

Jeh Johnson Addresses the Rise of Anti-Semitism in the U.S.

When I left the event in Bloomfield at the Temple Ner Hamid, I felt let down. The growing instance of hate crimes and bigotry during the last several years has me angry and frustrated. But I took notes, mature enough at 74 to realize I should reflect afterwards on whatever was said. Perhaps it was the Rabbi's call to all of us to defeat hate with love that got to me.

Johnson was a bit more pragmatic. Vote. Build bridges in our communities. As Obama's Secretary of Homeland Security from 2013 to 2017, he initiated the DHS Office for Community Partnerships. Like me, Johnson believes our democracy has made progress and is fundamentally sound. Like me, he is an optimist. And like me, he knows there will be setbacks along the way. As an African American, his experiences are different from mine. His grandfather, a PhD sociologist, was called before HUAC and accused of being a communist simply for writing about civil rights. Mr. Johnson is not naïve. He chooses his words carefully. Avoiding partisan statements, when pressed he admitted that he had spoken out publicly when Trump initially campaigned for a "Muslim ban" and said this continuous effort had undermined the DHS outreach program. He went on to emphasize that the growing lack of civility and respect in public life has "emboldened" many who had previously been hesitate to express their private views publicly. Now they think its okay. He linked all bigotry and hate – anti-Semitism, sexism, racism, etc. **"Bigotry does not discriminate."**

Some of us may disagree with his mild mannered approach, but it is hard to disagree with his long term view of ways to defeat the problem.

- **Rededicate ourselves to promoting civility, respect and tolerance** in all the non-partisan institutions and spheres of life – educational institutions, law enforcement, religious institutions, the military, health care, etc.
- Get involved in the political sphere and vote.
- Build public awareness and vigilance. If you see something, say something. Insist that our schools are prepared – student awareness and safety drills.
- Create bridges between the silos that exist within movements and organizations. (He's not a fan of identity politics.)
- **Assert that an attack on one is an attack on all – an attack on America, the most diverse country in the world.**

No quick fixes, but that's our reality. On the plus side, Mr. Johnson highlighted the reality that since 9/11 there have been consistent multidenominational bridges built in cities across the country led by Imams, Rabbis, and Priests together.