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Transcript: Thursday, February 26, 2015

Samuel Morse>>I am Samuel Morse, a former Young Judean, Year Course participant, camp counselor, and a current student at The George Washington University. I am here today in the role of facilitator for this program that was created by Hadassah's PRAZE Division. PRAZE is an acronym for

Programming, Advocacy, Zionism, and Education. These four topics help us develop strong connections to each other, to Israel, and to Jewish people all around the world. It is by crafting and delivering a wide variety of programs that Hadassah instills in its members, potential members, Associates, donors, and communities an unbreakable bond to Zionism. Each of us can then determine what Zionism means to us as individuals and how we fit as a piece into the larger picture.

We invite all of you-those here with us in the audience at Gallaudet University, including Naomi Brunnlehrman, Director of the PRAZE Division- and those of you participating from your local communities to join us in creating a safe space as we explore Zionism from various perspectives. We certainly may not always agree on any single definition of Zionism, but we are united by the respect that we have for everyone's right to form their own opinion.

Tonight we offer you the opportunity to listen to our guest speaker and to ask questions in the following manner: For those who are physically in the room with me, we ask that you write your questions on the index cards that we provided at the registration desk. Please write legibly and in large print, raise your card and it will be collected. For most of you, our viewers online, if you haven't already done so, please register with Livestream to enable you to type your questions in the chat box on the side of your screen so that we can pass your questions on to myself.

Please frame your questions in the spirit of respecting the differences in opinions that we are all entitled to. We are honored to have with us this evening, a man who is a former US Congressman from Ohio's 19th District, an Ohio state senator, a candidate for the United States Senate, and former Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents. When he left the Board of Regents in 2011, he was praised for his diplomacy, energy, and pragmatism. Throughout his professional career, our guest tonight, Mr. Eric Fingerhut has dedicated himself to leadership, public service, innovation, and the importance of higher education. In 2013, Mr. Fingerhut became the President and CEO of Hillel International, where he has continued along the path of public service. Fingerhut received his Bachelor's degree from Northwestern University and his juris doctorate from Stanford University Law School. Fingerhut has been and is now an active member of Ohio's Jewish and pro-Israel community.

While in Congress, Mr. Fingerhut co-sponsored many pieces of legislation that offered support for Israel. One such bill voiced support for Israel by seeking to restrict sales and the lease of defense materials to any countries or groups that have requested the United States comply with an Arab boycott of Israel. Since assuming his position in 2013 he's visited all regions of the world with active Hillel's including Russia and the United Kingdom.

In December he oversaw the opening of the first country's Hillel, under his direction Hillel has opened new chapters in both Switzerland and Austria. With him at the helm emphasis has been placed on making it a true global movement. At the Y he mentioned about anti-Semitism.

While it's not on every campus it's prevalent that it must be addressed there he said when issues on campus are framed as political events where students are put in unsafe positions in both physically and psychologically. He's called on movements target Israel responsible for anti-Semitism to reevaluate what they're doing and how it affects Jewish students on campuses I'm proud to introduce Mr. Eric Fingerhut this evening as today we try to answer the important question of what is Zionism today. Please join me in welcoming Eric Fingerhut.

[APPLAUSE]

Eric Fingerhut>> Thank you, Sam, I'm going to come over here just to be able to deliver a few comments and then we'll join Sam back at the dais to answer your questions. It's a great privilege for me to be here. Thank you for the warm introduction thank you to Gallaudet University for hosting this important program. It's a great privilege for me to be here I want to thank Naomi who helped organize it and colleague dear friend Paula Tucker the Hillel director here at Gallaudet University.

We're proud of the work you do and the Jewish students and Hillel program here at Gallaudet so thank you for your wonderful leadership. And of course it's a really wonderful privilege for me to be part of this program sponsored by Hadassah. Hillel and Hadassah share together a common commitment to the Jewish future, and we share a history that is mutually supportive, mutually productive and I'm so proud to be able to participate in this program to help move that partnership even one step closer together.

So you have to let me give a brief Hillel commercial. As Sam mentioned, we are truly a global movement, the largest Jewish student organization in the world by far. Today serving 18 countries on five continents. In North America alone, and over 550 college and university campuses, the places where well over 85 percent of all Jewish students in North America go to college. This is the future of the Jewish people literally in our hands, because while they come from extraordinarily diverse backgrounds and locations, they come together in their time in college to learn, to grow, to discover who they are and we hope to also build and strengthen their connection to Jewish life, to Jewish learning and Israel.

As Sam mentioned I've been president of Hillel for about a year and a half. And during that time I've not only traveled the world but I've had a chance to share Shabbat dinners with students at the university in Israel. Participated in Shabbat with the *Masorti* community with neighboring school University of Maryland and as Sam mentioned shared in openings of Hillel in Germany. I've been on small liberal arts campuses and large public university campuses and tonight it's my great privilege to be here at Gallaudet. Everywhere I've gone I have found impassioned, caring, impressive Jewish students who care about their people, their history and their Jewish Homeland, the state of Israel. It's so important to understand from Hillel's perspective that the love of Israel begins first and foremost with the love of the Jewish people.

It's from our Jewish identity, from our sense of peoplehood, from our sense of nationhood, our connection to each other, that we are brought to have an appreciation for the role of a Jewish homeland, and it seemed to me that it's an appropriate time since we're meeting just a couple of weeks short days before Passover to reflect that when we all gather together at our Seder tables just a short time from now that we are going to be, that we are going to be repeating to each other that sense of how we're all connected as a people. The *Haggadah* teaches your recollection the book that we read on the Passover Seder teaches us the whole.

[ Hebrew ]

In every generation we should regard ourselves as if we personally came out of Egypt

[ Hebrew ]

And you shall explain to your child, your children, on that day, as we will all do at the Seder table, it's because of what God did for us, for me, when we came out of Egypt.

We are connected through this unbroken line of Jewish peoplehood and it's through that sense of connectedness that we then connect as well through our work on campuses around the world to the largest Jewish community in the world. That Jewish community that resides in our ancient homeland, the state of Israel. And Israel programming at Hillel is as broad and diverse as are the campuses on which we serve. And the students that come to those campuses.

We give students a chance to get to know Israelis in Israel through participating in Taglit Birthright Israel trips. They have a chance to deepen their connections to Israel through getting to know a *Shaliach*, a representative from the state of Israel on campus through our Israel fellows program the largest program of its kind now serving over 70 campuses. They have a chance to talk about the issues and understand all perspectives on issues through our award-winning educational initiatives, such as the Ask Big Questions program which enables students to ask the challenging questions in a safe and supportive environment and also through participating with Israel advocacy groups on campus.

We're building these connections with incredible success. I'm proud to tell you that the national coalitions of Pro-Israel groups on campus are stronger than ever, they're working closer together than ever. And providing more opportunities than ever for students to connect with the state of Israel and to build their own relationship and own understanding of the state of Israel. But as you undoubtedly know, in today's world, that's only part of the story. Because the other part of the story is that Jewish students and pro-Israel students and of course there are many, many pro-Israel students who are not Jewish on campus, have found themselves defending against Israel against a campaign of anti-Israel activists dedicated to hurting Jewish state and Jewish life on campus.

The Hillel students and allies across the country are fighting campaigns, calling for universities to divest from companies, simply because they do business with the Jewish state. Anti-Israel student groups are turning governments into accusation chambers hurling words like Apartheid and genocide at Israel and Jewish students. Creating deep rifts on campuses where students are pitted against one another with increasing hostility. Hillel students and all Jewish students are proudly forming groups on campus, lobbying and working with administrators and educating their peers about the true nature of this hateful campaign.

But also about the true nature of Israel of course in all of its diverse pluralistic democratic reality. While we're proud of our students and their responses to these anti-Israel campaigns making their way to campus there's yet another level of concern that I have to fairly put on the table during this important forum. This year has seen a turning point where the ancient hatred of anti-Semitism has returned to too many of our campuses, under the guise of the anti-Israel activities. This hatred is too often tolerated or maybe not recognized, because it's being disguised at politics.

In an academic environment that so values freedom of speech anti-Jewish bigotry can often masquerade as legitimate political discourse and criticism of Israel. But let me be clear hate speech is not legitimate political discourse. When student leaders at UCLA question Jewish

student's ability to fairly and impartially serve on student government because of hire faith that was not legitimate political discourse. Drawing Swastikas on a fraternity or Hillel building are not legitimate political discourse.

Targeting Jewish students with mock eviction notices on their dorm rooms is not legitimate political discourse, physically barring Jewish students to visit a birthright sites at a fair and hurling slurs is not political discourse. There are students being intimidated and bullied. It's easy to condemn more extreme examples of anti-Semitism.

No one believes it's right to put a Swastika on a campus building and every university leader understands their role and responsibility in responding to those types of provocations. But it takes a strong university administrator to recognize and protect his or her campus from the disguised anti-Semitism hiding behind anti-Israel language that we see flowing today on some campuses.

Just last week, for example, chancellor Gene Block of UCLA did exactly that, when he stated clearly the BDS would not be sustained on his campus when asked about BDS he said this movement focused on one country is totally inappropriate.

Of course we're not going to divest, we're certainly not going to boycott Israeli universities. He recognized, Chancellor Block recognized the true and ugly nature of the activities on campus and the division and hostility they create on campus for Jewish students and for the entire academic community. We have to make sure that presidents and administrators at other universities see this issue as clearly as Chancellor Block does.

We must insist that universities make the policy and institutional changes necessary to keep Jewish students safe and free from discrimination at any college they chose to attend. One of the reasons why it's so painful for us to raise this issue is that there is a true love affair between the Jewish people and higher education. And particularly between the American Jewish community and higher education. After all, we were all immigrants. We all benefited from the great institutions of higher education that this country has produced, and we have given back in extraordinary numbers. We send our children to the greatest and best universities that we can send them to. We encourage them to evolve themselves in every aspect of campus life to open their hearts and their minds and spend their time building a knowledge of all of what a university has to offer. We give universities in this country our most precious gift, the gift of our young people, and we also support them with our resources.

Take a walk on any university campus and look at the names on the buildings. It's not just on the Hillel building. It's on the arts and on the sciences and on the libraries. The demonstration of the love and the appreciation for higher education by the Jewish community is very real. Ladies and gentlemen, this is the greatest and freest country in the history of the world and the Jewish people in this country have flourished in freedom and openness as never before in the history of the Jewish people.

This is truly a golden age and a golden place for the Jewish community. And within that great and free society are these institutions of higher education which in my judgment are among the greatest civic accomplishments, if not the greatest civic accomplishment of this great nation. You can't drive down a rural road or go to the middle of a major city without seeing a public university or a liberal arts college or an institution of higher learning of some kind. We must protect the integrity of those great civic institutions. We must make sure that they are open and

welcoming and safe and free of any harassment for all -- all students.

And of course especially so for our young Jewish students who we will continue to send to these colleges and universities in great numbers, and with great passion and with great gusto. And so let us all commit ourselves to do what we can to make sure that the great unbroken story of American higher education and the Jewish community on these campuses is one of continued growth and success.

I know we can meet these challenges that we face today if we face them honestly and we face them openly and I know we will do so together with organizations like Hadassah that have done so much to help young people understand their connection to young Jewish people and Zionism and I commit to you that Hillel who has been doing this work for over nine years will continue to do so God willing for many, many years to come.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Samuel Morse>> I'd like to thank Mr. Fingerhut for his comments. We'll move into a question-and-answer session now. Once again if you were handed a note card and have a question you can hold them up and they will be collected. So I guess just to start it off, do you think that one can be a Zionist and criticize Israel at the same time.

Eric Fingerhut>> Of course. Of course. The history of Zionism is full of debates and contentions, as you yourself noted in the introduction to the program, Sam. I heard you loud and clear. And you were right. The ability to criticize the government of Israel both in Israel and around the world is one of the great protected rights. I know we're sitting here. I mentioned we're sitting here close to Pesach, I waffled is it one week or two weeks. I've lost track of time. I think it's one week. This week. Week and a half. I just need to know, we haven't finished cleaning the house yet. So that's looking forward, which we always try to do.

Looking backwards, it was just last week that we all watched with unbelievable interest the robust democratic election happening in the state of Israel. Thanks to the Internet, we could watch the political ads as they argued back and forth. And even the great dismay that is greeting the discussion about comments that were made by the prime minister for which he's apologized about the voters, is a reminder that indeed Arab citizens vote openly in Israeli elections. So we're proud of that democracy. And here in this country we freely criticize American Jews organize themselves to support one political party in Israel or not.

The one thing that I think we all are, we all are committed to, and that is that we are committed to the belief that a Jewish Homeland that is a democratic Homeland, is a core -- it's a core part of being a Jewish people that we are a people. People as a Homeland. And we remain committed to that. Everybody wants to see it to be the best home land it can be. So we argue about how to achieve those goals. But as long as we remain committed to that Jewish homeland, then we'll stand ourselves in good stead.

Samuel Morse>> So one of the ways I like to think of it is your family members tell you to sit up straight. To make sure you look good. You're fine with that. So do you think it's that role that American Jews are just coming from all different angles and telling Israel, sit up straight, do this differently do that differently, is that role criticism plays.

Eric Fingerhut>> One of my predecessors in this job who is a great teacher, greater educator Avram Hillfield he said we should criticize Israel like we're criticizing our mothers not our mother-

in-laws. And I always tell Avraham I can't tell that joke because I love my mother-in-law. I won the mother-in-law jackpot. So I can't be criticizing. So I quote Avraham telling the joke. The way you criticize in the family requires you to come from that place of love. Another way I say it, I've got two boys. And if I -- I travel a lot for this job. I'm away a lot.

Imagine that I've been away all week, I come home and just before Shabbas, and I walk in the house and first thing I see is the house is a mess and after I see my wife after a week why is the house a mess? See the boys why didn't you finish your homework, why is your room a mess? What are they going to think about me?

Instead if you first hug your wife, do that first, by the way, and then you go see your kids and you kiss them and ask them how they are and you show them how much you love them and you spend time together, then later on, at night you say, by the way, I saw that report card, right. Let's talk about it. That's how you criticize within a family. And I think that's -- it's just something for us good to remember. We're Hillel. Why are we, Hillel named after the great elder the great sage of the people? Most everybody knows that Hillel was part of the great Rabbinic period and he actually had -- there was another great rabbi of that team they debated a lot. Shammai.

The Lincoln and Douglas, Gallaudet was formed by President Lincoln. So Hillel and Shammai would debate points of law, disagree on almost everything. And there was one point of law they were debating where it turns out that they could not resolve the argument. They were arguing, arguing, and the members of the Sanhedrin, the Rabbinic court couldn't resolve it they turned to the heavens and said who is right in this argument? And the answer that came from the heavens was you're both right. Alavalud.

[ Hebrew ]

Both these words are the words of the living God. You would think that would be the end of the story, so we should do either one, follow either interpretation of that point of law. But in fact the story goes on. And the answer that is given is each is the word of God, but we're going to follow the ruling of Hillel. So we ask why do we follow the ruling of Hillel.

And the answer is given, because Hillel and his followers were kind and gentle in their arguments and they first cited the opinion of the other side even before their own. So when they would argue, they would say Sam, Sam says that this is the right way to do so and they would state his argument fairly and accurately. And then they would state their own argument. And because of that form of discussion and debate, the rulings of Hillel prevailed.

The implication is Shammai's followers were not similarly loving and open in their style of debate. So this is a core principle. By the way, all of us fall off of it from time to time. None of us are perfect. I'm sure I snap at my kids and don't say the right thing when I walk in the house every week if it's been a long week and I'm tired or you're taken by surprise. So no one claims perfection here. But that's what we aspire to. And when we don't meet that goal as too often happens we redouble our efforts to meet it the next time

Samuel Morse>> So we're going to take a question from our audience now. So Zionism is kind of -- it's the struggle for a Jewish state, the fighting for a Jewish state. Obviously Zionism was much different pre-1948 and post-1948. So our question is: Do you think that there's a different definition of Zionism for today's youth as opposed to their parents or grandparents?

Eric Fingerhut>> You know, of course there is. I mean, I could say yes and stop the -- and stop the answer, because of course every generation is going to see it through their own lens. And we've formed our opinions through the history that we've seen. One of the things that is so painful for me to realize is that if you're a freshman on a college campus today and you deeply desire to see peace happen between Israel and its neighbors, Israel and the Palestinians, you have not really been given much hope in the years that you have been in your adult, mature enough to follow the news, because the last few years have not been a hopeful time. But if you widen the lens just a little bit, in my own lifetime, I've seen peace happen at an incredible pace. My first trip to Israel, Sam, was my summer of my freshman year of college. I went on one of those six-week summer trips. And we slept among other things we slept in the Sinai desert. I come back to school and president Sadat of Egypt goes to Jerusalem.

A year later the first peace treaty was signed with one of the neighbors, with Egypt which is a still strong positive force in the Middle East. And the Sinai desert is given back. So even in college I saw peace happen. Fast-forward you mention I was a member of Congress. In 1993 and '94. By the way, being a freshman Congressman is a little bit like being Forrest Gump. You're there, you don't have much to do with what happens but you're there to see history happen.

So I was there for the signing of the Oslo peace accords, the famous handshake between Rabin and the president nudging them together. I was there. I saw the formation of the Palestinian authority. In fact voted for funds to help set up the Palestinian authority and today as you know Palestinian authority is an entity that Israel negotiates with, that the U.S. government negotiates with. I was there when Rabin and prime minister and Jordan spoke to Congress after signing the major peace treaty which is in force today between Israel and the kingdom of Jordan. So mine own experience is one of seeing peace break out almost suddenly sometimes.

We didn't know about Oslo until we got the phone call to come to the White House. Sadat shows up in Jerusalem. We know being a young person living now it's been more discouraging than not. Of course their eyes are going to see it differently. Israel is now 66 years old. There's generations of people who have an Israeli identity. That's different than existed before. There's all sorts of factors that make it different. But I think it's an exciting future. We live in this extraordinary time. When I was speaking, I felt obligated and I do to make sure the people know that there are risks and dangers on campus that we have to speak up about before it gets too far away from us.

But I also wanted to make sure that people understand as we do that this is an extraordinary time in the history of the Jewish people living in this golden and free and open society. We also limited time, one of the few generations of the history of Jewish people where there's a state of Israel, generation where they grow up as Jews in a homeland. We're among the luckiest generation of Jewish people. We not only live in the age of the printing press but the age of the Internet where we can study any text and study with any great scholar or great rabbi. Pinch ourselves, we should, to know what a great time in which we live. So that is a reality for the next generation. As well as the challenges that clearly exist to have Israel be able to live at peace and security with its neighbors.

And both of those contrasting and the anti-Israel delegitimization campaign that goes around the world and finding its way to college campuses those contrasting realities the great reality I spoke of and the negative reality are both real and if you're growing up today you're living with both those realities. It's enormously challenging thing to assimilate both of those realities together.

Samuel Morse>> It seems like one of the things that you really focus on is the importance of kind of bringing people together like you said. Rabin and Arafat brought together. We had peace and then peace comes back and it waivers. So in September of last year you posted on Facebook that you were proud of the Cooper union Hillel by attending a speech by Mahmoud Abbas what made you so proud and Hillel so proud.

Eric Fingerhut>> Thank you for asking the question. Because it's a great example of what Hillel stands for. And there were people who criticized us for that. So for those who are listening I'm sure most know but Mahmoud Abbas the head of the Palestinian authority and this is the partner with whom Israel negotiates and the government of the United States, our government, negotiates, and he was speaking at Cooper union which is in New York, we have a Hillel there that's under the umbrella of the NYU Hillel because the union is not such a large school on its own. And of course he's also said things that bother us and that are incendiary. And so we there was those that urged a boycott of that speech but our Hillel student leaders encouraged people to attend, listen respectfully, to question and discuss afterwards and find the points of agreement or disagreement, as the case may be. And so that is the approach to which we strive it's what makes us proud of being a unifying force on campuses.

I readily admit to you as I did earlier that we don't achieve it every day. All of us strive to make the best decisions that we can in every case. And at a time when the forces, as I've mentioned, of delegitimization of Israel seem to be growing and seem to be particularly targeting college campuses. It's a reason to be even more concerned and it's a reason to be even more vigilant not to give away our core values.

Samuel Morse>> The next one is probably one you're asked a lot but I think the answer to it probably important given what you said before about how anti-Semitism on campuses is rising and it might not be at every campus but it definitely is tangible. So how should Jewish students stand up to hate speech on campus and what are maybe some pieces of advice you have for them, people everywhere.

Eric Fingerhut>> To expand the question not just Jewish students but entire Jewish community. I think we all have a responsibility.

And speaking to Hadassah it's important to say that as parents, as grandparents, as citizens of a community, as alumni of universities and colleges that we all have a responsibility. And so the key point that I think we need to keep in mind, I made a reference to it earlier, but let me try to be even more specific, is that political speech on campus of course are protected. The campuses are the most open environments in American society. But as everyone who works on a college campus or who goes to school on a college campus knows, there are rules on a college campus that govern the manner in which we speak to each other and the manner in which we protect the environment in which we're going to live together and learn together and grow together.

And so the rules on campus that govern other types of speech so that people don't feel that they're intimidated or harassed are absolutely governed in this area. And I feel that because the underlying nature of the dialogue is about a political issue, which is the question of the policies of the government of Israel, which is perfectly appropriate to question on a college campus, I'll be absolutely clear about that, but because the underlying nature is a protected political dialogue, we have unfortunately not noticed the growth of the behaviors around it that would not be acceptable if the underlying topic were other subjects that have been very much addressed by university administrators, and so we have an obligation.

Students do but frankly the adults of the community students are adults, the older adults, those of us out of school in our jobs and our professions, we have a responsibility to call that to the attention of the university administrators. I cited Chancellor Block from UCLA who got it exactly right. And to ask our university leaders to lead. We've had incidents where at student government meetings students are screamed at and students are called names. And walking across a quad having to be confronted with those kind of activities and again if it were a different subject it wouldn't be tolerated. Political speech one thing, but the conduct is over the line. And we need to stand up and say so.

Samuel Morse>> My next question is more specific but building on that same topic. Frequently supporters of Israel on campus you hear them being -- Israel and the Jewish people being accused of genocide. And that's a serious accusation, and we live in the United States so we value free speech and we value that people have the ability to say this, but what is the effect for people who might not be neither here nor there on the subject when they hear the words Israel and genocide together in the same sentence.

Eric Fingerhut>> This is an example of what I mean, right, which is that the level of the rhetoric has gotten to a point where it is -- not only is it factually incorrect but that's a factually incorrect statement and deserves to be refuted in the appropriate forums. But it's not just being stated as an academic matter which then can be debated and refuted through scholarly actions or even through debates, it's being yelled at people and it's being held up on posters and so the line of which I'm speaking is that we understand and I spoke of this earlier this hour, we understand that our love, our understanding and connection to a Jewish homeland comes first from the fact that we are a people.

People has a common, had a common identity that comes from, that dates all the way back to Abraham, but specifically to the Exodus to Egypt. This is the Haggadah, I'm not waving a random book at you, and that that people have a homeland. And so it's part of who we are as our Jewish identity. Criticize the policies the modern state of Israel that's fine but when you accuse our homeland as genocide and these other things you're really attacking our own identity as Jews and that's a line we have to help people understand and that there's a difference between attacking our beliefs and identity versus having a political debate. And I do think that on too many examples, not everywhere, but in too many places on too many campuses we've seen across the line and we need to call it and we need to help university administrators understand why it's crossed the line and help us walk back from it.

Samuel Morse>> So this next question, there's two parts to this question, one from the member of the audience my son is about to start applying to colleges what should we watch for, what can we do? And the second part of that question is it more important for Jewish students applying and going to college should they avoid the campuses where anti-Semitism has been at the apex or is it more important to go to the colleges to set the record straight.

Eric Fingerhut>> That's a great question. I'm not sure I can answer the second part. I think, look the number one thing you want to look for I'm biased how can I answer this question in an unbiased way, is a strong commitment to Jewish life on campus. Of course it's not Hillel but it's the central life of Jewish life on campus and we have a college guide you can go to our website which is [www.Hillel.org](http://www.Hillel.org), and get information about Jewish life on campus. And but of course there are other wonderful organizations, if I start naming them I'm going to get in lots of trouble. So I'll apologize to all my dear friends for not naming the other wonderful Jewish organizations that are on campus. But strong and robust Jewish life on campus is an important

factor. And then also if there have been incidents on campus, what was the reaction of the administration?

What was it that the university leaders respond, did they understand that their first and foremost obligation is to create an educational environment for students where they can flourish and grow and explore and learn and do everything that they want to do free of intimidation harassment. Not to be protected from political discussions or from tough or challenging ideas, but certainly to be able to be confronted with those ideas in a safe and educational atmosphere. First and foremost, we are not running, this is not Congress and this isn't the open green on the corner of downtown. This is an educational institution where we're sending our young people and they're going to learn in an educationally academically sound environment. That's the responsibility of our university administrators, and many of them, most of them do it beautifully and well. But it's certainly worth looking into that as well. And certainly I think that Jewish students will be welcomed, are going to be welcomed anywhere, but some campuses do a better job of keeping that environment in the right balance than others.

Samuel Morse>> So we saw a few weeks ago Benjamin Netanyahu came and spoke and support is not really drawn on any religious lines. You have support really everywhere. So this next question is from another member of the audience. They say that they're a Baptist so I respect that God gave Israel to the Jews but my friends in Egypt feel that they want to take more and more land. This person is wondering what can I say to him about Zionism, the bigger question that people believe they don't have the claim to the land of Israel, how do you fight that?

Eric Fingerhut>> So this is part of the essential nature of what college campuses should be about, which is to learn and to study and to understand. Hillel makes as many opportunities available as we possibly can for Jewish students to learn their history, to know the facts. And also the comment about the opinions of the person that the questioner knows. In Egypt is also about modern facts. They have to know their facts. And there's a lot to learn. There's a lot to engage in and a lot of misinformation out there. That's why we learn both in class and we learn in formal settings, too. In formal education environments.

By the way, one of our concerns about universities is to make sure that the Middle Eastern studies and Israel studies are truly academically rigorous and not tilting towards propaganda as opposed to academic rigor. And that's an area that does have to be watched carefully because it's an area of scholarship that is so infused with the individual passions of the scholars. But Hillel really operates in the informal learning environment. If you think about it. You're in class only a few hours. Ultimately a week if you are campus. But you're on campus 24/7. And you're really learning all the time. I often ask people to think to themselves, don't say out loud, what the most significant learning experience you had in college, what's the most transformative educational experience you had and ask yourself if it happened in a classroom versus happened involved in a student organization or in a dorm or in some other activity that you were involved in.

And candidly the odds are it happened after a classroom not inside a classroom just because of the amount of time you spend inside a classroom versus outside a classroom. That's the space in which Hillel operates. And you're learning that in the formal environment. I went to -- I was in Israel last winter to visit some of our birthright trips that Hillel helps organize, we're one of the leading organizers for birthright and *Taglit*. And these were students from all sorts of different universities. They were seeing about Israel and learning Israel firsthand, learning issues about lands and other types of questions that related to the substance of the question you asked me.

But what else they were doing you could see in their eyes for the first time if someone comes from Ithaca, New York and they're in Jerusalem I've never met these people and they say we're related, why am I connected to these people who I've never met before in my life. And I'm not a blood relative of. And that kind of sense of peoplehood is the powerful bond that enables us to take the time to learn the facts.

The questioner who is not Jewish is an example of just a very significant number of Christians and indeed many Muslims and peoples of all faith who understand and respect what the Jewish people have done by rebuilding their Homeland in Israel and want to help us continue to make that a nation that can live in peace and security and freedom with its neighbors.

So I thank him for the question and thank him for the love that he brings and that we feel.

Samuel Morse>> I'm going to read you a brief quote right now from one of the members of the Palestinian negotiating team. They said: There's no difference between the terrorism practiced by the Islamic state group led by al-Baghdadi and Israel's terrorism. What we're speaking of is the cooperation, the Cooper Hillel going to Abbas' speech. Is there a danger in going to listen to people saying stuff like this and are under the belief that Israel is committing terrorist acts.

Eric Fingerhut>> It all depends on the context and the framework. If those comments are being made in the course of a structured negotiation by appropriate government officials who are charged with that responsibility, it's one thing. If they're being made in the context of what is claimed to be either an educational or an advocacy program, then it's another thing.

And so we have to, you always have to take into account the context.

What we do at Hillel on campus is make sure that students have a chance to understand and discuss and learn about all arguments and to delve underneath the kinds of vicious lies that you just read and to know why it's a vicious lie and to know why it's wrong. But that doesn't mean that we invite those people who will say those things and those people who believe those things into our house in order to make that point. There's plenty of ways to make sure that all students understand the nature of what some people are saying and why those things are vicious lies without saying that we have to invite them into our house.

Samuel Morse>> My last question to you because we are running out of time is: So for Jewish students on campus today, for Jewish people living today, what is the most important challenge that we face as individuals as a community and how do we address this challenge? Save the best for last.

Eric Fingerhut>> That's a big question. What was it, that the Jewish people.

Samuel Morse>> What's the biggest challenge facing --

Eric Fingerhut>> Biggest challenge facing Jewish people. I think the biggest challenge facing the Jewish people is the challenge that we have faced every generation. The whole Vavadore in every generation and that is to transmit our heritage and our covenant from one generation to the next. It is not anything ever we take advantage. It is why we will sit down together as a people and recount the story of the Exodus. It's why we will recite together on a regular basis the watch words off our faith. It's why we -- it's why we educate our children. It's why we care about what we're doing because we're the inheritors of the covenant that was made at Mount Sinai and that binds us together as the holders of this great heritage and this great tradition. And I have to hand it down to my children.

[ Hebrew ]

Teach it to your children. I have to do that. And Hillel does that best we can every day across the world with as many young people as we can on as many college campuses as we can. Hadassah does that with the types of programs that you've described and that every individual member of Hadassah, parent, grandparent does for their children.

If we pass down our tradition, if we teach the importance of our faith and of our people and our laws and our tradition, all the rest will take care of itself

Samuel Morse>> Great. Well, thank you very much, Eric for coming and speaking with us tonight. I think it's been very insightful. I want to remind everyone that this session as well as all the past sessions have been recorded and may be watched alone, in a group, or as the centerpiece of a unit's or community program. Also, please share your feedback with us by completing our online survey which will be emailed to you. Your input helps us create programming that is of interest to you and your communities. Continue these conversations on our website and on Twitter you can use the hashtag #definingzionism. Additionally, if you haven't yet done so, please register for the entire Defining Zionism series to receive updates about all future programs. Like we talked about, while we probably don't agree on any one definition of Zionism, and what that entails, we can agree that the utterance of that very word can elicit a wide range of emotions and feelings in people.

But Jewish people however are united in the effort of making Israel a place safe not only for Jews but for all who value peace, tolerance and the freedom to exist. Again, we truly appreciate you taking the time to be with us here tonight and sharing your feelings and opinions about these very controversial issues and they'll become more and more important every day. The energy and pragmatism and the way in which you approach Israel advocacy on campus and life as a whole is vital to the discussion of Zionism and what it really entails. It is imperative that conversations like this continue in the future, because talking about something like Hillel and they did in the past, talking about something is truly the only way to bring about any change.

A special thank you to Gallaudet Hillel for hosting us this evening and to the volunteers and staff who have been involved in putting on the Defining Zionism program. Without you these presentations would not be possible. Please join us again on April 8th at 7:30 pm ET when this series will feature a presentation on Zionism and Combating BDS, Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions, by Sara Greenberg who is a graduate student at Harvard University And a member on the board of the Harvard Hillel. Thank you for coming and joining us at this latest installment of Defining Zionism in the 21st century.

Thank you whether you're in the audience or at home. To close we saw Israel last week Benjamin Netanyahu for a fourth term as Prime Minister. Hadassah supports the democratically elected government of Israel. Israel is once again striving for peace and security in these most trying times. These values, shared by both the United States and Israel, nurture our support of Practical Zionism. The fact that we have a Jewish state does not mean that we no longer have to fight for it. As we discussed, Zionism shifts and morphs into different things depending on the time. And the opposite is in fact true. We have to continue to fight for it. However, do it beg the question; what does Zionism mean to each of us in the 21st Century?

Lila Tov, and Good Night.

[APPLAUSE]