

News

Jewish Toledo stands with Israel, demands action from government officials at DC March

By Sue Ann Hochberg, Jewish Community Relations Council Chair Emerita

On Tuesday, November 14, representatives from Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo (JFGT), Hillel419, and Temple Shomer Emunim traveled to Washington DC to participate in the largest pro-Israel march in history. Close to 300,000 people gathered in support of Israel on the National Mall. The March, which also called for the release of the hostages being held by Hamas and to condemn rising antisemitism, was organized by Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The day started at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center for meetings with Senators Sherrod Brown and JD Vance and 12 of the 15 members of the Ohio delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives. Each of the elected officials addressed professional and lay leadership and college students from the eight Federations across Ohio.

Their message was one of resounding support of Israel in the war against Hamas. We specifically requested: passing the bill for \$14.3 billion in emergency security assistance; resisting dangerous calls for a ceasefire; increasing sanctions on Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other terrorist groups; increasing funding for homeland security grants for high-value nonprofit targets; and stopping Jew-hatred on college campuses.

Actions speak louder than words. We need them to walk the talk. They encouraged us to continue to communicate with their offices. Let's not let them forget. Please write to Senators Brown and Vance, and Representative Kaptur.

After the meetings, we headed to the March at the National Mall. The streets were closed to traffic. Security forces surrounded the Mall, including



Looking toward the U.S. Capitol on the National Mall during the March for Israel, November 14, 2023



Pictured l-r, Marcy Kuehnle, Mark Greenblatt, Rabbi Lisa Delson, Joe Rosenberg, and Daniel Pearlman

the National Guard with tanks, Capitol Police, and others. With security top of mind for all of us – wherever we go – it was especially comforting to see this increased presence with hundreds of thousands of Jews convening at one site.

Organizing around the tripod goals of supporting Israel, releasing the hostages, and combating antisemitism was brilliant. It was a rare event, not only because of the number of people who showed up but also because of the variety of views they represented across the religious and sociopolitical spectrum. It was a rally cry that attracted doves and hawks, black-hatted Orthodox Jews, queer Zionists waving rainbow flags, secular Israelis, and busloads of

congregants from suburban synagogues of all denominations. The Mall was dotted with blue-and-white Israeli flags, from tiny hand-held flags to massive banners wrapped around shoulders, like a tallit or a shawl.

The sea of people converging on the Mall was stunning. Being among so many Jews was thrilling. We were standing, nearly squished at times, beside folks from every state from the east to west coasts. I found the Columbus contingent and was able to share this once in a lifetime experience with my daughter. We held onto each other during the entire event. For a short time, all of us came together as a family, one big mishpacha.

The schedule was filled with speakers and musical guests. The Maccabeats led the US national anthem, with Israeli singer Omer Adam following with a moving rendition of Hatikvah. Singing Hatikvah with what we now know as hundreds of thousands of fellow Jews and supporters of Israel was breathtaking. The Israeli college

students and attendees prayed for the safety of the IDF soldiers and the return of the hostages. It was heartwarming to watch the Israeli students dance and sing with the Israeli musicians with such glee and abandon. It was genuine joy.

Chants of “Bring Them Home,” “Am Yisrael Chai,” and “No Ceasefire” rang out through our nation’s capital. Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle were seen holding pictures of hostages and signs affirming their support for Israel.

Ambassadors were welcomed to the stage, including U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism Deborah Lipstadt. US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), and Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) all showcased their support of the Jewish state, expressed disgust at Hamas’s atrocities, and were committed to the release of the civilian hostages.

It was encouraging to hear the politicians unequivocally support Israel. House Speaker Mike Johnson said, “The calls for a ceasefire are outrageous. America ‘stands unequivocally’ with the Jewish state. Israel will cease their counteroffensive when Hamas ceases to be a threat to the Jewish state.”

U.S. Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY) delivered a similar message to Johnson’s: “Israel must do to Hamas what America did to ISIS in the 21st century. It must do to Hamas what America did to the Nazis in the 20th century.”

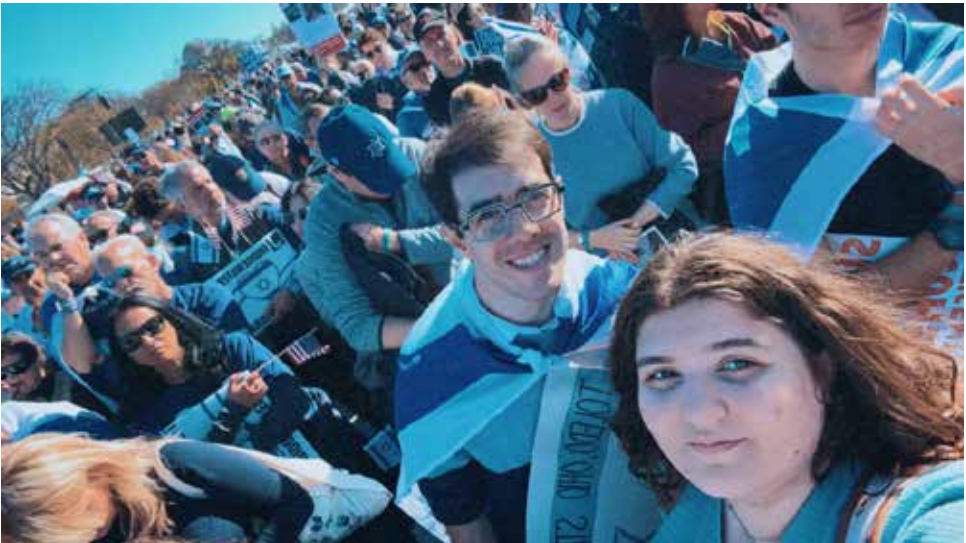
They called out and heeded the dangers of the “ignorant” rhetoric being spread around college campuses. Jeffries called it a “cancer.” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said, “Israel, we in America have your back. America feels your pain. We ache with you. We stand with you. And we will not rest until you get all the assistance you need.” The crowd joined the representatives in chants, exclaiming, “We stand with Israel.”

Actress Debra Messing shared her own words of grief, empowerment, and outrage. Messing held a moment of silence for the victims of October 7 and then introduced family members of Israeli hostages held captive in Gaza.

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Pictured l-r, Marcy Kuehnle, Mark Greenblatt, and Daniel Pearlman



Hillel419 at the march

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Hearing their stories was heartbreaking. This segment held one message: Bring the hostages home.

Christian Zionists made a strong showing at the rally. Hagee, head of Christians United for Israel, one of the largest pro-Israel lobbies in the U.S., was one of the speakers. “Choose Israel or Hamas,” Hagee told the crowd. “There is no middle ground in this conflict. You’re either for the Jewish people or you’re not.”

Israeli President Isaac Herzog addressed the crowd from the Kotel in Jerusalem. “From the most sacred site in the Jewish world,” he said, the “people of Israel are eternal, and no one will break us.” His words were poignant and inspiring. He ended his remarks with a stark and dark reminder of how the phrase “never again” came to be. He said, “[eighty] years ago, Jews came out of Auschwitz and vowed ‘never again’. As the blue and white flag was hoisted over our ancient homeland, we vowed ‘never again’. Forty days ago, a terrorist army invaded the sovereign State of Israel and butchered hundreds upon hundreds of Israelis in the largest massacre since the Holocaust. Let us cry out, together: Never again. Never again is now.” The crowd exploded in chanting “Never again. Never again is now” with him.

The crowd was addressed by two college students, Sabrina Soffer, who attends George Washington University, and Noa Fay, who attends Columbia University. Both expressed

their appreciation and importance for this rally as they face antisemitism on campus. Their stories, becoming all too familiar, were outrageous, their courage fierce.

Near the end of the rally, the alt-rock Jewish reggae and hip-hop star Matisyahu took the stage with the Maccabeats and sang his beautiful, soulful anthem for peace, “One Day.” I expect people from miles around could hear all of us sing with him. “The world has no idea how the Jews come together,” Matisyahu told the crowd. “Let’s go!”

The March for Israel demonstrated to our country’s leaders, and the world, that America stands with Israel. There was resounding support from the politicians. Again, we pray they walk the

talk. Actions speak louder than words.

To our brothers and sisters in Israel, the message was, “we have your back!” Message was received. The following was posted on X (formerly Twitter) from the State of Israel’s official account (@Israel): “Thank you to each and every one of our Jewish and non-Jewish brothers, sisters and allies. Your support during this difficult time means

everything to us and we feel your love always, but especially today.”

There we were – mishpacha – feeling ecstatic and relieved to be able to celebrate our Jewish identity, our love for and connection to Israel loudly and safely in a crowd where Israel’s existence wouldn’t be called into question and its right to defend itself was a given.



Sue Ann Hochberg with her daughter, Hanna Fotsch