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Local residents call for DeSaulnier to stop funding weapons for Gaza war

By Sharon K. Sobotta

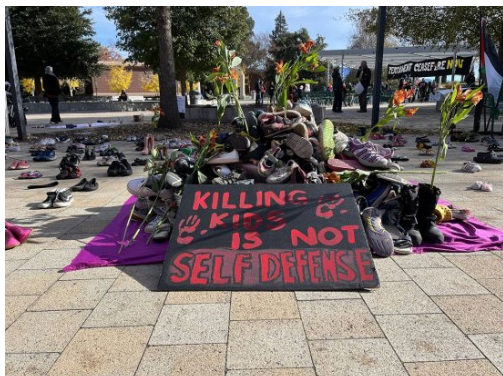


Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

Lamorinda residents were a part of some 300 people and a coalition of youth that greeted District 10 Congressman Mark DeSaulnier ahead of his 200th town hall meeting at Diablo Valley Community College earlier this month. In the center of the DVC plaza was an unmissable stack of children's shoes - collected and displayed by Jewish women in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties - covered with roses that surrounded a sign emblazoned with the words, "Killing kids is not self-defense," and many others with one central message: ceasefire.?

□ Ann Young is a Jewish Lafayette resident and the mother of a Campolindo High School student as well as a college student. Young helped organize the visual shoe display. She handed out flowers in honor of those who've been killed in Gaza during DeSaulnier's visit. "The shoe memorial is such a powerful and impactful way to remind people about what is happening right now in Gaza," Young said.

□ For Young, a ceasefire cannot happen soon enough. And she says her critique of the military actions of the Israeli military with funding provided by the U.S. does not make her antisemitic but rather a person that is standing tall in her Jewish beliefs. "I'm Jewish and I was raised in a Jewish family. We [Jews] were dehumanized, called animals and not seen as actual people [in our history]. Today Palestinians are being pushed together into the tiniest corner of a walled-in area and then they're being targeted.

□ "For me, the part of Judaism that has always been rooted deep within me that I took from my childhood Rabbi were the lessons of fighting for social justice when we see anyone suffering. It is not antisemitic to call for freedom and the life of other people - and not just my own," Young said. "It's as supportive of Judaism as one can get."

□ Bissan Abusharar is a Palestinian-American mother of four who no longer lets her 13-year-old son wear his kufiya in public, for the sake of his safety. "I remind him that we don't live in a perfect world and we are going to live, work and go to school with people who hold different views and we need to be respectful of their perspectives."

□ Bissan Abusharar hopes that DeSaulnier will convince more of his democratic colleagues to join his call for a ceasefire. She also hopes DeSaulnier will back up his own ceasefire call by voting against additional military funding for the state of Israel. "We were very happy with the way he interacted with our children. We're happy that he is in support of a ceasefire."

□ There was a stark contrast from outside the plaza, where empty pairs of shoes representing the thousands of children who've been killed in the war so far were displayed, to the interior where DeSaulnier's 200th Town Hall meeting began with the presentation of a cake. As the Congressman presented slides about what he'd accomplished in Contra Costa County, some members of the diverse crowd grew impatient. It became clear that many had gathered with hopes of talking about the unfolding situation in Israel/Palestine, a topic which DeSaulnier did not lean into during his town hall.

□ Bissan Abusharar and her husband listened patiently as their children played. Abusharar says patience, along with persistence, are the key ingredients for inspiring the hearts, minds and eventually the votes of political leaders.

□ "If we look back at history, we know that we have to be persistent. This is not going to stop if we just give up and stop showing up. We need to keep showing up for the children of Gaza and for the people of Gaza. They don't have a voice right now," Bissan Abusharar says. "We need to keep calling and pressuring our congress members and representatives to do the right thing - call for a ceasefire and stop funding weapons that are killing thousands of people."

□ Rena Meyers-Dahlkemp lives in the Canyon area near Moraga and is part of an interfaith coalition of women. "We can't keep going like this with this many children and families being killed daily with our tax dollars. That's not self defense." Meyers-Dahlkemp is clinging tightly to the hope that DeSaulnier will make good on his promise to children and families. ??

□ Like the Abusharar family, Meyers-Dahlkemp noted what was missing from DeSaulnier's commitment. "He listened to a 15-year-old who presented him with the scroll of names [of those killed in Gaza] who described how painful it was to go through and highlight the names of the children. The Congressman said it was horrible and shouldn't be happening, but he didn't make the commitment to stop funding the Israeli military which is what our big ask is today and so we'll keep pushing."

□ Lafayette resident Lynn MacMichael, who is in her mid-80s, appeared with her bright orange vest to work security. She's been showing up for racial justice and inclusivity both in Lamorinda and in the world at large for her whole life, and she can't wait for this war to end. "The U.S. voted against the ceasefire in the Security Council (last week) and we have to live with that. I've been to Israel, Palestine and Gaza several times. The situation has never been fair. We need a viable two-state solution with both people protected.

Many of us have even offered to go and stand right on the border to make sure there's no problem," MacMichael said. "I do not justify violence at all ever and I don't justify what Hamas did nor do I justify what the Israeli government has done since then. And when there's an unfair situation going on - with people in Gaza being in open-air prisons - people [will] resist. The U.S. has allowed and funded this with our tax dollars for decades with a \$3.9 billion blank [annual] check. This has to stop."

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