

Newsweek

Stop Asking Jewish Voters To Sacrifice Their Values | Opinion

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By Ron Halber and Joel Rubin

During a recent appearance before the Michigan Democratic Jewish Caucus, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel offered a midterm election road map for Jewish voters. “We have a moral imperative to place the needs of the world above even our own self-interest and, yes, even our own survival,” she said. She urged “sacrific[ing] the comfort, safety and security and even the very future of our own people in exchange for the opportunity to save the rest of humanity.”

As the leader of a Jewish advocacy organization and former Jewish outreach director for a major presidential campaign, we were thunderstruck by Attorney General Nessel’s remarks. Her comments couldn’t be more wrong or offensive. But what disturbed us even more was just how commonplace those sentiments have become.

Never before in our careers have we experienced an election season in which Jews are so often asked to excuse antisemitic rhetoric and disregard actions that should have no place in American politics, all to serve somebody else’s definition of a greater good. Political leaders and candidates in both parties are routinely asking the Jewish community to overlook behavior from supposed allies that we would immediately condemn if it came from opponents.

Here’s a simple message for our fellow Jewish voters: demand better than what we’re getting now from both parties.

Democrats are trying desperately to flip the Senate. They have candidates like Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan, who summed up a Hezbollah terrorist sympathizer plowing his car into a synagogue full of preschool children as a case of “hurt people hurt people.” He only apologized months later after securing the nomination. They previously ran candidates like Graham Platner in Maine, whose Nazi tattoo was perfectly fine to party leaders until he was accused of rape—and whose successor, Troy Jackson, suggested that the Holocaust was clouding Jewish Mainers’ views of Israel’s actions in Gaza, before he too offered a politically convenient apology.

Republicans, meanwhile, are trying desperately to hold Congress. They have incumbents like Randy Fine in Florida, who calls himself pro-Israel while comparing Muslims to dogs, backing the mass deportation of Muslims from the United States, and openly rooting for Palestinians to starve in Gaza. They are also rallying around candidates like Brandon Herrera in Texas, who has admirably referred to Nazi weapons as “ghetto blasters” and has spoken proudly of owning a copy of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, and Martin O’Donnell in Nevada, who hosted a Nazi sympathizer on his podcast and referred to the conversation as a “marriage made in heaven.”

These individuals have little in common politically. What they share is excuse-making from their respective national parties. Jewish voters are being told repeatedly in this election cycle to forgive and forget offensive comments and dangerous worldviews because the stakes are too high to do otherwise. As each party warns of an existential threat to the country if the other side wins, the common message to Jews is that we need to just keep our mouths closed and fall in line.

We reject that deal.

We reject the idea that hate speech should have a home in our political discourse. We reject the notion that acquiescing to discrimination is simply the price of admission to our political system. We reject the principle that ‘anything goes’ in pursuit of control of Congress.

As Jews, we know all too well the consequences of normalized bigotry. Jews comprise only two percent of America's population, yet we were targeted in 64% of religion-based hate crimes in 2025. The Anti-Defamation League recorded more than 6,000 antisemitic incidents last year, including a record 203 incidents of physical assaults against Jews.

These numbers don't exist in a vacuum. When lawmakers and political candidates routinely use hateful rhetoric, they inspire those who share those beliefs and are willing to act on them. Researchers who have examined this phenomenon call it "the emboldening effect." Studies have found a significant association between hate speech from political leaders and subsequent hate crimes. There are consequences when the boundaries of proper political discourse shift to such a large degree. When political parties reward, excuse, or ignore this behavior, they create room for even more of it.

At a bare minimum, individuals running for office should be modeling respectful behavior. It should be a basic requirement for the job. Yet in too many cases, it appears too much to ask.

With the midterm elections just weeks away, we encourage our fellow Jewish voters to hold both parties and their candidates accountable for their words. Antisemitism should never be tolerated from anyone. No amount of hate speech is worth the price of victory.

In our system, voters should set the standards by which politicians abide. We Jews should not be expected to tolerate the hate being directed at us on the altar of political expediency. Our dignity will be respected, and our votes must be earned.

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