

Jewish Values in Action

JCPA Candidate Questions

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) educates, engages, and empowers the American Jewish community relations network in order to promote justice and equality both at home and abroad. In preparation for the 2016 election, the JCPA policy team has identified the following issues to assist the JCRC field with formulating priority issues and questions for their election programming.

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Criminal Justice

Since the 1970s, incarceration levels in the United States have skyrocketed. Between federal and state facilities, the United States incarcerates more than two million men, women, and juveniles—more than any other nation in the world. Among this population, low-income and people of color are vastly over represented. Fully one-quarter are in for low-level drug offenses.

One in three black men will be imprisoned over the course his lifetime, which has devastating impacts on families and communities that endure long after they have served their time. Upon reentering society, individuals with criminal records suffer further marginalization and stigma that effectively, and in some cases, legally, bar them from leading a normal life—like finding housing, getting a job, qualifying for government assistance, and voting. Returning citizens are paying for their crimes long after the sentences are served.

Current efforts to reform the criminal justice system look to promote restorative justice at all levels of engagement with our justice system like giving judges the discretion to reduce mandatory minimums, assessing recidivism reduction services available for inmates, and improving reentry programming, helping lower the barriers to successful reentry after incarceration. There is also a growing push to address some of the root problems, such as racial disparities in education that may feed the “school-to-prison” pipeline, and policing in black and Latino communities.

In the United States, between state and federal facilities, we incarcerate over two million people, leaving a devastating impact on communities and families, as well as local economies. What reforms to our criminal justice system do you see as helpful in addressing this problem?

What is your position on criminal justice reform and why? Given recent police shootings, what steps do you think can be taken in our community to improve police relations and implement better community-oriented policing?

Poverty

The disparity in wealth distribution across the United States has been a central issue throughout this election season, but income inequality has been increasing for decades with profound consequences for society. Studies show that high social and economic inequalities are a major factor in determining physical and mental health, as well as overall social cohesiveness. Americans are working harder and more efficiently than ever before, yet a growing number of middle- and low-income families face temporary and permanent poverty due to stagnating wages, falling family incomes, and increasing job insecurity.

What policies do you believe can help lift the next generation out of poverty? What role should our state and local governments play in helping reduce inequality in our communities? What federal reforms do you support to reduce income inequality in our country?

Hunger

Food insecurity is one of the most acute hardships many Americans, including children, face across the country. In 2014, the most recent year for which we have data, over 48 million people—including more than 14 million children—suffered from food insecurity, lacking either sufficient food or sufficiently nutritious food. Millions of people rely on federal nutrition assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), especially during difficult economic times, and we should elect government representatives who will protect these vital initiatives.

What policies do you support to reduce childhood hunger and the growing silent crisis of food security in our state and country?

Immigration

We are a nation of immigrants, yet our immigration system is broken. For centuries, people from all over the world have come to the United States seeking a better life, free from persecution and marginalization. They have brought with them rich and diverse cultures that have become our nation's greatest strength.

However, an estimated 11 million people currently reside in the United States in a legal limbo that leaves them vulnerable to harassment and exploitation. Despite being statistically among the most law-abiding segments of society, undocumented immigrants have become the target of racist, nativist, and extremist rhetoric that blames them for our economic woes. To remain silent in the face of this hate is to be complicit in allowing our laws to be used as a tool for discrimination. Our immigration system should reflect the best of our national values: equality, fairness, due process under the law, and respect for human dignity.

What is your position on comprehensive immigration reform? What is your vision for helping undocumented immigrants find a pathway to citizenship? How can we best enhance our border security while considering family reunification, and civil and human rights protection?

Education

Education is one of the most important determinants of lifetime earnings, social mobility, and health outcomes. Yet our nation's public schools are chronically underfunded and underperforming, especially within low-income and rural communities. In a society that prides itself on being the "land of opportunity," poverty should not be the deciding factor in a child's prospects for the future. Much of the current policy debate centers around the exploding cost of higher education, but the problems that afflict our education system begin far earlier in a child's life, starting with the inaccessibility of affordable, high-quality preschools. Increasing the availability and affordability of early childhood education is one of the surest ways to close the achievement gap.

In addition, support for public higher education has been eroding for decades, falling precipitously since 2008. To offset the decline in public financing, public universities are turning to tuition and fee hikes, forcing students to take on loans that will take decades to repay. In fact, student loan debt now approaches \$1 trillion. Combined with stagnating wages, soaring student loan debt is crippling young Americans, restricting their career options and life choices for years to come—from marriage and children to retirement.

How would you strengthen our public education system? What role should the government play in addressing the lack of affordable public higher education and subsequent rising student debt?

Climate Change

Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing our generation. As global temperatures increase, extreme weather patterns and rising sea levels will exacerbate conflict, the spread of disease, habitat destruction, and species extinction. We are already experiencing many of these harmful impacts.

Last year, representatives from 196 nations agreed to a historic climate accord, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which enables countries to set voluntary national targets for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. The agreement also includes a \$10 billion Green Climate Fund—to which the United States pledged to contribute \$3 billion—that will aid developing nations with climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.

What is your view of global climate change? How will you ensure the United States makes good on its commitments, builds on the success of the United Nations agreement, and upholds climate policies like the Clean Power Plan, which aims to lower the electricity sector's carbon emissions? How do you think we can shift our economy to clean energy and promote renewable energy development?

Gun Control

With mass shootings occurring nearly every day, gun violence in America has reached epidemic levels. Americans are 25 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than people in other developed countries. Though the United States makes up just 4.4% of the world's population, we own almost half of all guns in the world. Studies show a direct correlation between more guns and more violence. In recent years, we have witnessed a profoundly disturbing series of mass killings in schools, shopping malls, theaters, houses of worship, and elsewhere, such as the atrocities committed in Orlando, San Bernardino, Newtown, Tucson, Aurora, and Oak Creek. Despite the media attention these horrific shootings received, tragically, most gun deaths are actually suicides.

What is your vision for preventing future gun-related tragedies? What is your position on universal background checks, proper mental health care, and bans on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines?

International Human Rights

The vigorous protection of human rights, based on human dignity, is a core tenet of Judaism. Armed conflicts, genocides, and mass atrocities are spurring one of the worst refugee and displaced persons crisis in history, with more than 60 million people now displaced by violence and war. While the majority of refugees are Syrian, ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas are also reaching crisis levels. On September 19, 2016, world leaders will convene in New York at the United Nations General Assembly to address the current refugee crisis, the magnitude of which has surpassed even that following the Second World War.

Widespread international neglect has forced those fleeing violence and persecution to needlessly risk their lives attempting to escape, causing thousands of preventable deaths. Refugees who survive the journey to host countries, whether residing in camps or urban environments, frequently have inadequate housing and food, limited access to medical and psychological care, and little to no educational or job opportunities. In many parts of the world, refugees continue to face discrimination, human rights abuses, and outright attacks.

The United States recently met its goal of resettling 10,000 Syrian refugees in fiscal year 2016. Do you think we have an obligation to go beyond this? What role, if any, do you see for the United States in addressing this unprecedented refugee crisis? Should the United States play a more active role in preventing genocides and atrocities around the globe? If so, what courses of action, including diplomatic and military strategies, do you feel are appropriate and why?

Israel

The United States plays a vital role in negotiating a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The only viable path forward is through a two state solution: the Jewish State of Israel and a State of Palestine, existing side-by-side in peace and security. While recent peace talks have not moved forward, violence on Israel's borders from ISIS and Hamas continue to grow stronger. Foreign assistance is an important tool the United States uses to support its allies, assist

developing nations, and protect national interests abroad. The U.S.-Israel relationship is built upon a firm foundation. For the last decade, the United States has provided an average of \$3.1 billion in security assistance to Israel annually. This agreement expires in 2018, and negotiations already are underway to forge a new one.

How would you characterize the U.S.-Israel alliance, and what role should that relationship play in U.S. Middle East policy? How would you respond if BDS legislation came before you for consideration? What role should the United States play in the Israeli- Palestinian peace process?

JFNA Election Questions

Many JCRCs also carry-out the work of the Jewish Federation of North American. JFNA's Washington office advocates on public policies that are in the interest of the JFNA system. Some may choose to integrate JFNA priority issues in to their election programs. [Click here](#) to access JFNA election questions.