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9 Tishrei 5779
September 18, 2018

The White House
Attn: Stephen Miller
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
Transmitted via email

Dear Mr. Miller,

Facing the imminent arrival of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, arguably the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, we write to counter the public, deeply inappropriate political attack to which you were subjected — in the name of Judaism — on Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year last week.

One need be neither Jewish nor particularly religious to find something deeply unsettling, even unseemly, in a Rabbi wasting the special opportunity to uplift his congregation at such an auspicious hour, to instead engage in a shameful personal attack on a former congregant. Whatever a person's politics, there is only one appropriate target for our displeasure, criticism and demands for improvement during the Days of Awe: ourselves. And still worse, he shopped video of his rant to the media, as if to publicize the damage done to his own reputation and that of his congregation.

But one notices one thing immediately on that video: the overwhelming abundance of empty seats. Vastly more media sources covered his offensive against you than congregants came to hear it — because people want something more on Rosh Hashanah than partisan politics.

In the Chapters of the Fathers, a collection of wise, valuable insights from our ancient sages, Rabbi Hanina said: "pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for fear of it, a man would swallow his neighbor alive." He tells us that even a dictatorship would be better than anarchy, and would deserve our prayers.

All the more so, we should be grateful to you for your service to the extraordinary country in which we live. All Americans, and particularly Jews — prime targets for attacks and violence — are indebted to you for your important work trying to protect the human rights of all people, while keeping Americans safe and our borders secure.

In a light-hearted video created for Rosh Hashanah, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke about how positive the last year was for Israel, and highlighted one of the many demonstrations of extraordinary warmth and friendship coming from the Trump Administration. One loses count of the ways in which this administration has ignored precedent to reject and defund terrorism, recognize the unique Jewish claim to our Holy Land and Holiest City, and celebrate Jewish life here in America.

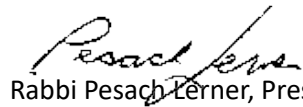
Criticism of government is welcome and appropriate in a democratic country. But nasty personal attacks aimed at demonizing a public servant are inappropriate. And all the more so, to hijack a High Holy Day sermon for this purpose is entirely foreign to us.

Sincere Jews like yourself, whatever their political beliefs or station in life, should know that authentic Judaism is very different from what was portrayed on that video. In the United States, Israel and around the world, recent decades have seen a truly miraculous renaissance in Jewish life, scholarship, and observance of our sacred heritage. Those who follow our traditions represent the rapidly — and only — growing segment of today's Jewish community. Our youth enter adulthood knowing that Judaism is far more than lox, bagels and social justice rhetoric.

Thanks to that growth, the majority of American rabbis today are those anxious to share with you authentic Jewish thought, who are guided by Torah instead of projecting their own opinions upon it, who motivate congregants to live better and fuller Jewish lives — and who would sooner speak about the evils of idle gossip or publicly embarrassing others than engage in them from the pulpit. The Coalition for Jewish Values is proud to represent over 1,000 of them in public policy, countering those who have misused Biblical passages and Hebrew phrases to miscast leftist rhetoric as “Judaism.”

During these *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, the “Ten Days of Repentance” spanning our Days of Awe, we hope that this letter brings some comfort to you and your family — which are now and forever welcome in any of our congregations. We hope to see you soon.

Yours Sincerely,



Rabbi Pesach Lerner, President

On behalf of the Rabbinic Board of the Coalition for Jewish Values

