



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

## Matt Brooks

**Executive Director  
of the Republican  
Jewish Coalition**

For the majority of his adult life, Matt Brooks has been involved in a leadership role within the Republican Jewish Coalition, an organization that seeks to enhance ties between the Jewish community and the Republican Party. Although he'd been active since the 1980s, never had Matt and the RJC experienced as consequential a period than this past weekend, when their annual leadership meeting in Las Vegas featured a star-studded lineup, which included addresses by President Trump and Vice President Pence.

Once the dust settled, *Ami* spoke with Brooks about the experience.



**Every year you get some really big names to your annual summit but have you ever had the president and vice president before in the same year?**

No. We have not. First of all, we've never had the president at our Vegas conference. We have been honored to have the vice president before. It's certainly the first time we've had both. It's pretty unprecedented for any organization to have both the president and vice president not only address the organization but literally fly across the country to do it. So we are humbled and we are honored and thrilled that we had an opportunity to say thank you to this

incredible president and incredible vice president.

**You've been doing this for almost 30 years, correct?**

Thirty-one, but who's counting?

**And this is the first time you pulled this off. What would you say changed this year that made you win the jackpot?**

I think this is the culmination of a lot of hard work by our staff and by our lay leadership to help make this organization into what it is today. And it's a testament to the RJC that the president and vice president and all the other speakers...the number



of governors and senators and congressmen we had was unbelievable. I think it has everything to do with how the RJC has evolved into a major impactful organization in the Jewish community and the reputation we built for ourselves.

**You say impactful. There have been reports of Jews leaving the Democratic Party. First of all, would you agree with this assessment? And if yes, what sort of impact would you say the RJC has had?**

We do know, because we made a strategic decision going back to the aftermath of George H.W. Bush's loss in 1992. We got a record low vote in the Jewish community. He got 11% of the Jewish vote. That really set off alarm bells within the RJC and we dedicated ourselves to do whatever it took to invest and to build and to grow and try to affect the presidential elections. We've been very pleased with the inroads we've been making. Ever since that low point, we've been making inroads among the Jewish vote to the point where we've gone from 11% to 25-30%. So we've almost had a three-fold increase in the Jewish vote. And as I say often, I am very confident that in 2020 we will continue that trend and Donald Trump will do better among Jewish voters than he did in 2016.

In addition to that, there is what we do to elect Republican candidates to the House and Senate, what we do to support our friends and also to make sure the people who don't share the views and values of the Jewish community aren't elected. For



example, like we did in the last cycle against Leslie Cockburn in Virginia with the election of Denver Riggleman, with our efforts to highlight why Scott Wallace was a horrible candidate for the Jewish community and how we helped elect Brian Fitzpatrick. We spent a million dollars in North Dakota helping to elect Kevin Cramer and defeating Heidi Heitkamp because of her bad vote on the Iran deal. In addition to our significant fundraising prowess, we also engage directly on the ground in helping to support our friends and defeat our enemies.

**Would it be fair to suggest that there's more of an upward tick in the number of Jews voting Republican as opposed to a mass exodus from the Democratic**

**Party over the last couple of months, as some have been claiming?**

We have a much bigger, long-term horizon perspective on this. It's not so much how much more we get every year, but the fact that we are steadily continuing to increase. Some years hopefully we'll be stronger than others, but we're focused on the trend line, and the trend line for the Jewish community in the Republican party is clearly upward.

**Let's get back to POTUS. What would you say, for you, was the biggest takeaway from the president's speech?**

When he sort of lays out his record in its totality, it is incredibly impactful to hear him recite all the things he has done. Obviously that includes

# ERETZ YISROEL. YOUR SON'S BAR MITZVAH. UNFORGETTABLE.



**PLAN-IT**  
ISRAEL  
EXPERIENCE AMAZING. EVERY TIME.

EVENT DESIGN  
LUXURY ACCOMMODATIONS  
ITINERARY PLANNING

718.360.9445

INFO@PLANITISRAEL.COM



recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, then moving the embassy, and ending the Iran Deal, and recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and pulling out of the UN Human Rights Council, and defunding UNRWA, and changing the culture of an anti-Israel bias at the UN. All these things just show that the president is a passionate and heartfelt supporter of the State of Israel.

### **Right at the beginning of the president's speech there were a couple of protesters. How did they get in?**

That's a good question. We're trying to figure that out. We tried to vet as much as possible all the people there. They were dressed in suits and ties and got through the Secret Service screening. But look, every single event the president has is interrupted by protesters. This was three or four people, it was 20 seconds, they were arrested and escorted out by Las Vegas PD and that's that. It's really not a big deal at all. Our team was prepared for hecklers and we instituted our plan immediately and it didn't impact the event at all.

### **Speaking of impact again, perhaps the most impactful part of the president's speech for me was the way he chose to honor Mordechai Lichtenstadter and Simcha Czin for saving an Israeli policeman from a terrorist. How did that come about?**

We've obviously followed that story very closely. One of our top

leaders, Steven Meisel, does an event every year where he makes an award for the defenders of freedom and security, and we have honored folks from Israel in the past who have stood up and helped defend against terror attacks.

And we've been following the story of these two guys and it was very clear that these were the perfect folks to honor at our event. We shared that with the White House speechwriting team in preparation for the event. They wholeheartedly agreed it's an amazing story. The president wanted to be sure to recognize them and include them in his speech, and that's how it got in.

### **Did they know the president was going to acknowledge them?**

We purposely held it back because even though the president wanted to have it in and was very excited about doing it, speeches change all the time. It was only right to tell them before because we wanted them to be seated up front so the president could see them, and when he recognized them, they could stand and all that. So they knew, but not days ahead. They certainly didn't know when we suggested that they come out to Vegas to be honored, because we didn't have a commitment from the president yet at that point.

But as we got closer, we let them know to be prepared. I know it was thrilling for them, and they spoke later in the afternoon following the vice president. ●