

Thank you all for being here today. And thank you to Lee Zoldan, Loop Synagogue President, for your introductory remarks.

My name is Mitchell Goldberg and I am the president of the Decalogue Society of Lawyers. I am also the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor who grew up in Germany, enduring the humiliations and pain of the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s.

Yesterday was the eclipse of the sun. Today we gather as a coalition of people willing to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, to say in one voice that we must work to eclipse bigotry and hate. Hate is an evil that all societies must confront. And they must confront it decisively.

This is not a political issue. This is not a party issue. This is an American issue.

Represented here today are the following organizations (in alphabetical order):

Alliance of Illinois Judges
American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists
Arab American Bar Association of Illinois
Asian American Bar Association
Asian American Bar Association Law Foundation
Black Women Lawyers Association of Greater Chicago
Chicago Bar Association
Chicago Loop Synagogue
Chinese American Bar Association
Cook County Bar Association
Decalogue Society of Lawyers
Filipino American Lawyers Association
Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois
Illinois State Bar Association
Jewish Judges Association of Illinois
Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago
Muslim Bar Association of Chicago
National Employment Lawyers Association of Illinois
South Asian Bar Association

I thank them for their support of this effort. I offer my sincere thanks to all those who made this press conference possible. I am especially grateful to Dartesia Pitts (CCBA President), Judge Thomas Mulroy (CBA President), Erica Kirkwood (BWLA President), and Donna Haddad (AABAR President) for speaking today. And I want to give a special thanks to the Loop Synagogue for hosting us.

A generation ago, brave men and women fought across the globe to end the scourge of fascism that had brought the world to its knees. And in the decades thereafter, brave men and women fought in courtrooms around this country to ring true the founding words of our great nation in the Declaration of Independence—that all people are created equal. These battles were fought against toxic ideologies that saw the murder of millions in Europe, including six million Jews, and the lynchings and violence committed against African Americans and other people of color in this country.

The bar associations and legal organizations assembled here today have, for decades, fought to protect the rule of law and to make certain that the rights of all people are protected, regardless of race, religion, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation.

Yet, despite these efforts, the scourge of anti-Semitism and racist hatred have been on the rise lately, across this great nation.

Though it has reared its head in many forms, it has spared no region, including Chicago.

We are gathered here at the Loop Synagogue—which was the site of a hate crime just a few short months ago that awakened our community, and its allies, to the problem of a newly emboldened, and especially virulent strand of anti-Semitism. In February, a man shattered the windows of this very synagogue and defaced it with swastikas. Then, just like now, people of good conscience stood together to decry hate.

Other anti-Semitic crimes have occurred across the country, including just days ago at the Holocaust memorial in Boston. This phenomenon has unfortunately become widespread—with no end in sight.

Bigotry and hate reared its head just over a week ago in an ugly rally, spearheaded by neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan, in Charlottesville, Virginia, which culminated in the murder of a counter-protester, with many more wounded. The hatred, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia on display was simply horrifying. During that rally, reportedly, a large number of white supremacists approached a Jewish synagogue, Congregation Beth Israel, and chanted anti-Semitic epithets at the congregants, who were inside praying their Sabbath prayers.

Though the First Amendment does give people a right to speak, acts of intimidation and violence can never be permissible.

Sadly, too many leaders have failed to timely and unequivocally condemn acts of hatred and those that promote it. This is made all the worse in an environment where our society, it seems, has increasingly lost our civility in political discourse. Haters thrive in such a vacuum. And, unfortunately, we have seen too many examples of those who peddle their hate ideologies emboldened in recent months, weeks, and days.

Most scary are the efforts by these hate peddlers to coopt and infiltrate other causes with their corrosive ideologies. Nationwide we have been witnessing the mainstreaming of anti-Semitism and bigotry within many groups. The result is that we are unable to comfort ourselves with the notion that the bigots occupy some kind of conservative fringe. And we have seen those who would intimidate people of color, Jews, and other minorities feeling empowered to do so.

Jews know all too well the dangers of remaining silent in the face of these trends.

Many years from now, our children will ask us what we did during these turbulent times. I refuse to let my answer be “nothing.” And I am extremely grateful to the leaders and members of all the organizations who are here today. Indeed, our unity of purpose here today is one of the bright spots these turbulent times have created.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (of blessed memory), used to say that in a hall of darkness, if you light one small candle, its precious light will be seen from afar. Our mission here today is to ignite our own candles of truth to illuminate our society to get us through the darkness.

In this spirit, we must call upon all of our national leaders to confront anti-Semitism, racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia decisively and to unequivocally condemn all acts of hatred and those who peddle it. And they all must reaffirm the importance of civility in political dialogue and lead with clarity of purpose.

The Bill of Rights and later amendments to the Constitution shows that our nation values diversity in our society. And those of us in the legal profession must use all of our tools to protect the rule of law, as well as to protect the rights of all of our diverse citizenry who make up the beautiful tapestry of the United States.

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Today marks the turn of the Jewish calendar to the month of Elul—a time of self-reflection and growth in the run-up to the High Holidays.

Jews have learned the wisdom that comes through painful experience, that in order to confront hate, it is simply not enough to look across to other communities, groups, or opposing political parties and point out the iniquities of those on the other side. Sometimes we must even look within ourselves and our own communities. Each and every one of us must be ever mindful of our own behaviors and to lead by example in our own speech and conduct. It is said that love overcomes hate. So let each of us commit to continuing to focus on what unites us as part of the human family.

With every challenge comes an opportunity. Today's challenges give all of us the opportunity to bravely confront hatred wherever it dwells. None of us can do this alone. We are stronger together. And together we can dedicate ourselves to uniting our separate candles into a blinding light of truth to drive back the darkness. Only together can we remove this evil from our midst.

As with the generations that came before us, the path ahead may not be easy or comfortable. But, for our children and those who come after us, it is incumbent on each of us to try.

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I thank you all for joining with us today. May G-d continue to bless the United States of America and may G-d bless our united efforts to defend the beautiful system of law that protects us and all Americans.