



JCRC Omaha 2026 Jewish Voter Guide on State and Local Races

Candidate Positions on Issues of Importance to Nebraska's Jewish Community and Our Neighbors

NEBRASKA STATE SENATOR Bill Bowes – Candidate for LD14

Antisemitism and leadership

Antisemitism can come from across the political and ideological spectrum. What responsibility do elected officials have to recognize and speak out against antisemitism, including when it comes from members of their own party, political allies, or supporters?

No matter where antisemitism originates, elected officials and leaders have the responsibility to call the person or group out. This type of speech or action cannot go unchecked. History makes this very clear. An important aspect of this question is; how does a person recognize antisemitism? This is addressed in the following question.

1. How do you define antisemitism, and how would you distinguish it from legitimate political speech or criticism?

In determining what is and what is not antisemitism, it is important to distinguish the difference between the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Criticism of a government, political system, or political party is free speech. Criticism of a religious group that espouses hate, violence, or the threat of violence is not justifiable. Antisemitism is the latter expressed towards Jewish people.

2. Community harmony in a polarized environment: Political rhetoric can contribute either to division or to mutual respect. What responsibility do elected officials have to avoid language that stereotypes or scapegoats religious, racial, ethnic, immigrant, or other communities, particularly during campaigns?

My personal philosophy, which I have shared with others throughout my career is, “treat everyone the same and treat everyone with respect”. As an elected official, my belief is that you have greater responsibility to treat everyone with respect in language, actions, and attitude.

Hate and bias

3. Should Nebraska codify IHRA legislatively so its applicability extends beyond what a governor can accomplish through executive action. How would you respond to acts of hate or bias affecting any community in your district or across Nebraska, and what legislative action, if any, do you believe is appropriate?

As LB538 attempted to codify IHRA in this past legislative session, a new bill should be introduced in the coming session. Thorough and thoughtful debate will enable the legislature to pass a bill that accomplishes the goals of preventing discrimination and bias, while providing for a procedure for reporting and investigating complaints.

Acts of hate and bias must be immediately denounced. These acts are in opposition of our community goal of living together in peace.

I don't believe any additional legislative action is currently needed. We have both state and federal civil rights protections in place. I will always be open to discussing issues and ideas.

Community security

4. Jewish institutions and other houses of worship have faced increased security concerns in recent years. What role do you believe elected officials should play in helping communities feel safe while preserving an open and welcoming civic environment?

It is the responsibility of elected officials to be up front and vocal regarding the type and character of what our communities should be. Officials should lead with appropriate language, encouragement, and positivity. Safety includes both law enforcement and the prosecution of crimes. We need to have strong law enforcement agencies to protect citizens and investigate crimes. We need equally strong prosecutors who will charge and prosecute criminals.

Church and State

5. Religious liberty includes both the right to practice one's faith and protection against government establishment of religion. As a state senator, how would you balance these principles when considering legislation affecting public schools and other government institutions, particularly when the religious beliefs of the majority differ from those of religious minorities?

Freedom and liberty are two of the bedrocks of our country. As a state senator, I would work diligently to protect religious freedom. Government should not inhibit the practice

of a religion, nor should it mandate any actions that would favor one religion over another, regardless of any majority.

Education

6. What role should the Legislature play in addressing antisemitism and other forms of religious discrimination in Nebraska's K-12 schools and public colleges and universities?

LB538, referenced earlier, would play a large role in addressing and preventing antisemitism and religious discrimination in all of our schools. State senators must pay close attention to, and defeat, bills that are introduced that may erode protections in place.

Budget

7. Nebraska faces a significant projected budget shortfall. What two specific actions would you support to restore structural balance, and what area of the state budget would you prioritize for protection?

In restoring structural balance, the two actions I will pursue are 1) to control government spending through prioritization, accountability, and transparency, and 2) grow the state's economy through workforce development, sensible regulations, and a stable taxation structure. The primary responsibility of government is to protect the safety and rights of its citizens. This is the priority when funding government operations.

Reserves

8. Nebraska entered 2023 with historically strong General Fund balances and nearly \$1 billion in its Cash Reserve Fund. What lessons should the Legislature draw from the fiscal decisions of recent years, and what spending, revenue, or tax-policy changes would you support to restore long-term fiscal stability?

The most significant lesson the Legislature should have learned is that the first action to take in government funding is to control spending. The state obligated \$1 billion to the Education Future Fund and took over the financing of community college expenses, and dedicated funds to property tax relief, all with the idea that this would provide home and property owners with lower property tax bills. There was no spending control placed on local councils and boards, so their revenues (and spending) continued to increase.

Food insecurity & Affordability

9. Food insecurity is growing and profoundly impacting families across Nebraska.

What role should state government play in addressing hunger, and how would your administration approach Nebraska's participation in and administration of federal nutrition programs?

The state should work to maximize participation in federal programs such as SNAP, Summer EBT, school nutrition programs, and WIC. Specifically, the state should streamline application and participation processes and use effective outreach strategies to enroll those eligible. Eligibility thresholds should be routinely re-evaluated and cooperation among non-profits should be encouraged, along with data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of programs.

10. With rising home prices and property taxes, homeownership is becoming increasingly difficult for many families. What would you do to make homeownership more affordable while ensuring local governments have the resources they need?

The affordability of housing relies heavily on supply and demand. Government can help somewhat on the supply side by having common-sense regulations that provide for safety but are not overly burdensome. The state should create an environment of stable, low taxation and look to grow the state's economy.

Workforce

11. What policies would you support to address Nebraska's workforce shortages, including attracting and retaining legal immigrants and refugees who can contribute to Nebraska's economy?

We want the state to be a place where people want to come – for jobs and quality of life. Keeping young adults in the state through workforce training programs at community colleges has proven successful. These same programs are being used to train legal immigrants, setting them on a path to success. Addressing childcare is also critical to keeping young families here in the state and active in the workforce.

Diverse representation

12. Relationships across differences: How would you build relationships with Jewish and other faith and minority communities—including communities whose members

may disagree with you politically—and ensure they have meaningful access to you if you are elected?

One of the things I enjoy most is building relationships. Everyone has value and everyone has something to contribute to society. In my time as Fire Chief in Papillion, I worked hard to be visible in the community and build relationships with local businesses, schools, and organizations. I'll bring this same passion to the legislature. I am a firm believer in being accessible – going to community events, being out in the public, being involved with non-profits.

13. How do you approach policymaking in a culturally and religiously diverse legislative district, and how will you engage with faith-based and minority communities if elected?

I think at the core of policymaking and in relationships, finding shared values is the key. We have conversations and discussions on our values, find those we share, and use this to make policies that are good for the community and the state. We can focus on our similarities and not let our differences be defining factors.

Israel and the Jewish community

14. Israel is an important part of the organized religious, cultural, and communal identity of most Jewish Nebraskans even while holding a wide range of views about Israeli government policies. How do you approach conversations about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way that respects both legitimate political disagreement and the concerns of Jewish constituents about antisemitism?

In a way, this goes back to the question on defining antisemitism. We can open, honest discussions regarding the politics of Israel, both pro and con, without making a judgement on the Jewish people. Israel is, and will continue to be, a valuable ally of the United States. We have much in common and should be mutually supportive.