

# OPINIONS

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## ▶ ABOUT THE OPINIONS SECTION

Viewpoints expressed in letters, commentaries, cartoons and other opinion pieces, besides the Light's own weekly editorial, reflect those of the writer or artist, and not those of the Light. We welcome submissions of letters and commentaries to [opinions@thejewishlight.com](mailto:opinions@thejewishlight.com).

## JEWISH LIGHT EDITORIALS

### Wrong Way, Parkway

**P**arkway School District's decision to hold all four of its high school graduation ceremonies on a Saturday next May teaches a very bad lesson at a very tense time.

It's a bad lesson because graduation day should be a time where everyone comes together in a spirit of pride for accomplishment and anticipation of what lies ahead. No high school senior should feel left out because of a wrongheaded move that leaves Jewish students who observe the Sabbath out in the cold.

And the change comes at a particularly bad time, nationwide. With the hateful, anti-Semitic shouts from Charlottesville still fresh in everyone's mind, no public school district should make a move that tells Jewish students that their heritage and their faith are not important. If anything, Parkway and all public school districts should be going out of their way to teach inclusion, not approving policies that brand one group as outsiders.

Compounding the issue that the ceremonies would be held on a Saturday is the fact that this year, on the date chosen by the district, May 19, Shavuot begins at sundown.

When opposition to the decision became public, including an online petition (<http://bit.ly/parkway-petition>) started by Parkway Central student Hannah Maurer, district officials began looking into the possibility of a change; a spokesman for the district said it hopes to have a decision soon.

The petition had garnered nearly 2,000 signatures as of Tuesday. That support for a more sensible solution should prompt Parkway to reconsider and show that it values all of its students, not just certain groups.

Problems with the Saturday date were made clear to members of the Parkway School Board by Rabbis James Bennett of Shaare Emeth and Brigitte Rosenberg of United Hebrew.

"They were putting all these concerns about convenience ahead of the morals and principals and values that the district has emphasized so strongly in their curriculum," Bennett said. His three children all graduated from Parkway Central.

And Rosenberg's daughter Zoe is set to graduate from Parkway in May. "I don't know what our family will decide to do," she said.

Parkway school board president and United Hebrew congregant Beth Feldman said the change was designed to make it easier for families to get in and out of the ceremonies, a process that is difficult at Queeny Park, where graduations have been held in recent years. Plus, the Family Arena is bigger, eliminating the need for tickets.

She said the district was surprised by the depth of opposition to the change.

"We as a school board and school district have a very broad perspective of all the things that we have to take into consideration when we make this kind of decision," she said, "and we were trying to do the best that we could with what we have to work with, and what we did did not work out."

She also acknowledged the timing was bad, given the tone of debate nationwide, and didn't want to see anyone feel excluded or feel the need to have an alternative ceremony on a day other than Saturday.

"There is a rise in anti-Semitism," Feldman said, "and I think people don't want to be separated because of their faith. They want to be included, just like everyone else, and I as a Reform Jew misjudged that."

"The thing that I had trouble understanding is the number of people who felt personally wronged by this decision. There was no bad intent."

No matter what the intent, the result should not have made Jewish families in Parkway choose between commencement and the Sabbath. The district's goal – to standardize and centralize graduation ceremonies for all of its high school graduates – isn't necessarily a bad one.

But if the only date available for next May at the Family Arena is a Saturday, the district should postpone the consolidated ceremonies for a year, or come up with a different day. Parkway graduates and their families deserve no less.

### Sand Storm, Summer Breeze or Just Hot Air?

**W**hite House adviser Jared Kushner's third peace-seeking mission to the Middle East was officially labeled as "productive," though it clearly brought no major breakthroughs in efforts to restart long-stalled direct talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Joining Kushner on last week's trip were Jason Greenblatt, the White House special representatives for international negotiations, along with Dina Powell, the deputy national security adviser. The trio met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and held high-level talks in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan.

Moderate members of the 22-nation League of Arab States are on record as being prepared to fully accept Israel as a permanent reality in the region if it will allow the creation of an independent Palestinian State alongside Israel. Keeping moderate Arab leaders in the loop makes sense in order to solidify any agreement that might be reached.

But the U.S. team faced a variety of challenges in its peace mission.

- Netanyahu and Abbas are dealing from positions of political weakness. Netanyahu could face criminal indictments stemming from multiple corruption investigations, and increasingly larger groups of Israeli demonstrators have gathered in front of his official residence demanding that he resign. Netanyahu has denounced the investigations into his official conduct as "a witch hunt."

- Abbas has almost no remaining credibility as the official leader of the Palestinians because he can point to no tangible accomplishment in his 11 years in office.

But the two leaders' weaknesses could spur them to want to achieve a peace agreement that would bring international praise. Abbas' predecessor, the late Yasser Arafat, held back-channel talks with Israel in Oslo after he lost the support of the Soviet Union and after the ouster of his ally Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

## ▶ ABOUT THE EDITORIAL

Our weekly editorial represents the Jewish Light's position on news and issues of importance to the Jewish community. Editorials represent the majority opinion of the paper's editorial writers and the Light's Editorial Committee. The Light welcomes a variety of opinions, and welcomes letters to the editor and commentary submissions from the community.

- In addition to Palestinian frustration over a lack of tangible progress, the Palestinian Authority remains split between the West Bank, which Abbas rules from Ramallah, and the Gaza Strip, which has been ruled by the terrorist group Hamas since it ousted the P.A. from that powder-keg region six years ago.

How could there be a "two state" solution when Hamas is the de facto government of the Gaza half of Palestinian territory? That reality must be confronted and resolved before any progress can be made.

- Kushner and Greenblatt seemed more flexible on re-committing the effort toward a two-state solution, the official U.S. position for the past three presidential administrations. Abbas has threatened to dissolve the Palestinian Authority if no progress is achieved toward an independent Palestinian State.

In contrast to his icy relations with former President Barack Obama, Netanyahu enjoys a cordial and openly friendly relationship with President Donald Trump. If Trump, through his son-in-law Kushner, can come to terms with Netanyahu on seeking a two-state solution, it just might become a reality.

Kushner's trip did not stir up a typical Middle East sandstorm; it was more like a late summer breeze. He deserves credit for keeping the process moving forward and enlisting the support of moderate Arab states in the region.

Now, the U.S. team has to keep the pressure on all sides to avoid having the effort end up as just more hot air in a region that already has more than its share.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Submit letters to [letters@thejewishlight.com](mailto:letters@thejewishlight.com)

### Moving moment at Mirowitz

Over 500 people were deeply inspired at the eclipse day celebration of the Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School. We were joined — children, families, neighbors and guests — in joy. Clergy of all Jewish streams were there, as well as Jews of all degrees of observance and faith. We all talked with each other. We smiled as Rick Recht and the students led us in song. And then...as the moment of totality approached, there was silence. As the corona burst forth, we all looked up to the heavens. There was a unity and a sense of awe. Applause broke out. It was a very special moment.

At that time, the divisions among Jews seemed so minor. The respect and joy in celebration united us all. We were one community and one people.

Would that more days were like that one. Thanks to the Mirowitz community for bringing us all together.

**Rabbi Jeffrey B. Stiffman**  
Congregation Shaare Emeth

### Reaction to letter, commentary

Kudos to the *Jewish Light* for including the Steve Finkel commentary in its Aug. 23 issue ("Liberal Light laughable on Charlottesville"). It is very encouraging to read a differing point of view from the liberal left pile-on of President Donald Trump. As a former resident of Skokie, I can speak to the effectiveness of its police force, which followed orders to protect lives and property, and the folks who secluded themselves in their homes, shades closed and ignored the whole event — very different from what we all witnessed in Charlottesville.

Is there a teachable lesson here for Charlottesville's mayor, Virginia's governor and other public officials?

Note to Henry Schvey (Letters to the Editor, Aug. 23), that nightmare you eloquently describe as our president in your letter to the *Light* is a direct result of what you refer to as "the democratic ideals" that the liberal Democratic Party has not lived up to. To the contrary, the only thing the Democratic party has aspired to achieve is the impeachment of the president.

**Barbara H. Michels**  
Chesterfield

## FROM FACEBOOK

The online version of the *Jewish Light*'s article by Staff Writer Eric Berger on the petition seeking a reversal of the Parkway School District's decision to hold all of its high school graduation ceremonies on a Saturday (see Page One of this week's edition) prompted a flurry of comments on Facebook, offering perspectives on multiple sides of the issue. Here are a sampling of comments. Join the discussion on our Facebook page: [facebook.com/stjewishlight](https://www.facebook.com/stjewishlight)

"Jewish lives are being threatened in Israel, Europe, and right here in the US...Let's stick to important issues. There is real Jew hatred out there. We need to focus on that."

"It's a public school. If religion comes first, send your kid to a private religious school."

"What about family and friends that a person would like to invite to their graduation? Perhaps moving it to Sunday would be better for all."