

Voices Interview with Gary Jones

Below is an article published in the August 11 edition of the Voices newspaper in which our Executive Director was interviewed regarding the Federation's statement commending the Southbury's Board of Selectmen's response to the political banner containing swastikas and asked to discuss antisemitism and hate generally.

Statement Commends Board for Condemning Use of Swastika

by Stephen Pendergast Aug 11, 2021

SOUTHBURY — Executive Director Gary Jones, on behalf of the Jewish Federation of Western Connecticut, and Rabbi Eric Polokoff, on behalf of B'nai Israel, wrote a joint statement in response to the use of a swastika in a political protest on Saturday, July 24.

The swastika was used to portray the Democratic Party as the modern day Nazi party and featured two Democratic donkeys overlaid with swastikas.

Their statement, "commends the Southbury Board of Selectmen for its bipartisan statement condemning the use of swastikas on a political banner displayed briefly over the weekend. The display of a swastika to make a partisan political point is not only morally wrong, it trivializes the Holocaust and the suffering of the Jewish people brought about by Nazi Germany and its collaborators

"As the Board of Selectmen's statement notes, Southbury has a celebrated history of opposing Nazism and the hate that it represents. By forcefully speaking out against the use of the swastika and other symbols of hate, the Town has added a new chapter to that celebrated history."

Voices spoke to Mr. Jones on Friday, August 6, and followed up on his statement and about anti-Semitism in general.

Mr. Jones thanked the selectmen for making a clear and bipartisan statement condemning the hate symbol.

"When people show support for the victims, it changes the narrative," he said. "It can create allies for the victims."

He said that the antidote for hate symbols and hateful rhetoric is to have the leaders and adults in the room speak out against it.

"I always like to say that you don't judge a community by the fact that

something bad happened there. You judge a community by the way the community responds to the bad action that happened there,” he said.

“The community as a whole should feel proud of itself,” he continued. “Good for Southbury.”

Mr. Jones noted that using a swastika in a political context was grossly disproportionate to the historic horror of Nazi Germany and showed a lack of understanding of what Nazism means in the world.

He continued, “it’s deeply offensive because it took perhaps the most grotesque portion of history in the world that although not exclusively, principally targeted Jews, and used that to make a political point. That’s not good.”

He said that the swastika is a painful reminder for members of the Jewish community, some of whom are Holocaust survivors or have family members who are survivors.

“We’ve got to expect better of our country,” he said.

Mr. Jones noted that anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic sentiments were not new, and that this modern iteration of anti-Semitism is an echo of anti-Semitism that historically has come from both sides of the political aisle.

Mr. Jones noted that the creation of Israel post-World War II and social media have added different layers to modern day hate and anti-Semitism.

“You have the ability to reach out and to hear people from all across the world,” he said. “Social media unlocks the ability of people to find kindred spirits, in a negative way, all across the globe.”

He said social media and the internet in general contain anti-Semitic materials that seem to stay and circulate. These materials can continue to inform people and make a person feel that others share their hateful perspectives, which in turn reinforces that belief.

“We really do need to count on the social media companies to do a much better job on policing and saying that [hate] is not acceptable,” he said. “There are consequences to speech.”

He said people have to stand against the hatred and speak truth and goodness.

“There are real consequences to this, and at a peril we ignore these bad things,” he said.

However, Mr. Jones said he is hopeful looking towards the future.

“I always have hope, but I always have concern, too,” he said.

Mr. Jones said that, comparatively America is remarkably less anti-Semitic than the rest of the world. However, anti-Semitism does exist, and he said the Anti-Defamation League estimates 12 to 15 percent of people profess

meaningful anti-Semitic beliefs.

“That’s much lower than the rest of the world, but that’s still a lot of people,” he said.

He continued that those who do make anti-Semitic remarks or share content are not necessarily hardened anti-Semites, and often a respectful and informative conversation can help someone change their ways.

“Certainly for people who are trying to be decent people, the way you approach them is by having a thoughtful conversation,” he said. “Most people don’t want to go around hurting people.”

He said that with those people we have to take the time to have a respectful conversation with them to teach them why it’s wrong.

“The best scenario in all these things is that there is someone to stand up for the victims who is not a member of the victims,” he said.

Mr. Jones said that allies are crucial in situations when hateful speech or acts of hate occur because it shows support for the victims while also taking the burden of education off the victims’ shoulders.

“It is a burden,” he said. “The best case scenario is when the victims have allies that come out and make the statement and do the teaching on behalf of the victims.”

He said the key to preventing hate is to convert bystanders to allies.

“Bad things happen when bystanders are bystanders,” he said. “You can often get good results when the bystanders take the initiative to stand up for the victims and educate or take action against the perpetrator.”

He continued, “if you do the right thing in the face of hate, it sends the right message and hopefully educates everyone else about what’s right and what’s wrong and that’s key.”

Mr. Jones noted a Jewish concept known as Tikkun Olam, which literally translates to “repair of the world.”

“What it means as a practical matter is that God gave us an imperfect world. It’s up to people to keep working to make it better and better,” he said.

Mr. Jones said that it reminds us all to keep trying to improve the world, and that the world can be improved.

He concluded, “There’s nothing magical. There’s hate out there, and if we work together, we can beat it.”

Full Article from Voices News Here



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The Jewish Federations®
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JFNA statement on the Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act

The Jewish Federations of North America are thankful to Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and John Hoeven (R-ND) for their work on securing the Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act in the bipartisan infrastructure deal approved in the Senate Tuesday night!

The \$1 trillion, bipartisan infrastructure bill that passed in the Senate last night included the Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act, which will provide \$50 million over 5 years for nonprofit energy efficiency upgrades.

"America's nonprofits, including the senior centers, community health organizations and food pantries that provide assistance for the most vulnerable, are often housed in outdated facilities and do not have the resources to modernize them. The Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act would fix that, paving the way for nonprofits to upgrade drafty, poorly insulated, decades-old buildings with inefficient heating and cooling systems and save on energy costs, all while reducing their environmental impact," Jewish Federations President and CEO Eric Fingerhut said.

"The Jewish Federations are thankful to Sen. Klobuchar and and Sen. Hoeven for advancing this important initiative."

SPEAKER SERIES, SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2021 – 10:00 AM



**GREATER WASHINGTON COALITION FOR
JEWISH LIFE**

Contact: Sally A. Talarico
Phone: 860-354-5406
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**"Finding Our Fathers (and Mothers, too): The
Joys and Pitfalls of Tracing Jewish Ancestors"**

Dan Rothenberg, father of today's Jewish Genealogy Movement, will be speaking on his book, "Finding Our Fathers," the first English-language guidebook to trace Jewish ancestors. It subsequently launched a global movement that today embraces dozens of organizations, research publications and computer databases...all dedicated to connecting Jews with their long-lost ancestors and relatives.

In Dan's talk, he discusses how he first got into Jewish genealogy as a 16-

year-old boy in the cemetery at his Grandmother's funeral. Although Jews long assumed they couldn't trace written 10 more books on many diverse subjects. He has been the Chief Editor of seven publications, most recently, Broad StreetReview. He has also been a columnist for The Philadelphia Enquirer, a syndicated film-critic and a contributor their ancestors back more than two or three generations, he points out that Jewish ancestor hunters enjoy some unique advantages. What are those advantages? Join Dan on August 22 and find out!

Dan Rothenberg graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and has to magazines such as Town and Country, Forbes, The New York Times Magazine to name a few.

Join Zoom Meeting
Doors open at 9:45 am:

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Meeting ID: 881 2502 7038
Passcode: 910397
TEL: (929)205-6099

UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Save The Date

- Thursday, September 2, 2021 at 12 P.M. Love&Knishes
- Sunday, October 17, 2021 at 10 A.M. Virtual Annual Campaign Kick-off Breakfast

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