

Why Everyone's Talking About VP Mike Pence's Visit to a Jewish Cemetery

Vice President Mike Pence visited the Chesed Shel Emeth cemetery near Saint Louis, Missouri, with Gov. Eric Greitens to see the desecration that took place there over the weekend.

What he did while he was there has everyone talking yet today.

Unlike most politicians, who would make a quick inspection, offer a few words and then leave, the second-in-command did what only a real leader would do. He took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves and got to work helping with the cleanup effort.

By the time Pence arrived, the headstones at the cemetery had already been repaired. But the volunteers were still there, cleaning up debris left behind by fall and winter weather, so he grabbed a rake and joined in the work.

About 100 volunteers had shown up at Greitens' request to help. Pence addressed them using a bullhorn:

There is no place in America for hatred or acts of prejudice or violence or anti-Semitism. I must tell you, the people of Missouri are inspiring the nation by your love and care for this place and for the Jewish community in Missouri. I want to thank you for that inspiration, for showing the world what America is really all about ...

I just want to thank your new governor. Thank you, Governor Greitens, and on behalf of the president of the United States, just let me say thank you to all of you for coming out and showing the heart of this state and the heart of this nation. You just make us all proud, so God bless you.

Earlier in the day, Pence and Greitens visited Fabick Cat, a Caterpillar dealership in nearby Fenton, Missouri. During his visit, he made a speech in which he referenced the attack on the Jewish cemetery and other recent acts of anti-Semitism in the U.S.

He said:

On Monday morning, America awoke to discover that nearly 200 tombstones were toppled in a nearby Jewish graveyard.

Speaking just yesterday, President Trump called this a “horrible and painful” act, and so it was. That along with other recent threats to Jewish community centers around the country—he declared it all a “sad reminder of the work that still must be done to root out hate and prejudice and evil.”

We condemn this vile act of vandalism and those who perpetrate it in the strongest possible terms.

And let me say it’s been inspiring to people all across this country to see the way the people of Missouri have rallied around the Jewish community with compassion and support. You have inspired the nation with your kindness and your care.

It just so happens three days ago, my wife and my daughter were overseas. We saw firsthand what happens when hatred runs rampant in a society. We were near Munich, Germany, where we visited the very first Nazi concentration camp ever to be constructed, a place called Dachau. We were accompanied by a survivor of Dachau, a 93-year-old man named Abba Naor, who told me he had arrived there as a 17-year-old boy. He described, as we walked through that memorial, the hellish life he endured—toiling away as a slave while those around were taken away, one by one, never to return.

By the grace of God, he survived, and now he tells his story so that the world will never forget.

But before we left, he spoke words that touched my heart and I'll always carry with me throughout my life, and they resonate with this moment today. He spoke of that hellish existence in the waning days of the war, and then he looked up at me with a smile, and he said: "Then the Americans came."

He spoke of the kindness of those American soldiers who liberated that camp, and he pointed a finger at me and told me, "When you go back, you thank every one of those soldiers for what they did for me and for my people and for my country."

Would you join me in a round of applause for every man and woman here who has worn the uniform of a United States of America? We are proud of you, and we are grateful to you.

The American soldier fought to end the hatred and violence against the Jewish people across Europe then, and as President Trump said yesterday, American will always, in his words, "fight bigotry, intolerance and hatred in all its ugly forms"—wherever it will arise. That's the American way.
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