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## AIPAC convention-goers split over Trump appearance

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Even as they applauded the turnout from their community at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's policy conference in Washington, DC, attendees from the Jewish Federation in the Heart of NJ were sharply split over the political controversy that loomed over much of AIPAC's proceedings between March 20 and 22.

Federation CEO Keith Krivitzky told *NJ Jewish News* he was pleased at the turnout of 200 people from the Heart of NJ — which encompasses Monmouth and Middlesex counties — twice the number of those who attended the conference in 2015. The boost in attendance, he said, "is the result of our great partnership with AIPAC."

Like nearly everyone else in an audience that topped 18,000 people, Krivitzky said he was deeply interested in hearing what the presidential candidates had to say about Israel.

"I think AIPAC was appropriate in inviting the candidates, and I am glad that most of the candidates" — Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, and Donald Trump delivered speeches — addressed the gathering. Their participation, said Krivitzky, "says something about the importance of Israel's relationship to the United States and keeping that focus on political leaders.

"And everybody was eager to hear what Donald Trump had to say."

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Among the AIPAC policy conference delegates at a reception sponsored by the Jewish Federation in the Heart of NJ are executive director Keith Krivitzky, front row, far left, and Alexa Silverman, director of AIPAC's NJ Region, third from left; and Rabbi Lisa Malik, back row, fifth from left, of Temple Beth Ahm of Aberdeen with members of her congregation.

*Photo courtesy Rabbi Lisa Malik*

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Trump had been an early source of contention; some delegates were wary of a statement he had earlier made stating that if he were elected he would be "neutral" regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Others, mainly rabbis, were planning a walkout under the banner of "Come Together Against Hate" — playing on the conference theme of "Come Together" — to voice objection to Trump's stances on a variety of issues and what they perceive as his animosity toward Mexicans, Muslims, and women, among other issues.

Krivitzky offered the following take on the rabbis who walked out during Trump's speech (in the end, 50-60 left the hall):

"AIPAC is not about making a statement about who you like and don't like," he said. "It is also about making a statement about the importance of the candidates to this community. AIPAC did an outstanding job of saying, 'We are inviting people into our home, and we treat them with respect.'"

But after Trump attacked President Obama by saying "he may be the worst thing to ever happen to Israel," Krivitzky added, the response of AIPAC president Lillian Pinkus — who criticized Trump and apologized for the favorable reaction his Obama comments received from many of the delegates — was "also appropriate, because you don't disparage other people's friends."

Rabbi Lisa Malik of Temple Beth Ahm in Aberdeen told *NJJN* she was pleased that 22 of her congregants — double the number from 2015 — attended the gathering. She called their lobbying of Rep. Frank Pallone (D-Dist. 6) and Rep. Chris Smith (R-Dist. 4) "a highly bonding experience."

Regarding the Trump controversy, she found the walkout to be extremely divisive. "I was approached and I declined," she said. "I thought everybody had a right to speak, whether we agreed with them or not. I thought my rabbinic colleagues gave him too much attention."

As far as his speech itself, Malik said, "I didn't find anything he said at the AIPAC conference to be offensive. The president of AIPAC did make a statement chastising the people who stood up for Trump when he attacked President Obama. I don't see what the big deal was, and I agree with Trump that Obama has done a terrible job.

"I thought the reaction to Trump's speech by the AIPAC president was overblown and outrageous," said Malik. "It put more attention on Trump than on the real issue of Palestinian violence and the threat of Iran."

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"I understand and respect that position; I just disagree with it," said Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, a North Brunswick resident. He is executive director of [Big Tent Judaism](#), an organization dedicated to bringing Judaism to interfaith families and the unaffiliated. He joined the walkout organized by his son, Rabbi Jesse Olitzky of [Congregation Beth El](#) in South Orange.

"I think the apology by AIPAC was heartfelt and it was warranted. It was as much a rebuke of the people and their behavior as it was of Mr. Trump. It was not about Israel," said Kerry Olitzky. "I didn't invite him. If AIPAC wanted him there it was their decision, but I was not going to abide by it. Even if you want to be bipartisan and include everybody, sometimes you have to make statements."

After watching a rebroadcast of Trump's remarks, Olitzky said, he believed the non-Jewish community "was also offended by Trump. It is not just we who have a set of Jewish values we felt he challenged and attacked, but the African-American people who were there also were attacked," he said. "They have a special relationship with the fact that Mr. Obama is the first black American president. When Trump disses them and there is an implicit racial slur there, he is speaking to a large segment of the community. When he is anti-immigrant, he is talking about us. Most of the Jews there were only one or two generations away from immigrants."

Although Mitchell Frumkin of Kendall Park, president of the Jewish Federation in the Heart of NJ, found the conference to be "a great event that showed support for Israel, both politically as well as from the range of Jewish people around the country," he opposed the walkout.

"It did not represent the people who were at the conference, and I think the press made a big deal about this walkout," he told *NJJN*.

"Trump's presentations are not presidential," Frumkin said. "What is going on with him and Ted Cruz right now is far from wise. It is a cartoon. It is not presidential politics. One of them is going to get the Republican nomination, but there are so many things going on that are clearly not presidential."

Woodbridge attorney Roy Tanzman, a past president of both the State Association of Jewish Federations and the Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County, told *NJJN*, "When I started going to AIPAC conferences in the 1980s there were about 300 people there. Every year when I go back it gets better and better and better. Everybody who was anybody was there. We got to hear the candidates, and all the sessions were great. It was very beneficial and it was important for people to be there."