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Jewish American Heritage Month Celebrates the Famous and Not-So-Famous

It's not quite a State Dinner, but an event in Washington on Thursday brings its own star power. The Obama administration is set to host the first ever reception to celebrate [Jewish American Heritage Month](#) (which happens to be May) and rumors are swirling that some big names could be arriving at the White House.

There's no confirmed guest list (yet), but there are reports that the attendees range from sports legends to writers to members of the Jewish community who contribute every day within Jewish organizations. The White House says the event won't be like the Hanukkah reception with religious leaders as guests. Instead the administration chose to focus on Americans who contribute to the culture of the country and also happen to be Jewish.

"Since its inception in 2006, Jewish American Heritage Month has highlighted the integral role Jewish Americans have played in shaping our nation's history and culture. President and Mrs. Obama wanted to take this opportunity to further celebrate these contributions. The reception also offers a chance to foster partnership, collaboration, and education in the spirit of Jewish American Heritage Month," White House Spokesman Matt Leirich told Fox News.

But, even if the idea is to foster a spirit for Jewish American Heritage month, there's still some buzz over one potential guest: left-handed Hall of Fame pitcher Sandy Koufax. Koufax, who pitched for the L.A. Dodgers in the 1960's, [famously refused to pitch in a World Series game held on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur](#), the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Neither the White House nor Koufax has confirmed his attendance, but that hasn't quieted some baseball watchers. One confirmed attendee is five time [Olympian Dara Torres](#), as well as various members of Congress, including Florida Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, an original sponsor of the resolution to create Jewish American Heritage Month.

Wasserman-Schultz says she's excited for the event. "This raises the profile and stature and awareness of Jewish heritage in America and fulfills the proclamation," the Florida Congresswoman told Fox News.

Wasserman-Schultz says she has been asking the White House for an event of this kind since 2006, when the proclamation marking May as Jewish American Heritage month was announced by President George W. Bush. And while there was no event last year during the first year of the Obama administration, she's thrilled the president signed on this year. "The idea and the concept behind Jewish American Heritage month was to foster educational progress, cultural progress and place an emphasis on that for the non-Jewish community so we can raise awareness in non-Jewish communities...to celebrate the contributions Jews have made."

Meanwhile, on the heels of the reception, the White House has announced that [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be visiting next week](#), and that the Obama administration is working out a time for a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. While there's no link between the events, the drive for peace between Israelis and Palestinians may come up at the reception.

[Steven Pease](#), author of *The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement: The Compendium of a Culture, a People, and Their Stunning Performance*, says while the announcement of the Netanyahu visit might be a coincidence, it's an opportunity for the administration to show the community that it cares about the on-going issue.

"It was not a glory year for the Obama administration, Israel and Netanyahu," Pease told Fox. "It's not a bad idea

to let people know they care. And there's no downside here." And while Pease admits there may be a political undertone to the event, he doesn't fault the administration for that. "It's time to say Israel is our partner."

Wasserman-Schultz said regardless of heads-of-state visits, the event is a big deal and shows the President is committed to making sure Americans understand the cultural contributions of Americans who happen to be Jewish.



Eve Zibel
Producer

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