

From: The Office of New York State Regent Roger Tilles

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For immediate release

On the anniversary of the Nazi Reich's infamous assault on Jewish communities

NYS Regent Roger Tilles is joined by educational allies in calling for Long Island schools to become a bulwark against hate

Calling anti-Semitism “a virulent cancer that has erupted into full public view,” New York State Regent for Long Island Roger Tilles is requesting the 126 school districts and 17 colleges and universities across the bi-county region to provide him with a specific and detailed curriculum plan that provides students with an understanding of how bigotry and intolerance led inexorably to the gas chambers of Nazi Germany.

“The current state mandate to teach The Holocaust in our classrooms is aspirational and non-specific at a time when hatred is on the rise once again and that violence is targeted at Jews. This time there will be no retreat in the face of evil and the battle to confront and defeat the rise of neo-Nazism begins in every classroom,” Regent Tilles stated.

In a message to area school superintendents and college presidents, Tilles wrote, “In my responsibility as the Regent for Nassau-Suffolk, I am seeking an initiative that ensures that each of your educational institutions becomes a bulwark against a lengthening shadow on our society. The events over the last year here, and across the country, have revealed that antisemitism was never really extinguished. It merely withdrew from public view, but like a latent cancer, it has now metastasized.

“While social justice and human rights still must be achieved in our nation, there is no other prejudice, hatred, bigotry, or racism that seeks the total annihilation of a people. The Nazis harnessed the industrial might of an entire nation to achieve that goal, reducing millions of people to “sub-humans” worthy of extinction. It continues to be a rallying cry for a current generation of haters and it will be up to you, as educators, to recognize your role as front line defenders of humanity,” continued Regent Tilles.

No places for hate

Dr. Lorna Lewis proudly, Superintendent of the Malverne School District, president of the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) and on the board of Erase Racism, stated, “The rise of anti-Semitism and bigotry should cause us all to be concerned. We have an obligation to teach our students of past and present inhumanities so that those acts of hatred are not repeated. Our Schools and campuses are no place for hate. All forms of hatred must be addressed in a culturally relevant and inclusive curriculum. Our students need to learn how to respect all cultures and to find the good in each of us. Our future depends on it.”

ERASE Racism Board member, Frederick K. Brewington, Esq., stated, “Knowledge and the sharing of it is the key to an open and equitable society. From the shameful history in the world of the holocaust to the current levels of hate that have enveloped our communities, there is an urgent need to educate and discuss what we as human beings have done to others based on differences in race, color, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, that we have used to separate ourselves. Hate, intolerance, and bias have no place in our society.

“ERASE Racism stands firm in taking all steps necessary to eradicate those social ills. I and ERASE Racism fully support the efforts to make sure that the truth be told about the holocaust, just as we do about the how necessary it is for us in America to come to know our troubling and sordid history. As The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was joined on the front lines by brothers and sisters from the Jewish community, that alliance is critical today as we stand together to realize that education is a tool to conquer hate,” he stated.

Tilles continued, “Rhetoric and good intentions are not defenses against the rising tide of antisemitic hatred. If we fail to educate our students regarding how the “Final Solution” was implemented by the Nazis, then we have no means of confronting a new generation who work within the dark crevices of social media, scrawling swastikas in the middle of the night, offering Nazi salutes, or entering synagogues with assault rifles. These are people who have not only learned to hate, but to deny Jews their humanity. The lessons are there, and now we, as educators of all faiths, colors, and creeds, have a responsibility to confront them through lessons well taught.”

Gloria Sesso, co-chair of the Long Island Council for Social Studies, stated, “Regent Tilles has placed himself on the front line of a conflict that pits our society against the soul-destroying forces of hatred and bigotry. History reminds us what occurs when we fail to man those ramparts. We need to place the teaching of history at the center of our defense against anti-Semitism and all forms of intolerance.”

Every tool at our disposal

Tilles observed that fifty years ago when he ran for Congress in Michigan, he was subjected to a campaign that asked voters, “Do you want a Jew in Congress?”

“I am discovering that five decades later, that kind of hatred has reemerged, undisguised, and perhaps even more threatening to an America whose strength lies in its diversity. Our future depends on not just condemning it but confronting it with every tool at our disposal,” he concluded.

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