

Proponent Testimony in Support of HCR 26
To Recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel
Committee on Interstate & Federal Relations | Ohio House of Representatives | May, 22, 2018
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Chairman Roegner, Vice Chair Becker, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to join you today and offer this testimony in support of HCR 26, 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 'till 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 me quickly lay out why we support this resolution, as well as what this resolution does, and, what it does not.

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 preemption, such as international relations.

Still, for the reasons set forth in the resolution, Ohio's businesses, universities, and research centers have deep ties, and vital interests, in Israel, and 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 have pledged to move the embassy.

Last week, 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, and yet more have pledged to do so.

The State Department's move last week, at the direction of President Trump, corrected the legal failing of over a decade. But the diplomatic error was even longer. In 1948, Harry S. Truman recognized the newfound Jewish state just minutes after they declared independence.

Aaron David Miller, a Mideast policy hand to every American president, of either party, stretching from the Carter Administration to that of President Obama, has noted President Truman's historic, and gutsy, move was marred by a mistaken placement of the American embassy. It should have been, even then, in Jerusalem.

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

Israel Remains Sovereign & Able to Act

Still, 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 of President Obama, and later, as the United States Ambassador to Israel for President Obama, has noted this as well, stating in fact, that President Trump's move may have helped break the ice on those negotiations.

Israel has long held herself out willing to negotiate 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 have unilaterally withdrawn from both the Gaza Strip and Southern Lebanon.

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 alone, and her citizens, who will determine any final status.

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

Jerusalem as a Unifier

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

I once heard then United States Senator Sam Brownback, later governor of Kansas, and now the United States Ambassador for International Religious Freedom, describe Jerusalem as a place of promises kept.

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

Today, Jerusalem is a city of ancient ruins and 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 has hoped it would, becoming a gathering place for everyone.

It remains a city of peace. The 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 federal legislation has been crafted to appeal to a wide, deep bipartisan consensus, we hope this resolution too can be just that.

I have seen that in Jerusalem, on its streets, and I have seen it here at the Statehouse as well.

Our hope is that in a legislative sense, it joins both caucuses and both chambers together. If there is a need to change language as drafted, we, as Ohio Jewish Communities would support that.

Jerusalem should always unite, and never divide.

Thank you for this opportunity. I welcome any questions.

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