

Bennett won't back Lapid's candidate for Jewish Agency head

Ruth Calderon boasted putting bread on her Seder plate.
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Prime Minister Naftali Bennett addresses the Knesset about the budget.
(photo credit: MARC ISRAEL SELLEM)

Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid's candidate to head the Jewish Agency, former MK [Ruth Calderon](#), will not receive Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's endorsement because of her unconventional approach to Judaism, sources close to Bennett said on Thursday.

Bennett aides were outraged by a video of Calderon saying on a panel with former Agency chairman Avraham Burg that she puts bread – not matza – on her Seder plate in order to remember the poor.

“Not [Jewish Agency](#) material,” a source close to Bennett said after viewing the clip from the Knesset Channel.

A veto from two members of the 10-member selection committee would be enough to disqualify Calderon. One veto is expected to come from the Orthodox World Mizrachi, while another member of the committee appeared also to reject her on Thursday.

“I am not Reform, so why should I back her?” the selection committee member said.



Former MK Ruth Calderon interviewing on the Knesset Channel (Credit: Knesset Channel)

Rabbi Pesach Lerner, a member of the Agency’s board of governors and chairman of the WZO’s Orthodox Eretz Hakodesh faction, criticized Calderon on Thursday, saying she cannot bring people around the table to solve the difficult challenges facing the Jewish people as did former Agency heads Natan Sharansky and Isaac Herzog.

“The new chairperson of the Jewish Agency must be a unifier, someone who can bring together the varied Jewish communities throughout the Jewish world,” Lerner said. “Someone who boasts of her eating bread and an orange at her Passover Seder sends a hurtful message to the overwhelming majority of world Jewry that she doesn’t share their tradition and values. Her appointment would politicize JAFI, internally and externally, and seriously damage the confidence world Jewry has in the Jewish Agency. Her appointment would compromise the Agency’s sacred mission.”

If she is rejected, Calderon would be the second unsuccessful candidate promoted by Lapid, following Intelligence Services Minister Elazar Stern, who dropped out after controversial statements he made in a radio interview but even beforehand, his candidacy lacked enough support for selection.

Some committee members are angry at Lapid for taking too long to choose a candidate and blame him for the lengthy process that is harming the agency’s reputation.

Calderon will be interviewed next week and like other candidates, she will be asked about her experience in fundraising, which, as an academic, would be a weak point for her.

In October 2020, Lapid announced with great fanfare the appointment of Calderon as president of the World Zionist Organization, which would have made her the first woman to head a Zionist institution, but after she discovered that the position was unpaid and she could not do it concurrently with her job at the Mandel Foundation, she declined the post.

There are now four female candidates for Agency head: Calderon, Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, and former MKs Michal Cotler-Wunsh and Omer Yankelevich. There are two male candidates whose interviews were held on Thursday night: former minister Danny Danon and former deputy minister Michael Oren. “We will choose the best candidate for the job, no matter what their gender,” a source on the selection committee said.

Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion wished Hassan-Nahoum success in the race at Thursday's city council meeting and said he supported her.