

Question for the Record for Rabbi Hauer  
Committee on Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and  
Workforce Development  
“Confronting the Scourge of Antisemitism on Campus”  
November 14, 2023 10:00 a.m.

Rep. Llyod Smucker (R-PA)

*Rabbi Hauer, while this hearing is focused on the scourge of antisemitism on college campuses, you noted in your testimony that levels of antisemitism have increased in our K-12 system and has spread to institutions of higher education. Can you explain some of the causes of this growth in antisemitism in our children’s classrooms?*

Rep. Smucker,

Thank you for the question. As you state, I had noted that the 17,000 Jewish teens that we serve in American public schools through our Jewish Student Union (JSU) clubs have begun to experience an elevated level of antisemitism in their schools. This is a recent development, especially pronounced post the Hamas massacre of October 7<sup>th</sup>, and it is especially concerning as it shows that the plague of brazen and appalling antisemitism has spread from higher education to public middle and high schools.

The trend is clear and unquestionable and expresses itself in the very same ways that it has in the universities:

1. Rallies, events, and signage that make the environment of the school hostile and unsafe.
2. Faculty members using their position of authority within the hallways and the classroom to address the situation in Israel in a manner that is experienced as hostile by Jewish students.

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3. Consistent targeting of individual students by their fellow students, whether on social media or in person.

To share a taste of this experience, here are the words of Maayan, one of our JSU participants from New Jersey:

*“My name is Maayan, and I’m a Jewish Israeli student at Teaneck High School. In my school, you see kids walking around wearing these keffiyehs, which would be fine if you didn’t see their Instagram posts advocating for Hamas saying this is how I stand with them. I was asked to say a few words about the environment at Teaneck High School, and it falls nothing short of disgusting, toxic, and suffocating. People would ask me after October 7th how it was at school, and I always downplayed it, saying that it wasn’t bad, that no one said anything, that I felt safe there. Those words were bold lies in your face. They cannot not be when you are who people are talking about behind your back: Jewish and Israeli. Walking through the hallways wearing a Jewish Star of David necklace comes with the consequence of pointed shoves and bumps. You have people looking and pointing and making disgusted faces at you. You hear people saying how Israel deserved what happened, how and I quote: ‘overjoyed’ they are with the massacres that took place. In class, you are forced to sit next to people who have openly advocated for the murder of your people, and you have to think ‘do they want me dead too?’ During lunch, all you hear are words against you, so full of hate and poison, smirks and giggles after they hear about another dead. How are you supposed to feel safe or even accepted in an environment like that, where you can’t even speak up for yourself because you are alone, an environment where students and teachers alike don’t hide their hatred towards Jews, towards us! In Teaneck High School, I feel like I’m constantly having to justify who I am while keeping quiet over the hate that’s poured on to me, and I feel scared.”*

That is *what* is happening. As to your question of *why* it is happening, how can we “explain some of the causes of this growth in antisemitism in our children’s classrooms,” the answer lies in one

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word: NORMALIZATION. Not long ago, brazen and explicit expressions of antisemitism were unacceptable in this country and would never have been tolerated in a school environment. That has changed dramatically as this ugliness has now become not only tolerated but a celebrated component of university culture. It is now normal to do this. And while that normalization began in the universities, it has not stayed there. What is rendered normal in one area of society – especially an area of influence – will quickly spread.

It is this normalization that is so frightening and that needs to be addressed by the Department of Education and by all those in positions of authority. There needs to be a clear and specific articulation of guidance regarding what kinds of speech create a hostile environment for Jewish students. This guidance cannot be general, as it has been to date, but can and should draw on the very accessible examples of the rallying cries, chants, signage, and memes that have become commonplace, first on university campuses and now in our public schools.

The United States must be a place where hate towards any group or individual identity is never normalized. Antisemitism has become normalized in certain spaces, and it is spreading. We need your leadership and decisive action to reverse this very worrisome trend.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your question.



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