

**CONGREGATION BETH EL
107 ADAMS STREET
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

February 17, 2026

Dear Editor,

The Bennington Banner commentary, “Ending Israeli apartheid starts right here,” appears to be deeply misguided and, whether by intention or not, crosses a line into antisemitism. It doesn’t just criticize Israeli policy; it asks our town to treat one country, and by extension one small local community, as singularly beyond the pale.

First, it treats Israel as a uniquely monstrous offender while presenting its condemnation as if it were simply “standing up for human rights.” The problem is not that Israel is being criticized; it is that no other country receiving U.S. military aid or political cover is held to anything like the same standard. Around the world, we see Muslims in Xinjiang subject to camps and forced labor, Rohingya in Myanmar ghettoized and stripped of citizenship, and caste-based exclusion in India still widely described as “hidden apartheid.” Yet, there is no sustained campaign in our local pages to declare ourselves “Uyghur-free” or “Rohingya-free.” These comparisons are not meant as excusal, but to show that when only the Jewish-majority state is turned into a local cause while similar or worse abuses draw no such campaigns, something other than even-handed concern is at work. That double standard is what makes the framing antisemitic.

Second, the piece encourages our town governments to adopt symbolic foreign-policy resolutions that do nothing to improve life for Israelis or Palestinians, but do a great deal to damage life together here. We have already seen in Vermont that these nonbinding “apartheid-free” measures pit neighbor against neighbor, turn Town Meetings into a proxy war over the Middle East, and leave those on the “wrong” side wondering whether their local officials still see them as full and equal members of the community. Neighbors who have worshiped and volunteered together for years suddenly find themselves lined up on opposite sides of a yes/no vote about a distant war, with all the bitterness of national politics imported into one room. For Jews, that question is not abstract: if your synagogue is publicly associated with the side that a town resolution condemns, you begin to ask whether your menorah or mezuzah makes you a target, and whether you can rely on the same sense of safety and solidarity others take for granted.

Third, branding Israel as an “apartheid state” in our local paper contributes to a broader process of dehumanization. Dehumanization occurs when a group is repeatedly portrayed as uniquely cruel, colonial, or beyond the bounds of normal moral concern. Over time, this makes it easier for others to rationalize hostility, exclusion, and even violence. In Jewish history, we have seen how rhetoric that erases complexity and paints Jews as a singular source of evil has led, step by step, to exclusion and attack. In the current climate of sharply rising antisemitic incidents, it is especially irresponsible to amplify a narrative that treats Jewish self-determination as uniquely illegitimate.

None of this means Israel, or any government, is above criticism. Many Jews, myself included, have serious concerns about particular policies and long for a just political solution that recognizes both Jewish and Palestinian self-determination. The issue is not whether people may criticize Israel, but whether we

apply one set of rules to every state - including those heavily supported by the United States - or reserve a special category of condemnation and boycott for the Jewish state alone. The former is part of democratic debate; the latter reflects a pattern that Jews recognize as a modern form of antisemitism.

Congregation Beth El has been part of the Bennington community since 1909. Our congregants live in Bennington, North Bennington, Shaftsbury, and many surrounding towns, and the congregation was founded with strong interfaith support that we very much hope continues today. We are your neighbors, coworkers, and classmates, not proxies for any foreign government. When local institutions adopt symbolic foreign-policy resolutions that single out Israel, they send an unmistakable message to a small minority community that it is uniquely suspect and unwelcome.

For these reasons, we oppose bringing any “Apartheid-Free Community” article to Town Meeting in Bennington, North Bennington, or Shaftsbury, whether by petition or by board initiative. If such articles nonetheless appear, we urge Shaftsbury voters on March 2 at Shaftsbury Elementary School, and North Bennington voters on March 17 at the Village School of North Bennington, to vote NO on the Apartheid-Free Community Pledge. Bennington voters should do the same if a similar article is warned there. Town government is at its best when it tends to the shared, concrete concerns of its residents, not when it is drawn into passing sweeping judgment on one of the world’s most intractable conflicts in a way that isolates and stigmatizes its Jewish citizens.

Those who want to act constructively can also help keep our laws and schools fair and safe. Instead of supporting H.R.13, a State House resolution that again centers Israel with “apartheid” language and risks importing the same divisive framing into Montpelier, we encourage readers to back H.310, “An act relating to education on the evolving nature of antisemitism,” which would strengthen Vermont’s ability to recognize and address antisemitic harassment in our schools and communities. Bennington County residents can contact Representatives Cooper, Corcoran II, Durfee, Greer, Hunter, James, Morrissey, Morrow, Nigro, Pinsonault, and Pritchard—by email or by leaving a message with the Sergeant at Arms at 802-828-2228—to urge support for H.310 and to express concern about H.R.13’s one-sided “apartheid” framing. Whatever our views on the Middle East, we all have a stake in keeping Town Meeting and the State House places where every resident, including Jewish residents, can walk in feeling that they fully belong

Sincerely,

Lance Allen Wang, President and
The Board of Directors of Congregation Beth El
Bennington, Vermont 05201