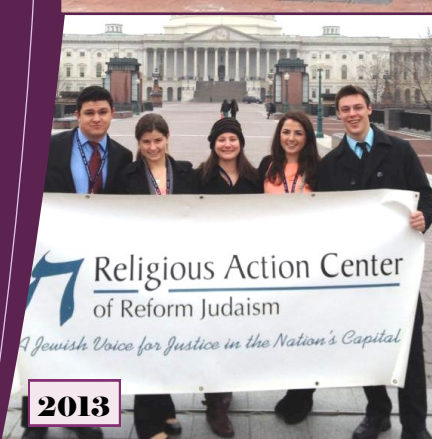


L'Dor V'Dor

From Generation to Generation



<http://www.rac.org/ltaken-social-justice-seminars>



CONGREGATION
SHOMREI TORAH
שומרי תורה



L'Taken 2018

Every year, thousands of high school-aged students participate in the Religious Action Center's *L'Taken* Seminar in Washington, D.C. In February 2018, sixteen of those students were from Congregation Shomrei Torah.



Malcolm McElheney, Jonah Gottlieb, Audrey Feiwell, Toby Feibusch, Kelsey Perlman, Faith St. Amant, Molly Louvau, Sarah Abramson, Bella Clark, Mia Zechow, Bella Nadler, Adam Zimmer, Sophie Flores, Lucas Navarro, Nate Rowand, Mara St. Amant, Joseph Harville

L'Taken is designed to expose students to a variety of public policy issues, show them how to explore the Jewish values surrounding these issues, and teach the skills of an effective advocate.

Throughout the weekend, students were given the knowledge and tools to write effective, persuasive and passionate speeches on topics of their choice. Speeches were presented when visiting the offices of our senators and representatives during the trip.

Students also took advantage of the vast opportunities available in our nation's capital by visiting the National Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Smithsonian National Mall and celebrating Havdallah at the Jefferson Memorial.

At the same time, students had the chance to meet and mingle with thousands of Reform Jews from across the United States, all of whom were in D.C. for the same reason—to pursue Tikkun Olam.

“I love taking our teens to *L'Taken* every year. I get to see them participate in programming that is rich and informative, interactive and thoughtful. Watching them deliver their passionate speeches is truly exciting. Through a program like this, we really see the best in our young congregants.

Two days after our sixteen Shomrei Torah teens came back from Washington, a horrible and senseless mass shooting occurred in Parkland, Florida. Immediately, teens from Parkland, joined by others from communities all around the country, mobilized and have been making their voices heard. This is a pivotal moment for teens everywhere. They have always had the drive and capacity to do amazing social justice work, but now it is publicly visible. It makes me happy knowing that their impact will be felt soon as they reach the age to vote (and run for office).

Our teens are part of this incredible movement. I hope everyone joins me in applauding the work they have done and the work they will do in the future .”

– Malcolm McElheney, Youth and Music Coordinator and *L'Taken* Chaperone

Immigration

Toby Feibusch and Kelsey Perlman

As you probably know, in 2012 the Obama Administration established the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, also known as DACA, which granted legal status on a conditional basis to undocumented youth who were brought to the United States as children. The average age of DACA recipients when they came to the United States was six and a half years old. This means that a lot of them do not remember anything from the country they came from. These children grew up going to school, living, and contributing to their community in the United States and some of them have even created families of their own who are US citizens. For many families being deported means having their family ripped apart and being sent back to a country that they do not remember ever being in before.

DACA has improved the lives of its 741,546 recipients so much. A survey of 1,308 recipients shows that DACA has improved the economic, educational, and employment experiences and outcomes of recipients and their families. For example 87% of DACA recipients are in the work force and another 8% are in school. On March 5, 2018 DACA will completely come to an end. This leaves all of the DREAMers subject to being deported. When they applied for DACA they put a lot of trust into our government by giving up personal contact information such as a phone number and home address. Since September 5, 2017, the Trump Administration has been using that information to track DACA recipients down and deport them.

The Reform Jewish movement still strongly believes that comprehensive immigration reform legislation is the only way to truly address the deficiencies in the immigration system. In Leviticus, the third of five books of the Torah, it states, “When strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall not do them wrong. The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” This text relates to us even now because the United States is a country of immigrants. Other than the Native Americans, we all came from somewhere else seeking a better life and a new start. The Torah teaches us to care for vulnerable populations, including non citizens. Some of the Central Jewish teachings are *Piddyon Shevuyim* which means redeeming the captive, *Chesed* which translates to kindness, *Hachnasat Orchim* which is hospitality, and the most important of them all: love your neighbor as yourself. All of these play a large part in what DACA is aiming to do.

Since 1873 the Union for Reform Judaism has spoken out repeatedly in the support of a fair and non-discriminatory immigration policy. As Jewish people, we are especially aware how helpful open immigration policies can be because we remember how they benefited the Jewish people fleeing persecution in search of a better and safer place to live.

I personally grew up in Guatemala. I have seen the struggle that people go through in order to make a better life for their families as well as themselves. Also, I obviously live in California. The majority of the students I go to school with are Latino, and I’m sure that a lot of them know or are Dreamers. The idea of having so many of my friends and classmates, as well as their families, be terrified of their future instead of looking forward to it, makes my heart break and my mind search for ways in which I could make a difference for them. When I learned about this opportunity, I immediately knew that this was the cause I wanted to lobby for. The reason for this is because like I stated before, this issue is really close to my heart. I want to be able to talk to my friends about colleges we want to attend, places we want to travel to, and families we want to have. I want to be able to have these conversations and not have them be uncertain and wonder whether or not they will be able to do these things like the rest of us. I, as well as the rest of the people fighting for the Dream Act, find it unjust that DACA recipients feel like this now just because they were born in a different country, speak a different language, and have a different color skin than the rest of us.

As women who are able to speak for the voiceless, we thank the Representative for co-sponsoring the Dream Act of 2017 (H.R.3440), and urge them to ask congressional leadership to bring the bill to a vote immediately. We believe that it is crucial for our Dreamers to know that they are being supported, that their families won’t be ripped apart, that there is a permanent, legislative fix, and that they are able to trust the government to have their best interest in mind. It is imperative that Congress passes a clean bill, with no added enforcement measures or funding for a border wall because these DREAMers are just like the rest of us: trying to make a living and lead the best lives they can in a situation that may not be quite perfect.

Climate Change

Audrey Feiwell and Sophie Flores

We are here to talk about the urgent and alarming issue of climate change, and what Representative Mike Thompson can do to combat it. As we’re sure our representative is aware; while, yes, the Earth is currently in a period of natural climate warmth, human irresponsibility is drastically perpetuating the issue.

In its 2013 report, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change concluded that the evidence for climate change is “unequivocal” and that human activity, primarily the CO2 emissions that come from the burning of fossil fuels, is “extremely likely” the cause. But climate change is not just a statistic; it currently is and will affect all living creatures of our world. Climate change causes increased exposure to extreme heat, poor air quality, changes in infectious agents and population displacement, resulting in heat-related illnesses, respiratory illnesses, food/water/ vector-borne diseases, and mental health consequences. In fact, it is predicted that between 2030 and 2050, climate change will cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year. Even though the United States is home to only 5% of the world’s population, we produce almost 1/3 of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. This means that we in particular have a great responsibility to address and potentially counter climate change by any means necessary.

As Jewish teens, we were raised on the concept of *bal tashchit*, “do not destroy”, teaching us that the human domain over nature does not include a license to abuse the environment, as is currently being done. We are obligated to conserve the land that has housed the human race for millennia, and preserve its sanctity for the equally deserving generations to come. As the book of Ecclesiastes says so eloquently, “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the Earth remains forever”.

And while we worry how climate change will increasingly affect future inhabitants of the Earth, we in Santa Rosa have already dealt with the dire consequences of our careless consumption of its resources. In the middle of the night on October 8th, we, alongside our families and most of our community, were forced to flee through embers, choking on clouds of acrid smoke. Violent winds and drought-dried land due to climate change were the main perpetrators of its rapid spread and ongoing devastation. The smell of smoke, howling winds, and the sound of sirens haunt us to this day. Over 10,000 homes burned to the ground, taking the lives of more than 40 people. Just weeks later, a similar catastrophe plagued our state yet again in Southern California, this time accompanied by mudslides.

Due to these global, moral, and personal motivators, we strongly urge Representative Mike Thompson to cosponsor the 100 by ‘50 Act, H.R.3314, legislation that addresses negative impacts of climate change and fossil fuel use. This “just transition” proposal intends to move to 100% renewable energy by 2050, taking away our large share of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. Cosponsoring this bill is the first step to saving our planet. Thank you for your time.



Sophie Flores & Audrey Feiwell

Kelsey Perlman & Toby Feibusch, right.

Reproductive Rights

Molly Louvau, Faith & Mara St. Amant

We are here to discuss the issue of women’s reproductive rights in our nation, specifically access to abortion. First, we would like to clarify that identifying as pro-choice is not the equivalent to being pro-abortion. It is simply the belief that women should legally be in control over their own bodies and be the only ones to make decisions regarding it.

In 1976, as I’m sure you are already aware, the Hyde Amendment was passed, prohibiting federal dollars from going to abortion services. This ban has mainly impacted women who rely on Medicare and Medicaid for health care, as well as women in the armed forces and some federal employees. Of the women within reproductive age in our nation, there are about 16 million relying on Medicaid and millions more using other federally-funded health plans.

The Hyde Amendment severely restricts these women’s ability to be in control of their reproductive health. Low-income women are most likely to rely on government-funded health care, skewing the proportions of women affected by this ban toward those of color, immigrants, and young women. This amendment has endangered millions of women’s reproductive health for 42 years, causing an entire generation of women to forfeit their rights over their bodies due to their financial status and nation’s policies.

From a Reform Jewish perspective, all life is sacred because we are all created *B’tzelem Elohim*, in the image of G-d, and we are all equal in that sense of value and importance. However, it says in *Mishnah Ohalot 7:6* “If a woman’s labor becomes life threatening, the one to be born is dismembered in her abdomen... for her life comes before the life of the fetus.”

We believe that an individual has not been created until the baby is born, therefore, we place the life of the mother, who is already living and breathing in the image of G-d, above the life of a potential child. While we do not believe abortion is an acceptable or reasonable form of birth control, if a pregnancy occurs by means of accident, rape, or if a complication puts a mother or her child’s life at risk, we believe the woman should not be forced to endure the emotional and physical trauma of giving birth.

As a young woman, I feel obligated to advocate for women, their bodies, and their right to control their reproductive health. A deep sense of concern for the lives and bodies of the women of the United States, and the rest of the world for that matter, is inflicted by the decisions made by men who do not, and are not expected to, know the haunting threat of an accidental, untimely, and ultimately inescapable pregnancy. This is a concern that is felt by too many to be ignored.

Usually, women living in unsafe, low-income neighborhoods are in need of abortions, but sometimes don’t have the means to receive one. Due to the low number of abortion clinics in America, an average of 59 miles of travel is required in order for women to receive proper care, but often cannot afford this transportation, extended time off of work, or the hotel room required to accommodate for a potential and common 72 hour waiting period.

The Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance Act, or the EACH Woman Act, repeals the Hyde Amendment and provides women of all ages, races, religions, and income levels, to receive a safe and legal abortion. It is vital to the women of America that this act is passed. In many states, parental consent is needed in order to gain an abortion, but it should be the mother’s decision, not her family’s. It is the right, not luxury, of each and every woman to decide when, how, and if they want to have a family.

Health care should be available to all that require it. As Rabbi Moses Sofer said “No woman is required to build up the world by destroying herself.” We thank you (our representative) for cosponsoring the EACH Woman Act.



Climate Change

Jonah Gottlieb and Bella Nadler

The Torah says: “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the Earth remains forever.” As you are well aware, human activity has exacerbated the natural greenhouse effect, causing the average global temperatures to rise significantly. The actions we take now are imperative for the future of not only our nation, but the entire world.

Today, we would like to express the way our Jewish values align with this issue and we would like to thank Representative Huffman for his co-sponsorship and constant support of the 100 by '50 Act.

When we think about natural disasters caused by climate change, our thoughts are automatically drawn to hurricanes like Harvey, Irma and Maria, or melting ice caps thousands of miles away. But for us, the problems facing our planet hit very close to home.

As you know, the Sonoma County fires of fall 2017 were devastating to the entire community. The powerful winds, caused by our mistreatment of the environment, turned several small blazes into walls of flame that destroyed businesses, homes, possessions and lives. Being in Petaluma, I was just outside the evacuation zone. At three AM the morning of the fires, I was awakened by the sound of dogs barking. Unbeknownst to me at the time, several of our friends from Santa Rosa and Sebastopol had evacuated in the middle of the night and showed up on our doorstep, along with their dogs.

From early Monday morning to Friday afternoon, my house was filled with evacuees. For that entire terrifying week, the number of guests fluctuated almost hourly, with new people appearing left and right. As the toxic air quality left us unable to go outside without masks, we were trapped inside, all of us fearing for our homes, schools and places of business. As we packed our bags in case the fires reached Petaluma, I reached out to my nervous friends online, all of us worried that our small high school would be forced to close if it burned the same way their homes did. These traumatic events cemented the idea in me that fighting climate change is not just about protecting plants and animals. Climate change directly affects human life.

Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths each year. Additionally, humans are becoming increasingly exposed to toxic air quality, polluted water and food-borne diseases. Unfortunately, the people most likely to be affected by these health issues are people who can only be blamed for a fraction of the damage to our environment. While the world’s wealthiest nations hold the greatest responsibility for climate change, poor communities and nations bear the brunt of the effects.

In the United States today, environmental risks are not evenly distributed, with social and economic minorities being impacted the most. This injustice has been going on for decades but continues to, time and time again, be swept under the rug. While seemingly capricious, communities are not contaminated at random. Traits such as race, ethnicity, and class can cause one to be at a disproportionately high risk for environmental disease. The United States is home to 5% of the world's population, yet we produce almost 1/3 of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. As a self-declared global leader, it is time to take some action.

Built into Jewish tradition is an obligation to love and care for all that G-d has granted to us. As G-d said to Adam in the Garden of Eden, “See how beautiful and praiseworthy all of my works are? Everything I have created has been created for your sake. Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy my world; for if you corrupt it, there will be no one to set it right after you.” G-d teaches us to preserve the world that has been created for all species.

The Jewish concept of *bal tashchit*, meaning “do not destroy,” expands on this notion by teaching us that human dominance over nature does not include a license to abuse the environment. Derived from Deuteronomy, Jews have been opponents of the human-caused destruction of our globe since ancient times. These Jewish teachings just reaffirm our belief that humans must take responsibility for ruining our environment and make amends for what we have done, before the climate is irreversibly altered.

With the planet's temperature increasing ever so quickly, the time to act is now. We thank Representative Huffman for supporting the 100 by '50 Act and being one of our nation’s best legislative hopes for saving ourselves from the planet we have contaminated, polluted, defiled and putrefied. We implore the Congressman to continue the fight for environmental justice by sponsoring legislation that will continue our efforts to fight climate change. To complacently stand by while the climate rapidly changes and hurts American citizens and the global population as a whole makes all of us complicit in the demise of humanity.



Israel

Sarah Abramson, Bella Clark

As members of the reform Jewish movement and involved American teens, we understand that Israel is a big and complex issue facing the US. As Jewish Americans we understand both sides of the conflict but we do see a peaceful, thriving Jewish state as a priority for Jews in the diaspora with many benefits for America as its most crucial ally.

Last year during my spring semester, I was lucky enough to be able to participate in a program in Israel called URJ Heller High which is a semester abroad program run through an organization called NFTY, the reform Jewish youth movement. Before this program, my views on Israel were informed only by information I had been given or told, but nothing I had ever truly sought out. This semester allowed me learn about the conflict in Israel through experience, rather than simply reading an article or watching a documentary. These experiences absolutely changed my life.

I was able to form a belief which is truly my own, based on my own experiences and encounters with Jewish Israelis from across the political spectrum, Palestinians living in both Israel proper and territories. While there is so much violence and hate between both sides of this conflict, there is also a sense of hope existing on both sides which never disappears even in the conflicts darkest hours. I was most able to see this hope when I met with a group in Israel called Kids4peace, which brings together teens in Israel from every nationality and religion to put aside their differences for a few hours every month and interact with people they normally never would. This hope for peace I saw in teens my own age inspires me every day when I think about this conflict and its resolution in the future. And while I do have hope that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be resolved one day soon, I unfortunately realize that there are so many deeply-seated issues which need to be addressed in order for resolution to occur.

We see the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be imperative for a multitude of reasons. As Jews, we see Israel as a place in which we can always find refuge; and it is painful to see our home and those who live in it, both Jewish and Palestinian, suffer. While we do see Israel as the home of the Jewish people, we also believe in the Jewish value of *btzelem elohim*, which sees everyone as being created equally and therefore deserving of the same rights. As American citizens, we also hold this belief on a constitutional level and see it promoted through our democratic system. When combining our Jewish practices and democratic values as American citizens, we see a balance of these aspects in Israel. The democratic system practiced in Israel, being the singular one throughout the middle east, is one of the main reasons we as Americans see Israel as our greatest ally in the middle east.

The only way for Israel to maintain its status as a democracy like we see today is through a peace process ending in a Jewish and Palestinian state. This type of resolution would not only benefit Israelis and Palestinians by finally bringing peace, but would provide many benefits to the US. These benefits include a thriving Israeli economy which is directly beneficial to the US, and keeping our greatest ally in the middle east thriving and at peace.

But for this type of peace process to occur between Israelis and Palestinians, we need US involvement. Some of the problems that have escalated over the last few years such as illegal Israeli settlements in the west bank, new

outbreaks of terror and violence on both sides, and rising animosity with an unwillingness to compromise all call for a third party intervention. Unfortunately we have recently seen this possibility begin to dwindle.

We know Senator Feinstein has long supported Israel and the necessary US involvement which has helped Israel in many ways and we ask that she continue this through supporting increased US economic aid to Israel and keeping the US involved in negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians as a necessary third party. However we know that now more than ever, anti-Israel sentiment is very prevalent throughout the US. So we ask Senator Feinstein to bring together her fellow democratic party members in support of Israel and this necessary US involvement which, will bring us a step closer to a lasting peace in the middle east.



Campaign Finance

Lucas Navarro, Nate Rowand, Mia Zechow

Campaign finance reform is a key issue in the United States because elections are the cornerstone of the democratic process; they’re what make us a democracy instead of another type of government. If running for governmental positions is too expensive for most people to do or if money becomes too influential in our elections, then they stop representing the will of the people and start allowing those with the most money to unduly affect our elections.

Before 2008, many campaigns were publically funded - they got money from the US government and from small donors for their campaigns but couldn’t take large donations. Barack Obama declined public funding in 2008 and made significantly more money with private funding than he could have publically, and after a Supreme Court decision in 2010, rich outside sources like Super PACs could essentially donate unlimited money to one candidate. Then, in 2014, outside sources were allowed to give money to as many candidates as they liked, where previously they could only give to 18 candidates. Because of these decisions over the past few years, money has been given a more and more important position in our elections, which creates a clear need for finance reform to ensure that poor and middle-class citizens do not have their voices drowned out.

This issue of money corrupting rings deeply within Jewish values. As it is written in Deuteronomy 16:19, “You shall not judge unfairly: you shall know no partiality; you shall not take gifts, for gifts blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the pleas of the just”. Currently, the public’s voices are being shouted over by large corporations and people who can afford to throw around large sums of money. These large donations are able to sway representatives and senators into complying with the wants of these donors. “As soon as a person receives a gift from another, they become so well disposed towards them that they become like their own person, and no person sees themselves as wrong,” writes *Talmud Tractate Ketubot*, a collection of interpretations of the Torah. By allowing candidates to accept large donations, we make the smaller donations their supporters give them less meaningful. The We the People Democracy Reform Act will make the public’s money more important and bring the power back to everyone just as it should be. Rabbi Yitzhak said, “A ruler is not to be appointed until the community is first consulted” and because of the current campaign finance reform, the community is not being consulted.

I’m no super PAC. I don’t own a multi-billion dollar company. I can’t raise millions in funds through just a quick trip to the bank. I’m just one concerned citizen. And yet, there are many more like me all across this great country, and our voices deserve to be heard as much as anyone else’s.

I became interested in campaign finance reform after realizing that it underlies so many other issues I feel passionately about. After losing my home to the devastating Tubbs forest fire, I care deeply about protecting the environment, but my campaign donations will never match those of large fossil fuel companies. I value legislation that promotes gun safety, but I can’t outbid the NRA. I strongly support net neutrality, but I won’t be able to overcome internet service providers. By myself I can’t do any of these things. However, when everyday people are encouraged to donate to campaigns they feel passionately about, together they have a chance to change the political landscape in a way that accurately portrays the American people.

In the 115th Congress, the We the People Democracy Reform Act of 2017 (Bill 3848) was introduced by Senator Udall and Representative Price. This would create a better public financing system for candidates that commit to accepting small donations and demonstrate their public support, and would offer a \$25 tax incentive for individuals making small contributions, allowing people to make their voices heard. We urge Representative Thompson to cosponsor H.R. 3848 to institute a better public financing system for Congressional elections.



Immigration

Joe Harville and Adam Zimmer

We came here today to speak to you about the Dream Act of 2017, H.R 3440. DACA is the act that the Obama administration established, providing nearly 800,000 undocumented immigrant youth, known as DREAMers, access to work permits, schools, and the ability to contribute to our economy and society without fear of deportation. In September of 2017, President Trump announced that he would be bringing an end to the DACA program. By ending DACA, these DREAMers are opened up to deportation, some to places they haven’t been to in decades. All many DREAMers want is just to give back to society and raise a family in the only nation they know as home.

This act is meaningful, bipartisan legislation that would provide a more permanent solution to individuals who are now at risk of deportation. The Dream Act would grant 3.3 million dreamers a possibility of permanent resident status, would permit conditional permanent residents to then obtain lawful permanent resident status if they attend college, work in the US, or serve in the US military. Also, our country benefits economically from passing the Dream Act. Passing the act and placing all immediately eligible workers on a path to legal status would add a total of 22.7 billion annually to the US gross domestic product (or GDP). Because the gains from legalization grow every year, the total gain in GDP over 10 years would be 281 billion dollars! Also, enacting the Dream Act would reduce deficits by about \$2.2 billion over the next ten years, according to the estimates by the CBO and the Joint Committee on Taxation.

Throughout Jewish history, Jews have been in the position that is similar to the DREAMers today, and understand what it’s like to be treated as a “stranger.” Our values are reflected in our ancestors’ writings in the Torah. For example, the book of Leviticus within the Torah commands, “When strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall not do them wrong. The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (19:33-34) As a Jew I see DREAMers as members of our community, not strangers. Their situation reminds me of our past, and we should help them receive the same assistance that the Jewish people received many years ago.

When people around the world are suffering, sometimes the conflict doesn’t seem truly real because of both the physical and mental distance from many of these issues. As a Californian, a resident of a state with a large immigrant population, the issues created by DACA are in my backyard. One day, my mom arrived home from her job as a sixth grade public school teacher in my hometown of Santa Rosa, California with a slightly dejected expression on her face. To find out what was wrong, or if anything was wrong, I asked her how her day went. She told me that one

of her students, a Hispanic child with immigrant parents, broke into tears at school because they were worried their parents would be deported to Mexico after living in the US for years after President Trump rescinded DACA.

Sadly, this portrait of sadness, betrayal, and uncertainty is not at all unusual right now. These feelings are what inspired me to educate others and advocate for protection for DREAMers, Americans who don’t deserve to get unceremoniously dumped back into a foreign country.

In conclusion, we would like to thank this Representative, Mike Thompson, for cosponsoring the Dream Act of 2017 and urge them to ask congressional leadership to bring the bill to a vote immediately.

It is vital that Congress acts to protect DREAMers and ensure there is a permanent, legislative fix. We ask that they continue to support a clean bill, with no added enforcement measures or funding for a border wall. Thank you for listening to us, and we hope you have a nice rest of your day.



