

From: Jewish Federation of Greater Naples jfeld@jewishnaples.org
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To: [REDACTED]



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Antisemitism and the Upcoming Elections: Become a Knowledgeable Voter

Jewish communities throughout the nation and the world have been plagued by an alarming increase in the number and severity of antisemitic incidents. Fortunately, for the last two years, Naples has been free of reported antisemitic episodes. We are saddened to report that recently there have been some troubling incidents that require our attention.

Earlier this year, antisemitic leaflets were distributed at both the Coconut Point Mall and the Miramar Outlet Mall in Lee County. While that is outside Naples and Collier County, it is close to home. Subsequently, antisemitic leaflets were distributed to households in Naples. Recently public statements were made by an individual who claimed to be affiliated with the campaign of a candidate for the Collier County School Board. That individual's public statement carried a coded antisemitic reference that was followed by blatantly antisemitic statements on her social media page. What was particularly alarming, was that when questioned publicly, that school board candidate not only declined to reject the antisemitic statements from someone on his campaign staff, but he declined to condemn antisemitism. Only after being subjected to adverse publicity, he subsequently disassociated himself from the offending individual's statements. All of this was fully reported by the *Naples Daily News*.

While it is inappropriate to condemn a candidate for another person's actions, that School Board Candidate's initial responses to the public and press about this incident is very troubling. In addition, it is alarming that the candidate provided an admitted antisemite such ready access to a public forum, where she was able to spread her virus of hate openly and broadly. The result was exactly what all antisemites want: publicity—with the hope of infecting more haters with antisemitism. In addition to the above incident, a fringe candidate for the Collier County Board and her campaign associate were connected to another antisemitic internet posting.

Your Federation Board and Committee Chairs have been carefully following these developments and have great concern.

As a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization, the Jewish Federation of Greater Naples must not show a preference, whether in favor, or in opposition, to any candidates. Our role can only be to comment on issues and urge you to be aware of candidates' positions on issues and what they say and do. Having said that, the two antisemitic incidents attributed to the campaign of two local candidates have a direct connection to local politics and people need to be aware of them given the upcoming elections in November.

We are also concerned about the upcoming November Collier County School Board elections because of the intent, express or implied, of some candidates to

allow Christian doctrine in the public schools. The promotion of a single religion's doctrine is a violation of the separation of Church and State as required by the Constitution. The founding fathers understood that to favor a particular religion's doctrine provides a fertile environment for discrimination against all other religions.

The motivation to include the inclusion of Christian doctrine in the public schools is based upon the belief that the Christian religion's message is the path to moral truth and knowledge. While candidates who are promoting this may not be doing so with antisemitic motives, we have learned repeatedly that when governments promote religious preferences, antisemitism follows.

Many in the Jewish community are not aware of this issue in the upcoming Collier County School Board elections. The candidates often soften the rhetoric as family values, (or even Judeo-Christian Values). Because these values are deeply held by many, this effort to include Christian doctrine into public schools tends to be ignored. While no one can object to teaching values that build a strong and honest character in our youth, beliefs that may be held by some Christians, may not be shared by those of other religions. It is our duty, as citizens to insist that our school board respect the Constitutional protection requiring that no one religion be given a preference over another. It is our duty as Jews, to insist that our children, as well as the children of any religious minority and those who observe no religion, not be subjected to religious doctrine in our public schools.

Our community needs to be aware of this trend of some School Board candidates to support the inclusion of Christian doctrine in public schools. If we are to protect the Constitution and our own interests, it is up to each of us to learn where the candidates stand on this issue.

Please check the background, positions, endorsements and platform of those who have endorsed School Board Candidates in the upcoming election. Please vote for a School Board Candidate in this important election.

Jeffrey Feld
President/CEO
Jewish Federation of Greater Naples

Jeff Zalasky
Chairman of the Jewish Community Relations Council

Joel Pittelman
Chairman of the Antisemitism Task **FORCE**

Jewish Federation of Greater Naples | 2500 Vanderbilt Beach Rd., Suite 2201, Naples, FL 34109



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