

Proponent Testimony in Support of HCR 11
Recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel
Federalism Committee | Ohio House of Representatives | September 11, 2019
Howie Beigelman, Executive Director, Ohio Jewish Communities

Chairman Becker, Vice Chair Stoltzfus, Ranking Member Miller, and Members of the Committee:

We are pleased to offer this testimony in support of HCR 11, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Why the State Interest?

Jerusalem has been the capital of the modern state of Israel since its independence in May of 1948. Long before that, and on until today, Jerusalem has held a special place in the hearts and minds of millions worldwide of so many faiths, and of no faith at all.

It is why the city has been a British protectorate, part of the Ottoman Empire before that, and boasts a Russian Compound, a German Colony, French Hill, the American Colony, an Armenian Quarter, and more.

Let's quickly lay out why we support this resolution, as well as what this resolution does, and what it does not do.

Why a Resolution?

As you know, resolutions express the sense of the House, and the Senate, on a public policy issue.

They have no official legislative, or legal, impact. This is especially so on an issue of federal primacy and pre-emption, such as international relations.

Still, for the reasons set forth in the resolution, Ohio's state and local governments, businesses, universities, hospitals, and research centers have deep ties, and vital interests, in Israel, and in Jerusalem.

Federal Background

In 1995, the United States Congress, in an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote passed, and President Clinton signed into law, the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act. Since then, every American president, and successive Congresses, pledged to move the embassy.

Last year, the United States embassy was officially relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This was long overdue, both from a legal standpoint, as well as a diplomatic one. Since that move, other nations have moved their embassies, or opened new commerce and trade missions, and yet more pledge to do so.

The State Department's move last year, at the direction of President Trump, corrected the legal failing of over two decades. But the diplomatic error was even longer. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman recognized the newfound Jewish state just minutes after they declared independence, making America the first friend and most steadfast ally of the new state.

Robert Satloff, of the nonpartisan Washington Institute for Near East Policy, has noted President Truman's historic, and gutsy, move was marred by a mistaken placement of the American embassy in Tel Aviv. Even then, it should have been established in Jerusalem.

So this resolution aligns Ohio with current, and in reality, longstanding US policy.

Israel Remains Sovereign and Able to Act

Israel's sovereign right to declare whichever city it desires as its capital is part of the same sovereign right to negotiate peace and to sign treaties. It is Israel's government and her citizens alone who will determine any final status. Nothing in this resolution changes that.

Nothing in this resolution precludes the Israeli government from continuing their bilateral negotiations with their Arab neighbors, including the Palestinian Authority.

Nothing in this resolution impedes the ability of Israel to reach an agreement, and, if they were to desire it, to swap land, or offer part of Jerusalem to the Palestinians for their capital as well.

Daniel Shapiro, who served on the national security staff in the Obama Administration, and later, as the United States Ambassador to Israel for President Obama, has noted this as well, even stating, that the moving of the embassy could help such face-to-face negotiations.

History has shown Israel willingly negotiates with any neighbor to end the conflict. They have signed two peace treaties, the first with Egypt, and the second with the Kingdom of Jordan, and they have unilaterally withdrawn from both the Gaza Strip and Southern Lebanon. They remain free to act now in any current or future negotiations.

So we believe this resolution is both an appropriate statement but also appropriately limited as it does not encroach on either the diplomatic functions of our federal government or the sovereign rights of Israel as a free and independent country.

Hope Turns to Fact

While many hoped the cause of peace would be strengthened by the embassy move, we know there were many who worried about the timing of the move in May 2018. Nearly a year and a half later, we can look back with some hindsight. We recall the words of the late United States Senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, himself a former US Ambassador to the United Nations, who liked to say, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."

The facts are that 2018 actually saw a record number of tourists to Israel from Muslim countries. On the diplomatic front, this year, Israel re-established diplomatic relations with the Muslim-majority nation Chad. It also welcomed a visit from Ethiopia's prime minister, itself a county with over one-third the population practicing Islam, and saw Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz meet his counterpart in the United Arab Emirates while in Abu Dhabi for a climate conference, which was itself an unprecedented event. A similarly public - and photographed - meeting of Katz with the Bahraini Foreign Minister took place this past June, leading to a press comment by the minister, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, that Israel has a historic place in the Mideast. Prominent Saudi bloggers and journalists are publicly urging normalization with Israel. Israel's prime minister was officially welcomed by the Sultan of Oman last November. And Israel has also increased security, commercial and business ties with Muslim nations, including Nigeria, with a population that is fifty percent Muslim, and also Rwanda - where the largest minority religion is Islam - which just launched direct flights to Tel Aviv.

So, in fact, the worries of potentially unintended consequences to the embassy move and its strengthening of Israel's claim to Jerusalem as its capital have not played out.

Jerusalem as a Unifier

We also note that Jerusalem is indeed special. To people of faith, certainly. But also in a secular sense.

Then United States Senator Sam Brownback, who would later be governor of Kansas, and now is the United States Ambassador for International Religious Freedom, describes Jerusalem as a place of promises kept.

Each year, he said, for millennia, Jews around the world expressed the hope they would celebrate and commemorate in a rebuilt Jerusalem.

Today, Jerusalem is rebuilt as a city protective of its ancient ruins but equally welcoming to technology entrepreneurs. It is holy to three faiths and a mecca of foodies and artists. The city captivates and inspires.

And it unites people just as King Solomon hoped it would, becoming a gathering place for everyone.

It remains the quintessential city of peace. Jewish tradition teaches even the name, Jerusalem, was itself a compromise, blending the two names given to the city by the King Melchizedek and by Abraham.

A Bipartisan Necessity and Opportunity

In that sense, we note, just as the initial federal legislation was crafted to appeal to a wide, deep, bipartisan consensus, this resolution is too.

To be in Jerusalem is to witness on its streets a deeply moving sense of unity, even among people with very different political opinions and diametrically disparate lifestyles. That happens here at the Statehouse as well.

So our hope is that in a legislative sense, this resolution joins both caucuses and both chambers together. Because Jerusalem should always unite, and never divide. If there is a need to change language as drafted, we, as Ohio Jewish Communities, are ready to work with you to effect that.

Thank you for this opportunity. Please reach out to us with any questions.