



## Dimensions

❖ JOYCE S. ANDERSON Special to the Jewish Times

### Guessing Game in Pennsylvania

Arlen Specter, the senior senator from Pennsylvania, dropped a political bombshell on the morning of April 28 when he released a statement that said he was switching to the Democratic Party. Specter, a 79-year-old fifth term senator, wrote that he has been a Republican since 1966 and was elected nearly 30 years ago, “as part of the Reagan Big Tent.” Since then, he said, “the Republican Party has moved far to the right . . . I now find my political philosophy more in line with Democrats than Republicans.”

Other senators have switched parties before, but the consequences of Specter’s move are far-reaching. At present, the Democrats are close to the magic number of 60 that will block

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filibusters by the opposition party on legislation or confirmation of appointments. Fifty-six senators are Democrats and two Independents, Sanders and Lieberman, vote with them. Specter becomes number 59. The Minnesota election results give Al Franken, the Democrat, a 300-plus lead, but Norm

Coleman the former senator has pursued a challenge in the courts. He has lost at several levels and vows to go to the United States Supreme Court.

In a news conference that afternoon, Specter revealed that he had seen polls the preceding weekend in Pennsylvania that showed Pat Toomey, a far-right conservative, beating him by a wide margin in the 2010 Republican Primary. He said that in the 2008 election, more than 200,000 Republicans had changed their registration to become Democrats. As a moderate, who had been one of only three Republican senators to vote for President Obama’s stimulus plan, he was reluctant to leave his fate up to the Republican voters in the primary. He had been elected five times by all the voters of Pennsylvania and he said, “I am not prepared to have my 29 year record in the United States Senate decided by the Pennsylvania Republican primary electorate.”

Specter was very clear about his pragmatic decision when questioned by reporters. He said, “I am ready, willing and anxious to take on all comers and have my candidacy for re-election determined in a general election.” He stressed his desire to continue working for increased attention to medical research in the years ahead. It should be noted that before he would sign on to the stimulus plan, he insisted on additional funding for research at the National Institute of Health. Specter, a two time survivor of Hodgkin’s Disease, as well as a brain tumor and bypass surgery, describes himself as “Full of vim, vigor and vitality.”

President Obama, when informed of Specter’s decision, had telephoned him to tell him, “You have my full support . . . We are thrilled to have you.” They posed later for the cameras along with Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid. Specter did say in his initial press conference that he was not an “automatic sixtieth vote.” But this disclaimer seemed to be swept aside in the media frenzy of reporting and speculating.

The honeymoon began to unravel within days. In the first of two important votes as a Democrat, Specter voted against his new party and opposed the budget resolution supported by President Obama. Then he voted to kill a measure that would have allowed bankruptcy judges the power to modify mortgages for homeowners, another Obama priority. He was interviewed on several of the television talk shows and made a point of saying, “I never said I was a loyal Democrat!” That assertion was compounded when he told an interviewer from the New York Times Magazine that the courts should rule in favor of Norm Coleman and deny the Democrats the 60th vote. In answering a

see DIMENSIONS page 9 ►



## The Region

❖ BARRY RUBIN Special to the Jewish Times



### Netanyahu’s Peace Plan

In his successful meeting with President Barack Obama, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented a superb, workable peace plan backed by a wide Israeli consensus

Those obsessed with whether Netanyahu would say the “two-state solution” mantra missed it.

In fact, Netanyahu didn’t accept that framework precisely because he and his Labor party coalition partner are for peace.

If Netanyahu said “two-state solution” it would buy him moments of cheap praise. But then, experience shows, their attention would turn to just one theme only: getting Israel to make unilateral concessions and take dangerous risks.

In the conception of Netanyahu and Barak, the right kind of two-state solution is the only solution to the conflict. But how to ensure it does end the conflict rather than just make it bloodier and on worse terms for Israel?

Netanyahu made this clear in his joint press conference with Obama:

“Everybody in Israel, as in the United States, wants peace. The common threat we face are terrorist regimes and organizations that seek to undermine the peace and endanger both our peoples.”

The real question is how to get peace without strengthening radical forces; how to get a solution that doesn’t make things worse for Israelis and Palestinians? Netanyahu continued:

“We want to live in peace with them. We want them to govern themselves, absent a handful of powers that could endanger the state of Israel.”

Israel wants peace – it has more incentive for that than anyone. When Netanyahu says Israel wants the Palestinians to govern themselves, he isn’t talking about limited autonomy but in the context of a functioning peace agreement, which means a state. What are the “handful of powers?” Obviously,

Hamas but it’s also a clear reference to influence and interference by Iran and Syria.

Why should Israel agree to any Palestinian state functioning as a base for destroying it?

He continues: “For this there has to be a clear goal...an end to conflict.” A definitive end of conflict agreement that the new framework ensures is key to any solution: two states not Round Two of

the conflict. The Palestinian Authority has rejected such a commitment for very obvious reasons: it hasn’t been ready to accept permanent peace even if it gets a state.

Both sides, Netanyahu continued, must make com-

promises: “We’re ready to do our share. We hope the Palestinians will do their share, as well.” To reach peace requires the Palestinian side to meet its commitments – which it has done far more rarely than Israel – and make concessions. This may seem obvious but is usually forgotten in Western policy and media coverage. President Obama did make this point about Palestinian obligations as well, more specifically than many observers seem to realize.

Read this carefully:

“If we resume negotiations, as we plan to do, then I think that the Palestinians will have to recognize Israel as a Jewish state; will have to also enable Israel to have the means to defend itself. And if those conditions are met, Israel’s security conditions are met, and there’s recognition of Israel’s legitimacy, its permanent legitimacy, then I think we can envision an arrangement where Palestinians and Israelis live side by side in dignity, in security, and in peace.”

Here is Netanyahu’s view of the two-state solution. If the Palestinians meet Israeli conditions – including the reasonable demand that Palestinian refugees be resettled in Palestine, not Israel – there

see RUBIN page 8 ►