

Summer Internship 2016: Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations

Noam Safier

Justus and Karin Rosenberg Foundation

Yeshiva University, Class of 2016

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations is a bipartisan, non-denominational organization that represents over 50 significant Jewish organizations on matters that pertain to the American and global Jewish community. Member organizations include those from all streams of Judaism, as well as political organizations from across the spectrum. The Conference acts as the unified voice for these organizations which allows for its Executive Vice Chairman and CEO, Malcolm Hoenlein, to advocate on their behalf.

Mr. Hoenlein, or “Malcolm”, as he likes to be called in the office, has been at the helm of the Conference for over 30 years and has built its prominence throughout his career. Malcom has extensive academic background in foreign policy which enables him to be an expert policy advisor. Although his day-to-day operations are confidential, Malcolm is often meeting with politicians and foreign officials, advising them on policy and advocating on behalf of the Jewish community and State of Israel.

Tucked away in a small corner of the Jewish Agency office on 3rd Avenue, the Conference makes up for its small size by executing large initiatives. Although many of the tasks I engaged in this summer were the direct result of recent current event developments, there were several daily responsibilities that I had. For example, Mr. Hoenlein hosts a weekly radio segment on the John Batchelor Show in which he interviews different foreign policy experts, diplomats and politicians. It was my job, along with the other inters, to come up with the questions for this

nationally syndicated show that reaches over 2 million people weekly. Guests included Congressman Ed Royce, the Chairman of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Danny Danon and a variety of members of prestigious foreign policy think tanks. Each question had to be well researched, formulated properly and poignant yet simple enough for the averagely educated listener to understand. The weekly task taught me to think critically about current events, make connections and draw my own conclusions. Other consistent projects included drafting press releases and researching and analyzing policy initiatives such as those pertaining to the US-Israel relationship and resolutions adopted by the UN. Additionally, I facilitated the formulation of a fundraising development plan, planned and set up events and executed a variety of other support tasks.

Just before my internship began, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an Executive Order that directed divestment of public funds from companies and organizations found to support the BDS movement against Israel. My very first task at the Conference was to monitor the media regarding the Order to see if we had to prepare a response to any criticism that may have arisen.

One initiative in which I played a key role was in mobilizing the Conference's member organizations to sign a petition denouncing anti-Israel bias at the UN. Over the summer, several resolutions came out of the international body condemning only Israel while ignoring the human rights violations being committed by many other countries. The petition was delivered to key politicians including UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, as well as Secretary of State, John Kerry.

A particularly memorable highlight of the summer was attending an event at the US Mission to the UN with Ambassador Samantha Power. The event was an open floor Q&A

session with Ms. Power where each attendee voiced their concerns about Israel at the UN. It was inspiring to see the way in which these Jewish leaders advocated on behalf of their communities and the State of Israel.

Although I learned a lot at the Conference, what struck me as most poignant was the importance and impact of being engaged in the political system on the highest levels possible when advocating for a cause. Grassroots movements are important and no initiative can be successful without the support of a community. However, without the proper engagement on the higher levels, things are unlikely to change. By developing relationships based on mutual understanding with the decision makers of the country, we can speak with an organized, unified voice and advocate the issues that are most pertinent to our community. This type of activism ensures that our voice is not only heard, but often heeded too. Working at the Conference allowed me to sit on the sideline and observe this activism at work.

Lastly, I would like to say thank you to the Justus and Karin Rosenberg Foundation for enabling me to spend my summer at the Conference. With anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism on the rise, it has never been more important to ensure youth engagement in our collective future. It is my hope that the foundation continues to empower future Jewish leaders and facilitate safety and certainty for the international Jewish community and the State of Israel.