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## **JALSA to honor new Senate President Rosenberg**

By Susie Davidson  
Special to the Advocate

(Link to other photos from Rosenberg's election as Senate President - Dan can we use State House News with credit?):

<http://statehousenews.com/?path=cms/gallery.aspx&twg=photos/2015/01-07%20Senate%20President%20Rosenbergo>

The Jewish Alliance for Law & Social Action (JALSA) will salute a political and civic trailblazer Sunday at Temple Israel in Boston when it pays tribute to newly-elected Senate President Stanley C. Rosenberg.

If his life had gone differently, however, you might have seen him leading the ha'motzi at the bima.

Rosenberg actually aspired to become an Orthodox rabbi when, as a foster child living in Malden, he studied for his bar mitzvah at Temple Israel. But he didn't get into Yeshiva University, and instead focused on a life of public and civic service, which culminated on Jan. 7 when the State Senator and Amherst Democrat became the 93rd president of the Massachusetts Senate. Rosenberg, now, along with the Governor and House Speaker one of the three most powerful state political leaders, was the first Jewish legislator, and becomes the first openly gay member to lead the Senate or House. He is also the first leader from Western Massachusetts since David Bartley served as House speaker in the 1970s, and is the longest continuously serving member of the Massachusetts Senate.

Rosenberg has said in interviews that the Malden religious community and social networks at college, where he played the tuba in a marching band, formed an arts organization, and joined a fraternity, were his attempts to form substitute family structures.

At its 13th annual meeting, JALSA will, as it does each year, provide a kosher brunch, elect new officers, and honor community leaders and groups that reflect its mission. This year, in addition to Rosenberg, the Raise Up Massachusetts Coalition and the Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence will be recognized.

JALSA, a social, economic and environmental justice organization based in downtown Boston, advances Jewish values and traditions in the pursuit of an equal and just society that safeguards civil rights and freedoms.

The group is led by JALSA President and State Rep. (D-Brookline) Frank Smizik, Vice-President Jonathan Scarsic, Executive Director Sheila Decter, Deputy Director for Administration & Finance Michelle Weiner Taylor and Deputy Director for Development & Outreach Cindy Rowe, as well as an elected Board.

"Our tradition concerns us with caring for the most economically vulnerable in our society – the widow, the orphan and the stranger – and challenges us with the ethical imperative to meet their needs," said Smizik. "Our basic principles include the right of all workers to fair treatment, which

includes fair and timely payment."

Decter said that JALSA files amicus briefs in significant cases, drafts and advocates for legislation, and uses the methods of community organizing to involve people in our work. "As a small social justice organization, we realized very early on that in order to create major changes, we needed to have many partners," she said. "We also knew that we had the deep and trusting relationships and experience to bring together these partners around significant public policy issues."

"In the face of issues raised over police use of deadly force against African-Americans and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, we pulled together some 20 groups to prepare a letter for the new Massachusetts governor on the creation of a cabinet-level civil rights official to impact the development of policy at early stages," said Decter, who added that an amicus brief is also being filed this week in the U.S. Supreme Court on a pending case dealing with benefits available under the Affordable Care Act.

"JALSA has also organized or supported coalitions on achieving marriage equality, protecting stem cell research, defending affordable housing, and improving public education," Decter added.

"Our work builds upon bringing Jewish values into contemporary society, and applying learning from ancient texts to our current public policy debates," said Rowe.

The Raise Up Coalition of over 100 community, labor, and religious organizations came together to improve the economic conditions of hundreds of thousands of low-wage Massachusetts workers. "JALSA served on its Steering Committee and helped guide the passage of a bill to create the highest minimum wage in the country and overwhelmingly pass the earned sick time question on the state's November ballot," said Decter.

The Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence began in 2013 following the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. "The Coalition brings together over 50 organizations across the state to address the epidemic of gun violence that plagues our communities in urban, suburban and rural areas, whether by homicide, suicide, or accident," said Decter.

JALSA serves on the Strategy Team of this coalition, which led the fight for passage of the state's first significant gun violence prevention law since 1998. "The law created universal background checks, a new standard for suitability for gun owners, and had provisions to create important data collection processes," said Decter.

In Decter's previous position as Director of the American Jewish Congress, New England, she helped initiate a signature campaign, "Stop the Guns: Protect Our Kids," which was formed in the wake of the mass shooting at a day care center at the Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles, and the shooting death of the AJCongress President in his San Francisco law office.

JALSA's outreach tools include creating, joining, and staffing coalitions; community organizing and leadership development; initiating and drafting legislation; providing access to key public policy decision makers; posting community-wide education events; writing and coordinating legal briefs and engaging members in public policy.

"Our religion sanctifies human life, telling us to 'turn our swords into plowshares,' and that taking a single life is as if one has destroyed the universe," said Rowe.

Rosenberg, who was one of 5 children in a Dorchester family, was placed in a Malden foster family at the age of 4 or 5 but was on his own at age 18, with no financial or familial support from either his biological or foster family.

In a recent interview in CommonWealth Magazine, Rosenberg cited similarities between political work and the study of the Talmud and ancient Judaic texts, which he called "an exercise in raising questions and trying to assess the efficacy of the information or the answers and the relationships between competing things, competing ideas."

Drawing upon his personal experience, Rosenberg founded and co-chairs the Massachusetts

Legislature's Foster Kid Caucus. He has also been active in a legislative and community program in Pskov, Russia that facilitates economic, social, and political development. He is active in the Council of State Governments and Americans for the Arts.

The 1967 Revere High School and 1977 University of Massachusetts graduate has held numerous Senate positions, including Chair of the Election Laws Committee, the Banking Committee, and the Senate Ways and Means Committee; Assistant Majority Leader; and the Senate's first President Pro Tempore, from 2003-2013. He is the highest-ranking LGBT elected official in the Commonwealth, and was instrumental in protecting the 2003 state Supreme Judicial Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage.

On Jan. 7, he pledged to make the Senate more transparent and to work to close the escalating income gap between Massachusetts residents. He is known for his vast and sharp command of legislative policy, and for his penchant for being both a uniter and a leader who encourages productive debate.

Yeshiva may have lost out, but on Sunday, JALSA will celebrate the gains enjoyed by so many beneficiaries of Rosenberg's civic and public efforts.

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JALSA's 13th Annual Meeting Honoring Senator Stan Rosenberg, Advocate for Justice, and Highlighting the Work of Raise Up Massachusetts and the Mass. Coalition To Prevent Gun Violence will be held on Sunday, January 25 at Temple Israel, 477 Longwood Ave., Boston. For information about tickets to the January 25 brunch, contact JALSA at [jalsaoffice@gmail.com](mailto:jalsaoffice@gmail.com) or 617-227-3000.