

Tuscola County Democratic Party Newsletter

November 2023

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Our Goals

- Ensure honest and transparent government.
- Restore and protect our environment.
- Support strong economic growth and opportunity.
- Strengthen voter access and turnout.
- Promote affordable education and health care for all.

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Notice of Our November Meeting

The regular monthly meeting of the Tuscola County Democratic Party will be held on **Thursday, November 16, 2023**. The meeting will be held at the Brentwood, 178 Park Drive, Caro, MI. Social hour will begin at 5:30 p.m. and the meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m.

We hope you will join us.

Fall Fundraiser



Our Fall Fundraiser was held on October 19 at the Brentwood. More than fifty people showed up to enjoy burritos, salad bar, drinks, and hang out with fellow Democrats. Jerry Tkach, Mona DeQuis, and Mark Putnam told us how to increase party membership and elect more Democrats to local public office in 2024. Sharene McCloy and Sharon Schwab drew the names of winners of fabulous door prizes.

President Biden Goes to Israel



At 6:31 a.m. on Saturday, October 7, 1,500 Hamas fighters bulldozed the fence surrounding Gaza, stormed into Israel, massacred more than 1,400 Israelis, and took more than 200 hostages. President Biden responded immediately with round-the-clock diplomacy, public speeches promising uncompromising support for Israel, and calls to the families of people believed to have been kidnapped by Hamas. On October 18, he flew to Israel and gave the whole country a hug, so to speak. During his seven and a half hours on the ground, the president said what Jews desperately needed to hear. He acknowledged the pain of the Israeli people, set the record straight on who bombed the Gaza hospital, and announced that he was going to ask Congress for additional military assistance to Israel.

With the hug and the speech came a whisper in Netanyahu's ear, a warning not to let overpowering anger drive Israel into going too far. The president expressed three concerns:

(1) Massive civilian casualties. Underneath the Gaza Strip is a vast network of tunnels, mostly under densely populated areas, in which Hamas has hidden weapons, fighters, and even command centers. Israel's ground invasion of Gaza is already encountering a common challenge in urban warfare — getting stalled in the streets and tunnels and then calling in air strikes to blow away the enemy and anyone else nearby, leading to heavy civilian casualties.

(2) A wider war. Arab governments and militant groups throughout the Middle East are closely watching the conflict and ready to jump in. Israel has fought multiple wars with each of its four neighbors, all of whom nominally support the Palestinian national cause. Today, Israel has peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, but its relations with its other two neighbors, Syria and Lebanon, are rocky. For more than four decades, Iran's rulers have pledged to destroy Israel and have provided significant military and financial backing to the government of Syria, the Hezbollah militants in Lebanon, and the Houthi militants in Yemen.

(3) Israel's lack of a coherent exit plan. Netanyahu has vowed to wipe out Hamas once and for all. If he succeeds, who will govern Gaza? The only likely possibility is the Palestinian Authority that now governs the West Bank, but Israel's right-wing politicians and settlers are working overtime to drive Palestinians out of the West Bank. This is a contradiction. The cold hard truth is that Israel cannot get out of Gaza unless they can replace Hamas with a capable Palestinian partner to govern there.

Why Did Hamas Attack Israel?



It's a long story. The Ottoman Turks had occupied Palestine for more than 400 years before the British defeated them during World War I and took it over. In 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour issued the Balfour Declaration, which established a "national home" in Palestine for Jewish people. From the 1920s to the 1940s, nearly 400,000 Jews, many of them fleeing from persecution in Europe and elsewhere, settled in Palestine. In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly recommended that Palestine be split into separate Jewish and Arab states. This plan was accepted by Jewish leaders, but rejected by the Arabs and never implemented. In 1948, the British withdrew from Palestine and Jewish leaders declared the creation of the State of Israel. The next day, soldiers from neighboring Arab countries attacked. By the time the fighting ended in the following year, Israel controlled most of Palestine. Jordan occupied land that later became known as the West Bank, Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip, and the city of Jerusalem was split in half between Israel and Jordan.

During the next couple of years, more than 700,000 Jews settled in Israel and more than 750,000 Palestinians were deported or expelled. Since then, there has been almost continuous fighting between Israelis and Palestinians with occasional flare ups into outright war. In 1967, Israel and a coalition of Arab states (primarily Egypt, Syria, and Jordan) fought the Six-Day War. Israel ended up taking over the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the western part of the Golan Heights, and the entire city of Jerusalem, and started building Jewish settlements in those areas. Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in 1978, but to this day has retained control over the other territories taken in the Six-Day War.

Fatah was founded in the late 1950s by Yassir Arafat and a small group of Arab Palestinians with the aim of destroying Israel and replacing it with a Palestinian state. By the end of the 1960s, Fatah had taken over control of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) with Yassir Arafat as its leader. During the 1970s and 80s, the PLO gradually began to shift their approach from armed conflict with Israel to negotiation. In 1993, Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords, in which Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist in peace. A self-governing Palestinian Authority (PA) was set up, and it exercised partial civil control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Yassir Arafat remained president of the PA until he died of a mysterious blood disorder in 2004. Mahmoud Abbas, one of the original members of Fatah, succeeded Arafat and was elected PA president in 2005. Abbas is now 87 years old.

The Gaza Strip is a narrow strip of land sandwiched between Israel and the Mediterranean Sea with a short southern border with Egypt. Just 25 miles long and 5 miles wide, it has more than two million inhabitants and is one of the most densely populated places on Earth. . Most Gazans live in refugee camps and rely on U.N. rations. In 2005, Israel withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza, but retained control over its airspace, shared border, and shoreline. In 2006, Hamas won the majority of seats in the Palestinian Authority's legislature and seized control of Gaza in the following year. Hamas was founded in 1987. It wants all the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan, which includes the modern state of Israel as well as the occupied West Bank and Gaza. It refuses to recognise Israel and is violently opposed the Oslo peace accords negotiated by Israel and the PLO in 1993. Since then, there has been nearly constant conflict, often involving Hamas' rocket launches into Israel and Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

Why did Hamas attack Israel now? Middle East experts think the attack was triggered by three factors:

(1) The policies of the far-right Israeli government enabling settler violence in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem has led to a sense of desperation among Palestinians and growing demands for a reaction. At the same time, the rising tensions in the West Bank caused by these policies caused Israeli to shift its forces away from Gaza and closer to the West Bank to guard the settlements, leading Hamas leaders to think that now was the best time to attack.

(2) U.S. intelligence and military officers have said they believe the timing of Hamas' attack was primarily aimed at disrupting negotiations between Israel and Saudi Arabia as the Saudis appeared on the verge of a historic step to normalize relations with Israel. If a Saudi-Israeli normalisation deal had been concluded, Hamas leaders believed it would have been a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict and may have eliminated the already weak chances of a two-state solution.

(3) Hamas leaders have been feeling more confident in recent years since they have managed to repair ties with Iran. For many years, Hamas has received significant financial support from Iran, but its relationship with the Islamic Republic has been rocky. In 2012, Iran cut off funding to Hamas after it refused to support the al-Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War, but resumed financial assistance to Hamas in 2017. U.S. officials estimate that Iran now provides more than \$100 million to Hamas each year.

Who is Mike Johnson?

On October 25, the United States House of Representatives elected a new speaker to replace Kevin McCarthy, who was ousted by Republican extremists on October 3. The new speaker is Mike Johnson of Louisiana's Fourth Congressional District. He comes from the far-right wing of the congressional Republican Party, and while he was not a member of the Freedom Caucus, he did lead the Republican Study Committee, a group devoted to the proposition that any dollar spent on social programs is a dollar too much.

And what does Johnson believe? He is a self-described evangelical Christian who is staunchly anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ rights, anti-union, and anti-immigration. He supports a nationwide ban on abortion and gender-affirming care for trans youth. He has close ties to the Israeli right wing, and he opposes further aid to Ukraine, saying such money would be better spent at home, although he has also called for extensive cuts to domestic spending programs. Johnson was instrumental in Trump's attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. He rallied his colleagues to object to counting the electoral votes from states won by Biden.

As House Speaker, Johnson calls the House to order, allows members to give speeches, decides which bills get voted upon, appoints key House staff members, and negotiates with the president and the Senate. Johnson's opening move has already set him on a collision course with the Senate. The House passed a \$14.3 billion aid package for Israel that lacks Ukraine funding and attaches a poison pill that would rescind funding for thousands of new IRS employees. Johnson must compromise to get that bill through the Democratic-controlled Senate, but when his predecessor, Kevin McCarthy, compromised in order to pay the country's debts and keep the government open earlier this year, House Republicans kicked him out.

And this is only the beginning. The House and Senate must work together to pass a short-term funding bill before November 17 to avoid a government shutdown and they must address other reauthorizations before the end of the year, including the farm bill, federal aviation, a Pentagon spending bill, and legislation on foreign intelligence surveillance.

Tuscola Dems Welcome Your Donations



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