

MENENDEZ LETTER TO TIME ON JOEL STEIN'S ESSAY ABOUT INDIAN-AMERICANS IN NJ

July 12, 2010

WASHINGTON - In response to Joel Stein's essay in *Time* on the Indian-American community in Edison, New Jersey (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1999416,00.html>), U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) has submitted the following letter to the editor:

To the Editor:

Joel Stein's attempt at humor at the expense of Edison, New Jersey's vibrant and productive Indian-American community ("My Own Private India," July 5) not only fell terribly flat but crossed the line of offensiveness toward a particular community that has dealt with violent hate crimes in the past. Mr. Stein's mocking allusions to revered deities in the Hindu religion are particularly reprehensible.

New Jersey's Indian-American community is one of our nation's many great immigration success stories. Those of Indian descent have introduced New Jersey to a rich and deep cultural tradition and have helped to spur prosperity and innovation. Unfortunately, our state's Indian-Americans have also contended with aggressive discrimination. In the late 1980s, a New Jersey street gang calling itself "The Dotbusters" engaged in attacks, vandalism and threats directed at the burgeoning Indian-American community. I am very familiar with the circumstances surrounding that sad episode - it is a reason that I authored New Jersey's bias crimes law while in the State Assembly. Words are more powerful than just a grouping of letters on a page, and unfortunately, they are often misused to spur hatred.

The beliefs shared by many of our productive, patriotic Indian-Americans may be comic fodder for Mr. Stein, but they are sacred to hundreds of millions of Hindus worldwide, a number of whom have contacted me to express their dismay. This type of ridicule can foster misunderstanding about our differences and marginalize a vibrant segment of our community.

While I believe that Mr. Stein's purpose in his essay ultimately was to embrace the burgeoning diversity in his hometown, I hope he understands that he offended a large number of its residents and, to some extent, opened old wounds. I also hope he will engage in a dialog with members of the local Hindu community to learn more about their heritage and why the language he used is unacceptable.

Sincerely,

Robert Menendez

United States Senator