

A defining moment for anti-Semitism



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Throughout this fall and into the winter, priorities for the organized Jewish community were becoming clear.

Our reality is coming to grips with the increase in violent anti-Semitism over the past two years. The Tree of Life tragedies in Pittsburgh were still fresh in our minds as the recent attack in Monsey, N.Y., took place.

Violent attacks in France in the early part of 2019 scared us as well, but shouldn't have been a surprise given the 74 percent rise in anti-Semitic incidents the French government had been reporting. After Jersey City and Monsey, you could almost hear people's thoughts - Pittsburgh ... again? Of course, Europe ... but now in the U.S? This is how our year ended.

One response was a march in New York that called for NO Hate and NO Fear. Yet, those defiant shouts underscored that hate is exactly what there is just too much of today. In Richmond, despite having so many amazing partners throughout the community and feeling like this is a place that is very safe for Jews - we still see the hate and very much feel the fear.

In a pointed article by Bari Weiss, the noted *New York Times* writer who often writes on anti-Semitism, she posed a very adept observation. Despite the focus of so many in the Jewish community on the rise of anti-Semitism; despite the myriad of organizations dedicated to its study and its eradication; despite all that - did we underestimate how deep and pervasive this oldest of hatreds was in America?

Did our unprecedented freedom and access to the levers of power in this country give us a false sense of security - so much so that we missed what was right in front of us.

On Jan. 12, a Standing Together RVA event on Anti-Semitism was held at the Virginia Ho-

ocaust Museum organized by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities in partnership with the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond and a number of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

On a panel made up of diverse community Interfaith leaders, Rabbi Michael Knopf of Temple Beth-El reflected on the Talmudic concept that "God loves difference."

He noted that over the past number of years, we have seen a cultural trend to attack difference or compel uniformity to one set of national beliefs. Others on the panel agreed and posited if a society begins to see difference or difference of opinion in a negative light or even as "evil," it should be no wonder that acts of bias and bigotry of a violent nature become more prevalent. In fact it is often anti-Semitism that becomes the harbinger of things to come.

In this context, as our Virginia Jewish Advocacy Day approaches, we should feel it as a genuine call to action to highlight our larger fears and concerns.

As a policy arm of the Federation, the Jewish Community Relations Committee has asked for money to be put in the budget for non-profit institution security. Gov. Ralph Northam has put that money in the budget to the tune of \$3 million, and we must make sure our legislators know the reasons why it must stay in the budget.

We are actively pursuing the development of a genuine Holocaust/Anti-Bias curriculum in our schools to attack the roots of bias and bigotry of all kinds and have garnered great support on that front from our community partners and the administration.

We are also in support of Attorney General Mark Herring's re-introduction of Hate-Crimes legislation. This year, we need to take this opportunity to let our voice be heard.

Please consider joining us on Feb. 5 on Virginia Jewish Advocacy Day.

To register, or for more information, visit www.jewishrichmond.org/JCRC. If you aren't able to join us, please consider contacting your Senators or Delegates about these issues and please do consider joining with us for future initiatives.

To reach me, email dcohen@jewishrichmond.org or call (804) 545-8626.

Editor's Note: To see an article and photos on the Standing Together RVA Anti-Semitism event held Jan. 12, see pages 26-27.

REGISTER TODAY

Virginia Jewish Advocacy Day

Wednesday, February 5

8 a.m. - 2 p.m.



*To RSVP and arrange
transportation from the Weinstein
JCC, visit
www.jewishrichmond.org/jcrc*

*Hosted by the Jewish Community
Relations Committee of the
Jewish Community Federation of
Richmond*

*St. Paul's Episcopal Church
815 E. Grace St., Richmond
The cost is \$36 for the event.*

Dietary Laws to be observed.

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