

Nov 13, 2024

Open Letter to NSNDP Leader Claudia Chender, MLA Dartmouth Shore

Dear Ms. Chender,

We are a group of concerned scholars rooted in Mi'kma'ki, coming together to condemn the NSNDP for its abandonment of now-former Eastern Passage candidate, Tammy Jakeman.

We are deeply disappointed that the party failed to stand up for freedom of expression and the democratic importance of fostering vigorous debate on contentious political issues. It matters little whether Tammy jumped or was pushed. By now, it is expected that NDP candidates who criticize the Israeli state's actions will be targeted by Israel's supporters. The NDP should be prepared to deal with the specious accusations of antisemitism.

As you know, Jakeman was singled out by the Atlantic Jewish Council (AJC) and the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) for what they describe as "deeply troubling" social media posts in 2023. According to the CIJA press release of Nov 8, simply saying that the state of Israel is committing a genocide in Palestine is antisemitic. In the wake of Israel's almost complete refusal to abide by the International Court of Justice's [multiple recent binding rulings and advisories](#) for it to prevent genocide and end its occupation, this is an untenable argument that conflates legitimate and accurate criticism of Israeli violations of international law with antisemitism.

While CIJA and the AJC are no doubt emboldened by the 31 Oct. release of Canadian Heritage's "handbook" on antisemitism, the handbook has been widely criticized for its reliance on the [flawed IHRA definition of antisemitism](#) and its use as a tool to launder Israeli state impunity. The federal NDP released a [statement on 3 Nov.](#) about the handbook, pointing to the document as an attempt to shut down criticism of Israel. CIJA's calculated targeting of Jakeman must be understood in this context.

Jakeman should never have been encouraged to resign, especially considering other members of your NSNDP caucus have made their support for the Palestinian cause clear, along the same lines as Jakeman. Sue Leblanc, MLA for Dartmouth North, made a statement just this past weekend that recognizes the need for a ceasefire in Gaza, the importance of the ICJ ruling, and the need to recognize the sovereignty of the Palestinian people.

A similarly clear statement from the leadership of the NSNDP should have been made in support of Jakeman, and continues to be needed now. We applaud the courage of Sean MacGillivray — long-time party member and respected community activist, riding association president for Cole Harbour, and provincial executive rep for Dartmouth — for speaking publicly about how the behaviour of NSNDP leadership compelled him to leave the party. The loss of Sean and people like him is a huge blow to the party. We agree with him: there are many rank-and-file members of the NSNDP who understand that it is always correct to oppose genocide and the disproportionate use of state violence against civilians.

As Larry Haiven, spokesperson for Independent Jewish Voices, said at a rally on 10 Nov.:

“By framing the issue to say that Tammy Jakeman’s remarks ‘did harm’ to Jews, the NDP is succumbing to a horrible moral blackmail. Whenever ANYONE criticizes Israel, whether robustly or mildly, some Jews are going to feel hurt. But it’s necessary. When the ICJ called Israel’s actions a plausible genocide, no doubt many supporters of Israel felt pain. The end result of focusing on hurt feelings versus dead bodies is to shut everyone up as the genocide happens before our eyes.”

Without a clear statement from party leadership, many progressive Nova Scotians will be asking why we should support your party when you stood silently by, facilitating the exit of people like Tammy Jakeman and Sean MacGillivray instead of anchoring your party to the spirit of democratic debate and defending our freedom of political expression? Is it that your party disagrees with the ICJ, or that you simply find your rank-and-file expendable when they are attacked by supporters of Israel’s actions in Palestine?

We are calling on you as leader of the NSNDP to make a clear statement about Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza and commit to stand by candidates that speak out about Israel’s actions.

Signed,

Ajay Parasram, Dalhousie University
Ardath Whynacht, Mount Allison University
Judy Haiven, Retired Professor, Saint Mary’s University
Val Marie Johnson, Saint Mary’s University
Alan Surovell, Dalhousie University
Larry Haiven, Professor Emeritus, Saint Mary’s University
Jonathan Langdon, Professor, St. Francis Xavier University
Nouman Ali, Professor, Dalhousie University
Nissim Mannathukkaren, Dalhousie University
Anupam Pandey, Part-time Faculty, Dalhousie University
Mohammed El Hazzouri, Associate Professor, Dalhousie University
Neil Balan, Contract Faculty, Dalhousie University and Saint Mary's University
Tara Perrot, Professor, Dalhousie University
Megan Bailey, Dalhousie University
Theresa Ulicki, Dalhousie University
Gary Kynoch, Dalhousie University
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