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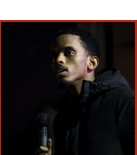
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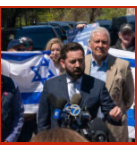
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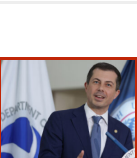
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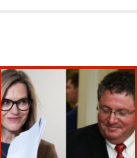
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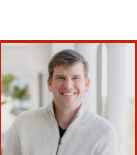
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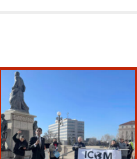
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SOUND OF SILENCE

Klobuchar, Walz staying silent over Fateh staffers' antisemitism

Mayor Jacob Frey's most prominent backers are declining to criticize his rival for employing staff that celebrated the Oct. 7 Hamas attack



Omar Fateh, a member-elect of the Minnesota State Senate, speaks during a vigil (Photo by Stephen Mauteren/Getty Images)

By [Matthew Kassel](#) · August 15, 2025

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Leading elected officials in Minnesota are remaining silent in response to a top Minneapolis mayoral candidate, far-left state Sen. Omar Fateh, whose campaign has faced scrutiny for employing staffers who have celebrated Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks and called for Israel's destruction, among other extreme views he has yet to publicly address.

Fateh, a 35-year-old Democratic socialist, now employs a campaign communications manager, Anya Smith-Kooiman, who, in now-deleted social comments recently unearthed by *Jewish Insider*, has endorsed the Hamas attacks as a justified act of "resistance," said Israel "does not have a 'right' to exist" and "must be dismantled," and amplified a comment dismissing widespread reports of sexual violence on Oct. 7 as "propaganda," according to screenshots.

Meanwhile, David Gilbert-Pederson, a local political activist and City Council aide who has been listed as a Fateh campaign staffer in filings, has unreservedly praised the Oct. 7 attacks, insisting in remarks on a December 2023 panel discussion that supporters of the Palestinian cause must "stand in unconditional solidarity with those resisting oppression."

But even as some of the state's leading Democratic lawmakers have endorsed Fateh's rival, incumbent Mayor Jacob Frey, who is seeking a third term, they have so far declined to weigh in on the staffers' comments and Fateh's decision to hire them, which has raised questions about his acceptance of extreme rhetoric on a particularly sensitive issue.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Gov. Tim Walz, who are Frey's most high-profile backers in what is expected to be a hotly contested race, both avoided addressing the matter to *JI*. A spokesperson for Klobuchar declined to comment on Friday, and representatives for Walz did not return multiple requests for comment.

Prominent Democratic officials who have not taken sides in the mayoral contest also did not respond to requests for comment — including Peggy Flanagan, the lieutenant governor who is now running for U.S. Senate, and Rep. Angie Craig (D-MN), a pro-Israel lawmaker also seeking to replace retiring Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN). A spokesperson for the senator did not respond to a message seeking comment about Fateh.

The muted responses underscore an increasing reluctance among many Democratic elected officials and public figures to speak out against extremist or antisemitic language related to the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas.

In Minneapolis, only one of the three City Council members who have endorsed Frey's reelection bid was open to weighing in on the matter, denouncing the campaign staffers as well as Fateh's judgement for choosing to employ them.

"Defending the Oct. 7 terrorist attack is disgraceful, and it's embarrassing that Sen. Fateh is OK with this behavior," Linea Palmisano, a Democratic councilwoman, told *JI* on Friday. "Who mayors surround themselves with matters, and anyone who stands by these remarks isn't ready for the job."

LaTrisha Vetaw and Michael Rainville, the other Council members supporting Frey, did not return requests for comment.

While Fateh himself has not used the same rhetoric as his allies, the state legislator has been a staunch critic of Israel — calling for a ceasefire 10 days after the Hamas attacks and accusing Israel of genocide in its war in Gaza.

Fateh has also voiced his support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel, which some critics have accused of stoking antisemitism, and has pledged not to engage with the local Jewish Community Relations Council, according to a candidate questionnaire solicited by the Twin Cities chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, a supporter of his campaign.

In the document, portions of which were recently obtained by *JI*, Fateh vowed to "refrain from any and all affiliation" with the JCRC, which the DSA dismissed as a "Zionist lobby group" akin to AIPAC, J Street and Christians United for Israel — even as the group is nonpartisan and represents the Jewish community to Minneapolis government officials.

Fateh did not share an explanation for his answer despite space to do so, according to the document reviewed by *JI*.

Steve Hunegs, executive director of the JCRC of Minnesota and the Dakotas, sharply criticized the state senator's responses to the DSA in a statement to *JI* on Friday, while questioning his commitment to combating antisemitism.

"Sen. Fateh's campaign slogan promises a 'city that works for everyone,'" Hunegs said. "But how can Sen. Fateh be understood as anything other than a divider when he's pledged to boycott Jewish organizations? Likewise, how can Jews feel that our safety will be a priority when Sen. Fateh's staff traffic in antisemitism? As proud Jews we aren't going to allow Sen. Fateh, the DSA or Hamas apologists drive us from the public square."

Fateh's campaign did not respond to a request for comment on Friday.

Fateh, who assumed office in 2021 as the first Muslim and first Somali American to serve in the Minnesota state Senate, won the state Democratic Party endorsement last month over Frey, who has challenged the results.

The mayor, 44, is the second Jewish mayor to represent Minneapolis and has been increasingly outspoken against rising antisemitism in the wake of Hamas' attacks, while opposing some resolutions on Israel in the City Council that he has dismissed as one-sided. He has also been a critic of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his handling of the war in Gaza amid a worsening humanitarian crisis.