

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bonamici (OR-01)
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
"Confronting Pervasive Antisemitism in K-12 Schools"
2175 Rayburn House Office Building
Wednesday, May 8, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There is no question that we must do more to combat antisemitism – not just in schools but everywhere. We must do more to protect Jewish students and Jewish Americans who are threatened and harassed and attacked because of who they are.

Every student deserves to feel safe and be safe at school. At the same time, we must do more to address the rise in Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination and hate as well.

I have said multiple times that I hope this committee can work together on constructive ways to address the scourge of antisemitism.

And I will express that hope again today, that we seek solutions that recognize the seriousness and scope of the challenge, the importance of keeping students safe at school, and the need to balance the civil rights of students to be free from discrimination under Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act* with the with the First Amendment right to free speech and expression.

This is the education committee, and I hope we will discuss the important role of education and importantly, prevention.

In fact, at the top of the list of the Biden Administration's U.S. National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism is to "Increase School-Based Education about Antisemitism, Including the Holocaust, and Jewish American Heritage."

Antisemitism is not a new problem; ADL, the Anti-defamation League, has been working on it for decades and in fact, they even have a Center for Antisemitism research.

AJC, The American Jewish Committee, has an action plan with a toolkit for public school administrators. Lesson plans and other teaching materials are widely available through organizations like the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Like New York and several other states, my home state of Oregon requires Holocaust and Genocide Studies, with age-appropriate curriculum available. I remember and thank my late friend, Holocaust survivor Alter Wiener, who when he was in his 80s and early 90s told his story of survival to hundreds of audiences in universities, colleges, middle and high schools, places of worship, prisons, and clubs, personally and through his book, *From a Name to a Number*. That's the kind of unforgettable education that makes a real difference. May his memory be a blessing.

I also want to emphasize– and emphasize strongly– that it is important for leaders to stand up to antisemitism no matter where it comes from. Many of my colleagues claim to care about the rise of antisemitism in this country. But when white supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Virginia with burning torches and chanted “Jews will not replace us,” the President at the time, Donald Trump, said there were very fine people on both sides.

One of the participants at that Unite the Right rally was Nick Fuentes, a vile antisemite who among other statements has denied the scope of the Holocaust while comparing Jews exterminated in concentration camps to cookies being baked in an oven. Former President Trump hosted Nick Fuentes at Mar-a-Lago in November 2022.

General John Kelly, who served as then President Trump’s Chief of Staff, has stated that the former President spoke favorably about Hitler, including that Hitler had done “some good things.”

And just a few months ago Donald Trump said, "Any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion."

Despite these persistent examples of comments that others have called antisemitic and continued relationships with well-known antisemites, I have not heard one word of concern from my colleagues across the aisle; in fact, what we have seen is consolidation of support for the former President.

If my colleagues cared about antisemitism they would condemn and denounce these comments from the leader of their party.

I want to offer any of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle the opportunity right now to condemn Donald Trump’s previous comments. Does anyone have the courage to stand up against this?

Let the record show that nobody spoke up at this time.

I look forward to the testimony and conversation today – again with the hope that we can have a constructive dialogue about how to fight back against antisemitism so all students can be safe and feel safe at school – whether that’s a K-12 school, a college or university.

I yield back the balance of my time.