

## Rabbi Jonah Pesner Addresses Roundtable on Antisemitism at the White House

December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Good morning,

Thank you to my brother and Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, great to see you here given the night that you had in your hometown. But you're here talking about antisemitism, so we appreciate you.

I'm Rabbi Jonah Pesner, I lead the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the largest and most diverse denomination in Jewish life. There are two million American souls who identify themselves as Reform Jews, and we're located not only in the large urban centers that are often associated with the Jewish people, but we are in small towns, our congregations and our summer camps are in rural Indiana, rural Georgia, rural Texas and everywhere you find Americans there are Reform Jews.

We're very grateful to you, Second Gentleman, for convening this conversation and, to the White House, because its urgent. I also want to acknowledge I sit on the Faith Based Advisory Council of the Department of Homeland Security with my colleague Michael Masters, and as the governance chair of the leadership conference for civil and human rights, I sit at the department of Justice at our quarterly meetings where we talk about antisemitism under which I take the lead. I say all of that because I associate myself with the wonderful letter that Senators Rosen and Lankford sent to the Administration yesterday, calling for more interagency cooperation. As a Jewish leader who deals with all the branches of the federal government around antisemitism, I urge that kind of interagency cooperation and I thank Senators Lankford and Rosen for their leadership in this work.

I want to acknowledge that my folks are deeply concerned, they're afraid of what's happening at this moment. And I want to acknowledge what the threats and threat levels are: they are concerned about the campus antisemitism. I have four daughters between 18 and 25, I know what's happening on campuses and its real. My children's Zionism is being tested. And we acknowledge as a Jewish organization that is often associated with the progressive movement, there are social movements in the progressive world that erase us because of our Zionism. Just ask the CEO of National Council of Jewish Women, we have lots of stories to tell.

But the single, most important threat that is on the minds of our people is the white supremacist, white Christian nationalist threat that believes in the replacement lie that there is a plot funded by the Rothschilds and the Soros's or whoever to turn America Black, Brown and Muslim because Jews have to control the world.

There is a direct line from Charlottesville "Jews will not replace us" at a Confederate statue, the driving force behind this presidency and President Biden's decision to reclaim the Soul of America, that act of violence where they stood outside my Reform synagogue in Charlottesville with assault rifles threatening my Jews while they were at prayer, to Pittsburgh and what we saw at the Tree of Life massacre and Dor Hadash, a refugee HIAS Hebrew immigrant aids society congregation. That same line leads to what we then saw in Buffalo in the Tops supermarket, a Black supermarket that was targeted by white supremacists because they believe in the anti-Jewish hateful lie. And of course, how can I not name the assault on the Capitol? As Ambassador Lipstadt said, if you believe not only in protecting Jews but you believe in protecting democracy and human rights, that's the real threat.

We urge all levels of government to focus on that threat- we understand in the Reform movement that our safety as Jews is in our solidarity with other marginalized communities, and we are a diverse, multi racial Jewish community. Fifteen percent of the American Jewish community is not white. We are Black, we are Brown, we are Latino, we are Asian, we are of course LGBTQIA and we understand if you oppress one of us, you oppress all of us.

So, as you do this interagency work, do it with a multi racial, racial equity lens to make sure that we lift up all marginalized communities and not just the Jewish community.

Thank you.