

Members of the committee, I thank you for your commitment to the state of Ohio and to its people.

My name is Austin Powers. I'm a member of our community and a performer with the local dance company, BalletMet. I am writing to ask you to vote NO on HB188, and not to approve any appropriation for it. At a time when schools, libraries, and food pantries are experiencing funding cuts and working people across Ohio are worried about paying our mortgages, the last thing we want our taxes to be invested in is subsidies for foreign governments and businessmen.

Imagine if there was a bill to create a commission of people with political and economic ties to Russia, for the purpose of creating vaguely defined "partnerships" with Russia. I doubt any of us would support it. We would question whether it is wise to partner with a nation which is currently involved in a war which is straining its economic stability and which the international courts have ruled against. We would question whether the commission members can be objective in their decision making on Ohio's behalf if they were selected specifically for their political and economic ties to Russia. We would ask why Ohioan's tax money should be spent supporting foreign business interests instead of being invested here in our own community.

HB188 does just this. The bill requires the 6 members of the commission who are appointed from the house and the senate to have ties to organizations which "promote Israeli affairs", specifically excluding neutral or dissenting viewpoints. I know Ohioans don't have a unanimous positive view of Israel- why should our viewpoints be excluded, by law, from the committees deciding our economic future? Why should our economic future be tied to an economy which is straining under the weight of multiple illegal wars? How can working Ohioans be sure that this commission represents our interests? What oversight and accountability mechanisms are included in this bill to ensure that this is about jobs for Ohio instead of politics abroad? The answer is none.

Many Ohioans do not believe Israel will be a stable financial partner for us. Their sovereign credit rating has been downgraded several times by all three major ratings agencies, their GDP is significantly below trend, and they face a strong and growing global boycott campaign, similar to the one that toppled apartheid South Africa. On top of this, Israel is in significant legal trouble with multiple bodies of international law. What will be the economic fallout if Israel has to obey the ICJ's 2024 ruling and evacuate the illegal settlements in the West Bank, and pay reparations to the Palestinians whose homes were taken? What if they're forced to pay reparations for the destruction of Gaza? Even if International Law is not enforced, how will their already struggling economy recover if their government continues to fight wars with most of its neighbors? I think that this partnership is much more likely to turn into a bailout for a foreign nation than something that benefits Ohio workers.

Vote no on HB188. Invest in Ohio communities instead. We need it.

Thank you- Austin Powers