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# Gubernatorial Candidates Tout Support For Jewish Community in Digital Forum

By Debra Rubin | October 21, 2021

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New Jersey's gubernatorial candidates, during a virtual forum, sought to burnish their credentials with the Jewish community, stressing a strong alliance with Israel, forceful responses to combat antisemitism and initiatives to support hard-pressed nonprofits.

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The October 14 forum, sponsored by the Jewish Federations of New Jersey 19 days before the November 2 election, featured Democratic incumbent Phil Murphy and Republican challenger Jack Ciattarelli. Each separately gave opening and closing statements and took questions from leaders from the five participating federations.

“Participating in the democratic process is a core American Jewish value,” said Roy Tanzman, chair of the state organization and a past chair of the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey, in kicking off the hour-long forum. “This civic and religious duty during this unprecedented time is more important than ever, and it is important that we as Jewish communal leaders educate ourselves.”

Both candidates emphasized the valuable role the Jewish community plays in the cultural, civic and economic life of the state.

Calling it “one of the most consequential communities in the state and country,” Murphy cited his ties to both New Jersey’s Jewish community and that of Germany, where he served as American ambassador from 2009 to 2013. There he became committed to a “never again” philosophy that has resounded with him in the fight against antisemitism. “You’ve got my back and I guarantee you I have your back,” said Murphy.

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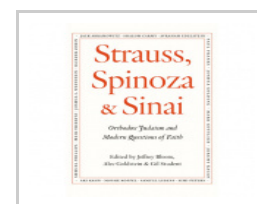
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Ciattarelli said New Jersey's more than 500,000 Jews make the state "more economically, intellectually and culturally vibrant."

Murphy said he had taken seven trips to Israel since 2014, including one while governor, and estimated bilateral trade between New Jersey and Israel is now about \$1.3 billion annually and rising.

Ciattarelli, a former state assemblyman from 2011-2018, said among the changes he plans to make would be establishing a new school-funding formula and distribution of state aid to achieve parity in certain state services and funding between private and public schools.

Ciattarelli said during his campaign he visited Israel, calling it a "life-changing experience," learning about threats to Israel's security in Sderot and meeting with entrepreneurs and business owners to learn about new technologies and innovations, to entice them to do business in New Jersey. "The reason that so important to me is I'm determined to make New Jersey a better place to do business, and that means increasing our bilateral trade with allies and partners like Israel," said Ciattarelli, adding that last year Israel did \$14 billion in bilateral trade with New York, calling the disparity between the two states "unacceptable."

Murphy said the partnership with Israel has deepened and grown throughout his administration, as evidenced by such initiatives as the New Jersey-Israel Commission, which he said has been "repopulated" and its executive director position filled after being defunded under former Governor Chris Christie.



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“Whether it’s religion, education, commerce or culture, innovation or economy, the ties between our state and Israel run very very deep,” said Murphy. He cited a joint business and technology venture between the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and anticipated more higher-education cooperation in the near future, including ventures between Rutgers University and the University of Tel Aviv.

“There’s no state in America that shares as many realities and similarities as New Jersey does with the state of Israel at all levels of government, education, culture,” said Murphy. “We’re the same size geographically... but that innovation, that character, that grit, the attitude I find we share overwhelmingly.”

Murphy also praised the state Division of Investment for divesting \$182 million in state pension funds from Unilever, the parent company of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream, over its decision not to sell in the Israeli territories, promising a continued fight against the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel.

Ciattarelli said he also would not tolerate any corporate actions supporting BDS or antisemitism, had issued a strong statement criticizing Ben & Jerry’s and while in the Assembly voted for the law through which the state undertook the divestiture.

Murphy noted that his administration has taken forceful action to counter rising antisemitism, including pressuring Facebook to take down Rise Up Ocean County’s antisemitic page, going after other hate websites and the people who painted swastikas on houses and streets in Bergen County. He said it was also important to teach children to understand hateful behavior is unacceptable and impress upon them the lessons of the Holocaust.

Additionally, Murphy said more money had been earmarked for security at private schools; that law enforcement had been mobilized in the fight; and that we “used our bullhorn” to speak out, adding, “Unfortunately, antisemitism is not something you can wrap a bow around and say we’re done. We have to exercise extreme vigilance forever and always, and I promise you I will be the governor who will.”

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Ciattarelli noted that too many districts statewide don't teach the Holocaust, although Holocaust education is mandated, and he would see that is rectified. He also said he would form a Jewish council he would sit with monthly to listen to issues affecting the community.

Ciattarelli said his administration "would not tolerate any form of discrimination or antisemitism" and he believed he was the first gubernatorial candidate to have a rabbi, Avi Richler, executive director of the Chabad of Gloucester County, on his advisory board.

"Unfortunately, when there is an antisemitic act we have to call it out for what it is and not delay in the telling the people of New Jersey that is an antisemitic act," said Ciattarelli. "It's not to be tolerated, and those who participated in the act will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law under our hate crimes legislation." He said he would also work with university leadership to fight antisemitic and anti-Israel bias on college campuses.

Murphy called the work the federation and their partners have done in the pandemic "absolutely extraordinary" and said his administration "put a ton of money on the street" through grants, loans and equity, including to charities, through the Sustain and Serve program, "a national model" in helping restaurants and individuals with food insecurity, allocated hundreds of millions of dollars in state and federal money to small businesses, rental assistance and childcare providers, relief for nonprofits, learning loss and mental health health, taking the burden off other nonprofit agencies.

The five participating federations were: the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey; Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest; Jewish Federation of Somerset Hunterdon and Warren Counties; Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey and Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey.

By Debra Rubin



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