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HEADLINE: CARDIN TO HEAD PRESIDENTS CONFERENCE

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HIGHLIGHT:

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BODY:

WASHINGTON - Leaders of American Jewish groups yesterday elected **Shoshana Cardin** as the first woman to head the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Cardin, a resident of Baltimore, Maryland, is a well-known and respected figure in organized Jewish life. She currently serves as chairperson of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, a constituent of the Presidents Conference, and as a member of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency. She expects to begin preparing for her new job when she flies to Israel Saturday night with her predecessor, Seymour Reich, and Presidents Conference executive director Malcolm Hoenlein, for three days of meetings with Prime Minister Shamir and other Israeli officials.

Her new post makes Cardin the spokesperson for American Jewry to the Bush administration in matters regarding Israel, a role that often entails attempting to articulate the position of the Israeli government to U.S. officials, while explaining Washington's behavior to Jerusalem.

It is a crucial role that Cardin acknowledges has become particularly difficult during the Gulf crisis, as the gap between Israeli and American interests has widened because of the Bush administration's efforts to hold together its Arab coalition against Saddam Hussein.

"The job is exciting and probably more challenging than it would have been before August 2," Cardin said.

Her most controversial previous role in the Jewish world was as a leader of the huge 1988 protest by American Jewry over the "Who is a Jew" issue. When Shamir was on the brink of amending the law of return to deny recognition as Jews to those converted by Reform and Conservative rabbis, Cardin led the American Jewish leaders who informed him that Israel as a whole, and particularly the Likud, would lose U.S. Jewish support if Reform and Conservative Judaism were delegitimized.

Cardin sought to reassure the Orthodox members of the Presidents Conference, who were uneasy about her selection, in a special meeting she held with them earlier in the month. She said she had promised them that "the conference does not address issues of religion as agenda items," and that she intended to put her personal convictions aside and speak for the consensus of Jewish organizations when addressing political issues.

Cardin has also faced controversy on a personal matter. Her husband Jerome was convicted and sent to jail in 1988 for stealing \$385,000 from a failed Baltimore savings and loan in which he was a key investor. Though sentenced to 25 years, he was released from prison early because of health reasons and currently lives at their second home in Miami.

She said, however, that she has put that scandal behind her, and that the multitude of Jewish organizations she has been involved with have scrutinized the record and established that she had no connection to any wrongdoing.

"I am not new to any of the decision-makers in Israel or the U.S.," Cardin said. "I have been functioning and acting

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in a leadership capacity for a sufficient number of years to be a known entity.