

Jewish Social Justice Roundtable For Immediate Release

CONTACT: Erica Brody (212) 213-2113 x51, ebrodyny@jewishjustice.org, cell (718) 608 4514
Regina Weiss (212) 213-2113 x20, rweiss@jewishjustice.org, cell (357) 263 3405

170 Jewish Social Justice Leaders to Meet With Obama Administration

Washington, D.C.; July 27, 2011—On Friday, July 29th, 170 representatives of organizations that are part of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable (JSJRT) of which the Rabbinical Assembly is a founding member, will travel to the White House for a policy briefing to exchange ideas on housing, healthcare, food justice and education. The JSJRT is a group of 21 nonprofit organizations promoting economic and social justice as a core tenet of Jewish life. The RA delegation includes Rabbis Jack Moline, RA director of Public Policy, Jeffrey Wohlberg, RA past president and rabbi emeritus of Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, DC; Jacob Blumenthal, Shaare Torah Congregation in Gaithersburg, MD; Michael Safra, B'nai Israel Congregation, Rockville, MD; Andrea Merow, Beth Sholom Congregation, Elkins Park, PA; Ron Shulman, senior rabbi, Chizuk Amuno Congregation and Daniel Burg of Beth Am Congregation, both of Baltimore; Elizabeth Richman, program director and rabbi-in-residence at Jews United for Justice. and Jan Caryl Kaufman of the Rabbinical Assembly in New York. Other RA members attending are Rabbis Jason Kimmelman-Block, Senior Director of Leadership Initiatives and Rabbi-in-Residence, Jewish Funds for Justice; and Sheldon Lewis, rabbi emeritus of Kol Emeth Congregation, Palo Alto, CA. We are proud that Rabbi Moline will deliver the closing statement and d'var Torah to the group as they meet with the Administration. Rabbis Richman, Kimmelman-Block and Merow will also deliver kavvanot and brachot on Friday's program.

“Many people think the Jewish community has only one message to bring to Washington and it's about Israel,” said Rabbi Jennie Rosenn, director of the Jewish Life and Values Program of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, which funds the JSJRT. “In reality, the Jewish community is deeply involved in issues of social justice here and around the globe. We are so pleased to have been invited to discuss these issues with the White House staff as we work to create a more just world.”

Some participants are eager to tell White House officials about the public housing tenants in Chicago who teamed up with local organizations to renovate hundreds of uninhabitable apartments for low-income residents. Others want the Administration to hear how a Jewish community member with life-threatening brain cancer struggled to get adequate health insurance. When she had to take a leave of absence from her job, she was denied workers' compensation because her cancer was a pre-existing condition. A third representative will share a story about a family of five that has to rely on an Oklahoma food bank to eat.

“The fact that 170 Jews are coming to the White House to talk about housing, healthcare, education and food justice shows that these issues are priorities for millions of American Jews,” said Simon Greer, President and CEO of Progressive Jewish Alliance & Jewish Funds for Justice.

“The number of Jews and Jewish organizations engaged in social and economic justice work has grown exponentially over the past two decades. The Jewish Social Justice Roundtable is a manifestation of that growth and of the urgent need we see to promote opportunity and secure basic rights for all Americans.”

Grounded in a rabbinic tradition to pursue justice, American Jews have a rich history of civic engagement and involvement in socio-political movements, including the labor movement, civil rights movement and the women’s movement, along with many other human rights struggles. Today’s American Jewish community is furthering this legacy by spurring economic development, alleviating hunger, protecting workers’ rights, preventing homelessness, and strengthening social justice leadership across lines of race, class, and faith.

Jane Ramsey, director of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, explained, “The American Jewish community brings a powerful voice to issues affecting the most vulnerable people in our society. The Jewish Social Justice Roundtable is a manifestation of a strong and growing progressive movement reflective of our Jewish prophetic values.”

“It is important that a variety of faith-based groups have their voices heard by the Obama Administration,” said Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly. “Faith-based groups in this country represent a spectrum of belief, ideology and religious practice.”

“Currently, the debate in Washington is focused almost exclusively on reducing the size of government, even as unemployment remains high, and more and more families need to rely on the social safety net,” said Nancy Kaufman, CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women. “As Jewish social justice activists, we are coming to Washington to express our belief that the ultimate goal in any government policy decision—be it the budget or any other issue—must be informed by a commitment to social justice and a more equitable distribution of public funds.”

“I am inspired by our collective commitment to advance a social justice agenda on the national and global stage,” said Ruth Messinger, president of American Jewish World Service. “We must not underestimate the power of letting our government know that global food justice, equitable healthcare, education reform, and affordable housing are authentic expressions of Jewish values. They are issues that Jewish leaders care about deeply and will work on intensively.”

Rabbi Gilah Dror, president, Rabbinical Assembly
Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president, Rabbinical Assembly
Rabbi Jay Kornsgold, chair, RA Social Justice Commission
Rabbi Ashira Konigsburg, RA representative to the JSJRT

The Jewish Social Justice Roundtable comprises:

American Jewish World Service
AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Hazon
Jewish Community Action

Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
Jewish Organizing Initiative/Center for Jewish Organizing
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Jewish World Watch
Jews United for Justice
Keshet
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
National Council of Jewish Women
New Israel Fund
PANIM Institute of BBYO
Progressive Jewish Alliance & Jewish Funds for Justice
Rabbinical Assembly
Repair the World
Union for Reform Judaism/Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism/Just Congregations
Uri L'Tzedek

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