



**Ron Halber**

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**October 29<sup>th</sup> speech @Adas Israel**

**Link to video : <https://venue.streamspot.com/video/35e4b7886a>**

(min 18.14- 22.16)

My name is Ron Halber and it is my pleasure to serve as the Executive Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, which is the community relations and public affairs arm of the Federation and over 100 institutions, organizations, and synagogues throughout MD, VA, and DC.

Before I have the honor and privilege of welcoming MD's Governor Larry Hogan, I would first like all elected officials who are here today to rise and be recognized. Now, in the spirit of civility, I would like all candidates for public office to stand and be recognized. I want to thank both of you for joining us here in solidarity today.

I would also like to note presence of so many members of the clergy representing an incredibly diverse array of faith groups joining us today. Your presence your friendship and words of love and support and comfort have meant so much to us over the last 72 hours. I want everyone to see how many members of clergy have joined us. Please stand members of the clergy and be recognized.

Thank you for being here during our time of need. I want to note the recent words of Israel's President Reuven Rivlin about the attacks in Pittsburgh:

*"I feel your pain today and with me is the entire Jewish people. It is hard for us to believe, hard for us to understand, how hatred and evil rose up, to damage and to uproot the Tree of Life- Eytz Chaim. How can we accept that a house of worship becomes a place of death? How does hatred dare to harm our dear people at the holy time of Shabbat prayers?"*

*At this time of pain, we cannot offer you consolation. But we can take you to our hearts and tell you again and again- you are not alone! The people of Israel and the entire Jewish people stand with you! In your time of pain in your time of loss, we are with you. One people. One family. Unbreakable. Eternal."*

We are honored today that a delegation is here from the Embassy of Israel, led by Ambassador to the United States Ron Dermer. I know Mr. Ambassador, there can sometimes be differences between the American Jewish community and the state of Israel, but in the end, we are all one family deeply committed to each other's well-being and we are thankful and privileged that you and your staff have joined us here today. Please stand and be recognized.

It is now my distinct honor and privilege to welcome a true friend of Israel and the Jewish community: MD Governor Larry Hogan. I want to thank the Governor for his outspoken leadership and solidarity with the Jewish community both privately and publicly. This weekend he personally called JCRC's President Sam Kaplan- am, if you could raise your hand to be identified- to offer condolence and solidarity, and all the government resources available to the Jewish community to make us feel safe and secure. Thank you for our ongoing friendship and strong relationship, Governor Hogan. Please join us.

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(min 33.30- 39.28)

What is happening in our America?

In one week, pipe bombs were sent to former elected officials, African Americans were killed at Kroger's, and now the bloodthirsty killing of 11 of our fellow Jews on Shabbat in Pittsburgh.

Shock. Sadness. Outrage, and Fury. I am sure you felt many of these emotions. And, so did I.

And then after the stunning reality sets in, the human mind attempts to identify a rationale or an explanation.

But the problem, my friends, is that there is no reason or explanation for what happened.

(it's basically the heart of a conversation I had with my 13-year-old daughter yesterday)

A clearly unstable man with an intoxicated history of hating Jews suddenly decides it's time to become violent. Attacks against Jewish institutions have happened before in this country in LA and in Seattle- and others. But make no mistake about it, what happened on Shabbat was the most violent attack against Jews in our nation's history.

Unfortunately, this was entirely predictable.

Anti-Semitism, racism and bigotry has become normalized.

Combine that with the accessibility of social media, mental illness and available weaponry and you have a toxic brew that will culminate in violence.

There are some obvious things we can try to do to reduce the chance of this happening again: more intelligence gathering, greater access to mental health services, reasonable gun control, bias education and more.

But by far the most important thing is a change in the national discourse.

Something has become rotten in America's moral fiber, in our society, and we must and - we will - take America back.

We insist that when racism, and anti-Semitism and bigotry arise from anywhere in our society it is immediately, wholeheartedly condemned without reservation or equivocation from across the political spectrum. And we insist that our nation returns to its core value of civility.

The Jewish community will stand defiant. We will not permit this pathetic murderer to scare us from going to synagogue from participating in our organizations or sending our children to school. In fact, it will accomplish the exact opposite, it will strengthen our resolve to stand proudly and tall as American Jews.

And we will not cower!

The extremists want to define our community as "the other," but we won't let them because they are the "other". These are haters whose values strike at the very foundations of our nation's values of equality and respect for diversity. We will not let them define our America.

This is also a good time to remember that our brothers and sisters in Europe are also facing unrepresented levels of anti-Semitism.

Let us draw comfort today from the over 3,500 people who have joined us. This room represents the best of America joining in solidarity to reassert our common commitment to equality, civility and respect for all.

And let me assure you, both the JCRC and the Jewish Federation are ready, willing and able to meet any challenges that will be met on behalf of our community-and we will also demand that all levels of government- federal, state, and local- make funding available to help provide for the operating costs for our institutions and the congregations to protect their clientele.

History is filled with those who have sought to intimidate or eradicate the Jewish people. But each time they failed, and they will fail again, let me assure you of that.

May G-d comfort the families of those impacted by the violence, may the memory of our 11 brethren serve as a blessing and may we only be blessed with better days ahead.

Thank you.