

## Journalists Weigh in on Jewish Impact of 2012 Presidential Race

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The 2012 Presidential race will be one of critical importance to the Jewish community, with key issues including Medicare, Mideast policy and the economy, according to press experts.

In the wake of the State of the Union address, and the results of the Florida Republican primary, The Jewish Federations of North America called upon Lynn Sweet, Washington bureau chief at the Chicago-Sun Times and Ron Kampeas, Washington bureau chief at the JTA news service, to examine issues critical to Jewish voters in the 2012 presidential race.

Nearly 200 participants joined the call, moderated by William Daroff, vice president for public policy and director of the Washington office of JFNA, to hear the journalists' perspectives on the Republican primaries, the Democratic campaign strategy and themes voters will hear leading up to the November election.

"What happens in the 2012 elections, both on a congressional level and the presidential level, could have a tremendous impact on where we stand as a Jewish community," said Daroff. JFNA, which represents a broad community and many viewpoints, is not a political advocacy organization and does not take partisan positions on elections.

Read more about journalists weighing in on Jewish impact of the 2012 presidential race [here](#).

On the topic of a Republican presidential candidate, both journalists agreed that Mitt Romney would be the likely nominee, based on his decisive victory in this week's Florida primary. "The Florida primary was nasty and negative, but it produced a stronger Republican candidate in Mitt Romney," said Sweet. "I can't see a path that doesn't lead him back to Tampa when the Republicans meet here in August [for the Republican National Convention.]"

Although the Florida primary may have lacked newsworthiness in the Jewish world, since, as Kampeas pointed out, exit polls showed less than one percent of primary voters were Jewish, Democrats capitalized on the opportunity to address issues important to Jewish voters in the battleground state, such as Medicare.

At this early stage in the presidential race, Kampeas said, Democrats "want to seize the narrative on the Israel issue, which is how the Republican candidates have been framing their pitch to Jewish voters, and they also want to contrast Obama's approach on domestic issues with Republicans."

Some of those domestic issues include differentiating from Republican proposals to privatize Medicare, Kampeas said. Florida Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, chair of the Democratic National Committee, has been particularly vocal about Republican proposals reviving the "donut hole" – a coverage gap in Medicare prescription drug benefits – an issue that would affect the sizeable elderly Jewish population in South Florida.

In analyzing the general election, the journalists pointed to hot-topic foreign policy issues including strategies on sanctioning Iran, as well as Obama's relationship with Israel. Kampeas noted that a recent Romney quote about standing "shoulder to shoulder" with our allies was a "reference to what the Republicans perceive as Obama's weakness on Israel, where he openly criticized Israel during his administration on its settlement policy....That's going to be a theme that plays out and that's going to be difficult for the Obama administration to counter."

Sweet believes the White House's Jewish outreach is a priority, and pointed to a recently launched page on their website aimed at "Jewish Americans." The page features testimonials from a wide array of American Jews, as well as clips of Obama at Jewish conferences and speaking to Jewish leaders.

Sweet said the video may be the White House's attempt to "explain a little of how they see the [U.S.-Israel] relationship, which is 'Sometimes, among very good friends, you have the same goal but you don't see the same path in getting to that goal.'"

Kampeas argued that Obama's Israel record may be strong "enough" to retain the Jewish vote. He explained: "Jewish voters are always more likely to support the Democratic candidate for historical reasons as long as he meets the threshold of being pro-Israel enough, even if the Republican candidate is more pro-Israel."

Both journalists insisted that the presidential race will not be about Israel, but instead about the economy, even for Jewish voters. Said Kampeas, "If Obama hemorrhages Jews, it will be for the same reason he hemorrhages votes: because he's not able to handle the economy."

Sweet, too, believes that unemployment rates will dictate Obama's success in the November. Unemployment rates are "his toughest challenge right now, not any of the rivals out there."

For those who could not participate on the call, a recording is available [here](#).

This call was the first in a series of calls regarding the 2012 Presidential election. For more information, please contact [Shelley Rood](#).