

President Holloway, thank you for welcoming us to the Rutgers family. I'm encouraged to hear about your recent trip to Israel, and rather than heed the calls of divestment, you've chosen to work closer with the Jewish state, by signing a Memorandum of Understanding between Rutgers and Tel Aviv University, to boost research collaboration between the two schools. That's a wonderful development.

Today, of course we witnessed another milestone — the prime minister of Israel, Naftali Bennett is visiting the United Arab Emirates — the first official visit of an Israeli prime minister to any Gulf nation. It's significant to see the Abraham Accords continue to sow seeds of peace with progress toward normalization between Israel and Arab states. I was lucky enough actually to be at the White House for the signings in September 2020. What's particularly remarkable is that we're seeing Gulf nations moving toward peace with Israel, while many of our college campuses are moving away from Israel, unfortunately, and Palestinians are continuing to attack our key ally.

President Holloway, I appreciate your commitment to excellence and to disagree civilly, as you artfully articulated in your inaugural address, which I read again today, which is really a special speech. As you said in your remarks, "When we disagree, we will do so without denying one another's dignity. This is what excellence looks like." And I couldn't agree more, and how we should, of course, judge this moment — debating was civility, striving toward a common goal, recognizing our diversity of ideas and backgrounds is indeed one of our greatest strengths — not just at Rutgers, but of course, as the United States of America.

I also want to thank Rabbi Reed for hosting us in this beautiful facility. We're on the campus, home to 6,400 Jewish undergrads — the most in the country.

You have such wonderful, vibrant, and active Jewish life here on campus, and this particular facility, this new facility, the largest Jewish camp facility in the entire country — the building, I mean, this makes the Capitol look small.

We should all be very proud of this community and all you do for the university and for our state. Dating back to 1943, the work that Rutgers Hillel has done for students — to explore their Jewish identity and to support the Jewish community, whether through Shabbat dinners, trips to Israel, volunteer service in the community, or simply a place to study on campus — and I think you're in the middle of exams or getting close to it — is so important.

I'm honored to join with you today and share a little bit about my own story, my upbringing in New Jersey, the values I learned, and how I try to bring these values to my work in Congress for our beloved state, every single day.

I'm here today, as we're witness to so many growing troubling issues in our world, to discuss the importance of standing up to antisemitism and hate and extremism in our own state, our country, and around the world, and how we must address how these threats and extreme anti-Israel and

antisemitic incidents can affect our campuses, our learning, marginalizing our students, and the safety of our broader community.

As I mentioned, I grew up in a North Jersey household. My mom, of blessing memory, was a nursery school teacher and my dad owned day five and dime. I went to Hebrew school, observed the high holidays, and became a bar mitzvah. I went to the University of Pennsylvania for college, couldn't get into Rutgers, was active in my historically Jewish fraternity — Alpha Epsilon Pi — had my share of Shabbat dinners at Hillel there, and later served on the national foundation board of AEPi. I was also active in Jewish causes in graduate school, in Oxford, where I took a leadership role in the L'Chaim Society there in England.

My wife, Marla, whose grandparents lost most of their families in the Shoah — we're both very proud to pass on the lessons, values, and customs that we were blessed with to our two children, our son, Ben, our daughter, Ellie, who will become a bat mitzvah this June. She's got the hard part; she's studying away. We stress the importance of tikkun olam — to repair the world, or, put another way, to perfect our union. That's something I aspire to everyday in my job, and it's a philosophy that seems more necessary than ever.

As we all know, antisemitism is nothing new. We have certainly faced more virulent, painful, and punishing moments in our history. But in recent years, what had been simmering beneath the surface has now been uncorked and we are seeing it rear its ugly head from extremists both on the far right and the far left.

Now, there are many reasons for this most recent resurgence — I place a lot of blame on the explosion of social media and cable news, where we're able to cloister ourselves into ever smaller communities, which often become echo chambers of certain news, anger, finger pointing, and factual inaccuracies.

This reality has resulted in even greater division and deep seated fury. It's not only social media that is driving the rise we see in antisemitism. With, of course, the younger generations' distance going on, they lack a direct connection to someone who lived through the Holocaust — others simply haven't learned about the Holocaust at all, or how Israel came to be.

Instead of celebrating our history and diversity, whether that's Irish, Jewish, Black, or Latino, there's so many issues that are tearing us apart — over our faiths, race, and backgrounds, and it's happening in a moment when we greatly need unity and healing.

This division has seeped into our high schools, onto our college campuses, into our municipal council meetings, and even to the United States Capitol, and has sparked debates ranging from critical race theory to intersectionality. And, instead of sitting down together and working through our differences of opinion and thought — the very foundation of academia — we shoot off a tweet, cast judgment, and then ask questions later.

Today, here at Rutgers Hillel, I want to focus on one particular casualty from that division in Jersey and here on campus, among students and professors. We all know that antisemitism is on the rise here at home, our college campuses, and around the world. According to the Anti-Defamation League, ADL, last year was the third highest year for antisemitism incidents in New Jersey and across the entire nation — even in the midst of a global pandemic. And in a 2020 report, the FBI found that antisemitic crimes make up more than half of all religiously motivated crimes.

Just think about that: a population of fewer than 2% of the United States makes up more than half of the hate crimes in the entire country. An ADL survey this March said that 63% of American Jews have experienced or heard antisemitic comments, slurs, or threats in the past year, most of them online. Like many of you, I have experienced far too many of antisemitic incidents firsthand, including swastikas on my campaign signs, slurs on my Facebook page, and to my face, and, unfortunately, in the halls of Congress.

Not long ago, I held an event in my district to talk about the benefits of the bipartisan federal infrastructure bill, only to have members of the Working Families Party disrupt the event by screaming “Jew” at me. What has our country come to?

I've heard from students and families across the state who have been deeply impacted by the recent rise in hatred, bigotry, and intolerance, including right here at Rutgers. Just a few blocks from here, at the same Jewish fraternity I was part of — Alpha Epsilon Pi — was vandalized during the fraternity's 24-hour reading of the names of the Holocaust victims for Yom HaShoah.

New Jersey now has the third highest rate of hate crimes in the entire country. And, of course, it's not only Jewish people or the victims. I've spent many hours on the phone with an imam, a rabbi, a priest, a superintendent, grappling with how to handle a racial or religious slur on the bathroom wall. I'll never forget walking over broken glass in Jersey City when that kosher grocery store front was shot up, and visiting the families who lost loved ones.

Regardless of background, unfortunately hate rears its head in so many communities. In light of these threats, it's critical that we work together with our religious communities and institutions to make sure that we have the resources that we need here in New Jersey and across the nation to protect religious freedom and to keep us all safe.

We must also speak up clearly against antisemitism and all forms of hatred and bigotry, whether that's against Catholics or Muslims, Blacks or Latinos — only by working together can we ensure there's no place for hate anywhere in our state.

As Tom Lantos, the only Holocaust survivor to have served in the United States Congress warned us, “The veneer of civilization is paper thin. We are its guardians, and we can never rest.”

That's why we're counting on our community here at Rutgers, New Jersey's flagship public university, to stand strong in our shared fight against hate. Even a slight, slight crack in this paper, thin veneer can allow a flood of these evils to take an even tighter hold of our society, as we have seen many times before in Jewish history. We cannot allow these ideas to fester, to go unchecked, or to be further embraced. We must always stand up and speak out whenever and wherever we see it.

Let me be as clear as I can be: No student deserves to be targeted because of who they are or what they believe — here or anywhere.

When the Jewish community at Rutgers is confronted by hate or intolerance, this is an attack on all of us, regardless of background, regardless of faith. No Jewish student should feel uncomfortable sitting in a classroom wondering if her professor doesn't accept them because of her faith.

Earlier this year, when the foreign terrorist organization, Hamas, attacked Israel, it was disgraceful that the part-time faculty union at Rutgers — New Jersey's flagship public university — sided with the terrorists. It was even more sickening that the university felt that it had trouble defending the pro-Israel students on campus and stand up to such blatant antisemitism. They had to back down from the initial comments of support.

When the part-time faculty union called for the University to boycott Israel as part of the anti-Semitic BDS movement, all you could hear from Rutgers were crickets — it's shameful, and it's unfortunate. Instead of choosing to address hate and animosity toward our ally Israel, the University felt that the pressure was so intense that it had to change its course.

Now, we need to — everybody on campus — have the moral compass and fortitude to stand up for what's right.

It's not always easy — there's a lot of noise. I know it; I experience it all the time. It can be overwhelming and, frankly, it comes from all different perspectives, and it's very difficult, especially in a university setting.

Many students have also witnessed hostile antisemitic tropes and rhetoric associated with aggressive BDS tactics here.

For example, the campus student group Students for Justice in Palestine has not only called for BDS, they have vocally and repeatedly spoken out against fellow students, the Jewish community, and Hillel for being Zionists.

While BDS, which as you all know, stands for the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement, is painted as a socially-progressive cause on college campuses, that could not be further from the truth.

BDS inherently denies the Jewish people's 3,000-year-old connection to the land of Israel, while seeking to delegitimize Israel and deny its right to exist as a Jewish state. And the founder of the BDS movement has called for the destruction of Israel.

This is antisemitism dressed up as political purity.

While it's absolutely acceptable for students and faculty to speak their minds and disagree, the goal of the BDS movement is eradication of Israel. Imagine if someone called for the destruction of one of the 22 countries in the Arab league?

When organizations, companies, and institutions validate BDS, they're contributing to the problem and furthering that hatred.

That's why it was deeply problematic when the New Jersey-connected entities like Ben and Jerry's chose to participate and validate the movement by refusing to do business in the West Bank. Like others, I called on the Ben and Jerry's parent company, Unilever, to rectify the situation and our governor, Governor Murphy, took the important and laudable step of divesting in Jersey from Unilever stocks until the company addresses Ben and Jerry's support of the antisemitic movement. That's leadership.

We cannot allow actions like these to go unchecked. I've also asked the United States Securities and Exchange Commission, the SEC, to request Unilever amend their regulatory filings and disclose the material, financial risk factors they face by participating in the antisemitic BDS movement, including the approximate 13% decline in their stock since the announcement of the boycott.

Interestingly, when the part-time faculty union at Rutgers harshly criticized America's key ally and called for the University to divest from Israel, they blatantly ignored other relevant and pertinent realities. There was no mention that Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization as designated by the United States of America, attacked our key democratic ally Israel. There was no mention of how Israel is the only country in the Middle East that permits members of the LGBTQ community to live freely, has Arabs in the Knesset, and leads the world in women's rights. No mention of the Palestinian textbooks in schools that propagate hate and call for the destruction of the Jewish state. Nor were there calls to stand in support of women's equality in Gaza, where male relatives can petition a court to prevent a woman from traveling.

Where was the part-time faculty union's outrage when Afaf al-Najar, a nineteen-year-old student with a scholarship opportunity in Turkey, could not leave Gaza because her father filed a petition that prevented her from traveling? Or when a Hamas Commander was killed in 2016 simply for being gay?

This double-standard that the part-time faculty union holds — of solely criticizing Israel and not Hamas — has no place at Rutgers and it must end.

Again, there is nothing wrong with having a robust debate about our foreign policy or the policies of a foreign government. We have it in the House of Representatives nearly every day, I welcome it. But, it is not open season for individuals to talk of “dual loyalty,” “the Benjamins,” “space lasers,” “Israel’s hypnotic trance on the world,” smearing that state as “genocidal” or practicing “apartheid,” or other ancient and very dangerous tropes.

Unabashed anti-Zionism may not be used as a smokescreen for antisemitism, as it far too often is.

When Jews are confronted with calls for the destruction of the state of Israel through boycotts, divestments, and sanctions — a country where half of the Jews of the world live and is the only safe place for a people who face genocide — that is antisemitism.

When only Jews are denied the right to self-determination, to live a peaceful existence as a Jewish state — that is antisemitism.

When students are afraid to outwardly support the state of Israel on campus because of fear that their professors will treat them differently — that is antisemitism.

When the United Nations ignores human rights violations in Arab and Muslim states, but instead focuses like a laser on Israel — that is antisemitism.

We must continue to insist that there be no tolerance for antisemitism in our society.

Universities are places of freedom of exchange of ideas and debate — not hate. And I know that groups, organizations, and centers at Rutgers live up to and reflect common and fundamental Rutgers values — the same values President Holloway talked about in his inaugural speech and have continued to espouse.

So, I feel it's very important that when we see anyone acting outside the lines of living up to the ideals of Rutgers, they should not be allowed to brandish the Rutgers badge.

At an event marking the twentieth anniversary of September 11, Rutgers' Center for Security, Race and Rights held an event with several controversial speakers, including those who have ties to terrorist organizations.

It is unconscionable that a day meant to reflect on the deadliest attack on United States soil was used to provide a platform to those affiliated with Palestinian Islamic Jihad — a foreign terrorist organization designated by the United States. There is simply no reason why those with ties to militant terrorist organizations, groups who have killed civilians, deserve a podium to students

here at Rutgers. With domestic terrorists and homegrown violent extremists often being inspired by propaganda from foreign terrorists, we must castigate and alienate these groups and their associates wherever they are, especially at New Jersey's flagship public university.

At another event, the same group hosted Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) — whose officials have connections to Al-Qaeda and Hamas networks.

Hamas sympathizers, or others with ties to other terrorist organizations involved in 9/11, have no place on college campuses. Associates of Palestinian Islamic Jihad have no place on this college campus. I know we all believe that hate has no home here. It's time we all practice what we preach.

If these are the speakers shaping the minds of students on campuses, how can any university claim to be working against antisemitism?

The free exchange of ideas does not mean support for those who support terrorism and violent extremism.

That's why I'm so honored to be here, to join forces with all of you. And the fact that President Holloway took time out of his incredibly busy schedule, not only to travel to Israel, not only to visit with you weeks ago, and to talk to you and to listen, and to respect you, as he respects so many others across the campus and across the state — but the fact that I know he stands strongly with us against antisemitism and to make sure that we rededicate ourselves to addressing all forms of hate and to fight back against the antisemitism Rutgers students face.

The University administration, I know, will not be intimidated by any part-time faculty union or anyone else on campus.

I'm confident that, working together, we can improve the trust, understanding, and the dialogue between the Jewish community and Rutgers here at Hillel and beyond. The Jewish community must be a vital partner in conversations about what happens here on this campus.

First, given the knowledge about the Holocaust is beginning to fade, and we know that, it's more important than ever for educators to commemorate the Holocaust, and discuss and learn from its history — whether that's fighting for legislation, which I have — the Never Again Education Act — to create a new grant program — bipartisan — for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to provide schools and teachers with the resources and tools they need to teach about the Holocaust and make sure we address hate and intolerance and the impact it can have on society.

Many of us work together on the NO HATE Act, a bill that will strengthen federal law to combat hate speech, threats, and attacks against anyone. This will help ensure that our nation can better respond to and combat despicable acts of hatred.

Additionally, we must prioritize the safety and security of areas like Hillel and other Jewish organizations — and, frankly, any religious organizations deserve protection for religious freedom, whether it's a temple or a mosque, it's very important. That's why I've fought so hard for Nonprofit Security Grant Programs and other resources — and Rutgers should have the same resources that the federal government, makes sure they're coming back to New Jersey, and Rutgers should also have what they need to protect everybody. And sending a clear message that there will be consequences, not excuses, when Jewish students and entities are attacked or targeted — or any religious group. Swastikas on dorms, or when there are slurs used against Jews or when the part-time faculty union urges BDS, or takes the side of a terrorist organization — no excuses. And, considering recent events, it's important to send a clear message that all Rutgers students and community members, including those who identify as Jewish or pro-Israel, are equally valued and they shouldn't be afraid to be penalized or singled out. That goes for anyone of any race, religion, gender — you name it — especially as white supremacy is on the rise, and across the nation, we must not tolerate it in any form.

We cannot forget that just two years ago, white supremacists and far right extremists were marching on a university campus in Charlottesville, chanting “Jews Will Not Replace Us.”

When it comes to faith, all Americans should be able to observe their religion free from fear. So, again, I want to thank you all for being here today, and, again, I want to thank the University President for being here today.

Rutgers must be consistent and I know they will be — standing up against any kind of forms of intimidation or aggression, wherever they see it. I know we will all be watching — with pride for Rutgers and pride for the state of New Jersey.

And let me finish with the words of a former Rutgers law professor you may have heard of, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She reminded me why I'm so passionate about calling out antisemitism and supporting the U.S.-Israel relationship, which is so essential to protecting the United States of America. She said, “The demand for justice runs through the entirety of the Jewish tradition. I hope I will have the strength and courage to remain constant in the service of that demand.”

We cannot shy away from that demand for justice. We must support Jewish students and the Jewish community here at Rutgers, across New Jersey, and across our great country.

If we stand together, support one another against hatred, I believe that our best days will always, always be ahead of us.

Thank you again, President Holloway, Rabbi, Rutgers community for coming together.

God bless all of you, God bless our students, and may God continue to bless and watch over the United States of America.