

L'Dar V'Dar

From Generation to Generation



www.cstsr.org/ltaken

L'Taken 2019

CONGREGATION
SHOMREI TORAH
שומרי תורה



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁנָּתַתָּ לָנוּ הִזְדַּמְנוּת לְתִקּוֹן אֶת-הָעוֹלָם

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, shenatan lanu
hizdamnut l'takein et haolam*

Praised are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe,
who has given us the opportunity to change the world.

EVERY YEAR over
2000 high school aged
students participate in
the Religious Action
Center's L'Taken Semi-
nar in Washington, D.C.

In January 2019, fifteen
of those teens were
from Congregation
Shomrei Torah.

CHANGING the World



The Shomrei Torah delegation in front of Senator Kamala Harris' office.

Top to Bottom, Left to Right:

Mateo Mijares-Greenberg, Benjamin Eisley, Cayden Schneider, Olivia Jacobs, Julia Goldin, Benjamin Wainer, Jack Jacobs, Jonah Gottlieb, Kelsey Perlman, Miko Giglio, Rachel Banks, Mara St. Amant, Rachel Harris, Faith St. Amant, Talia Polston-Schwartz, Rabbi Stephanie Kramer, Malcolm McElheney.



Shomrei Torah sent a group of teens to Washington DC for the L'Taken Social Justice Seminar for the eighth consecutive year – regardless of the longest government shutdown in American history. Despite the shutdown and a two-day snowstorm, our 15 teens still accomplished something incredible.

The Religious Action Center, the legislative branch of the URJ, brought together dozens of congregations from all over the U.S. for this seminar. During their four days in DC, our teens participated in programming and simulations all geared toward the understanding of these three important points: what issues are in need of advocacy, why the pursuit of justice is inherently Jewish, and just what can a teen do about it. In addressing these, the RAC made space for the teens to dive deep and taught them how to be an effective advocate. All this culminated in our teens meeting with representatives on Capitol Hill.

Most of the congressional offices were open, despite the shutdown, so our teens were able to lobby on issues upon which they are the most passionate. Staffers from the offices of Senators Kamala Harris and Dianne Feinstein and Representatives Jared Huffman (CA-2) and Mike Thompson (CA-5) were there to listen to what the teens had prepared. The Shomrei Torah delegation chose to lobby on campaign finance reform, funding disability education programs, immigration reform, gun violence prevention, LGBTQ+ rights, comprehensive sex education, and climate change. While explaining why these issues were important to them as teens and as Jews, they requested cosponsoring for legislation the Reform movement supports.

Our teens were challenged in a unique way while they were in DC. This caliber of experiential education is something truly special, and we know just how vital the work is. These fifteen young adults know what they must do now to make their future a better place.

LGBTQ RIGHTS

Olivia Jacobs & Cayden Schneider

There has been plenty of progress made since the Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964. For example, the legalization of same sex marriage and the acceptance of “top surgery” have been large steps forward in equality for the LGBTQ+ community, yet there is still a lot more to be done. Many of these issues that still need to be addressed are connected to people’s sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual Orientation refers to an individual’s physical or emotional attraction to the same and/or different sex. Gender Identity refers to a person’s inner understanding of the gender to which they identify... each person’s unique knowing or feeling... separate from a person’s physical body or appearance. 26 states do not have explicit nondiscrimination protections for sexual orientation or gender identity, in regards to employment and housing. This means that people could be denied a job, fired from a job, denied housing, or have their rent raised because of how they identify sexually or with their gender.

There is a similar situation in 27 states that don’t have explicit nondiscrimination protections, which could deny people basic public accommodations. In 2017 FBI Hate Crime statistics revealed that there were 1,130 hate crimes based on sexual orientations in 2017 and 119 hate crimes based on gender identity, including 106 targeting transgender people. These numbers of hate crimes were an increase since 2016. The Human Rights Campaign 2018 Healthcare Equality Index reports that 70 percent of transgender and gender non-conforming patients and 56 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual patients experienced some sort of discrimination in health care. In 2016, one in four LGBTQ+ Americans reported having experienced discrimination. From all of this information, it is clear that there is need for a change in this country for the LGBTQ+ community.

Both of us identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community causing us to have a personal connection to this topic. I have a few friends who identify as non-binary. They both use they/them pronouns and use gender neutral names. One of these people told the teachers that they wanted to be addressed in that way. The teachers were supportive, but other

students began to act strange around them. The other person doesn’t want to deal with this pressure that is put on them, so they continue to respond to another name and she/her pronouns. This fear of being the gender as they identify should not be a part of peoples’ high school or adult lives.

While I was in the 7th grade I knew someone who was in 6th grade. He started transitioning that year which was quite brave. But due to that ,some individuals believed it was appropriate to make fun of him. Him and all of his friends, even some people who barely knew him, told them to stop. Sadly they did not listen and continued doing what they were doing. Later on that year it got so bad for him he started having suicidal thoughts. Which he ended up acting on, but he didn’t end up succeeding in his attempt. When the bullies heard about what happened it really put things in perspective for them. The problem is that it shouldn’t take attempted suicide for people to understand how important being supportive of someone’s gender identity is. I want this bill to be passed so people’s childhood problems don’t follow them into their adult lives. I am afraid for people like our friends when they grow up and they could possibly be denied housing, denied or fired from work, and continue to struggle throughout their lives.

As Jewish teenagers growing up in a time of change, our Judaism reflects our values. Judaism teaches that all human beings are created *b'tzelem Elohim* – in the Divine image. As it says in Genesis 1:27 “And God created humans in God’s own image, in the image of God, God created them...”. This is important to the LGBTQ+ movement because it shows that if God created us in God’s image, that being what ever gender or sexual orientation that you identify with is who you are supposed to be. Across Jewish legal codes and rabbinic commentary, there are hundreds of references to at least six different genders. Rabbi David Saperstein, Director Emeritus of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism wrote, “Regardless of context, discrimination against any person arising from apathy, insensitivity, ignorance, fear, or hatred is inconsistent with this fundamental belief. We oppose discrimination against all LGBTQ individuals, for the stamp of the Divine is present in each and every one of us.” All of these examples show how the Jewish religion is in support of LGBTQ+ equality.

Overall, we are asking for your continued support of the Equality Act (H.R. 2282/S.1006 in the 115th Congress). This act addresses many areas of LGBTQ discrimination including employment, housing, education, jury selection, public accommodations, credit, and federally funded programs. This will be done by using already existing civil rights laws and adding people’s sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of things that are protected. The Equality Act will significantly shrink the discrimination and hate that the LGBTQ+ community faces. This bill will give the LGBTQ+ community the same protections given to other protected classes under federal law.

The Equality Act has not yet been reintroduced in the 116th congress. Thank you for cosponsoring the Equality Act last congress, and we urge you to cosponsor the Equality act again when it is reintroduced. As teenagers growing up in this country, looking toward the future, we ask for your continued support to get this bill passed.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Talia Polston-Schwartz & Kelsey Perlman

As you probably know, the effects of climate change are abundant and incredibly severe. We’ve already begun to see the effects through extreme weather events like the hurricanes and wildfires that affect everybody, but especially lower income and vulnerable communities. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress. In addition, the world is expected to reach 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming as early as 2030 unless significant action is taken. Once we reach this limit, we will see an even more dramatic increase in effects such as heat waves, decreased rainfall, decreased crop yields, species loss, ocean acidification resulting in coral reef bleaching, and sea level rise will occur, impacting the health, food security, water supply, and economic growth of communities around the world. This is an issue that requires immediate action on a large scale. The 100 by ‘50 Act is an ambitious and comprehensive energy bill that would mandate the U.S. move to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050, an incredibly important step in the right direction.

As a reform Jew, I am very passionate about many social justice issues. This passion has come almost entirely from my connection to my Jewish community and the teachings of Judaism. Because of my strong connection to my Jewish community, I have been able to lobby and educate people on important bills, participate in marches and protests, and much more. Judaism speaks extensively about our responsibility to future generations. When God created Adam, God showed him the Garden of Eden and said to him, “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.” As God shows us, the world is precious, and we are responsible for protecting and preserving it.

Both of us lived very close to the fires in October of 2017. It got as close as 3 miles from my house and we both know many people who

lost their homes. Just yesterday we were walking outside when it was snowing and someone pointed out that the snow falling looked like ash falling from the sky. As soon as I heard that I started to feel like I couldn’t breathe. When the fires were going on I would run from our synagogue, where I was helping to run a day camp for kids who were impacted by the fires, to the car trying not to breathe outside air for fear of it damaging my lungs and all of a sudden I was thrown back in time. No matter how many times I told myself it was just snow, it was hard to shake the feeling of being right back in my backyard with entire pages of cookbooks falling onto my yard.

In November of last year I got the opportunity to become a Student Advisor to the California Board of Education. When I got asked what I would change about the education system my immediate response was to better the climate education and increase the sustainability of the schools themselves. A couple of friends and myself who are members of the California Association of Student Council created the proposal of CESA (California Environmental Schools Award). The CESA is established to recognize high schools that have attained a high level of environmental competence in the areas of recycling, waste reduction, energy conservation, and water conservation. Schools that have fulfilled at least one action per sustainable principle (the areas stated previously) will be awarded the CESA by the Superintendent every calendar year. Many people of the California Board of Education liked our proposal and we have been working with Alex Lee, the Legislative Aid to Senator Stern’s Office in California district 27 to write a bill that we are currently trying to get adopted in California.

While I am trying to do my part in California, we need action on a larger scale. We urge Senator Feinstein to be an original cosponsor on the 100 by ‘50 Act, (H.R. 3314/S.987) in the 116th Congress, when it is reintroduced. This legislation addresses myriad negative impacts of climate change and fossil fuels. We believe that the 100 by ‘50 Act is crucial because it will help us prevent the catastrophic effects of climate change.

IMMIGRATION

Jack Jacobs, Mateo Mijares, Faith St. Amant, Mara St. Amant

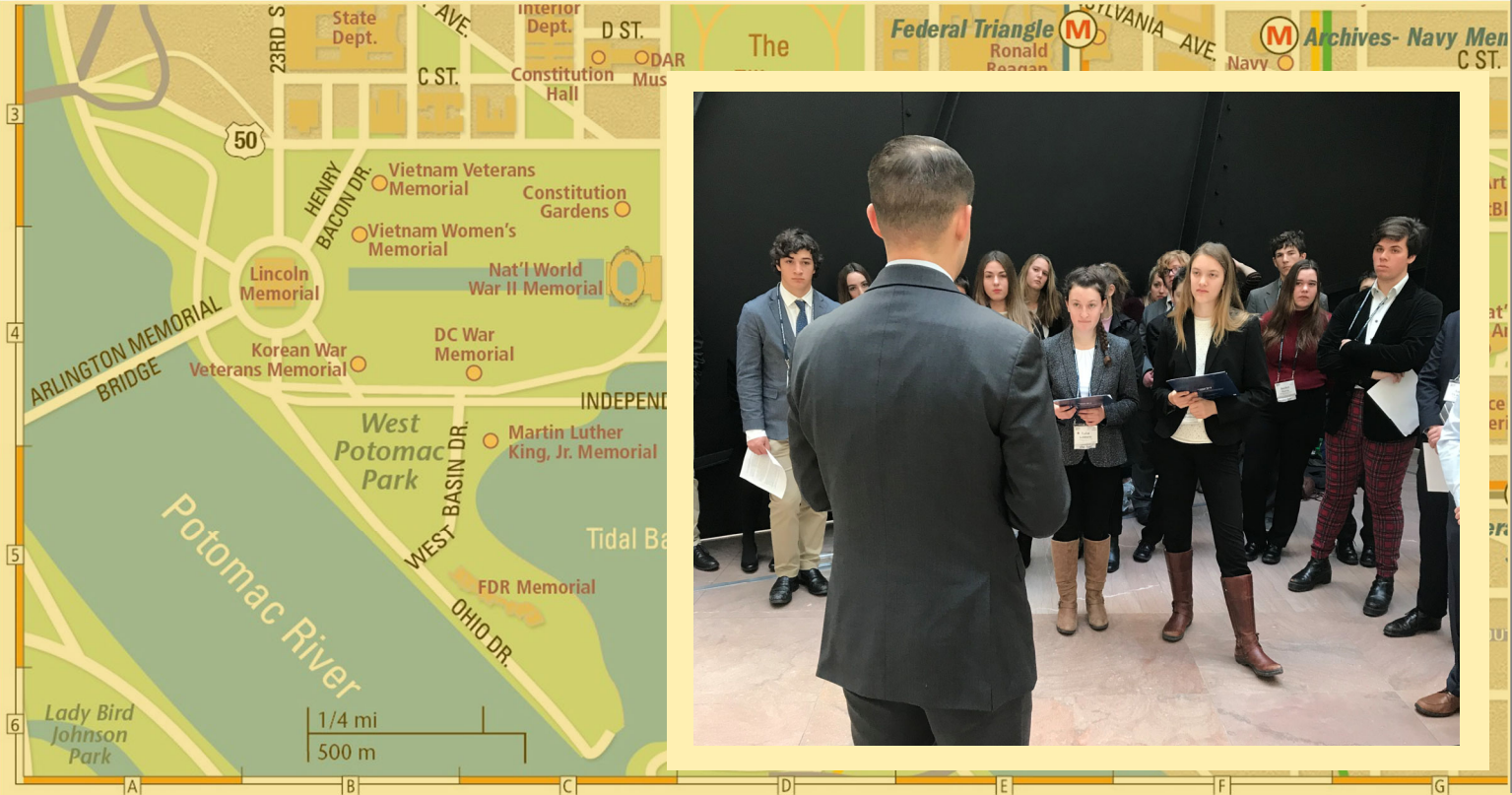
As Barack Obama stated, “We are, and always will, be a country of immigrants.” When the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival program (DACA) was established, the lives of over 800 thousand undocumented immigrant youth, known as DREAMers, were drastically improved. Surveys show that DACA has improved the economic, educational, and employment experiences of all of its recipients. 87% of DACA recipients are in the work force and another 8% are in school. However, despite the indisputable benefits of the widely supported act, the Trump administration brought an end to the DACA program in September 2017, making hundreds of thousands of DREAMers vulnerable to deportation. The DACA participants trusted the federal government with their names and contact information, which makes them all the more vulnerable to deportation now. The proposed DREAM Act will not only benefit its hundreds of thousands of recipients, but will also provide huge economic benefits to the U.S. The act would reduce deficits by \$2.2 billion in the next 10 years, according to the CBO and Joint Committee on Taxation. In a country where immigrants contribute to the economy every day, passing this act will greatly improve the lives of the invaluable immigrant population and will be a tremendous boost to the economic strength of our nation.

As I’m sure you’re far too familiar, in October 2017 the Tubb’s wildfire devastated much of northern California, including a portion of our hometown, Santa Rosa. It was a miracle that none of the teens here today from northern California lost their homes, but the destruction was not purely of property. I remember updating the map of the wildfire while grocery shopping with my mother and seeing the address of my Jewish summer camp being painted red on my screen. I remember the bags under my best friend’s eyes growing day after day with the stress and sorrow of couch surfing with her family after the loss of the only home she had ever known. I remember spraying my house with a hose rather than gathering my belongings as a spot fire grew two blocks from my home. We all remember how many of our classmates and fellow congregants lost the only homes they had ever known. The DREAMers

have only known the U.S. as home and with an understanding of what loss and displacement feels like, we cannot stand idly by as their fates remain uncertain.

One of the core beliefs of Judaism is that each individual has a vital duty to love the stranger. In the Torah, this idea is mentioned at least 36 times. In Leviticus 19:34, God commands, “the stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt!” As a people who know all too well what it feels like to be that stranger, we understand how catastrophic the impact of a broken immigration system can be on groups of individuals like the DREAMers. Our history as “strangers” reminds us of what this impact looks like in the modern world and we are committed to create the same opportunities for these young immigrants that are so valuable to the prosperity of our own community.

Introduced last Congress, the Dream Act of 2017 (S.1615/ House Resolution 3440 in the 115th congress) would provide a more permanent solution to DREAMers who now have a greater risk of deportation. The DREAM Act has not yet been reintroduced into the 116th congress, but if enacted the Dream act would first, give DREAMers permanent resident status on a conditional basis. Currently, there are 3.3 million people who could be eligible for protections under the Dream act. Second, it would permit conditional permanent residents to then obtain lawful permanent residence status if they attend college, work in the U.S., or serve in the U.S. military. Third, it would make college more affordable for undocumented youth by changing rules that limit their access to in-state tuition and college loans. Every year, about 65 thousand undocumented students graduate from the U.S. high schools but face uncertain futures without legal status. I would like to thank Senator Harris for cosponsoring the Dream Act of 2017 and I urge the senator to sponsor or cosponsor legislation protecting DREAMers this session. Not only will this bill help vulnerable dreamers and significantly improve the economy, it will be widely supported by the public. It is vital that Congress acts to ensure there is a permanent, legislative fix providing DREAMers a path to citizenship. I ask that they continue to support a clean bill, with no added enforcement measures or funding for a border wall. We need Congress to act now in order to guarantee these promising youth a safe and educated future. Thank you for your time and attention.



CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Ben Eisley

If we want our government to protect the people, we must first ensure that every person is heard. You have supported bipartisan legislative strategies in the past, so I imagine you understand this sentiment. You understand that every side has something to contribute—even when you disagree with those sides on certain issues. For this reason, I believe you understand why our current system of campaign finance must be changed.

In the 2016 elections approximately \$6.44 billion dollars were spent—which is a sum of money I literally cannot comprehend. The effort required to raise this much money was massive—and targeted by necessity. During the election cycle, only 0.08% of the U.S. population donated the maximum two thousand seven hundred dollars to their preferred candidate allowed by federal law. Common sense dictates that the average, working person doesn’t have much to donate. This is why I find it circumspect that 21% of spending during the election was not spent by a presidential candidate, but was instead spent by a private group in support of a particular candidate. 1.38 billion dollars supporting candidates were spent without limitations, presumably by a select group of people.

Logic, common sense, and Jewish teachings all agree that money is a blinding force in politics. According to Rava, a Jewish scholar, bribes not only influence opinion, but also make leaders unaware of their bias. It is hard to deny that having large amounts of money spent in one’s favor—money being something valued in our society—for doing something teaches us that we are doing something right. But as Rabbi Yitzhak taught, “a ruler is not to be appointed until the community is first consulted,” and as I mentioned earlier, a large portion of our United States community does not have the ability to represent itself this way—with money. As a result, as our laws stand, we are not doing right by our people. Our system allows for the people with the most money to gain the most favor in the ears of our politicians—and—I should mention—allows them to majorly weaken politicians who do not support their views. This small portion is not the community. Under current Supreme Court rulings we cannot weaken the power of this upper class. However, there are ways we may increase the power of the people.

The We the People Democracy Reform Act of 2017 was introduced to the House during the 115th Congress by Representative Price, and sets up a system by which a candidate for any federal office may have small donations matched multiple times, in exchange for agreeing to accept no support from private groups. This system would promote fundraising campaigns targeting a wide base rather than a small one: the community.

This system, in which the average person would have a major role in the outcome of elections—where every person would feel that their voice is not eclipsed by others—is one I have learned to hope for. When I was first elected the leader of my Boy Scout troop, I learned that the best way to resolve a conflict is to ensure that each person gets their side heard. The scouts under my responsibility would get into arguments—often about the outcome of some game—and the arguments would rapidly grow into yelling matches. In order to calm a person down, I needed to talk to that person one on one, not in a crowd, and, most importantly, let them express their point of view. That view didn’t need to dominate my decision, but I did need to acknowledge that I’d considered it—and my scouts needed to understand I had considered it. They wanted, in other words, to be empowered.

However, in my school, I learned and saw that the average U.S. citizen was not feeling empowered. In my classes, I was taught that the largest political party was the one that didn’t vote, and met peers whose family’s had decided that voting was futile. I was confused, and slightly depressed by the lack of confidence in a political system built for the people.

This is why I’m here today. If, in the course of the 116th Congress, the We the People Democracy Reform Act of 2017 or similar legislation is introduced, I would like you to cosponsor it. By cosponsoring, you can help to pass these acts through, and restore the confidence of the people. I would like to ask you to stand with me, the Reform Jewish Community, and the people of this country. Please, support this act.

PRO-CHOICE

Rachel Harris, Julia Goldin & Rachel Banks

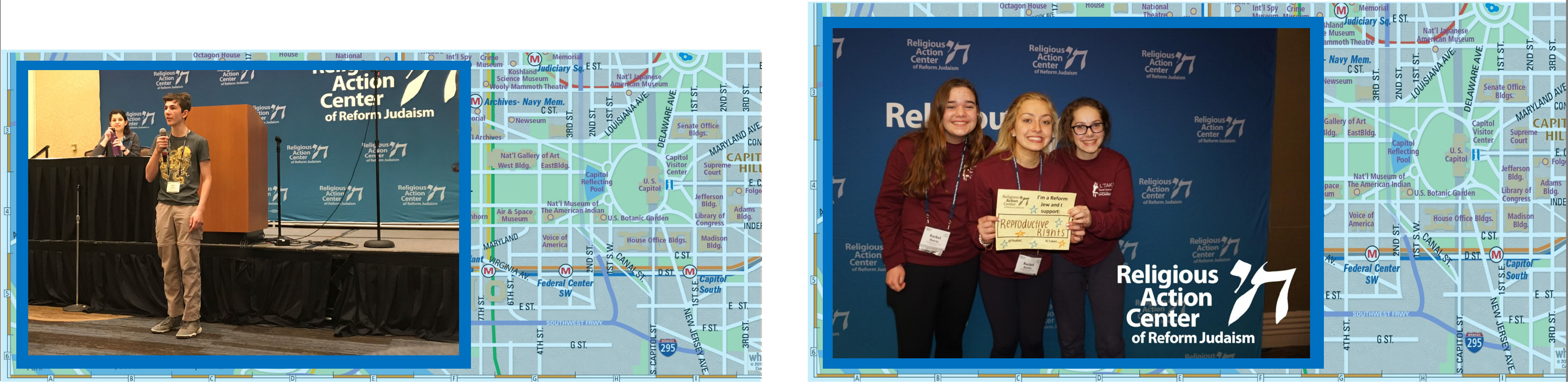
Since the Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade in 1973, there have been an increasing amount of restrictions on a woman’s access to abortion services. Although the original decision defended the right of every woman to have an abortion, depending on where you live and your income level, it can be difficult or nearly impossible to receive this essential medical service. Anti-Choice advocates have been working hard to restrict a women’s access to abortion, passing policies that mandate state counseling and parent involvement, increasing waiting periods, and much more. The most harmful of these restrictions is the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits the government from giving federal money for abortion in all federally administered healthcare plans, except in cases of rape, incest, or when the mother’s life is in danger. Since these federal programs are often used by low income individuals, these laws disproportionately affect these people and prevent them from exercising their right to choose. Although 64 percent of voters believe that health insurance should cover reproductive healthcare, the Hyde amendment still persists. Additionally, depending on the state you live in, there can be very few places to access abortion services. In 90 percent of U.S. counties, there are no abortion providers at all, with women having to drive many hours to receive their care. Despite abortion being a women’s right, guaranteed by the Supreme Court, and being supported by 70 percent of Americans, abortion remains out of reach for many in America.

As young American Jews, we are influenced by the Jewish values that we have been taught throughout our lives. In Judaism, our belief is that life is sacred, and the life of the mother is placed above the potential life of a fetus: we are told, “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.” (Mishnah Ohalot 7:6) The Torah often distinguishes between the value of the life of the fetus and the life of the mother, implicating, like by the words of Rashi, an 11th century sage, “For as long as it did not come out into the world... it is permissible to take its life in order to save its mother.” An abortion can save a woman both physically and mentally, during all stages of life in which a female has the ability to reproduce. Young women have the ability to become

pregnant at a very early age and time in their lives. With peer pressure and media influence, young people are becoming sexually active younger and younger. We all know people who are sexually active at our age, with some even becoming pregnant.

Luckily for us in California, we have access to amazing organizations like our local Forestville Teen Clinic. There, young people have access to emergency contraception, birth control, and counseling about their options in case of pregnancy. These services are extremely helpful to teens who are confused and overwhelmed. Currently, I am a Junior and I am surrounded by confused and overwhelmed teens, one being a girl that I have known since sixth grade, who became pregnant the summer between eighth grade and freshman year. Thanks to organizations like the Forestville Teen Clinic, she was able to address the issue early and have an abortion. If she had not been able to have accessed these options, her whole life could have been changed. She would have had a much harder time achieving higher education which would limit her opportunities to support her child, and, more importantly, herself later in life. This is an incredibly common case, and luckily this girl was able to get the care she needed: an abortion. Unfortunately, as we mentioned before, despite this being their right, not every woman has access to this medical necessity. This makes it all the more important that we do something, so that every woman can have the opportunity she wants and deserves.

The Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH Women) Act (H.R. 771 in the last Congressional session) was introduced in the 115th Congress by Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA-13). The EACH Woman Act would repeal the Hyde Amendment, and would guarantee that every person who receives care or insurance through a federal plan or program will have coverage for abortion. The EACH Woman Act has not yet been reintroduced in the 116th Congress. We thank Representative Huffman for co-sponsoring the EACH Woman Act in the last congress, and urge him to cosponsor the bill when it is reintroduced this session, supporting the rights of women across America.



LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

Miko Giglio

Today I would like to discuss LGBTQ+ rights with you. In 2015, the U.S. Transgender Survey found that 31 percent of transgender individuals reported being denied equal treatment, verbally harassed, and/or physically attacked at a place of public accommodation. In 2016, one in four LGBTQ+ Americans reported experiencing discrimination. Based on these statistics, we can conclude that the treatment of LGBTQ+ Americans is a poor reflection of the way our society views these individuals.

As a Jew, I believe it is important that I tie my beliefs into my advocacy. In Leviticus 19:18, it states "you shall love your neighbor as yourself". To me, this means that no matter how someone identifies, there should be no reason to harass them based on their personal identity. In Genesis 1:27, it reads "...And God created human in God's own image, in the image of God, God created them...". As a believer in God's word, I believe this means we should treat those around us well, unconditionally. Discrimination towards individuals, no matter the circumstance, goes against this belief.

I have always felt like a girl, for as long as I can remember. When I was very little, I would say to everyone around me that I was a girl, even if they tried to tell me otherwise. I would dress like a girl, only hang out with girls, and I honestly felt like a girl on the inside. Even though I have always felt like a girl, I was born in a boy's body. I don't feel like a boy whatsoever. Not a single percent of me thinks in the way a male would. I will never be a boy, even though there was a large period of time where I was convinced I needed to identify as a boy, and this was torture. I am so happy I can live as a girl now.

I've been on hormones for years, and plan on getting the gender confirmation surgery soon. I'm just like every other girl. I only have crushes on boys, I love doing my makeup and wearing cute clothes and doing my hair. I've done competitive cheerleading since I was 10 years old, and I'm probably one of the girliest girls I know. Everyone that knows me will tell you that I'm as feminine as they come. Look at me. Now imagine me being forced into a men's bathroom. How would God feel about this? God made me the way I am and I am so grateful, because I have this incredible opportunity to be myself with no inhibitions. If we discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals including myself, for absolutely no reason, this is a hateful reflection of a loving God.

The Equality Act will address many areas of LGBTQ+ discrimination by amending existing civil rights laws to include protections based on an actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. This will include areas of employment, housing, credit, education, public accommodations, federally-funded programs, and jury selection. The Equality Act will significantly reduce the amount of discrimination LGBTQ+ people face and will provide an avenue for recourse for victims of discrimination. This bill will provide the same protections to LGBTQ+ people that are provided to other protected classes under federal law. The Equality Act has not yet been reintroduced in the 16th Congress. I urge Representative Bishop to cosponsor the Equality Act when it is reintroduced. It is vital that LGBTQ+ people have the critical legal protections that so many other vulnerable and minority communities have in our nation's civil rights laws. Thank you.

GUN CONTROL

Jonah Gottlieb

A few weeks ago, I was in southern California with my dad, brothers, uncle, and grandfather at a local bowling alley, Gable House Bowl. Although I was engaged in the game early on, the building was hot and there was little to talk about, so as the hours progressed, I began to wonder when I could leave. But I stuck it out, bowled a few more frames, said goodbye to my relatives and returned home a few days later. A week or so after that, a fight broke out at that same bowling alley, and a convicted criminal pulled out a gun and murdered three people. In the same place where I had wondered when I could leave, some people never would.

The pervasive nature of gun violence in America is an issue faced in no other developed nation. Our homicide rate is 25 times greater than that of our international counterparts. Moreover, the cost of gun violence to U.S. citizens is estimated to be a hundred billion dollars every single year. Due to these almost unbelievable statistics, the Union for Reform Judaism recognizes that gun violence is one of the most pressing issues of our time. The Torah is very clear when it comes to the issue of violence and our responsibility to prevent it. The book of Deuteronomy teaches that we are obligated to make our communities safe for those around us. "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so you do not bring bloodguilt upon your house if anyone should fall from it." In other words, we are liable for the harm caused by guns unless we do everything in our power to bring about common-sense regulation.

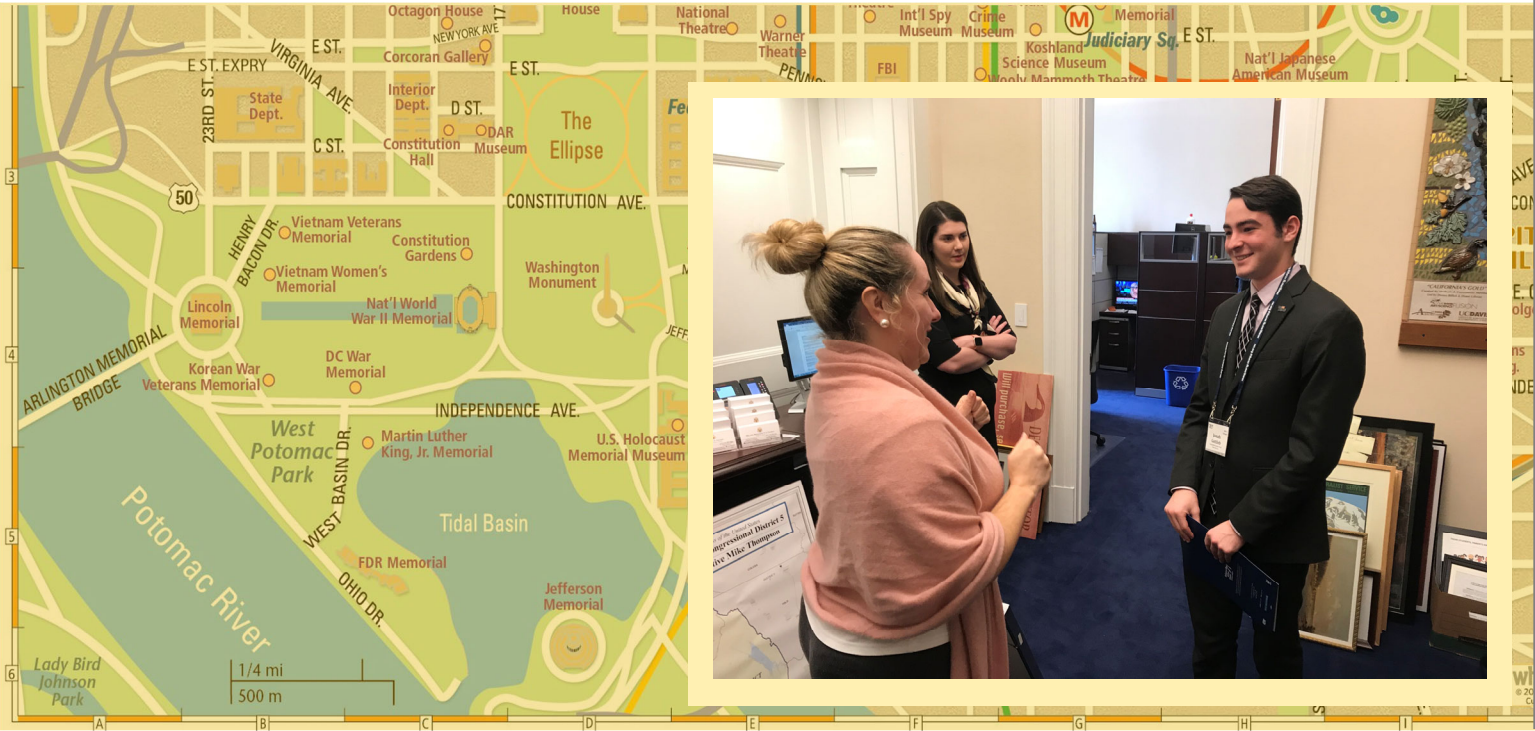
I thank Congressman Thompson for his tireless dedication to ending the epidemic of gun violence that plagues our nation. Due to its effectiveness and bipartisan appeal, H.R. 8 will undoubtedly save lives. H.R. 8 closes a much-abused loophole in the Brady Bill, and our country will be a much safer place after it passes. However, there are still other gaps in the Brady Bill that, if left untouched, will continue to wreak havoc on our communities.

I implore the Congressman to further his efforts to make our nation safer by introducing or cosponsoring future bills aimed at closing two loopholes, the first being the "72-Hour Loophole", sometimes re-

ferred to as the "Charleston Loophole." Although most background checks are completed instantaneously, background checks sometimes take days to complete, usually when there is something suspicious about the record of the would-be purchaser of the weapon. Under current federal law, a licensed firearms dealer can sell a gun to a purchaser if their background check is not completed within three business days. Due to this loophole, some prohibited purchasers of guns are able to legally obtain firearms, despite possessing a disqualifying record. Perhaps the most infamous occurrence of this was when the terrorist in Charleston, South Carolina was permitted to purchase a firearm because his criminal record was not found within 72 hours.

The other glaring imperfection in the Brady Bill is the so-called "Boyfriend Loophole." Although domestic abusers are barred from possessing firearms according to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, the federal definition of abuser is very specific. Federal law only prohibits abusers from owning guns if they had a child with their victim, is or was married to their victim, or lived or currently lives with their victim. Therefore, abusers who fall outside of this narrow definition can obtain a weapon by perfectly legal means.

There are legislative solutions that close both of these loopholes, and I petition Representative Thompson to introduce them to the House or support them if they are brought up by another member. I thank him for his incredible efforts to end gun violence by introducing H.R. 8, and I urge him to continue doing everything he can to save lives. I thank him on behalf of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, for the Torah instructs us to "...not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is shed." I thank him on behalf of my grandparents, who are terrified every time they enter their synagogue or bowling alley, fearing they'll be part of the next shooting. And I thank him on behalf of myself, for, considering the frequency of gun violence in America, soon it may not be my neighbor's blood that is shed. It may very well be be my own.



IDEA FULL FUNDING ACT

Benjamin Wainer

1 in 12 American children live with a disability; I speak as one of that 1 in 12. As a student with ADHD, I rely on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to bypass the boundaries placed in my path by ADHD. Over 6.6 million students nationwide also receive special education services designed to meet their individual needs. When IDEA was first enacted, Congress pledged to cover 40% of the cost using federal funds. The remaining 60% was to be paid by the state government. However, as of today, the federal government (Congress) pays 16% of the total cost. The remainder of Congress' unpaid pledge ends up being split by the schools with money that otherwise could have been used in key programs for their students by the state government.

In Leviticus 19:14 we read, "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind." These Reform Jewish values can be applied to IDEA in that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act works to remove these stumbling blocks in order to make society more equitable to those with disabilities.

My disability affects many aspects of my everyday life. Even while writing this speech, my ADHD repeatedly caused me to lose focus, severely impeding my progress. My specialized education program at school makes things much easier for me, but my school should not have to dip into their own funding just because Congress negated to follow through on their promise. I urge Representative Thompson to cosponsor the IDEA Full Funding Act upon its introduction in this session.

