



STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY CONCERNS



THE JEWISH COMMUNITY VALUES THE SUPPORT OF THE NEW YORK CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION AND THE MANY INITIATIVES SPONSORED BY OUR REPRESENTATIVES AND SENATORS. MANY OF THESE MEASURES REFLECT A DEEP AND ABIDING COMMITMENT TO ISSUES OF CONCERN TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. AS WE TAKE STOCK OF OUR MUTUAL CONCERNS AND PRIORITIES, WE ASK CONGRESS TO TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING ISSUES WHICH ENJOY A BROAD CONSENSUS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND ARE CONSIDERED TO BE HIGH ON OUR AGENDA.

INTERNATIONAL

Foreign Aid

Congress should help ensure America's role as the world's leading superpower by approving the foreign aid budget. This includes economic and military assistance for Israel -- a cost effective way to strengthen allies and protect US interests. Foreign aid promotes peace in the Middle East, counters radicalism and fosters economic stability and security in the region.

Peace Process

A strong US-Israel relationship is the key to a secure and stable Middle East. Peace and stability in the Middle East is in the US national security interest. Congress has been in the forefront of reinforcing this relationship. America can play a constructive role in promoting regional peace by calling for an end to Palestinian initiated violence and terror and by supporting the right and responsibility of the democratically elected government of Israel to determine its own security arrangements. Chairman Yassir Arafat must be held accountable for the violence sweeping the territories. Israel is not responsible for the creation of the refugee problem and, therefore, rejects the "right of return" of refugees to Israel. A unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state is in breach of all existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. The Administration and Congress should encourage direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and her neighbors, resist imposed solutions, insist on Arab implementation of existing agreements, and urge the elimination of hostile Arab rhetoric. The civilized world must vehemently condemn the hate and incitement perpetuated in the often virulently anti-Israel and anti-Semitic curriculum in Palestinian schools and censure the negative reporting in the Egyptian, Syrian and Palestinian media. We further condemn Hizbollah attacks in Southern Lebanon which violate international law and the UN endorsed agreement which secures Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon. We commend Congress' broad bipartisan support for Israel and solidarity with the people of Israel during all times, particularly during this period of intense difficulty.

Peace and Security

We appreciate the commitment of Congress to Israel's military and security needs. Peace and security are indivisible; thus, the pursuit of peace and the practice of violence are incompatible. We commend the unshakable determination of the Administration and Congress to help Israel meet its security needs. This includes the support of measures which guarantee Israel's qualitative military advantage and the enhancement of US-Israel strategic cooperation

International Terrorism and Arms Control

Terrorism is a global threat, as is Syria's, Iran's, Iraq's and Libya's growing arsenal of conventional and non-conventional weapons which threaten Israel and the free world. Israel has the sovereign right to protect its citizens from violence and terror. The JCRC urges the international community to aggressively join the war against terror and proliferation by adopting measures sanctioning individuals, groups and states which

support violence and violate norms governing arms control. We endorse the policy of containing Iraq and preventing that country from reconstituting its weapons of mass destruction capability. This includes the need to continue UN sanctions and weapons inspections. US policy towards Iran must proceed with great caution until there is substantive evidence of change in Iran including steps to end the development of weapons of mass destruction, support for international terrorism and opposition to the peace process. The JCRC encourages all efforts to secure freedom for nine Iranian Jews falsely accused of espionage. The JCRC supports US-Israel cooperation to combat international terrorism and the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. We firmly support joint US-Israel cooperation, research and development of anti-missile technologies to combat these threats. We applaud the Administration and Congress in efforts to discourage Russia, China and North Korea from helping Iran to acquire ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction and endorse continued activities in this regard. Eight years after the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina and four years since terrorism destroyed the AMIA building, the JCRC calls on the new Argentinian government to conclude the investigation into the terror attacks.

United Nations

Direct bilateral negotiations between the parties without imposed solutions are the cornerstone of peacemaking in the Middle East. In an effort to avoid internationalizing the conflict, we urge non-interference by the UN on matters concerning the Arab-Israeli dispute. We encourage vigilance in assuring that the UN does not deteriorate into a political arena. We roundly oppose all biased, anti-Israel and other discriminatory actions in the international body. This includes recent efforts by the Palestinian delegation to condemn Israel for "excessive use of force," and to seek the deployment of an international observer force in the region.

We thank Congress for its involvement and support in initiatives which seek to secure Hadassah's consultative status as a non-governmental organization and full membership in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). We ask the Administration and Congress to employ efforts which assure that the forthcoming United Nations World Conference Against Racism, which will convene in Durban, South Africa in September, 2001, does not deteriorate into a diatribe against Israel.

Jerusalem

Under Israeli sovereignty, Jerusalem is open to followers of all faiths, with access to all holy places of worship ensured. Jerusalem is the undivided capital of Israel. The JCRC thanks Congress for its efforts to assure that Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, remains united as the capital of the Jewish State. The JCRC reaffirms its endorsement of the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act of 1995.

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Israeli MIA's and POW's

We applaud the efforts of Congress and the Administration to secure the release of all Israeli soldiers held captive and to secure information of their whereabouts. We are outraged at the kidnaping of three Israeli soldiers by Hizbollah. This action was in clear violation of international law and the UN supported agreement for Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon. We support all efforts to secure their return. The fates of Israeli Air Force Navigator Ron Arad and Israeli soldiers Zachary Baumel, Zvi Feldman and Yehuda Katz are a pressing human rights issue. We thank Congress for supporting measures which require the US Department of State to report findings on the fate of these MIA's and hope that these requirements will be implemented.

Jews in the Former Soviet Union

We are concerned about economic and political instability and an autocratic regime in Russia which does not encourage democratic reform. We urge vigilance in combating any form of intolerance or anti-Semitism at any level, especially in those countries which have suffered discrimination in the past. Of paramount importance is continued and unimpeded freedom to emigrate, support of all efforts to sustain Jewish life for those who wish to remain, and an easing of the process of reclamation of Jewish property.

DOMESTIC

Faith-based Initiatives/Charitable Choice

As the public discourse on faith-based initiatives evolves, the Jewish community acknowledges the important role that synagogues, churches, temples and mosques play in meeting the needs of the poor and vulnerable. As we review the various proposals, we remain concerned: that government support for religious institutions respect the principle of separation of church and state; that government does not intrude into the mission and functioning of religious organizations; that the provision of services should not open the door to religious proselytizing of beneficiaries; that both recipients and employees are protected against discrimination in a manner consistent with current civil rights laws; that new initiatives should not reduce program standards and accountability; and that such programs should not reduce funding to effective human service agencies with a proven track record. We are eager to work with the Administration to define a mutual consensus on the appropriate role of religious institutions in social service provision. Moreover, we commend the Administration's efforts to expand charitable giving through the IRA charitable rollover and the non-itemizer charitable deduction.

Hate Crimes

We favor the Local Law Enforcement Act of 2001 which provides Federal assistance to States and local jurisdictions to prosecute hate crimes. Attacks, rooted in bigotry, have an impact on a community that reaches far beyond the victim and his/her family.

Holocaust -Era Restitution and Compensation

The Jewish community recognizes and appreciates the extraordinary efforts by the US to secure a measure of justice for Holocaust victims. We are hopeful that continued governmental involvement will lead to the resolution of outstanding claims. The JCRC supports Congressional efforts to exclude income received by Holocaust survivors for the settlement of Holocaust-related claims from federal taxes.

Religious Freedom

The JCRC supports the passage of the *Workplace Religious Freedom Act* which requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for religious employees unless such action would cause an undue hardship in the workplace.

School Prayer

JCRC opposes efforts to institute prayer or silent meditation in the public schools.

Genetic Nondiscrimination

We favor legislation that would prohibit insurers and employers from discriminating, in any way, based upon an individual's genetic information.

Election Reform

America's democracy is predicated on the right of all eligible voters to cast their ballots and to expect an impartial tabulation of the results. Outdated voting systems and restrictive rules, such as insufficient polling hours and the lack of translators and translated materials, becloud such rights. The JCRC urges Congress and the Administration to work together to identify national standards for voting and to muster appropriate resources to ensure that every vote counts.

Affirmative Action

A just society has an obligation to seek to overcome the evils of past discrimination and other deprivations by affording help to those who are historically disadvantaged. Efforts to level the playing field – such as compensatory training/education and intensive recruitment – can only hasten the productive participation of the historically disadvantaged in our society. However, we reject the proposition that race, religion, gender or ethnicity is a qualification or disqualification for any post -- we believe that individual merit is the touchstone of equality of opportunity. The JCRC will closely monitor Congressional and Executive policies affecting Affirmative Action.

Moreover, anti-discrimination laws can only be effective when enforcement agencies (e.g. EEOC) function appropriately. Victims of discrimination should not have to wait years before their cases are adjudicated.

Given the great diversity of our agencies and their clients, UJA-Federation is impacted significantly by a great deal of the legislation on which Congress deliberates; however, we would like to highlight the following concerns.

Restore Benefits to Immigrants and Refugees

Although we are very pleased that over the past four years Congress has restored some of the benefits denied legal immigrants and refugees as a result of the 1996 federal welfare reform law, many legal immigrants arriving after August 22, 1996, as well as refugees living in the US for more than seven years remain without important benefits. UJA-Federation of New York urges the support of legislation that would ensure the well being of refugees and legal immigrants who are children, elderly or disabled.

We strongly support restoration of benefits to legal immigrants in a number of ways, including restoring SSI and Medicaid to certain categories of legal immigrants who became disabled after entry, permitting food stamp eligibility to legal immigrants who reach age 65, and requiring states to provide Medicaid or SCHIP to legal immigrant children and their families regardless of their date of entry to the US.

Ease the Burdens in the INS Citizenship Process

In recent years, dramatic changes to the law and the unprecedented growth in the size and responsibilities of the INS have overwhelmed the agency. Though processing times of naturalization and green card applications has improved applicants must still wait 12 to 18 months and sometimes longer for their paperwork to be processed. There is clearly insufficient funding for the agency to adjudicate and process

applicants in a timely fashion. UJA-Federation believes that immigration laws must be enforced through nationally set priorities that are applied consistently, professionally and humanely. We support legislative efforts such as the Senior Citizenship Act of 2001 which would ease the challenges of learning English and American history and civics for the very old.

Maintain Support for Housing Programs

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program provides needed housing for this country's older Americans. In the past six years this program has sustained a 40% cut in funding from \$1.3 billion in 1995 to \$779 million in the current fiscal year. The President's budget for FY 2002 adds just several million dollars. The number of Section 202 units funded annually in the past two decades has declined dramatically, from 20,444 in 1979 to 6,000 in 1999, despite the success and the strong demand for this type of housing. As the elderly population has grown, the need and demand for low-income housing with on-site services has increased dramatically. Section 202 housing provides older people with the physical security and support they require in order to remain independent and out of more costly institutional care.

Support Naturally Occurring Retirement Community Supportive Service Programs

Enhancing NORC Supportive Service Programs is a creative and efficient method of providing supportive services that permit the elderly to age in-place. NORCs are housing complexes in which people have "aged in place" and want to remain. Typically, young families moved in, raised their children and never left. Now there are concentrated pockets of older people living in dwellings that do not provide needed services or a supportive physical environment. Providing home renovations, medical care, social services and caregiver support to those living in NORCs has resulted in efficient, targeted services and allows elderly people to remain in comfortable and less expensive surroundings while maintaining their independence and dignity.

We encourage the President and Members of Congress to support NORC demonstration projects within the Labor-HHS Appropriations Bill and co-sponsor or support authorizing legislation to bring supportive services to NORCs.

Support Adequate Funding for the Title XX Social Service Block Grant

In 1998, the transportation reauthorization bill received funding by reducing Social Service Block Grant (SSBG) authorization levels beginning in October, 2000. In a time of a large budget surplus and growing needs due to a slowing in economic growth, we urge the restoration of funds for the SSBG at the previously authorized level of \$2.38 billion. We are very disappointed that despite the enormous cuts sustained by the program in recent years, President Bush's budget for FY 2002 proposes to reduce funding for the SSBG by another \$25 million to \$1.7 billion and limits the amount of TANF funds that can be shifted to the SSBG further reducing the amount of money available to states for this important program. The Social Service Block Grant program provides federal funding to states to provide a wide variety of services to promote economic self-sufficiency, preventing and remedying the neglect and abuse of children and adults, and preventing inappropriate institutional care through the provision of community and home based care. In the past four years, more than \$750 million has been cut from this program. Steeper cuts in funding will necessitate that providers scale back these critical services.

Invest in the Child Care and Development Block Grant

UJA-Federation urges Congress to increase funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and invest in our children's future. We are concerned that

while President Bush's FY 2002 budget request for the CCDBG proposes an additional \$400 million for a new voucher initiative for afterschool child care, his budget reduces discretionary funding for the CCDBG itself by \$200 million, a cut in funding of ten percent. We hope that Congress will support a significant investment in child care initiatives that would make child care safer, more reliable and more affordable for families. Sufficiently funded, the CCDBG enables parents to work, maintain their economic independence and stay off welfare. However, while more than ten million low income children in working families are eligible for child care assistance, last year only about ten percent of these families received help because funding levels were insufficient.

Summer Youth Employment as a Stand Alone Program

For decades the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) provided job experience for tens of thousands of the state's teenagers by offering economically disadvantaged young people jobs and training during the summer months. The program included academic enrichment, basic and remedial education, work experience programs, and support services such as transportation. The federal *Workforce Investment Act*, which goes into effect July 1st, has changed summer youth employment from a stand alone program into one of ten mandated under a block grant for youth employment and training.

We are concerned that the number of job opportunities available is limited by the mandate that thirty percent of the block grant be used for out-of-school youth - last year only two percent of SYEP participants were out of school. It is anticipated that more than 25,000 jobs will be lost in New York City alone. We are hopeful that Congress will reinstate SYEP as a stand alone program so that thousands of disadvantaged teenagers learn skills essential to their future success in the workplace.

Enhance Mental Health Services for the Elderly

We urge Congress to fund the Mental Health Services Block Grant and the Targeted Capacity Expansion for Mental Health Services at levels equaling those proposed by the Administration. Enhanced mental health services for seniors would enable many more frail elderly to live productive lives in more normal settings such as their homes or in senior centers, among friends. The high co-payments required by Medicare make it almost impossible for the frail elderly to afford mental health services.

We are very pleased that the Clinton Administration has requested a \$60 million increase in funding for the Mental Health Services Block Grant and has proposed \$30 million for FY2001 to strengthen the ability of non-mental health service systems, including primary care settings and agencies serving the elderly, to treat those with mental health disorders.

Maintain Support for Housing Programs

We believe that the viability and the annual funding level of \$700 million for the Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly program must be maintained. The number of Section 202 units funded annually in the past two decades has declined dramatically, from 20,444 in 1979 to 6,000 in 1998, despite the success and the strong demand for this type of housing. As the elderly population has grown, the need and demand for low-income housing with on-site services has increased dramatically. Section 202 housing provides older people with the physical security and support they require in order to remain independent and out of more costly institutional care.

UJA-Federation also believes that the Administration's and Congress' proposed renewal of all expiring Section 8 rental assistance contracts and increase from 60,000 to 120,000 in Section 8 vouchers is a move in the right direction toward meeting the growing need for housing assistance.