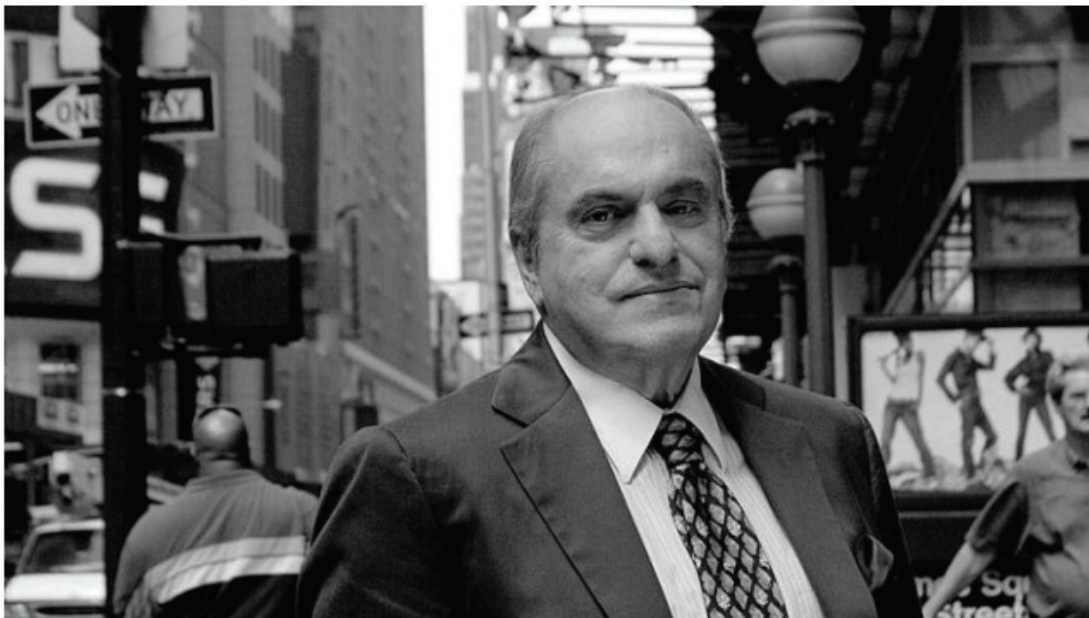


Leon Charney, TV show host and 'unsung hero' of Camp David, dies

New Yorker helped foster back-channel Israel-Egypt talks before 1979 deal; hailed by Carter for role in negotiations

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Undated image of Leon Charney in Times Square, New York (Wikimedia commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, Leon H. Charney Media Foundation Inc.)

NEW YORK – Leon Charney, the Jewish TV talk show host, lawyer and real estate tycoon who was said to have helped foster key back-channel negotiations between Israel and Egypt leading up to the Camp David Accords, has died.

Charney's death was announced by Florida Atlantic University, which awarded him an honorary doctorate last December. Charney was 77 or 78.

"Leon Charney shows unequivocally that one person can make a huge difference in the world," FAU President John Kelly said at the ceremony honoring Charney last year, calling him an "unsung champion of peace."

Charney was a behind-the-scenes adviser to President Jimmy Carter when he was negotiating the Camp David Accords in the late 1970s between Israel and Egypt. For one of Charney's books, Carter is quoted as describing Charney as "one of the unsung heroes of the peace process."

The fortune Charney earned as a lawyer and in real estate won him a place for several years on Forbes magazine's ranking of the 400 wealthiest Americans. In 2009, Charney came in at No. 296 with a fortune estimated at \$1.3 billion.

Later in life, Charney was known for his cable TV show, "The Leon Charney Report," which focused on politics and issues of Jewish interest. As host, Charney interviewed Israeli politicians, generals and entertainers, American journalists and Jewish community figures, among others.

Born in 1938 in New York to a Jewish immigrant family with little money, Charney attended Yeshiva University and helped finance his education with gigs as a synagogue cantor. After graduating from Brooklyn Law School, he became an entertainment lawyer. Through a combination of ambition and serendipity, Charney got involved in politics and made many high-powered friends, including Ezer Weizman, who later became Israel's president.

In the early 1970s, Charney used his connections to then-Sen. Vance Hartke of Indiana to help bring some 1,000 Soviet Jews to Israel, according to a Charney biography on the website of one of his philanthropic endeavors.

Charney entered the world of New York real estate only in 1980, buying a building at One Times Square. Thirty years on, Charney had amassed 1.5 million square feet of commercial office space.

In addition to dabbling in politics and TV, Charney penned several books, including "Battle of the Two Talmuds: Judaism's Struggle with Power, Glory and Guilt," "Back Door Channels: The Price of Peace" and "The Mystery of Kaddish: Its Profound Influence on Judaism."

Charney, who had two children, also was involved in a number of philanthropic activities. In January, he launched the Leon Charney Resolution Center on the campus of the Eastern Mediterranean International School, an international boarding school located in Ramat Hasharon, Israel.

He also made sizable gifts to the cardiac division at the NYU School of Medicine in New York and the School of Marine Sciences at the University of Haifa, both of which carry Charney's name.