

## **Testimony by Benjamin Mutti of the Richland Community Prayer Network in support of House Concurrent Resolution 11**

I would like to thank Committee Chairman Representative John Becker, the entire Federalism Committee, and Sponsor Representative Candice Keller for granting me the opportunity to speak on behalf of House Concurrent Resolution 11, (HCR 11) "Recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel."

I am delighted to report my State Rep., Mr. Mark Romanchuk of the 2<sup>nd</sup> District, is a co-sponsor of HCR 11.

In my testimony, I would like to bring you the bird's eye view of Mr. Romanchuk's district, along with the 70<sup>th</sup> District represented by HCR 11 Sponsor Mr. Darrell Kick, which encompasses the Richland and Ashland Counties of the North Central Ohio region.

To begin, Israel and Jerusalem specifically, hold a special place in the hearts of Ohioans. The deep relationship between Ohio and Israel is profound and strikingly evident. I will ask the Federalism Committee to consider the following events that have transpired in North Central Ohio in recent times:

In February of 1997, a delegation of clergy from Shiloh, Ohio visit Shiloh, Israel and bring with them the key to their city as a gift, initiating a sister city relationship between the two communities.

In May of 2002, then former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Ashland University in the wake of 9-11 to discuss effective measures on combatting terrorism.

In June of 2008, two Israeli dairy experts visit a Mennonite farmer in northern Richland County as part of a Ohio-Israeli Agricultural Initiative sponsored by the Negev Foundation, based in Cleveland, Ohio. The goal of the collaboration is to connect companies and professionals from Ohio and Israel in the agriculture industries.

In March of 2015, visits are made to local congregations by Eeki Elner, Founder of the Israeli Leadership Institute, based in Sderot, Israel. Mr. Elner would eventually be the keynote speaker at the Mansfield observance of the National Day of Prayer in 2015. Three years later, he publicly states: "I travel extensively throughout the States and I have never seen anyone like Ohio, more specifically, North Central Ohio, who loves Israel more."

In March of 2016, the 200<sup>th</sup> Red Horse Squadron of the Mansfield National Guard serves as the project lead for the construction of four multi-purpose buildings in Israel providing permanent operational exercise space for both U.S. and Israeli military forces that participate in joint military exercises,

In January of 2017, an apology letter is written to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu by clergymen representing one hundred and three congregations throughout North Central Ohio apologizing for the Obama Administration's refusal to veto a United Nations Resolution 2334 which called the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria an "international crime."

In February and March of 2017, nearly nine months prior to President Trump's historic Jerusalem declaration, five grassroots demonstrations in support of Jerusalem as Israel's capital take place in the North Central Ohio in the city squares of Mansfield, Lexington, Bellville, Perrysville, and Loudonville. The peaceable demonstrators hold signs reading "Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel" and "We stand with Israel." Nine months before the official recognition.

In May of 2017, leading clergymen from forty-two congregations across Richland County petition the Richland County Treasurer and Commissioner Board to invest in Israeli bonds. Consequently, Richland County government agrees to invest \$200,000 in Israeli bonds as an expression of solidarity with Israel and as a practical way to combat the anti-Semitic BDS movement. This purchase is in lockstep with the counties of Cuyahoga, Summit, and the Ohio state government, which is rated as the largest holder of Israeli bonds for a government entity in the world.

In December 2017, three influential clergymen from North Central Ohio publicly support President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel in local media outlets.

In October of 2018, the City of Ontario is visited by the Deputy Speaker of Knesset, Mr. Hilik Barr, the second in charge of the one hundred-twenty member Israeli Parliament. During his address, Mr. Barr publicly states "Ohio is truly the greatest friend to Israel in the United States, no doubt about it."

In November of 2018, the City of Ontario is visited by former Mayor of Shiloh, Israel Mr. David Rubin who publicly speaks about his miraculous escape from a terrorist attack. Mr. Rubin is thanked by the Ontario Mayor in a correspondence and invited to come back to the City of Ontario, Ohio.

In March of 2019, Messianic leaders from the City of Ontario publicly support President Trump's recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli sovereign territory in local media outlets.

In June of 2019, I and others, participate in a Ohio delegation travelling to Bogota, Colombia, meeting with the Israeli Ambassador to Colombia, and the Chief Rabbis of Guatemala and Colombia. In addition, a declaration is signed with one hundred other Messianic leaders repudiating anti-Semitism around the world.

Each year a host of Israeli-based traditions occur throughout North Central Ohio, including Holocaust Remembrance services, public menorah lightings, Passover Seder meals and Bless Israel events are held by various congregations, leaving an indelible footprint on the culture of North Central Ohio.

In November of 2019, retired four-star Major General Eyal Ben-Reuven is scheduled to visit the City of Ontario, Ohio and share his experience standing alone against four hundred Egyptian commandos during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Media coverage of these events have been tracked throughout the world by WorldNet Daily, Charisma News, Breaking Christian News, Israeli Breaking News, OneNewsNow, USA Today, Ashland Times Gazette, Mansfield News Journal, Frontlines Ohio, Messianic Times, and Noticias Cristianis of Latin America; to name a few.

For perspective, Israel journalist from the Golan Heights, Mr. Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz, wrote an article entitled: "Does Rural Ohio lead the world in love of Israel?"

Furthermore, the close friendship Ohio has with Israel, as illustrated by North Central Ohioans is unmistakable and indisputable. It is for these reasons that I hope the Federalism Committee will vote and approve House Concurrent Resolution 11 and get the ball rolling to have the Ohio Legislature formally recognize Jerusalem as capital of Israel. Thank you for your careful consideration.