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MEMO

To: Members, Rabbinic Circle

From: Rabbi Yaakov Menken, Managing Director
on behalf of the Rabbinic Board

Date: January 26, 2021 / 13 Shevat 5781

Re: 2020 Calendar Year in Review: We Have Arrived

In 2020 the power of our distinct voice in public policy was more apparent than ever. Major media outlets acknowledged our opinion, and we played a critical role in defending religious liberty, upholding family values, and fighting Anti-Semitism. With your partnership, we will continue to represent the authentic Jewish perspective and advocate for our principles under the new U.S. Administration in 2021.

Strengthening the Pro-Values Coalition

When our allies or other faith-based organizations are attacked for their beliefs, our support as a Jewish organization is especially compelling. We saw numerous examples of this during the past year.

We were the only Rabbinic group to back President Trump's nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court and deplore partisan attacks on her faith and family. We opposed the anti-religious bigotry at the root of these attacks — which has significant repercussions for religious Jews — and acknowledged Barrett's credentials, jurisprudence and expertise as qualifying her for a seat on the Supreme Court.

One hundred of our member rabbis signed a letter to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos urging him to cut ties with the SPLC's "Hate Map," pointing out that it is notably biased against those who fight Radical Islamic Terrorism, while giving a pass to those, like its partners at the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), who are tied to Hamas and other terror organizations. The list targets pro-values organizations as well, and our letter was designed to benefit those groups as well. Our letter was covered by Fox News, and from there spread to other conservative outlets such as PJ Media, the Federalist, and Dennis Prager.

On the legal front, we filed an amicus brief in support of Catholic Social Services (CSS) in *Fulton v. Philadelphia*. The City of Philadelphia's new rules for foster care require religious groups like CSS to declare same-sex couples to be suitable hosts for foster children — contrary to their religious beliefs — or be excluded from foster care entirely. Besides being rife with anti-religious bias, the city's position directly harms dozens if not hundreds of children stuck in the system rather than being placed with loving foster parents. Our

involvement as a rabbinic group benefits religious liberty for all – including Jewish organizations – and America’s most vulnerable children.

Challenging Anti-Semitism and its Anti-Israel Facade

Ours has also been a critical voice in challenging Anti-Semitic sentiments expressed by politicians, activists and organizations, many of whom claim their bigotry is merely “criticism of Israel’s government.” At the same time, we contradict and oppose partisan misuse of Anti-Semitism by left-wing groups that ignore its growth on the left, while accusing conservatives of using “dog-whistles” so high-pitched that only the accusers themselves can hear them. This is an area where our rabbis — drawing on millennia of education and bitter experience — can demonstrate both an even-handed attitude and superior command of history.

In March we condemned Anti-Semitic comments from Minnesota Congresswoman Betty McCollum, which she justified with the discordant hashtag “#StopAIPACsHate.” She falsely claimed that AIPAC was occupying “Palestinian” land, imprisoning “Palestinian” children and promoting Islamophobia. The CJV’s statement rebutted each of McCollum’s claims and called out the underlying hate. CJV’s Israel Regional VP Rabbi Pruzansky said at the time that “It is hard to find a more concise demonstration of anti-Semitic rhetoric cloaked in ‘Palestinian rights’ advocacy than [McCollum’s] tweet.”

Later that spring, the CJV also responded to Mayor Bill de Blasio’s targeting of NYC’s Jewish Orthodox community. Following a large gathering at the funeral of a senior rabbi in Williamsburg, which was approved by and coordinated with the NYPD, de Blasio offered a harsh “message to the Jewish community” in which he threatened that police would “summons or even arrest those” who violate social distancing regulations. We noted that de Blasio’s selective criticism of Jews was not only dishonest but repugnant, particularly in light of recent Anti-Semitic attacks across New York City.

Later in the year we challenged a disinformation campaign from Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) promoting well-known anti-“Israel” activists — Rep. Rashida Tlaib, writer Peter Beinart, Professor Barbara Rasby, and commentator Marc Lamont Hill — purportedly speaking on “Dismantling Antisemitism, Winning Justice.” The CJV decried JVP’s risible and offensive effort to shield these individuals from justified criticism.

At the end of December, the CJV similarly called out Anti-Semitic statements from Senator-elect Rev. Raphael Warnock, and the effort by the Jewish Democratic Council of America (JDCA) to cover for his record – what a *Newsweek* op-ed under my name called “The Jewish Left’s Warnock Whitewash.” The facts were so obvious, and the CJV’s stature so well-appreciated in the rabbinic community, that the leaders of Georgia’s two largest Orthodox congregations, in Atlanta and Savannah, both happily signed our letter. Here again, our effort was covered by major news outlets like the Atlanta Journal Constitution, the NY Post, and Breitbart as the first and only organized Jewish response.

Providing an Authoritative Jewish Voice

From the outset, the left attempted to minimize our view, claiming, for example, that we represented “only six rabbis.” No one can say that today. Our Rabbinic Circle now consists of over 1500 traditional, observant rabbis, such that we are able to assemble 100 signatures on letters in just days.

Most importantly, Jewish and other news services can no longer justify having only left-wing rabbis and Jewish organizations opine on public policy without rebuttal. Instead, media outlets now acknowledge the CJV as a major Jewish organization, and seek our perspective on Jewish issues, Israel and peace, family values and religious liberty. This year we were covered in Fox News, the NY Post, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Breitbart, and Newsweek — besides Jewish media of all kinds.

By the end of 2020, our contacts at the White House would ensure we knew about each new announcement, and openly sought our comment. The departing Administration requested that a letter on behalf of an individual be sent on CJV stationery, in order that it make a more significant impression – acknowledging that our name was widely known and respected.

Several American Jewish organizations attempt to influence policy not just here in America, but in (and towards) Israel as well. During 2020, Rabbi Steven Pruzansky retired from his long-standing position leading Congregation Bnai Yeshurun in Teaneck, NJ, and moved to Israel, providing us with an Israel Regional Vice President to interact with allies and political figures in that country, and both state our positions there and better inform us here in America.

We welcomed two new rabbinic board members to represent the breadth of our American presence: Rabbi Moshe B. Parnes of Hollywood, FL, dean of the Hollywood Community Kollel as Southern Regional Vice President, and Rabbi Zev Smason of St. Louis, MO, leader of Nusach Hari B'nai Zion as his counterpart in the Midwestern region.

And, at the very end of the year, discussions with Rabbi Jonathan Guttentag of Manchester, England culminated with his appointment to the post of International Liaison, as we announced on January 6 of this year. Rabbi Guttentag will carry our voice to Europe and worldwide, working with allies to influence policy in other nations as we do here in America. Just within the past week, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow and President of the Conference of European Rabbis asked us for help fighting a new ban affecting ritual slaughter in Belgium and religious liberty throughout Europe.

And with all of the above, what was described herein is merely a sampling of the CJV's activities; our statements, press releases and media coverage are all outlined in fuller detail on our website.

As we enter 2021, it is clear that the need will be greater than ever for an authentic Jewish voice. The new Administration will face considerable pressure to make decisions contrary to the our values, and will benefit from contrary opinions expressed through Jewish teachings.

It is important to note that all of the above has been accomplished with funding appropriate for an organization that was proving its ability to make a real and distinct contribution. We know that this has changed, and that the CJV has provided an outstanding return on the charitable investment of our supporters. With your partnership in the coming year, we can and will accomplish much more, as we mobilize supporters, educate the public and advocate for authentic Jewish values in public policy.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me (menken@cjvalues.org) or our President, Rabbi Lerner (lerner@cjvalues.org) if you would like to learn more about participating or supporting our efforts.