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Politics

Stevens cheered at Jewish school after backing GOP candidate, as El-Sayed holds tongue

Democrat Stevens, who has a Jewish fiancé and is exploring conversion, criticized El-Sayed's associations with anti-Israel figures.

Andrew Lapin November 2, 2026



Michigan Democratic Representative Haley Stevens (L) endorses Republican Senate candidate Mike Rogers (R). (Photo by Dominic Gwinn/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images)

YPSILANTI, Michigan – Democratic Michigan U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens was given an extended ovation at a fundraising gala for a Detroit-area Jewish day school Sunday, hours after her endorsement of Republican Mike Rogers for Senate.

The next morning, at the day's first rally for Abdul El-Sayed, the Democrat she spurned, Stevens' name didn't come up once.

"I don't think much about my former opponent," El-Sayed said to reporters afterward. "I think a lot more about whether or not these young people are going to be able to afford the life that they're graduating into."

Stevens, who is not Jewish but has been a longtime pro-Israel stalwart, was celebrated at the Yeshiva Beth Yehudah annual dinner as many members of her party across the country spoke out against her decision to break with El-Sayed. She had contested El-Sayed for the Senate nomination and had initially endorsed him before the former rivals split after trading barbs in the days leading up to Tuesday's vote.

Video of Stevens' minute-long standing ovation was shared on social media by representatives of Agudath Israel of America, a major Orthodox advocacy group. Strongly pro-Israel Jews have largely lauded her move to Rogers, which she said came about in part because of her objections to El-Sayed's past relationship with anti-Israel streamer Hasan Piker.

Also on Sunday evening, Stevens struggled to explain the timing of her decision in an interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper but stressed that she believed she was helping Democrats beat back antisemitism within their own party.

"I'm trying to help the Democratic Party. I felt the same way about Graham Platner and his Nazi tattoo," Stevens said, referencing the Democratic Maine Senate candidate who ultimately stepped down from the nomination. Asked if she believed El-Sayed is antisemitic, she responded, "I think some of the actions have certainly been antisemitic, Anderson, but I'm just sick of who he stands with."

She named Piker and "the uncle," referring to Piker's uncle Cenk Uygur, whose PAC recently released an ad supporting El-Sayed that blamed Israel for the price of groceries. After Stevens publicly pressured El-Sayed to condemn the ad's contents, the candidate appeared to do so on Saturday night, which Stevens celebrated in a statement — hours before endorsing Rogers.

On CNN, Stevens suggested that many other Democrats felt the way she did.

"I've been hearing from a ton of Dems, Anderson, who have said, 'Thank you. This is how we felt.' They haven't liked this campaign. It's painful," she said. A growing number of Michigan Jewish Democrats have pledged to vote for Rogers, though more than 1,000 have also signed a letter pledging to vote for El-Sayed.

A Jewish Democrat in Georgia, state Rep. Esther Panitch, appeared to side with Stevens. Panitch tweeted on Sunday that the congresswoman had put "country over party."

Stevens' mother, Maria Marcotte, who also said she voted for Rogers, pointed to her daughter's treatment by pro-Palestinian activists during the primary campaign in a statement to CNN defending her decision.

But that decision has played poorly even with Jewish and strongly pro-Israel figures among her own party. Michigan state Sen. Jeremy Moss, who is running for Stevens' House seat, and state Rep. Noah Arbit, who signed the "Nonnegotiable" open letter petitioning El-Sayed to affirm "Jewish sovereignty in Israel" and other issues, were among the vocal critics of her decision.

"I have severe concerns about [El-Sayed's] rhetoric redounding dangerously on Jews," Arbit wrote on X. "But the sane answer for anyone who claims to care about democracy, rule of law, minorities cannot be to embrace Rogers' disgusting, dangerous Islamophobia."

Stevens is a longtime beneficiary of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. AIPAC and affiliated groups spent nearly $30 million backing her primary Senate run, according to Fortune magazine.

El-Sayed and Rogers made their closing cases to Jewish Michiganders in interviews on 60 Minutes Sunday. Rogers said he "passionately" defended Israel's right to exist and defend itself, adding that his opponent "refuses to even acknowledge that Israel has the right to exist."

Asked by CBS journalist Ross Douthat whether Israel has the right to exist, El-Sayed said "Yes," qualifying that the form of a future state or states for Israelis and Palestinians depended on a "shared understanding" between the groups. He repeated his views that Israel committed genocide in Gaza and that he did not want "my taxes to buy another country a bomb or a tank."

El-Sayed said Jewish voters should trust him regardless of their "disagreements" about Israel because "there are a lot more of things that we agree on here."

"When it comes to standing up for Jewish Americans, I will be right there," he said.

Yeshiva Beth Yehudah is spread across multiple suburban Detroit campuses and is the largest Jewish day school in the state. Its annual fundraising dinner, "An Evening of Unity," is known for drawing big national names in politics and the media, usually from both major parties.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, a Democrat, was the evening's keynote speaker, and the gala program also featured personal letters from President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance.

But it was Stevens, a regular supporter of the school, who turned the most heads. She was presented with what the emcee called "a specially designed, illuminated book of the five scrolls of our prophets, which remind you all of our heartfelt esteem and appreciation for who you are."

The yeshiva's leadership also extended warm wishes to Stevens' fiancé, Democratic megadonor Jason Turkish, whom the yeshiva's emcee described as "our dear friend." Turkish's own endorsement of Rogers came days before the congresswoman's. Stevens has said she might convert to Judaism ahead of her marriage.



(L-r) Michigan U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell, Michigan Democratic Senate nominee Abdul El-Sayed, and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren address reporters following a rally for El-Sayed in Ypsilanti, Michigan, Nov. 2, 2026. (Andrew Lapin/JTA)

Meanwhile, on the campus of Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti the next morning, El-Sayed ignored Stevens during his stump speech at a get-out-the-vote rally.

He did, however, single out by name another ideological opponent who has recently attacked the candidate on Jewish issues: Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the Health and Human Services Secretary.

Kennedy, at a recent event for Rogers in Grand Rapids, had claimed that "Arabs don't produce science." Following heavy criticisms of his remarks, Kennedy doubled down on social media Friday with a chart purporting to compare Nobel prizes won by Arabs and Jews.

El-Sayed, who has often drawn contrasts between his own public health background and Kennedy's, seized on the secretary's remarks. "He wanted to talk about the scientific contributions of the 500 million Arabs in the world," El-Sayed said. "I want to talk about the scientific contributions of one very poorly capable HHS secretary."

Stevens' name was also not mentioned by other speakers, which included Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren; Michigan Rep. Debbie Dingell; and Michigan state attorney general

nominee Eli Savit, who is Jewish. One speaker, Ypsilanti Mayor Nicole Brown, alluded to “drama” and “crash-outs.”

Dingell, asked about Stevens, said, “I think the time to talk about that is after the election.”

But during the rally, Dingell did acknowledge the concerns Stevens had raised.

“I’ve been in the Jewish community in the last few weeks, and they’re really scared,” she told the crowd. “They are seeing a rise in antisemitism. They can’t go to their synagogues without security. They’re being taunted. It’s not OK. Are we going to stand up to antisemitism?”

The hundreds of mostly young El-Sayed fans in the audience loudly cheered in the affirmative.

This story has been updated to include coverage of El-Sayed's campaign rally on Monday.