

OPINION »

Andrew Yang: My vision for New York City's Jewish community

By Andrew Yang

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By Getty Images

I was on the Lower East Side on Sunday with my wife, Evelyn, for a small-business tour. In my 25 years in the city, I've visited the neighborhood countless times for any number of reasons: to eat at Russ & Daughters or Congee Village with friends, visit the Tenement Museum or ride my bike before linking up with the Manhattan Bridge.

But on Sunday, while meeting with business owners, workers and customers, I reflected more deeply on the Lower East Side as the locus of the rise of the Jewish community in New York.

The neighborhood has changed dramatically since Jewish immigrants began moving there in large numbers in the 19th century. More recently, South Asians and Latinos have called the Lower East Side home, and the tenements have been retrofitted as gallery spaces and clubs or given way to high rises.

But the working-class spirit brought to the Lower East Side by its early Jewish occupants, and the corresponding desire to live the American Dream, continues to animate the community.

Jewish immigrants who overcame extraordinary odds and persecution in Europe, including but not limited to the Holocaust, were once again tested in the United States. But the community persisted and has achieved remarkable success in all areas of American society, all the while maintaining a deep communal commitment to social justice and family.

That story resonates deeply for me. My parents immigrated from Taiwan, where my dad grew up with dirt floors on a peanut farm. I'm so proud they made it here, and that I have had opportunities my parents once thought

weren't possible for their children. American Jews showed families like mine the possibilities that existed here.

This is why the Jewish community should know that, as mayor, I'll always be a reliable partner. That's an essential goal for any leader of New York City.

I'm concerned about the direction of this country. It's why I ran for president in the first place. Our social fabric is fraying and the recent attack on the U.S. Capitol is an outgrowth of that. The rise of white nationalism in particular is a threat that seems to only be growing. The grainy footage of a sold-out Madison Square Garden hosting a Nazi rally in 1939 now seems like it could happen again today. The recent vandalism of the Museum of Jewish Heritage with a Confederate flag was a stark reminder of the threat that white nationalists still pose to New York's Jewish communities.

I share the Jewish community's anger about the recent rise in hate crimes. In 2019, anti-Jewish attacks made up 58% of all hate crime complaints in New York City.

We need to do a better job at guarding against all hate crimes, including antisemitic ones. The NYPD, in conjunction with federal authorities, must focus on rooting out hate and gun crimes rather than nonviolent offenses.

But not all hate crimes are committed by organized neo-Nazis. We need to build better relationships between different neighborhoods throughout the city. New York's diversity is its greatest asset, but friction is a feature of every melting pot. Through our clergy, community groups and schools, we can do a better job at fostering empathy and understanding across race, religion and ethnicity.

A pluralistic democracy is not an easy model to maintain, especially during a time of profound economic change. We have to work at it.

A Yang administration will push back against the BDS movement, which singles out Israel for unfair economic punishment. Not only is BDS rooted in antisemitic thought and history, hearkening back to fascist boycotts of Jewish businesses, it's also a direct shot at New York City's economy. Strong ties with Israel are essential for a global city such as ours, which boasts the highest Jewish population in the world outside of Israel. Our economy is struggling, and we should be looking for ways to bring back small businesses, not stop commerce.

And of course, as mayor, I'll respect religious freedom. It's a central reason why so many immigrated to this country in the first place. I will not get in the way of anyone's right to circumcise their children and maintain the traditions of their faith. I have and always will attend friends' *brissim* to celebrate this important religious milestone in the life of their new children.

Because religious liberties are a core part of our constitutional guarantees, I also won't be changing the tax status of faith-based organizations. While richer, larger tax-exempt entities should pay a fee while the city's tax base recovers, religious institutions and schools will continue to be exempt.

During my campaign, and if I am elected Mayor, I will continue to look to the Jewish community as a source of inspiration for what is possible in New York City. And I will stand with my Jewish neighbors against antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence. New York is New York thanks to our city's Jewish population — past, present and future.