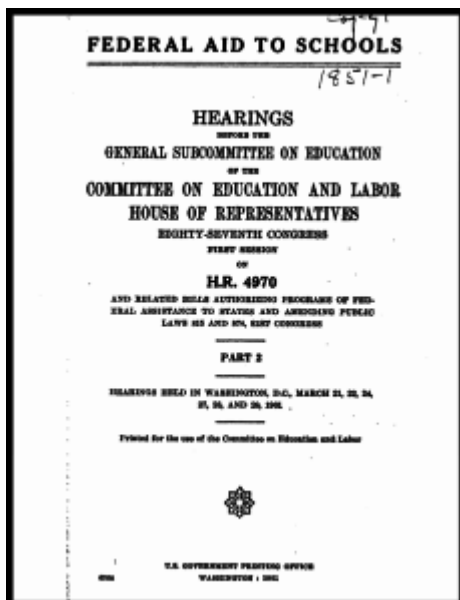


# PHOTOS & VIDEO BELOW: 2016 National Leadership Mission to Washington, DC

February 26, 2016



A delegation of some 50 lay leaders of Agudath Israel of America converged on the nation's capital earlier this week to mark the 55th anniversary of the late president of Agudath Israel [Rabbi Moshe Sherer's historic congressional testimony](#) regarding government assistance to religious school communities.



Rabbi Sherer's testimony was considered so significant at the time that it was featured on page 1 of the New York Times. And, with the benefit of more than half-a-century of historical hindsight, it marked the beginning of a new level of government advocacy for Jewish day schools and other needs of the Orthodox community.

Through the years, Agudath Israel has built on the foundation established by Rabbi Sherer's testimony – founding the first full time Orthodox Jewish Washington Office in 1987, developing a national network of regional

advocacy offices across the United States, spearheading advocacy efforts that have resulted in many millions of dollars flowing annually to the Jewish community.

While the focus of this year's Agudath Israel National Leadership Mission to Washington was on education, the group also had the opportunity to share concerns on a range of pressing issues: the security of Israel, the alarming rise in global anti-Semitism, fighting the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanction) movement, homeland security, religious freedom and social services for the needy.

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The Mission commenced with dinner Tuesday evening in the stately Mansfield Room in the Capitol building. The dinner was headlined by four prominent elected officials: Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), and Joni Ernst (R-IA), and Representative Jason Chaffetz (R-UT).

In welcoming remarks, Agudath Israel board chairman, Shlomo Werdiger, explained why Agudath Israel leaders came to Washington from across the country: "Rabbi Sherer taught us how important it is to be proactive in fighting to protect our rights and to access the government benefits we so desperately need. That means engaging our elected officials directly face-to-face, and impressing upon them the justice of our cause."

A highlight of the dinner was a series of presentations by Agudath Israel's regional directors, each one outlining recent legislative accomplishments in states across the country. The presentations, moderated by Rabbi A.D. Motzen, Agudath Israel's national director of state relations, were made by Rabbis Moshe Matz (Florida), Ariel Sadwin (Maryland), Yitz Frank (Ohio), Avi Schnall (NJ) and Shlomo Soroka (Illinois).



(L-R) Rabbi Ariel Sadwin, director Agudath Israel Mid-Atlantic Region; Rabbi Yitzchak Ehrman, COO of Agudath Israel of Illinois; Rabbi Shlomo Soroka, director of government affairs, Agudath Israel of Illinios; Rabbi Moshe Matz, Agudath Israel's Florida director; Rabbi Yitz Frank, Agudath Israel's Ohio director

*[For optimal viewing experience, hover over and click the magnifying glass in the lower right corner of the picture.]*

(Photo credits Shmuel and Dov Lenchevsky)

On Wednesday, the Agudath Israel delegates, who came from a dozen states around the country, broadened the conversations, meeting with key Representatives and Senators of both parties, as well as with prominent White House officials.

The day started with a breakfast reception on the House side of Capitol Hill, at which the Agudath Israel delegation met with Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD), second ranking Democrat in Congress; and, in order of appearance, Representatives Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA); Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ); Todd Rokita (R-IN); Jerry Nadler (D-NY); Lee Zeldin (R-NY); and Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY).

The Mission continued with a session in the White House, at which the group engaged with senior policy officials regarding the benefits available to

nonpublic school students under the new federal education law, homeland security grants for religious schools and organizations, and how to deal with the resistance in certain communities to the growth and expansion of Orthodox Jewish populations.

Following the White House session, the Agudath Israel delegation went to the Russell Senate Building for what may have been the highlight of the Mission, a lunch meeting with a bipartisan group of seven Senators: Robert P. Casey Jr. (D-PA); Chris Murphy (D-CT); Mark Kirk (R-IL); Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY); Orrin Hatch (R-UT); Ben Cardin (D-MD); and Charles Schumer (D-NY).



(L-R) Rabbi Labish Becker, executive director of Agudath Israel; Mr. Shlomo Werdiger, Agudath Israel board chairman; Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT); Rabbi Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel's Washington director and vice president for federal affairs; Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Agudath Israel's executive vice president; Mr. Howard Friedman, member of the board of trustees of Agudath Israel of America

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(Photo credits Shmuel and Dov Lenchevsky)



Senator Schumer, the final speaker of the day, warmly recalled his longstanding relationship with Rabbi Sherer, and congratulated Agudath Israel for continuing to build on its late president's legacy in the years following his passing.

Perhaps the most important message, repeated by many of the members of Congress, was how crucial such visits are for decision makers. Nothing can replace face-to-face interactions with informed community representatives. One after another, Senators and Representatives echoed that sentiment and reiterated that their door is open to continue the dialogue.

The Mission was chaired by Agudath Israel's chairman of the board, Shlomo Werdiger. The individual sessions were chaired by Rabbi Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel's Washington director and vice president for federal affairs; Rabbi A.D. Motzen, Agudath Israel's national director of state relations; and Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Agudath Israel's executive vice president.



Mission delegates in front of the Capitol building

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