

First Post-Pandemic Capitol Hill Jewish American Heritage Month Celebration

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This May, after a two-year hiatus, once again over 200 community and lay leaders gathered on Capitol Hill to celebrate and commemorate the Jewish legacy and contribution in America.

This annual event, hosted by Project Legacy, took place in the ornate Kennedy Caucus Room of the Russell Senate Office building. Jewish American Heritage Month Celebration is held annually during the month of May, which has officially been proclaimed as Jewish American Heritage Month by successive Presidents.

This year, **President Joe Biden** proclaimed, “The Jewish American experience is a story of faith, fortitude and progress. It is a quintessential American experience — one that is connected to key tenets of American identity, including our nation’s commitment to freedom of religion and conscience. This month, we honor Jewish Americans — past and present — who have inextricably woven their experience and their accomplishments into the fabric of our national identity.”

Members of Congress from both parties attended the event, expressing their support for the Jewish community and achievements and delivered remarks. Members included **Sen. Thom Tillis** (R-N.C.), **Sen. Sherrod Brown** (D-Ohio), **Sen. Ben Cardin** (D-Md.), **Sen. Cory Booker** (D-N.J.), **Sen. Richard Blumenthal** (D-Conn.), **Sen. Maggie Hassan** (D-N.H.), **Sen. Ron Wyden** (D-Ore.), **Sen. Jeff Merkley** (D-Ore.), **Rep. Grace Meng** (D-N.Y.), **Rep. Jim Costa** (D-Calif.), **Sen. John Hickenlooper** (D-Colo.), **Sen. Tim Kaine** (D-Va.), **Sen. Ted Cruz** (R-Tex.), **Sen. Jacky Rosen** (D-Nev.), **Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz** (D-Fla.), **Rep. Tim Ryan** (D-Ohio) and **Rep. Brad Schneider** (D-Ill.).

Many notable guests were present as well, such as **Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt**, the special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism; **White House Jewish Liaison Chanan Weissman**; event co-chairs **Brock Pierce** and **Alex Yakovlev**; and **Rabbi Levi Shemtov**, Executive VP of the American Friends of Lubavitch (CHABAD). Diplomats from the embassies of Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Slovakia, Hungary, Korea and Morocco joined together in support of Jewish heri-

tage as well.

Event Chair **Greg Rosenbaum** introduced the four honorees: ADL national director emeritus **Abe Foxman**, philanthropist **Tzili Charney**, **Bukharian Chief Rabbi Itzhak Yehoshua** and founder of Tzedek Association, **Rabbi Moshe Margareten**.

Speeches at the event addressed the history of Judaism and antisemitism in America, the present situation and how to approach the future of Jewish community in the United States.

Sen. Wasserman Schultz, the originator of Jewish American Heritage Month, thanked **Greg Rosenbaum** for leading the celebration each year.

Sen. Kaine called the honorees “Four fantastic role models for all of us.”

Sen. Cruz stood by the Jewish community, saying, “It is now clear to us that America needs to be friends with Israel; therefore, we will be friends with Israel.”

Sen. Cardin stated, “I don’t know of a person who has done more to fight not just antisemitism, but the rise of hate in the United States and around the world than **Abe Foxman**.”

Sen. Wyden made a statement, saying, “Nobody is free unless everyone is free; and the Jewish people understand that!”

Rep. Meng, noting her connection to the Jewish people, said, “In our district, every month is Jewish Heritage Month.”

Sen. Hickenlooper, praising the Jewish community, said, “What you are all here for are what these recipients have stood for.”

Rep. Schneider, talking about his own experience, related, “The first thing I did when I came to Congress was put a *mezuzah* on my door.”

Sen. Brown: “American Jews and people of all faiths have dedicated their lives to fighting for justice in our local communities and in our great country; Jewish heritage is American heritage.”

Sen. Blumenthal: “Thank you to **Greg Rosenbaum**. All of you know him, and you know how much he has done to celebrate and preserve Jewish heritage.”

Rep. Costa: “We are here today because of the Jewish people, for the world that they have and continue to make, with their presence felt.”

Sen. Booker wished, “*Yeyasher*

koach and *b’ezrat Hashem* next year we will see a nation with less hate and more love.”

Rabbi Levi Shemtov made an impact in his statement, “As the victims of antisemitism, we need to understand why we are who we are, and that is something which is unfortunately diminishing in our generation. We must counter this as much as we must counter antisemitism itself.”

The members of Congress then congratulated the honorees and presented them with their awards. **Sen. Tillis** expressed thanks to **Rabbi Margareten** for his tireless work in the humanitarian field: “The Tzedek Association, led by **Rabbi Margareten**, stands for protecting and saving lives. This is what inspires him to work on improving our criminal justice system, and it’s also what inspires him to work on other humanitarian causes.”

Rabbi Margareten, accepting the award, said that he accepted it on behalf of the entire Tzedek Organization team for their work in Ukraine. Noting the 2,700 people they have already fed and rescued — which was met with applause by the attendees — **Rabbi Margareten** went on to say, “It is important to thank our members of Congress, and I think that we can accomplish incredible things together. Thank you for this great honor.”

Sen. Merkley said about the honorees, “I was struck by what they had done — **Abraham Foxman** leading the ADL for decades, **Ms. Charney’s** Resolution Center for Peace and Diplomacy for students all around the world...”

Sen. Rosen congratulated **Abe Foxman** for the award, saying, “There is nobody who has been more passionate, more outspoken, who has knocked on every door, the epitome of persistence, doing everything he can to make this world a better place ... and to fight against global antisemitism.”

Abe Foxman said in his speech, accepting the honor, “I have been privileged to be part of the American Jewish community imperative of never again ... [I believe in] a fairer and more honest America that can undo prejudice, as well as ... in the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

“I believe words make a difference, that the power of life and death is in the tongue, that words can kill and words can heal, that good words

can stop hate, that they can prevent pain and save lives. I believe we can change people’s minds and hearts.”

Sen. Hassan spoke about **Ms. Charney**, specifically how her philanthropic work spans many disciplines. “Tzili does important work to promote education, conflict resolution and peace. What I was struck by about her work is her ability to work across disciplines in the areas of diplomacy, medicine and the arts.”

Tzili Charney, after accepting her award, gave the following speech: “American Jewry was always there to support American democracy and inhale the notion of American exceptionalism. Conflict resolution and peacemaking were always on top of their agenda. It is no surprise then that my late husband actively supported **President Jimmy Carter’s** effort to make peace between Israel and Egypt in the late ’70s. I am committed to continuing this rich legacy of educating future generations about the need to exercise diplomacy first and to aspire to resolve what may look like an unsolvable conflict.”

Sen. Cardin presented an award to **Chief Rabbi Itzhak Yehoshua**, saying, “We honor your outstanding leadership, building a community of 65,000 members, indeed an invaluable contribution to the American Jewish experience.”

Chief Rabbi Yehoshua noted that the day was 3,334 years from the date that the first *mann* came down from heaven. “It came every day and then disappeared, and the question is, why? Some of the Rabbis say it is because we must learn how to say thank you daily. And in conclusion, I would like to thank G-d for giving us this opportunity to be together after such a long time. Finally, I’d like to thank all the honorees for what they are doing and what they do for the community.”

In conclusion, **Ezra Friedlander**, CEO of The Friedlander Group and founder of Project Legacy, acknowledged **Brock Piece**, chairman of the Bitcoin Foundation, and **Alex Yakovlev** as pillars of Jewish American Heritage Month celebration.

Greg Rosenbaum ended his remarks by inviting the participants to the panel discussion on the **Abraham Accords**, hosted by **Bobby Rechnitz**, that took place after the luncheon.