

State of the Jewish Union Address

Thank you for joining us today, whether you are here in Washington or watching from communities across North America.

Article II, Section 3 of the United States Constitution provides that the president "shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient."

The Jewish community in the United States similarly needs to share with Congress, from time to time, the state of our community and recommend to their consideration measures to help support and advance our continued flourishing within the great American compact. This is especially true in 2026 for two important reasons.

First, we face unique challenges at this moment, especially relating to the rise in antisemitism and the security of our community. The most important responsibility of government is to protect its citizens in their places of worship and communal gathering, and we must urgently seek the attention of Congress on this critical matter.

Second, as we prepare to join in the celebration of America's 250th birthday, we recognize with gratitude that America is truly the most open and welcoming society in which Jews have dwelt outside the

holy land in the 4000 years since Abraham was called by God to leave his home and begin the great journey of monotheism. We also recognize and celebrate the enormous contributions that our Jewish communities have made to the peace, prosperity, and success of the American experiment. We are determined to see that this great record of American freedom and the Jewish communal contribution to that freedom continues unbroken for the good of America and the world.

AMERICA AND ISRAEL

The focus of today's talk will be about the state of Jews in America, but it is not possible to have that conversation without acknowledging and addressing the emotional, familial, and religious connection between the American Jewish community and the people of Israel. This connection has affected us deeply since October 7, 2023.

Looking back, we have enormous pride and appreciation for the support that the people and the government of the United States have given to the people of Israel throughout these last two traumatic years. It is especially the case that Congress helped keep the plight of the hostages held captive by Hamas in the forefront of

everyone's attention. Members from both parties met with former hostages and their families regularly, and issued countless statements of support, as did Presidents Biden and Trump and their administrations. And we will never forget President Trump's personal diplomacy that undoubtedly resulted in the release of the final living hostages and the return of the remaining bodies of the deceased. Our gratitude is immense.

At the same time, the distorted and increasingly antisemitic protests that we have experienced across the country have endangered our community. The response of law enforcement has not been consistently prompt or comprehensive. While recognizing the limits of federalism and local control, there is much to be done.

There is also much more to be done regarding antisemitism on campus. We thank all the colleges and universities across the country that have taken strong and pro-active steps to ensure their campuses are safe and welcoming to Jewish students. There are many great universities in this country that have done so. But there are too many that have not.

We strongly encourage passage of the bipartisan **Protecting Students on Campus Act of 2025**, which would require federally funded colleges and universities to clearly inform students of their civil rights under Title VI and provide accessible information on how to file discrimination complaints. We thank President Trump for signing the **Executive Order on Transparency Regarding Foreign Influence at American Universities**, which will help end the secrecy surrounding foreign funds in higher education. The launch of the new public reporting portal and upgraded data tools is an important step toward restoring accountability and public confidence. We urge Congress to act on this important issue as well.

SAFETY, SECURITY AND ANTISEMITISM

That the security of the Jewish community in this country is at risk cannot be doubted. It should be enough to point out that, in 2025 alone, three Jews were murdered on the streets of the United States for being Jewish – Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lischinsky, a young couple who were attending a Jewish community gathering at the Capitol Jewish Museum a few blocks from the Capitol of the United States, and Karen Diamond, who was standing on the streets of Boulder, Colorado holding a sign that sought to bring attention to the

plight of the hostages in Gaza. And already in 2026, a historic synagogue in Jackson, Mississippi was burned nearly to the ground in a blatant example of antisemitic violence.

But there's more – much more. Threats of violence and serious plots to commit violence are uncovered and thwarted weekly.

Last year, the FBI recorded 1,938 anti-Jewish hate crimes. That is the highest number ever recorded since the FBI began tracking in 1991. It represents 69 percent of all religion-based hate crimes in America. Jews are 2 percent of the population but the target of nearly 70 percent of religious hate. That is more than five antisemitic hate crimes every single day.

And those are just the crimes that were reported and prosecuted. The Secure Community Network logged more than 5,400 threat reports in 2024. They tracked 870 false bomb threats and swatting incidents against Jewish institutions. They made over 1,300 referrals to law enforcement, including the FBI. The ADL made similar referrals from their in-depth tracking of threats on social media. And then there are the protests that threaten Jews going into synagogues

– screaming and pressing in on them as they make clear their willingness to attack if given the opportunity.

We have done our part. We have built professionally run community security initiatives funded by the Jewish Federation in each community. These community security initiatives connect every synagogue, Jewish Community Center, Jewish school, Jewish camp and more, and work closely with local law enforcement and the FBI field offices to ensure effective collaboration. And of course, every institution has their own security guards and trained volunteers – and a security budget.

Last year we reported to Congress that the Jewish community is collectively raising and spending over \$765M per year in securing our community and that number is growing. This Jewish tax is unique to our community. No other ethnic or religious groups in America must protect itself every day in every setting.

Here’s just one example. A cultural film festival that most organizations can host by simply renting out a local movie theater, printing flyers, and posting the event on social media, costs our community thousands of dollars in security and requires local law

enforcement back up. As a result, it becomes either outrageously expensive or even impossible to hold the event. In America! In 2026!

This is, of course, not the first time that we have asked the federal government for assistance with our security. We appreciate the work of the Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI. We're grateful for the support we have received from the

Nonprofit Security Grant Program, even as we remind Congress that the current funding levels meet only half of the current demand, and this demand is growing along with the threats and the attacks I have described.

But none of this is enough to meet today's threat levels. And so we recommend to Congress for consideration these six measures:

First: Increase funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program to \$1 billion annually and make the program more flexible and simpler to use. Demand has far outpaced supply. In 2024, nearly 7,600 applicants sought almost \$1 billion in grants. Only 43 percent were approved. Religious institutions that need protection are being turned away.

Second: Provide federal support for security personnel. A single full-time security guard costs \$90,000 a year. A community security director costs \$160,000. These are costs that synagogues and day schools are absorbing from their operating budgets, money that could be going to education and human services.

Third: Expand the FBI's capabilities to detect and disrupt domestic terrorism before it strikes. The United States now spends nearly a trillion dollars per year to face down foreign enemies and terrorists. Fighting domestic terror needs greater investment as well.

Fourth: Increase support for the state and local law enforcement who protect our institutions every day. We need their help, and they need your help.

Fifth: Social media companies must be more accountable for the antisemitic hate and incitement to violence through their platforms. Extremist content is algorithmically amplified. Regulating those algorithms is a public safety imperative. Jewish children and teens are facing growing risks online, including antisemitic harassment, bullying, and extremist content. These threats cause real harm and too often spill from the digital space into real-world intimidation and

violence. We recognize the difficulty of legislating in this field, but states are moving forward, and it is time for Congress to move forward as well. We are encouraged by the work of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the many bipartisan efforts to address this issue.

Sixth: Prosecute hate crimes aggressively to ensure accountability and deterrence.

We know Congress believes in our first amendment right to practice our faith freely. Unfortunately, our ability to exercise this right in 2026 depends on comprehensive, even extraordinary, security precautions. We urge you to make this a matter of highest priority in this legislative session.

FLOURISHING JEWISH LIFE

And it is important for Congress to know that the desire to exercise our freedoms as a community - to join in the vibrant religious, educational, and cultural life of the Jewish community - is greater than ever.

Across the United States, religious participation has been declining for decades. Yet Jews are showing up more and doing so with

intention and purpose. In fact, we are experiencing what we have called "the Surge," a sustained rise in Jewish engagement that began after October 7, 2023, and continues to this day.

Our Jewish schools are growing; our camps are bursting at the seams – and our community has a plan to double the capacity of both over the next decade. This is why we strongly support the new federal **Education Scholarship Tax Credit** and urge all 50 states to opt in so the funds can reach the families and schools in every community. I speak as a proud product of public education in America when I say without equivocation that Jewish education does not compete with public schools - it strengthens and enhances American life.

So, it is important for the Congress to know that Jewish life is not only what we are protecting, but **what we are building**. It is Jewish education and Jewish experiences, but it is also human services, dignity and belonging. It is caring for seniors, feeding families, supporting people with disabilities, welcoming newcomers, and strengthening the communities in which we live.

When a historic church was set on fire in Jackson, Mississippi, our response began with security, but it was also much more. Within

days, the community held Sabbath services, celebrated life cycle events, and reopened religious school in a local church. When we woke to the news of the terrible massacre in Sydney, Australia on the day we were to begin celebrating the holiday of Hanukkah, tens of thousands of people packed celebrations in public squares, Jewish Community Centers and synagogues across the United States, singing together, praying together and being proud to be Jewish. When you are home, please come visit the Jewish institutions in your community. We invite you to see for yourself the beauty and the vibrancy of American Jewish life as this country turns 250!

WHAT JEWISH FEDERATIONS DO

And while you are at it, Members of Congress, get to know your Jewish Federation. We are the engines that build and sustain flourishing Jewish communities. We help you build communities that are healthy, safe, caring, welcoming, and inclusive, educated and engaged, and involved in civic life.

In the United States of America, social services are a partnership between the non-profit sector, especially faith-based communities, and the government. Jewish Federations are at the center of this social service network for our community. Across our system, we

care for the neediest amongst us, we support families in crisis, we fund mental health services and provide social services that meet people where they are.

That is why we know that changes to programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and the Older Americans Act must be carefully monitored to ensure they do not unintentionally harm vulnerable individuals or destabilize essential services.

It is why the asset limit on the Supplemental Security Income program should be raised so that low-income seniors and people with disabilities do not lose essential benefits simply for saving a small emergency fund. The bipartisan **SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act** would modernize these limits, raising them to \$10,000 for individuals and \$20,000 for couples and indexing them to inflation going forward.

It is also why bipartisan innovations in long-term care are desperately needed. The demographic reality is clear. We are living longer. Needs are increasing. The current financing model is not sustainable. Bipartisan proposals such as **The WISH Act**, which

would establish a federal long-term care insurance benefit to provide a federal backstop while encouraging private long-term care planning, and **The Credit for Caring Act**, which would create a federal tax credit of up to \$5,000 to help working family caregivers offset out-of-pocket long-term care expenses deserve strong support, and we welcome other ideas as well.

In addition to caring for those who need us most, the Jewish Federation system spends roughly half of its allocable dollars on formal and informal Jewish education, including day schools, camps, Hillels, adult learning and more - and we have plans to invest more here as well.

Federations train the next generation of Jewish leaders.

We support Israel experiences that transform lives.

Federations help build welcoming and inclusive communities. We create the physical and spiritual spaces where Jews come together.

We strengthen synagogues, Jewish community centers, and the countless organizations that make Jewish life possible. And we foster belonging in all those spaces.

We are active in government and civil society. Our volunteers and professionals are on the front lines in city halls, school boards,

statehouses, and Congress. We support America and its values, we fight antisemitism, we advocate for Israel and build relationships with leaders who stand with us.

And we are deeply connected to Israel and the global Jewish people. From October 7, 2023, to the end of 2025 Jewish Federations raised nearly \$1B in emergency aid for the people of Israel.

The State of the Jewish Union in America is strong, but it is being tested. We are united in our commitment to America and to Jewish life, even as we worry about the real threats of violence and the growing acceptance of antisemitic rhetoric.

We are your fellow citizens, your constituents, and your partners in building American life. We look forward to discussing these issues with you in Washington DC and at home.

As I mentioned at the outset, we look forward to joining with all Americans in the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence this July 4th.

We will all read together what has been called the greatest sentence

ever written: This fourth of July, we will all read together what has been called the greatest sentence ever written. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We join with you in our prayer that 2026 will see the full blossoming of that promise for all people of all faiths. God bless America.