected to the current Congress.

The number of Jewish Republicans in Congress remains at two: Rep. Lee Zeldin fended off a challenge from fellow Jewish candidate Perry Gershon in New York's 1st Congressional District, and Rep. Lee Kustoff prevailed in Tennessee's 8th.

Hail to the chairs

The spike in Jewish numbers, and in their proportion among the winners (a fifth!) is not the only Jewish story coming out of Tuesday. A congressional insider told me that six Jewish Democrats are likely to become committee chairs when the 116th Congress gavels in on Jan. 2.

The list includes three New Yorkers: Eliot Engel, who will head Foreign Affairs; Nita Lowey, Appropriations; and Jerry Nadler, Judiciary. The others are Florida's Ted Deutch, the Ethics Committee; California's Adam Schiff, Intelligence; and Kentucky's John Yarmuth, Budget.

That's six out of 20 committees, including key panels that will have a role in overseeing the Trump administration.

Schiff especially has been itching for the reins, accusing the current Republican chairman, fellow Californian Devin Nunes, of obstructing investigations into allegations of Trump campaign collusion with the Russians during the 2016 election. Schiff has become one of the leading faces of the "resistance," often appearing on cable news to make the case that the president deserves greater scrutiny.

Nadler at Judiciary also is significant. The veteran lawmaker has already said he will not institute impeachment proceedings against Trump — yet. Nadler has said he is ready to look deeper into allegations of sexual assault against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

And this week Nadler said his committee would take a look at the firing of Attorney General Jeff Sessions, which effectively removed Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein from the job of overseeing the probe led by Robert Mueller into any Trump-Russia connection. Rosenstein, who is Jewish, had been a firewall protecting the probe from Trump's meddling — much to the president's oft-expressed chagrin. Sessions' successor, Matthew Whitaker, is known to be a Trump loyalist.

Yarmuth has said he wants to see Trump's tax returns and whether Yarmuth's branding and properties stand to benefit from his status as president. This week, Engel told The Washington Post that he will hold hearings on possible Trump Co. conflicts of interest overseas.

Trump, in a wild and angry exchange with reporters on Wednesday, said he would get the Senate — still led by Republicans — to investigate Democrats if the House ratchets up the pressure. Trump has no say — or at least shouldn't have any — over what the Senate does.

Healer in Chief?

During that news conference, the president on multiple occasions was asked about hate crimes, anti-Semitism, his charged rhetoric about immigrants and what he would do to heal the divides in the country.

Trump bristled at any suggestion that he was responsible for the climate. He said anti-Semitism was "very sad," that he "hated" to see it, but when pressed would not say what he intended to do about it. He did note that he had moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem and that China (or, really, U.S. companies that import their goods) will soon be "pouring billions" into the U.S. Treasury.

Most U.S. Jews are unlikely to be appeased: A poll commissioned by J Street, the liberal Jewish Middle East policy group, showed 72 percent of Jewish voters held Trump at least somewhat responsible for the climate leading to the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting that claimed 11 lives. It also showed that 76 percent of respondents voted for Democrats in the midterms.

Ron Dermer, Israel's ambassador to the U.S., spoke for those Jews who do feel Trump has said and done the right thing on anti-Semitism, at least after Pittsburgh.

"After Charlottesville, President Trump did not say the right thing. After Pittsburgh, he did," Dermer told supporters of the World Jewish Congress on Wednesday. "He condemned the anti-Semitism in the strongest possible terms."

Florida Stays Red, for Now

Results in Florida races were reliably seat-of-your-pants: As of this writing, recounts are likely in the Senate and gubernatorial races, although Republicans Rick Scott and Ron DeSantis have declared victory for senator and governor, respectively.

Politico analyst Marc Caputo says it's time to stop calling Florida purple and declare it Republican red: He says the state's working-class whites have solidly transitioned to the GOP.

Maybe. But voters also passed a constitutional amendment enfranchising 1.4 million of its felons who have completed their sentences. That bid, led in part by the state branches of national Jewish civil rights groups, will bring new voters to the polls, including a disproportionate number of minorities, who tend to vote Democrat.

In Massachusetts, Jewish groups took the lead in keeping a law protecting transgender people in public accommodations. The "Yes on 3" campaign, maintaining the right of people to use the locker room or bathroom matching their gender identity, won the day.

But Were the Hot Dogs Tasty?

Sheldon and Miriam Adelson joined other major donors to Republicans to watch the returns at the White House. Reports said they ate "pizza, mini hot dogs, hamburgers and French fries served from elegant dishware."

For Sheldon Adelson, perhaps that helped wash down a difficult night: He had given tens of millions of dollars to protect the GOP House majority. And while Republicans boosted their majority in the Senate, Adelson saw a favorite senator, Heller in the Jewish billionaire's own state, go down.

He did back DeSantis and Scott in Florida, and that may turn out well for him.

Adelson's major issue is Israel, and Tuesday night sent mixed messages on that front. AIPAC praised the outcome, with folks close to the lobby noting that New Jersey Sen. Robert Menendez, who perhaps is the strongest Israel defender among Democrats in the body, pushed back a strong challenge. Also, the pro-Israel mainstream was relieved that Leslie Cockburn, who wrote a book in 1991 sharply critical of the U.S.-Israel relationship, did not flip Virginia's 5th District for Democrats.

J Street also had what to celebrate with 122 of its 163 endorsees winning, and maintaining the loyalties of more than half the Democratic caucuses in the House and Senate. Meantime, three sharp Democratic critics of Israel will take their seats in January: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York's 14th District; Ilhan Omar in Minnesota's 5th District; and Rashida Tlaib in Michigan's 13th.

Does that portend a shift away from Israel for the Democrats? Not for the next two years, with pro-Israel stalwarts Engel and Lowey heading key committees. But we'll know more about where the wind is blowing in 2020.

WORTH A LOOK



Megan Messerly at The Nevada Independent provides a deep dive into the meteoric ascent of Jacky Rosen from synagogue president to senator in three years.

TWEET SO SWEET



A nation held its breath Thursday at the news that Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was hospitalized with three broken ribs. New York Times columnist Dave Itzkoff came up with a way to keep her liberal voice on the court.

STAY IN TOUCH

Share your thoughts on The Tell, or suggest a topic for us. Connect with Ron Kampeas on Twitter at @kampeas or email him at htell@ta.org

