

January 9, 2022

Dear Rabbi Freedman:

I write to thank you for talking with me about so many important issues for the Jewish community in Texas.

We have worked together for years across my three terms as a City Council Member. Together, we have advocated for economic and racial justice. We have condemned anti-Semitic and Islamophobic threats alike, along with all other forms of hate.

I greatly appreciate our partnership. In these times of hurt and unrest, I have been struck by how local Jewish leaders are among the first to answer calls for change and justice for communities of color, for immigrant families, and for the disadvantaged.

This spirit of solidarity is what motivates my run for the United States Congress. As I leave my local post to run for federal office, my values remain the same. It is not always easy, of course, to know how to apply these values within a complex and morally fraught world. But my commitment is to continue learning, and to remain in conversation with our Jewish community as I try to do my best. I hope this letter reflects my continued learning and dialogue on issues specific to Jewish safety at home and across the world.

At home, I will remain a persistent voice against bigotry and anti-Semitism. If I am fortunate enough to be elected a member of Congress, I pledge to take these values and put them into action in federal policy.

The recent, and continued, anti-Semitic attacks in Texas certainly inform my perspective. Just this week, you and I spoke about how even the most fringe actions of neo-Nazis on the internet can boil over and transform into violence. When we reckon with the horrors of the Holocaust and the continued threat of anti-Semitism worldwide, it is clear to me why many Jewish Americans are concerned about safety not only in Israel but also here at home.

My approach to foreign policy is based in adherence to values rooted in justice and democracy. I believe in the right of Israelis to live in their own democratic state. I also believe in the right of Israelis to live in peace, free from violent attacks from nation-states or from groups like Hezbollah or Hamas, and in Congress I will support the continued federal aid for self defense of Israel. This includes the systems necessary for defense against rocket attacks that could harm civilians.

I also believe in the right of the Palestinian people to live in peace, security, and democracy. These are fundamental rights. To arrive at safety and sovereignty for all, I believe the clearest path is a two state solution that will win the peace.

To achieve such a solution, we cannot ignore the economic and power imbalance faced by the poorest Palestinians. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza and indefinite occupation in the West Bank are untenable for Israelis, Palestinians, and our collective conscience. I believe that a long-term solution in which all people in the region live in prosperity and peace is not only possible, but necessary. This two state solution is the clearest path to such peace, but as U.S. presidents of both parties have repeatedly acknowledged, unchecked settlement expansion in the West Bank makes it more and more difficult to achieve this.

Underlying our shared commitment to safety, democracy, and self-determination is another core value: respect for human rights. A human rights approach to foreign policy should condemn violence in all its forms and should protect the rights of all people. Therefore, I support policy to provide humanitarian aid to those in need, while also restricting aid from being used in a manner that violates basic rights. As we discussed, there are currently federal rules and laws on foreign aid, and those rules protecting human rights are something I support. Updates may be necessary to protect everyone's rights, but such updates should not be imposed in a discriminatory manner against any people or nation; rather, I support a human rights approach broadly. A commitment to protecting human rights is paramount for U.S. foreign policy, and ending any violations of human rights is critical for achieving long term peace wherever there is conflict.

In considering possible solutions to all these challenges, I have communicated to you that I am not a BDS supporter. I want to be clear about this position, as I hope to be an accessible representative to people of many backgrounds with many foreign policy views. I support everyone's right to freedom of speech, and I will use my platform to promote understanding and to stop harm.

In addition to human and civil rights issues, you and I have spoken at length about the threats of nuclear proliferation. I support the continued efforts of the Biden Administration to reach a constructive and verifiable agreement with the Iranian government to ensure that Iran cannot ever acquire a nuclear weapon. It's also important for such an agreement to address the Iranian government's dangerous expansionist policies and its support for violent and extremist groups.

Lastly, I cannot finish this letter to you without acknowledging how challenging conversations are around the shared future of Israelis and Palestinians. This topic involves the current and historical trauma of two peoples, and so it is understandable why it is so hard to talk about. When one raises valid concerns around Palestinian rights, there is too often the threat that one could be unfairly charged with anti-Semitism. And advocating for the safety of Jewish people in Israel does not mean being callous to the plight of Palestinians.

Attempts at being even-handed risk creating false equivalencies: we risk reducing lost lives to tick marks on either side of a ledger—a ledger keeping score on one side of the Green Line versus the other, keeping count of who is most at risk, or who started the fight, or who is most deserving of our solidarity. The principle of solidarity for all humankind, then, feels further from our grasp when we need it the most.

This principle of solidarity often gets lost in political conversations on this traumatic topic. I think of the conversations I have had about Palestinian suffering. Quickly, conversations turn away from addressing the suffering itself and turn toward who is most to blame for such suffering. But so quickly lost in many of these debates is, first and foremost, a deep acknowledgement of the suffering. This requires deep acknowledgement of poverty and injustice. It requires a reckoning with the displacement of families and lives lost to war across the region. Our religious traditions call on us to recognize and end such pain. In my own Catholic social teaching, it is written, "Feed the people dying of hunger, because if you do not feed them, you are killing them."

This moral core is what must guide us toward being a democracy that is a force for peace and justice. Together, we must represent our community to be an active force for good that feeds the poor, cares for the sick, and ends wars, no matter what. It is our clear, and shared, imperative.

This imperative applies to Palestinian suffering and lives lost, and it applies to the lives lost in Israel, and the lives at risk because of continued conflict in the Middle East.

I know there is much for me to learn, and that any exercise in democracy and responsive government is, in part, an exercise in humility. I hope to learn more by visiting the Middle East, including Israel and the West Bank. I want to hear the diversity of perspectives from people living there, and I would be interested in traveling with you, Rabbi, along with Palestinians and Muslim and Christian religious leaders. I know firsthand how solidarity and commitment can create a more just society, both at home and abroad. Thank you again for your generosity and time.

Yours,  
Greg Casar  
Congressional Candidate for Texas's 35th District