

conflict," MK Shaked emphasizes. "A big law I'm working on would define Israel as a Jewish country." Shaked said the legislation is necessary to redress the rulings of Aharon Barak, who served as the president of the Supreme Court from 1995 to 2006. Barak "dominated the court, and democratic values were promoted over Jewish values," Shaked insists. "We want them to live in parallel."

In a *Jerusalem Post* profile, MK Michal Biran (Labor) says her agenda is to make the national budget "more transparent" and to improve the working conditions for outsourced employees, who have traditionally worked without receiving benefits.

Biran would also like to provide scholarships to ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arabs, both underrepresented in the workforce, "so they can find employment, which will increase their feeling of solidarity with society," and encourage them to perform military or National Service.

MK Zandberg has "a rainbow of goals": to advance the peace process, women's rights, gay rights and civil justice. "I'm working very hard to make medical cannabis more available," she says, referring to marijuana. "And to make sure the public, and not just rich guys, reap the benefits of our natural resources, like natural gas and phosphates."

If Calderon has her way, Israelis will learn more about Judaism in a non-coercive way. Long ago, the Talmud scholar noted that in order to reinvent themselves, Israelis "gave up more Jewish culture than is healthy. We got to a point where we are ignorant. The aim is to make decisions based on knowledge, not on ignorance."

Like the public, Calderon says, the country's female MKs are still finding their way. "It's like building the plane while you're flying in it."

Michele Chabin is a journalist living in Jerusalem. She covers the Middle East for The New York Jewish Week and other publications. She wrote "A Taste of Culture in the English Mama Losben" in our summer 2013 issue.

Let's Crack Down on Sexual Assault in the Military

by MARCIA J. WEISS

Sexual assault has emerged as one of the defining issues for the United States military this year. Its occurrence has reached epidemic levels. A recent Pentagon survey found that an estimated 26,000 sexual assaults took place last year, up from 19,000 in 2010. The numbers are actually much higher, however, as more than 86 percent of service members do not report their assault, fearing retaliation or ostracism from their units. Less than 5 percent of sexual assault cases move toward prosecution and less than one-third of those cases result in imprisonment. Although the majority of complaints have been filed by women, who comprise about 15 percent of the military, statistics show that one in five have been assaulted. Often overlooked is that the majority of service members who are sexually assaulted are men, and their assaults have been vastly underreported.

The military chiefs contend that it is the responsibility of commanders to ensure trust between victims and leaders, and it's the military justice system's duty to investigate and prosecute sex crimes properly. Despite promises that commanders would be held accountable for any failure to do so, there exists a general tolerance of sexual harassment and abuse.

Bills to toughen penalties and prosecution have been introduced in Congress. Significantly, the Military Justice Improvement Act of 2013 (MJIA), introduced by Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand (D-NY), has bipartisan support. Both Senators Rand Paul (R-KY) and Ted Cruz (R-TX) have signed on to this proposal, as have 38 other Senate cosponsors. The measure would give experienced military prosecutors, holding the rank of colonel or above, rather than commanders, the power to decide which sexual assault crimes to try — with the goal of increasing the number of people who report crimes without fear of retaliation. The bill would also take away a commander's authority to convene court-martials and put them in the hands of judge advocate generals (the military lawyers).

Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), chair of

the Senate Armed Services Committee, supports a measure requiring a senior military officer to review decisions by commanders who decline to prosecute sexual assault cases. Levin and the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that cutting commanders out of the legal process entirely would undermine their ability to enforce order and discipline. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) feels that Congress should replace commanders with state prosecutors to deal with military sexual assault cases. Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO), although a Democrat and member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, opposes the MJIA, stating that victims can report assaults outside the chain of command. Although state courts already have authority over rape and sexual assault cases should a victim choose to go that route, this rarely happens as the military prefers to prosecute its own.

Obviously, there is much confusion and disagreement among legislators. What is clear, however, is that victims of military sexual assault should be encouraged to report these offenses without reprisal. The perpetrators must be brought to justice outside the military chain of command.

TAKE ACTION! Encourage your legislators to support the Military Justice Improvement Act of 2013 so that justice and reform will prevail.

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TAKE ACTION!