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Washington, D.C. — June 17, 2026

The Honorable Ro Khanna
U.S. House of Representatives
306 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Your June 1, 2026 cosponsorship of H.Res. 69

Dear Representative Khanna:

In 2022 you sent me a message you marked off the record, and it is still the most revealing thing you have ever told me. “One of the biggest obstacles I face to one day having a shot in national politics,” you wrote, “is the Hindu right.” You said they were trying to discredit you, that “the Hindu right wants to sabotage me.” You laughed it off, you typed “Hahaha,” but you meant it. And in the years since, I have watched you organize your public life around that one private fear.

So I am going to ask you the question that fear raises, and I will not dress it up. What are you so afraid of, Ro?

Because the fear does not hold up, and you of all people know it.

Let me go back to how we started, because it tells the whole story. You reached out in 2019, after I wrote about Hindu nationalism’s reach into American politics, the same year you declared in public that it was “the duty of every American politician of Hindu faith to stand for pluralism, reject Hindutva.” You messaged me privately, word for word: “How we navigate the issue of right wing nationalism is the challenge of our time.” The next year, when I told you I did not share your domestic politics but respected you, you wrote back: “No harm to it. And much to gain. I think you should really own your position.” You were telling me to own mine.

We met for lunch in your district in 2022, off the record, to “get a sense of each other,” and for the next two years we stayed in regular contact. I watched you take real heat and hold your ground. When you spoke out against the expulsion of Rahul Gandhi, India’s most prominent opposition politician, from the country’s parliament, and the trolls came after your

grandfather, who had gone to prison in the struggle for India's independence, I defended you in public and told you in private, "I trust your principles. So far, for a politician." You wrote back, "don't forget for a politician part. But ultimately I want a world of peace and pluralism." You knew the caveat. You accepted it. I believed you.

And across those two years, you named the thing yourself, again and again. You called the official courtship of India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, what it was, "pandering to right wing Hindu," and told me there was a "powerful financial/lobbying base" behind it. You reminded me you had already faced "two challenges from a Hindu right candidate," with a third coming, "at real political cost." When the Hindu American PAC announced that I "should be ignored, not engaged" and you answered me anyway, you wrote: "I am getting attacked for replying to you hahahaha. But it helps me ironically. Shows I am my own person." When one of their loudest voices smeared you, you wrote: "This is almost an attempt for election interference, trying to sabotage me." You saw them clearly. You named them precisely. And you were proud, then, of being your own man.

Then, in July 2023, I drafted a piece that named what you had been telling me in private, and you reversed in real time. "But I genuinely am not concerned on the right wing Hindu," you wrote across several messages, "my actions much more influenced by our national security interest." When I put it to you plainly, that you were concerned about Hindutva opposition as an obstacle to your national ambitions, you answered, "No I am just describing it as fact. Not that I care... Genuinely not concerned of clout of far right." The fear was real enough to confess when it stayed between us. It became "simply not true" the instant it might reach print. You wanted it both ways even then.

So in May 2024, I gave you the cleanest chance to settle it. I wrote to you, on the record, for an article on Shri Thanedar's "Hinduphobia" resolution. You had not cosponsored it, and I asked whether you would, and why or why not. You had answered me on everything for years. You did not answer that. The silence was its own reply.

Then watch where the fear took you. This April, the Hudson Institute hosted Dattatreya Hosabale, the general secretary of the RSS, for a fireside chat in Washington. The RSS is the Hindu-nationalist paramilitary at the root of Modi's movement, and it is the outfit that sat out the very freedom struggle your grandfather went to prison for. And your face was in that room. Not in person. On video. Hudson played a message you recorded and sent them. When the criticism came, you wrote: "I did not appear. Hudson, a think tank, asked for a 1-minute video which we provided. Have no idea on their guest list and certainly do not support RSS in anyway." I had published a piece on that exact event two days before it happened, with the RSS headliner named in the first paragraph. "I did not appear" is true the way a magician's

patter is true. You appeared. You just arranged not to be standing there when you did.

Then, six weeks later, you cosponsored House Resolution 69, that same “Hinduphobia” resolution, and announced you were “proud” to do it. That resolution did not come from nowhere. CoHNA, the VHP of America, and the Hindu American Foundation pushed it, and they are the American arms of the same movement the RSS leads. When you signed on, HAF celebrated, thanking Thanedar for “championing” the resolution and calling the campaign “grassroots advocacy.” This is the tell. You disavow the RSS, and then you put your name on the resolution its American affiliates drove, the one that turns a manufactured word, “Hinduphobia,” on scholars, journalists, and anyone who criticizes Modi. You do not support the RSS, you tell us. You just support its initiative in America. It cannot be both.

I am not the only one who reads you this way, and I am not reading you any way you did not first read yourself. When I spent nearly an hour and a half walking with you around the Capitol the day after Modi addressed a joint session of Congress, and I said a lot of people think you are straddling the fence, you answered — paraphrasing — “Exactly.” Raju Rajagopal of Hindus for Human Rights told Middle East Eye that your reluctance to speak against the Modi government came from “citing the clout of Hindu nationalist groups in the US.” Mohamad Junaid, an assistant professor at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, told Al Jazeera you know exactly what you are doing, that you “want to run with the hare and hunt with the hound.”

So back to the question. What are you so afraid of? Because I went looking for something that would justify it, and there is nothing there.

It is not the money. I have read your FEC filings, every itemized contribution since 2011, some forty-four million dollars of it, and the donors tied to Hindu nationalist groups are a rounding error. Bharat Barai and his wife, donors tied to the VHP of America whom The Nation named in 2023, gave you thirty-seven thousand dollars across twelve years, under a tenth of one percent of what you have raised. And here is how little they fear exposure, and how little you need them: nine days after The Nation named Barai, he wrote you another thousand-dollar check. Your money is Silicon Valley money. You could send back every dollar Barai ever gave and never feel it.

And it is not the votes. The Hindu-right activists who could not stomach your 2019 tweet recruited a candidate to end you, Ritesh Tandon, backed by Romesh Japra and the super PAC he registered for the job, Americans for Hindus, and you beat him 65 to 24. He ran again in 2022 and lost again, did not survive the 2024 primary, and when he scraped into this year’s general he managed 14.8 percent. You told me yourself that Tandon was “high on your

docket.” He was never a threat, and you knew it.

And look one district over, at what their money actually buys. This year, in the seat next to yours, the network ran a candidate of its own, Rakhi Israni, who built her campaign around “dharma,” sat on the board of the Hindu American PAC, and drew \$351,954 from families tied to the HSS, the RSS’s American wing, and the Hindu American Foundation, more than a third of her outside money. She raised over two million dollars, more than a million of it her own loan, and outraised the rest of the field combined. Then the voters met her. A Republican who spent about twenty-six thousand dollars edged her into fourth, by 323 votes, in one of the bluest districts in California. That is what the Hindu right delivers at a ballot box even when it empties its wallet. These are the people you are afraid of.

So the fear is unfounded where it should bite. They cannot defund you and they cannot unseat you. And even if they could, even if their money mattered and their votes could touch you, a man of principle pays the price for his convictions. That was the standard you set in 2019, when you took their fire and did not flinch, and it is the one you bragged about to me when you said replying to me “shows I am my own person.” Which leaves only what you admitted in 2022: you accommodate them anyway, not because they fund you, and not because they can defeat you, but because you decided their hostility is the one thing that could cost you a national future. So you placate the very people you once called your saboteurs. That is not strategy. It is a bet that the road to the presidency runs through them.

And it is an insult to the rest of us. When you tell us the video and the resolution are about national security and pluralism, you are asking us to be stupid. You think you can send your face to a Hudson event headlining the RSS’s general secretary, then your name to their resolution, and trust the rest of us not to notice it is the same man doing both. That is the disturbing part, not that you are afraid, but that you assume we will not see it. You are treating an entire community as a monolith of Hindutva-first voters you have to appease, as if every Indian American in your district thinks like the RSS, which is no more true than assuming every white voter is a Christian nationalist. We are not toddlers, Ro. We can see exactly what this is.

At least your colleagues Raja Krishnamoorthi and Shri Thanedar are consistent. They picked a lane and they stand in it. You are the one trying to have it every way at once: the pluralist tweet and the RSS video, the human rights speeches and the Hinduphobia resolution, the private confession and the public denial, the man who told me to “own your position” and the man who would not answer a single on-record question about his own.

And you have it backwards. You think the national future you want depends on not crossing them, when the reverse is true. No one is written into history for the fence. The names that last belong to the people who took the harder side of a defining question and held it when it cost them.

You reach for one of those names yourself, over and over. When Rahul Gandhi was expelled, you called it “not what my grandfather sacrificed years in jail for,” and you were right. Your grandfather went to jail beside Gandhi in the Quit India movement and gave years of his freedom for what he believed, and that is why his name still means something, to you and to the country he helped free. Your own congressional biography says why he was there: he spent those years in prison, it reads, “for promoting human rights.” So hold yourself beside him. He went to prison for human rights. You will not risk a bad headline to defend them, out of fear of a movement that has never come within forty points of your seat. By the standard you reached for when you were criticizing Modi, a video sent to the RSS and a name on its resolution are not what your grandfather sacrificed years in jail for either. The man who chose a cell over silence has a grandson who chooses silence to keep his prospects. He earned the kind of legacy you say you want by refusing the very bargain you keep making. The stand you keep avoiding is not the threat to that legacy. It is the only thing that would build it. The straddle is how you get forgotten, and worse, it is how you spend down a name that deserved better.

So which one of you is real? The man who told me in 2019 that confronting right-wing nationalism was the challenge of our time, the man who was once proud to be his own, or the man who in 2026 lent his face to that movement’s general secretary and his name to its weapon, out of fear of people who cannot touch his money or his seat? Pick one. Tell us plainly. And if you can square it, square it on the record this time, not in a message you will later wish you had marked off.

I am still listening. I always have been.

Sincerely,

Pieter Friedrich
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Independent Journalist and Author

Delivered by hand to the Office of Representative Ro Khanna, 306 Cannon House Office Building, June 17, 2026.