

President Mark G. Yudof  
Keynote Address  
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Thank you, Cliff.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here this afternoon. My wife, Judy, and I have long supported the mission and the work of the AJC.

To be honest, Judy is the one you really should have invited to speak. I often refer to her as my Jewish Pope—I simply obey her rules.

Although Judy was unable to join me today, we both always consider it a privilege to speak to this distinguished organization.

Now, we're here this afternoon to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Project Interchange, and I'd like to begin by discussing why I consider it to be such an important program. And to give you some recent context for what I'm about to say, I want to tell you about one of the things I've been doing for the past few months in my capacity as president of the University of California.

I've been hitting the road, traveling the length and width of the state to speak to communities that are far from UC campuses. I'm talking about towns like Redding, Vacaville, Chico, Fresno—even Palo Alto, home of the team that wears red. My message to Californians in these cities is simple: you have a stake in the university's success even if you don't have a student in your family; even if you don't work for UC; and even if you live hundreds of miles from a campus.

A big part of getting this message across involves myth-busting. In other words, acknowledging the many myths about UC—myths that say students are getting priced out, that administrators salaries are rising, and so on—and then debunking them, one by one, with clear evidence.

This has proven to be very effective—people like to hear the facts, as it turns out—and I believe that it has helped the broader message about the importance of UC ring true with many more Californians.

Now, I mention this recent tour of mine because Project Interchange, from my perspective, plays a similar, valuable role in educating the global community about Israel and the Jewish experience.

An overall objective of Project Interchange, as we all know, is to bring civic and government leaders—in addition to leaders from other religious and cultural traditions, as well as leaders in business, healthcare, education, entertainment, and so on—to Israel to experience it firsthand, and in the process to increase understanding of the country.

As a result, Project Interchange ends up busting a lot of myths about Israel—and in turn, demonstrating many truths.

For example, it demonstrates how small, geographically speaking, Israel is as a country. I really don't think it's easy to understand how compact Israel is until you've visited. And this is important, because unless you have a sense of the geographic smallness and compactness of Israel, then it can be very difficult to understand the effect this has on relationships with its neighboring countries, or even on day to day life.

It also demonstrates the heterogeneity of Israeli society. Far from the more homogenous society that's often depicted in the media, Israeli society is richly diverse—even among its Jewish constituents, who may be Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi. And Project Interchange lays bare this diversity through meetings with groups as varied as Bedouin leaders, secular left-wing intellectuals, and Palestinian university administrators.

Project Interchange also reveals Israel's remarkable prosperity. Israel only has 7.1 million people, but among other factors, its policies on immigration, research and development, and military service have greatly enriched its entrepreneurial culture. It possesses the highest density of start-ups in the world. And Israel has more companies listed on the NASDAQ than any other country except the United States.

The trips demonstrate that Israel is not an extended war zone. That Jerusalem possesses an embedded history of great significance to not only Jews, but also to Muslims and Christians. That Israel is a democracy—and like most democracies, that it's a messy one with many voices.

Now, although I have traveled to Israel many times, I re-learned many of these truths during my own time with Project Interchange. And four University of California chancellors are also Project Interchange alumni: UCLA Chancellor Gene Block, UC Irvine Chancellor Michael Drake, UC Santa Cruz Chancellor George Blumenthal, and UC Santa Barbara Chancellor Henry Yang. They, too, have affirmed that their experiences on Project Interchange were of immense value, and have helped inform their leadership on our campuses.

But the value of Project Interchange goes beyond the facts that participants learn and experience in the course of their trips. Because just as my California myth-

busting tour has an overarching objective—to demonstrate the importance of UC to all Californians—Project Interchange possesses a broader objective as well.

And that objective is to help participants to have a better grasp of the significance of Israel as a Jewish homeland, and to understand, at least in part, the Jewish narrative.

As many of you know, this is a narrative that can sometimes be difficult to convey only through words. That's why visiting Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, for example, is so important. It's an incredibly powerful space that cannot fully be described in words. In turn, many visitors—of all religious faiths—often find themselves speechless, and deeply moved.

Now, in thinking about the Jewish narrative, and recognizing its power, it's also important to remember that, like all narratives, it is in many ways a living organism, constantly evolving.

As we all know, from the Babylonian destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E., until 1948, when the state of Israel was established, Jews have been a diaspora. And thousands of years as a diaspora is a very long time.

In that context, the physical existence of an established, recognized Jewish homeland is a recent—a very recent—phenomenon. And it's not only shifting the Jewish narrative, it's also added a dynamic to the diaspora that didn't exist before. American Jews today, for example, are considering and examining their relationship to Israel in a way that Louis Brandeis or Emma Lazarus never had the opportunity to do.

And this brings me to the final point I want to make this afternoon:

This new dynamic has complicated, in some ways, concerns about free speech and hate speech in our community.

Now, I know that there is, at times, great concern in our community about acts of intolerance toward Jewish students on UC campuses. And I want to be very clear. I am extremely sympathetic to these concerns. I find it very disturbing that in the forty years I have served four universities, acts of intolerance, and intolerant speech, towards Jewish students continue to take place. This is a matter of deep, personal importance to me.

On university campuses today, Jewish students find anti-Israel events and campaigns—and aggression towards pro-Israel speakers and supporters—threatening, and sometimes motivated by anti-Semitism. And there is still, at times, anti-Semitic graffiti, and anti-Semitic verbal harassment.

Now, I do not equate all anti-Israel speech with anti-Semitism. But I am greatly disturbed when pro-Israel speakers are shouted down, as I am when the Israeli flag is desecrated. And I stand by the statement that I have made many times, including in the last several weeks: I believe, firmly, that it is unacceptable to disrupt the speech of others, and that it is unacceptable to engage in hate-driven physical acts or verbal attacks that are meant to silence, or intimidate, those who would express differing opinions.

As a result, my charge as a university president—and it's the same charge for every other public university leader—is both a very difficult and very important one:

It's to combat hate speech while also respecting the First Amendment.

Now, this charge is relatively easy to execute when it comes to outright discrimination or unlawful acts, both of which have clear legal remedies for prevention and cessation.

It's also relatively easy to do when we're faced with acts of physical aggression, or attempts to block classrooms, or riots. In these instances, we can, and do, legally stop perpetrators from engaging in such activities.

But the law is very clear on what public universities, as well as the American government, cannot do when it comes to hate speech, or what I call "bad" speech.

In sum, the *content* of someone's speech does not decide whether or not they can make that speech.

Now, as a constitutional law scholar and teacher for many years, I realize that the broader implications of this law are not always easy to accept. But remember: this law is just as powerful a tool for those who oppose tolerance, as it is for those who perpetrate it.

As I've said many times, the antidote to bad speech is *good* speech. Student groups, the university administration, community organizations—all of these can and do host their own conferences; start their own campaigns; and invite their own speakers, whose good speech resists, in effect, the bad.

Even more importantly, while bad speech cannot always be stopped, it can and must be condemned. University presidents and chancellors, for example, are people too, with their own constitutional rights. And while they might not have a constitutional obligation to condemn bad speech, they do have, in my opinion, a moral obligation to condemn it. Their responsibility is to speak out forcefully when members of their community are harassed or intimidated.

Now, I'm proud to say that this is what happens at the University of California. At every turn, either I or my chancellors—and in some cases, both—have condemned bad speech when it occurs in our community. And we will continue to do so.

We are also undertaking many other steps to ensure a climate of respect and tolerance on our campuses, for all members of our university community.

These range from a new campus climate reporting system, which includes both an online system and an 800 number, to revising our student code of conduct by strengthening prohibitions on any conduct deemed threatening or motivated by bias (including religious bias).

We are also in the process of a ground-breaking, system-wide campus climate study—the first in UC's history. Part of this study has involved working with the Museum of Tolerance and the Anti-Defamation League to improve our campus climate. And it has included undertaking fact-finding tours of the Jewish student experience, which were led by Rick Barton of the ADL and Alice Huffman of the NAACP.

We have refused to recommend or implement university divestment from the State of Israel.

We re-structured the new student orientation and move-in calendar so that important new student events did not compete with the High Holy Days—ensuring that our Jewish students could participate in both.

And we maintain a wide variety of programs and activities dedicated to the Jewish experience on all ten of our campuses. And it's my belief, as the many alumni of Project Interchange may attest, that exposure to the Jewish narrative, and an understanding of the role a Jewish homeland plays in that narrative, benefits everyone in our university community.

Before I conclude, I want to encourage anyone who is concerned about the experiences of UC Jewish students, faculty, and staff to contact the university and get the facts about how we are working to ensure a climate of tolerance, civility, and open-mindedness. You can pick up the phone, or send an email or a letter. We welcome the opportunity to give you the facts on this important issue, so that everyone can become better informed.

And finally, I'd like to close today with a reference to Maimonides—one of our greatest thinkers, and one who lived his life with the most virulent form of Anti-Semitism. A fundamental message that Maimonides gave us through his writings and teachings is that the life of Judaism flows from the free and full use of our

intellectual powers, and that we should build on the discoveries of the wise ones who came before us.

To those insights, I would add that we should be defined by our ideals and our morality, and never by the culture of Anti-Semitism. It is to our great fortune that AJC, and Project Interchange, have long embodied these principles. And as President of the University of California, I stand committed to them as well.

Thank you.