

Good evening. I am Vicki Fishman of the JCRC. Thousands of members of the Jewish Community gathered last night to mourn the cold-blooded murder of a young American and 5 others held captive in Gaza by Hamas for almost 330 days. Hersh Goldberg-Polin spent his childhood in Virginia. He was kidnapped from a musical festival celebrating peace and unity that came to an abrupt and bloody end on October 7. Hersh spent his life building bridges between peoples of different faiths and upbringings, who strove for coexistence between Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. His left arm was blown off by a grenade before being taken from the world of light and stolen into the terrorists' tunnels that run under Gaza. Hamas built the tunnels with the international aid it received over the course of 20 years – aid that might have built a thriving home for millions of Palestinians if Hamas had actually wanted to provide for its people. For 11 months, Hersh Goldberg-Polin survived with limited oxygen, suffering tortures that we can only imagine. His captors could have released him at any point, but they held him as a cynical bargaining chip. And then, this weekend, he was shot multiple times in the back of the head - executed. Hersh was part of the fabric of the Jewish community of Virginia. His family is here, his friends are here, his values are here. And we are all shattered.

Loud voices in our region have been calling for you to take up a ceasefire resolution. Many of those voices simply don't want Israel to exist. Giving heed to those voices now and considering a ceasefire resolution will do nothing to advance peace. As you surely know, Hamas breached a ceasefire on October 7. Hamas also breached a ceasefire deal last November when it reneged on its commitment to release Carmel Gat and Eden Yerushalmi, who were the list that had been agreed to by Israel and Hamas. Hamas changed its mind. Carmel and Eden were shot alongside Hersh this weekend.

It is not Loudoun County's role to weigh in on international affairs. Loudoun County needs you focused on building Loudoun County – ensuring good schools, good roads, good communities. You are close to the ground on those issues, you have expertise and advisors on those issues, you know this community better than anyone else – and you are best situated to ensure that it thrives in these concrete ways. Unlike you, our federal representatives receive security briefings on the ongoing international negotiations for peace and security. Your commentary on Israel, Hamas and the Palestinians can serve only to divide the community here at home.