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## Why we're not (yet) putting out a statement – and what that means for you

Dear colleagues,

Remember when we stood in our beautiful Klinghoffer Lounge last week and toasted a lechaim to the elections and to our American democracy? I stood before you and told you how much I love this country, how proud I am to live here, and the deep sense of pride and gratitude I feel about our processes.

I still believe that to be true, now more than ever.

Over the past few days we've seen a growing call for our Federation to make a statement about the elections, about appointments by the President-elect, and more. In one form or another we've heard "why doesn't the Federation represent the views of the majority of American Jews, whose duty is to speak up in denouncing, for example, the appointment of Stephen Bannon as Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor to the White House?"

"Surely staying silent is unacceptable and dangerous?"

Here's where we are, what we're doing, and why ...

We're a community organization in a divided community. Hundreds of thousands of people rely on us every day of the year. You read that right. Hundreds of thousands. Every day. No one else can do what Federation does. Remember that our core mission – to **care** for those in need, to **build** Jewish community, and to **save** the world, one person at a time – has not changed and will not change. The proposed appointment of one individual in government doesn't change our need to work with that government. It means that we have to be vigilant, along with our partner organizations and community. But we would never rush to intentionally jeopardize the safety and welfare of those we serve and those who depend on us.

Why? Because we're not just a social services agency; we're a community organization.

We learned a lot from the “Iran Agreement” debate in our community and other communities last summer. For example:

1. You can make all the statements you want, but if you don’t have an inclusive process to listen respectfully to people, you can do more harm than good.
2. Bigotry, hate and intolerance are threats to our community; they can arise both from expected and unexpected corners. And sometimes from within our own camp.
3. Some things – appointments, nominations, statements – are symbolic of wider issues. Focusing on the immediate can be momentarily gratifying but ‘misses the point.’
4. Statements are all well and good. But plans of action are smarter. Plans that include coalition-building, strategic growth, inclusion, respect, strengthening our mission, protecting our community.
5. Here’s the most important thing I want to reiterate: we’re a divided community. If we write off significant numbers of our community and alienate them without discussion and without inclusive dialogue we don’t get to call ourselves pluralistic, diverse and tolerant. Does that mean we never make statements on things that matter? No. It means that we’re respectful, careful, and mindful of the impact of what we say. And before we make those statements we remember their impact, and we talk with those who disagree with us.

Leslie is convening lay leadership in the near future to introduce the idea of community-wide discussions. I’m also convening our rabbis for the same purpose. At a later stage, our CRC may be tasked with convening other types of meetings. We’re not going to do this alone, and we’re not going to do this without a meaningful process of respectful dialogue.

In the meantime: in the run-up to the elections we asked you to categorically refrain from connecting Federation on your social media platforms with any and all political statements or endorsements. We’re now easing that rule somewhat for those of you who have personal (not Federation) social media profiles. We ask that – in the spirit of community

tolerance and respect – you keep posts dignified and appropriate. But you deserve your voice on social media.

I welcome your input. This is the beginning of a conversation, and we'll convene an all-pro meeting in the near future so that we can discuss. Thank you for all your work. I'm deeply grateful to be with you.

Warmly,  
Dov

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