Meet the MK: Ronen Hoffman

Yesh Atid’s No. 19 supports party platforms on burden of service, lower housing costs, downsizing gov’t

By GIL HOFFMAN

The last player drafted by the US National Football League has the distinction of being called “Mr. Irrelevant.”

Ronen Hoffman, the 19th MK on Yesh Atid’s Knesset list, was a longshot to make it into the parliament. But he did make it in, and is determined to become one of the most relevant legislators.

Hoffman cares about the connection between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. After working at summer camps in Atlanta and California and at Israel’s Consulate in Atlanta, he started Camp Kimama, an international summer camp that brings Jewish teens from more than 40 countries to Israel, to attend camp together with native Israelis.

“It is important to bring students from abroad to Israel,” Hoffman said. “It gives them a real experience of a living bridge.”

Hoffman taught political psychology, among other things, at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center. Now that he is an MK, he will have many interesting specimens to study among his colleagues in the parliament.

Name: Ronen Hoffman
Party: Yesh Atid
Age: 49
Hometown: Born and raised in Afula, now lives in Herzliya
Family status: Divorced with an 18-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter. His ex-wife was born in the US and lived in Australia.

Profession before becoming an MK: I was the information officer at the Israeli Consulate in Atlanta. I served as personal assistant to [former prime minister] Yitzhak Rabin in the 1992 election. I coordinated the Israeli delegation to peace talks in Syria. Then I moved to academia. I started the first Israeli think tank together with Prof. Boaz Ganor: the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at IDC Herzliya. I received a doctorate from Kings College in London on peace negotiations in the Middle East. Since then, I have taught government, diplomacy, strategy on international relations and political psychology at the IDC.

Why did you decide to enter politics? For me, politics has always been my profession. Working with Rabin and the peace process was an internship for me. When I moved to academia, I still dealt with politics but on a theoretical level. I never left politics. I always wanted to be an MK, but I was waiting for the right framework. When [Yesh Atid leader Yair] Lapid entered politics, I emailed him and he replied. We met when I went to a parlor meeting and then I became involved in the campaign as a volunteer. We got to know each other, and I was happy he put me on the list. We knew we were gaining momentum. I was optimistic but careful.

What are the first three bills you plan to propose? I am currently studying. I don’t know what specific bills I will propose yet. I will focus on political negotiations in the Middle East, public diplomacy, helping youth movements, informal education, and the agricultural communities in the periphery.

What was the most interesting experience you had on the campaign trail? I was fascinated by the motivation of people who had no experience in professional politics, who volunteered and contributed by being active in order to bring about change. I saw it all across the country. It was moving.

This Knesset has a record high number of women and religious people. How do you think this will affect the way it functions and the kinds of changes it brings? I would like to see more women. We have made progress but there is a long way to go. I hope that the Knesset will be a reflection of the general public, so it will be a microcosm of the public as a whole.

Do you think haredim and Arabs should do military or national service, and if so, how should the state enforce it? I am all for Yesh Atid’s plan for equalizing the burden of service. It is the only serious plan, it is realistic, and I think it should be implemented. I think our party should not compromise on this issue.

Do you support a religious-Zionist chief candidate, such as Rabbi David Stav, for the chief rabbinate? I am not familiar with that issue yet.

What can be done to lower the cost of housing in Israel? The Yesh Atid platform calls for building 150,000 apartments for rent on state land to lower housing prices for young people and reduce the price of homes to purchase because the supply of apartments would increase.

What do you think can be cut in the budget, which must be passed within 45 days of the government’s swearing-in? The government itself should be smaller. There is so much money for ministries that are not really needed. I would cut the fat of the government. I would also reevaluate how to fund the education system, but that is more complicated.

What is your position on talks with the Palestinian Authority and a possible Palestinian state? I think we should immediately go back to the negotiating table with the PA. I support Yesh Atid’s plan for a two-state solution. It was a mistake that Netanyahu’s government ignored the PA. As a result, the Hamas got stronger. We should go back to speaking to the PA. It is good that [US President Barack] Obama is coming [in March] and Israel is on his agenda. I hope it will create momentum that will bring us back to the table.

Do you support the adoption of the Edmund Levy Report, which recommends the state approve unauthorized Jewish settlements in the West Bank? When I answer questions like this, I make a point of studying it and reading it.