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Message from the Chair

ASSEMBLYMEMBER MARC LEVINE, 10TH DISTRICT

I've always found guidance in the wisdom recorded in the Rabbinic text of the Talmud, Pirkei Avot. It is the only book in the 63 tracts of the Mishna that does not deal with laws. Pirkei Avot focuses on moral advice and ethics. In it, Rabbi Tarfon taught: "It is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but you are not free to desist from it either." This teaching is both insightful and motivating as the Jewish Caucus works on issues both specific to the Jewish community and universal to all Californians.

I could not be more proud of the substantive and purposeful work of the members of the caucus. As chair, I am privileged to serve with Senator Ben Allen as vice chair during this term. When I was first elected to the Legislature in 2012 there were only 6 Jewish lawmakers. Now, our membership consists of a diverse group of legislators with ambitious goals and policy agendas. They have all been instrumental in the justice we pursue and the successes we celebrate.



This past legislative year, the caucus secured \$2 million in the state budget for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program in the California Office of Emergency Services. This funding protects nonprofits across the state vulnerable to attack from acts of hate and violence. We hosted Israel's Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Economy, Avi Hasson, to enhance California's partnerships with Israel's robust high-tech industry. In June, the Jewish Caucus invited Members of the Legislature, Capitol staff, and community members to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the reunification of the City of Jerusalem. Our event took place simultaneously in Washington D.C. and Israel to create a moment of unity and connectedness between the two countries.

The caucus joined Governor Jerry Brown to discuss our priorities and the rise in anti-Semitism throughout the state. We worked with California's public universities to make sure Jewish students feel welcome on campus. The caucus also met with the University of California President Janet Napolitano to discuss campus climate and the 2016 Principles Against Intolerance. After anti-Semitic events took place at San Francisco State, the Jewish Caucus took quick action. Caucus members met with California State University Chancellor Tim White and San Francisco State University President Leslie Wong to discuss increased acts of anti-Semitism at San Francisco State.

Throughout the year we have strengthened relationships with our sister caucuses, including the LGBT, Women's, Black, Latino and Asian Pacific Islander caucuses. Along with the other caucuses, the Jewish Caucus actively supported immigrants and the 200,000 Californians participating in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

There is more work to do and we are not free to desist from it.

Updates from our Members

SENATOR BEN ALLEN, Vice Chair, 26TH DISTRICT

I was honored to serve as vice chair of the Jewish Caucus during this productive year, and I'm proud of what the caucus accomplished on policies that are important to our community.

One of our most significant achievements was securing a \$2 million appropriation in the state budget to improve security at places such as Jewish community centers, schools and synagogues, that are targets of hate-motivated violence. The funds will be used to upgrade buildings and security systems to help prepare for and prevent acts of violence. With the recent surge in hate-motivated threats this year, this funding is particularly timely. We are pleased that these funds will help dozens of nonprofit organizations.



Other highlights of the year included the festive reception we hosted in June to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, which was well-attended by legislators, staff and lobbyists. The 52nd annual Herschel Rosenthal Capitol Seder was a wonderful gathering of nearly 200 members of the Capitol Jewish community and supporters of our caucus. We also participated in a memorable exhibit at the California Museum called "Light and Noir – Exiles and Emigres in Hollywood, 1933 – 1950" that highlighted the amazing contributions of emigres who fled Nazi persecution, and went on to achieve unparalleled success in the film industry.

I appreciate the leadership of our chair, Assemblymember Marc Levine, who oversaw our caucus's activities with focus and good humor. I look forward to continuing to serve as vice chair in 2018 as we carry on the good work the caucus has done since its establishment in 2012.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER JOSE MEDINA, 61ST DISTRICT



I have been a proud member of the Jewish Caucus since I was elected into the Assembly in 2012. I am deeply concerned about the recent rise in anti-Semitism across the United States over the past year. Even in my own district, threats made against the Jewish community have surfaced.

Notwithstanding the very real prejudices that exist, I am encouraged to see that within my district, community members of all walks of life have joined together to take a stand against hate. Temple Beth El in Riverside, for example, has proved to be a place where community members can gather to not only discuss strategies to fight anti-Semitism, but also combat prejudices against other disenfranchised groups—such as undocumented immigrants, members of the LGBTQ community, and racial minorities.

In March, I attended an interfaith gathering hosted by Temple Beth El entitled, "Riverside Standing Together." This event enjoyed a multicultural group of participants which celebrated diversity, and shed light on the challenges faced by the local community and around the world. I am pleased that events such as this take place in my district, and I am proud to have participated.

Gatherings such as these unite us, and make us stronger against hate. Our commonalities outweigh our differences, and the more we can come together, the better. I look forward to making progress in the journey of social justice.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER MARC BERMAN, 24TH DISTRICT



As I reflect on my first year in the Legislature representing the heart of the Silicon Valley, it has been memorable for many reasons. I can attest to the value of the Jewish Caucus. In fact, I felt the benefits during the caucus retreat just a few weeks after Election Day, where I had an opportunity to get to know my colleagues and ask them many questions about my new life. Since then, the caucus has served as both a venue for conversation and reflection (particularly important for those of us new to the Legislature) as well as a means to advance policy and raise awareness during a time when we have seen an unprecedented increase in anti-Semitism nationwide.

For the past decade, the California State Assembly has honored survivors of the Holocaust during a designated California Holocaust Memorial. Though only in office for a matter of months, I was honored to author and present, on behalf of the Jewish Caucus, the annual resolution declaring April 24, 2017, California Holocaust Memorial Day – a day when we remember the 6 million Jews who died and countless other victims, survivors, and liberators of the Holocaust. It was not only a day to recognize survivors and heroic liberators; it was also a day of personal reflection for me. My grandmother was a childhood survivor of polio when the Nazis invaded Poland and created the Warsaw Ghetto. Although she eventually escaped, the effects of the atrocities stayed with her the remainder of her life.

I thank Jewish Caucus Chair Marc Levine and Vice Chair Ben Allen for their leadership, and I look forward to more progress in 2018.

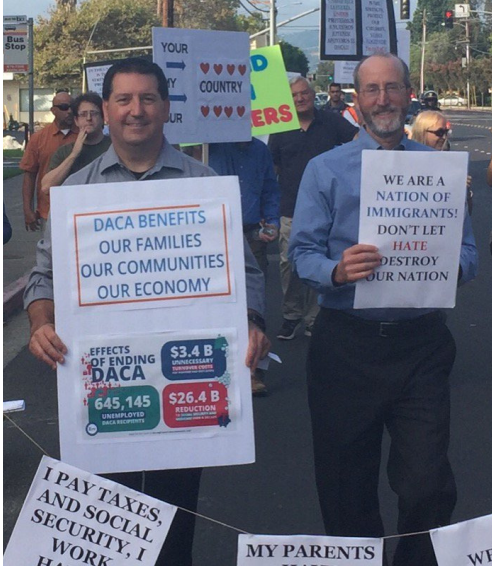
ASSEMBLYMEMBER TONY THURMOND, 15TH DISTRICT

It was a busy year in the legislature as we did everything in our power to stay true to California values in the era of Trump. I was proud to stand with the Members of the Jewish Caucus and push back against President Trump's efforts to isolate marginalized communities. I was honored that the entire Jewish Caucus in the Assembly joined as coauthors on my House Resolution 57 that called on Congress to censure Trump in the aftermath of his divisive comments following the tragic events in Charlottesville. Whether by maintaining schools and hospitals as safe places in the wake of federal immigration policy, continuing to lead on climate change and air quality regulations, or addressing hate speech and hate acts on school campuses, the California Legislature and the Jewish Caucus set an example for the rest of the nation.



In the upcoming legislative year, I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Jewish Caucus to continue promoting California values. I will be engaging with Caucus members on my bills addressing social justice and equity issues such as moving money out of the prison system into early education and afterschool programs, addressing the teacher shortage through affordable school employee housing, and increasing access to computer science education for all students. In these challenging times, the Jewish Caucus and the California Legislature continue to lead the fight for progress.

SENATOR STEVE GLAZER, 7TH DISTRICT



As a child, I wrestled with questions such as: If I had lived through the Krystallnacht, would I have stayed or fled? If I was hiding with Anne Frank's family could I have been quiet and helpful? If I was in the Warsaw Ghetto, could I have stayed strong and defiant and figured out an escape? And even more poignant in my thoughts today, had I not been a target would I have been able to see the signals of unrest and tyranny before they happened?

Would it be hurtful graffiti on a fence, a lawn, a church or synagogue that would have sounded the alarm? Would it be violence against my neighbors or my family? Would it be hate speech from a leader of my country?

What would be the signals that the life and liberty of others were in danger and what would I do about it?

If there is one clear truth from history, it is that nothing is ever stagnant. Waves of change have washed over the earth – from peace to war – and repeat again.

It is because we fear the peeling back of these layers of protection that we assemble here today.

Does the visible presence of neo-Nazis, unhooded Klansmen, white supremacists and others who preach hate and intolerance signal a new level of alert?

My radar, hard wired into me after a childhood of social turmoil and a schooling about the worst of human excess, is certainly on very high alert.

HERTZBERG'S HUG S'MAYACH, 18TH DISTRICT

On Sunday, October 8, Senator Bob Hertzberg hosted his first Legislative Sukkot Bagel Brunch at his home in Van Nuys. The large sukkah sat over 30 people and featured decorations and artwork from local synagogues.

Sen. Hertzberg provided updates from the recent legislative session, touching on housing bills that address the State's homeless epidemic, as well as his signature bail reform effort, which lay leaders from Bend the Arc who were in attendance have actively supported. He also highlighted the work of California's Legislative Jewish Caucus.

Rabbi Noah Farkas, Rabbi at Valley Beth Shalom, a prominent social justice leader and County Housing Commissioner in Los Angeles, explained the holiday of Sukkot and the symbolism of sitting inside a temporary structure, representing the fragility of life. The brunch attracted a cross section of Valley community constituents and Jewish community leaders.



The most moving moment of the morning was when after a round of introductions it was clear that a range of people, from observant Jews to those who had never been in a sukkah before, were all sitting together and learning. After explaining the symbolism of the lulav and etrog, Rabbi Farkas acknowledged those who were in a sukkah for the first time and led everyone in a shehechyanu, celebrating this first experience together.

SENATOR SCOTT WIENER, 11TH DISTRICT

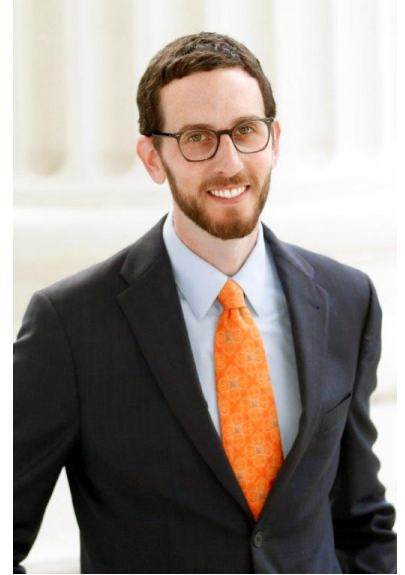
Across the country, we're seeing an alarming rise in anti-Semitism, driven by a President who coddles and enables white supremacist groups. It's easy in California, and in cities like San Francisco, to think that we aren't susceptible to the rise of these dark divisions, but even one of the most progressive cities in the country faces this challenge.

Earlier this year, the Jewish Caucus intervened in what had become a hostile environment toward Jewish students at San Francisco State University. An organized anti-Israel movement on campus culminated with the exclusion of Hillel from participating in a campus resource fair. The idea that a group would be barred from partaking in campus activities is jarring and unacceptable at any institution, let alone a public university. This incident went far beyond anti-Israel advocacy - Hillel is simply a Jewish student group - and tipped into anti-Semitism.

All students have a right to express their views, including opposition to policies of the State of Israel. Students even have a right to express opposition to the existence of the State of Israel, as much as I disagree with that view. But we cross a line when the University allows an atmosphere of hostility toward Jewish students.

The Jewish Caucus, under the leadership of our chair, Assemblymember Marc Levine, met with SF State President Les Wong and CSU Chancellor Timothy White to express our deep concerns about the hostile environment for Jewish students on campus and the need for immediate corrective action. President Wong and Chancellor White both committed to take firm action to improve the atmosphere at SF State, to address past issues, and to ensure no future repeats.

This problem won't be fixed overnight. Yet, it has been valuable for the Jewish Caucus to engage and show leadership on an issue so critical to the Bay Area Jewish community. I want to thank Assemblymember Levine for his leadership. Our community and country are stronger when we work together to share and support our diversity.



SENATOR HENRY STERN, 27TH DISTRICT

The California Legislative Jewish Caucus is comprised of some of the finest legislators in the state—an emerging power base for justice, equality and progress in the halls of the Capitol. Beyond Sacramento, the Caucus has forged a beachhead to fight against rising tides of anti-Semitism and hatred in every pocket of California.

For healing the world is not a gentle or passive mission. We must stand tall as Jews and defenders of the oppressed and marginalized. If not us, who? If not now, when?



SENATOR HANNAH-BETH JACKSON, 19TH DISTRICT

Responding to the violent and alarming displays of white supremacy and anti-Semitism in Charlottesville, Virginia last August, California Senate Judiciary Chair Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson convened a hearing in early October to examine the status of hate groups in California and to make sure our state is doing everything possible to prevent such a tragedy from recurring here.



The Anti-Defamation League's Joanna Mendelson reported to Committee members on the significant increase in race-based hate crime, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism over the past two years. She noted California is home to the largest population of white supremacists and neo-Nazis in the nation. Several panelists, including the Jewish Community Relations Council's Jessica Trubowitch, went on to describe how the resulting sense of fear and intimidation is impacting the State's large Jewish population.

"I'm proud that in California, we view our tremendous diversity as a strength and we strive for inclusion and respect for all of our residents," Senator Jackson remarked, "but we are fooling ourselves if we think nothing like Charlottesville could ever happen here."

Federal constitutional doctrines limit what government entities and officials can do to prevent people from engaging in hate speech. That's the clear conclusion from Supreme Court decisions like that affirming the right of the American Nazi Party to march publicly in Skokie, Illinois. Nonetheless, there are many ways that government officials can use their voice and their policy to make a more inclusive vision for the State.

Senator Jackson is committed to finding ways to make sure that the vision of a peaceful and inclusive California prevails over the sick, cowardly nonsense these guys are spewing.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER BLANCA RUBIO, 48TH DISTRICT



It is a great honor to be a part of the California Legislative Jewish Caucus (CLJC). I would like to share with you my personal story regarding my Jewish Heritage, how I first learned of it and the childhood memories that painted the portrait of this family truth— along with a major highlight from this year's CLJC efforts.

Ten years ago my cousin learned of our Jewish ancestors dating back to 1492 in the Iberian Peninsula who were kicked out, driving the emigration of our people to Mexico. It brought back memories of growing up in Mexico playing a game we called "tomo-tado." To play the game we used a four-sided spinning top with pictures on each side officially known to the Jewish Community as a dreidel. I joined the Jewish Caucus, knowing of my Jewish heritage, but not our lineage. Earlier this year, I decided to get my DNA tested and I'm proud to say I am 48 percent Sephardic Jew.

As an immigrant, I understand the struggles one must overcome to obtain equal protection under the law. A vivid highlight from this year's CLJC efforts was showing support for the 200,000 California participants in the DACA program by urging the President to rescind his decision targeting Dreamers. Like me, DACA participants traveled thousands of miles to our country for better opportunities and I will continue to advocate for their protection.

I look forward to continuing, alongside my colleagues, to advance our shared goal to be a Jewish voice for justice, equality, progress and to serve as a resource and advocate for the Jewish Community as a whole.



OUR MISSION

To be a Jewish voice for justice, equality, and progress.

To promote the educational, social, legislative, professional and cultural interests of its members.

To serve as a resource and advocate on behalf of the professional, educational, social, political and cultural concerns of the Jewish Community.

To develop and advance programs and policies that further the interests of the Jewish Caucus.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAUCUS

Visit <http://jewishcaucus.legislature.ca.gov>

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