



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins: Antisemitism Rears its Ugly Head in New York

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November 9, 2023

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Antisemitism Rears its Ugly Head in New York

Friends,

The situation in the Middle East has always been a powder keg and there's a lot to unpack there. Not only has it challenged the best minds since 1948, it has divided the region for thousands of years. The wounds are deep and old so I won't try to dissect this ancient dispute via an email. It can't be done and that's just the plain truth.

However, I would like to tackle what's happened in New York since the October 7th Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel. Like you, I watched the videos from victims and astonishingly, even from the body cams of the attackers. What I saw were carefree young people at a music festival and looks of confusion as they incredulously watched the sky. I saw them being chased across fields and savagely gunned down. I watched civilians being attacked, taken hostage, and subsequently heard of victims being tortured and murdered in gruesome fashion, including women and children.

Some, American citizens among them, were paraded through the streets in complete defiance of Geneva Conventions with a barbarity that hasn't been seen in decades. That's what I saw, and I can't unsee it.

And while the Hamas celebration videos were distressing, nothing prepared me for Americans here at home cheering them on. But hate spreads faster than you think. Even just a little ember burns hot and spreads quickly when given enough oxygen. Sadly, it seems that oxygen is being provided on the campuses of American universities and high schools. Almost daily, pro-Hamas rallies turn into violent, ugly calls for the death of Jews and the destruction of Israel. Now we're left with kids removing the Star of David from their necks and skipping classes for fear of being attacked, right here in New York.

At Columbia University an Israeli student was assaulted after he confronted a woman for tearing down posters of Israeli hostages. At an anti-Israel protest at Binghamton University they announced that "Israel is worse than Nazi Germany." At the Cooper Union, Jewish students, fearing for their safety during an anti-Israel rally, barricaded themselves in the library. And things are so bad at New York University that Jewish students, faculty and alumni wrote a letter condemning the administration. It seems that in the name of progressivism, our system somehow fostered a new kind of intolerance movement, where anything but progress is being made. And lest there be any doubt, this hatred is not directed at Israel, but at Jews, right here in our communities, students in our schools.

Sadly, despite vibrant, Jewish communities that have long been part of the Long Island fabric, our schools are not immune either. The antisemitic graffiti has already started, the taunting text messages, and even slurs at sporting events. In Newsday, our educators said a polarized society and social media are "a recipe for disaster" because "young people are still figuring out who they are."

And that's where I land this. As a dad to four young daughters who love concerts, I cannot imagine the pain experienced by parents watching those videos. Nor can I conceive of being so worried that I advise my child to skip class or hide their identity. Admittedly, I hope I never do know what that's like and I'm ashamed that friends and neighbors feel this terrorized in their own neighborhoods. We're better than this. And maybe that's the point. Maybe one has to have lived a little and suffered a little to see the futility of hate. Maybe it takes some experience and some age to let empathy guide us instead of a "cause."

Most of us are good people. No matter where we come from, what faith or background - we work hard, we take care of our families, and we live and let live. But sometimes good people have to speak up. And now is that time. It took less than 30 days for antisemitism to take hold in the United States, the same nation that sent her sons to fight it 82 years ago. We cannot afford silence.

At the State we're asking Governor Hochul to join us in legislation that combats antisemitism in our schools, but I know there's no way to legislate the hate out of people's hearts. It must be challenged every day, fought every single day, by people like you and me. Please don't give that ember any room to breathe and grow, not even an inch. Lock arms with your neighbors, whomever they may be, and fight it because it's going to take every one of us to set this right.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack M. Martins". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "M".

Jack M. Martins
State Senator