

Jewish Insider

NY House Members Discuss Israel at JCRC Legislative Breakfast



via Twitter/Ravi Batra

By Jacob Kornbluh on Sunday, February 12, 2017 ·

HEARD YESTERDAY IN NYC – Democratic House Members, Reps. Yvette Clarke, Eliot Engel, Adriano Espaillat, Hakeem Jeffries Carolyn Maloney, and Tom Suozzi addressed JCRC-NY’s Congressional Breakfast at the offices of the UJA-Federation of New York in Manhattan.

Highlights:

Jeffries on strengthening Democratic support for Israel: “Within Congress, Israel – on the Republican side and the Democratic side – is still a strongly bipartisan issue, and I know all of us in the NY delegation are committed to keeping it that way. Amongst certain aspects of the Democratic base, broadly on the progressive side, I think it’s important to understand that progressives, separate and apart from the issue of Israel, tend to be anti-intervention in their view, anti-conflict – however they define that. And so, in the context of Israel, constantly immersed in conflict because of the tough neighborhood that Israel lives in, and the need, obviously, to maintain a strong military solely for its survival, and to maintain its qualitative military edge, I think there are some progressives who ideologically have concerns, separate and apart from what Israel may be doing. But that said, I think there are two ways for us to continue to try to address what should be a concern, so we keep Israel strongly bipartisan on the Left and on the Right outside of Congress.”

“The first is just to continue to educate folks about the unique dynamic that Israel confronts and trying to be a Jewish and democratic state in the face of – what was described to me when I first went to Israel as – a tough neighborhood. And, obviously, when there are people who are bent on Israel’s destruction there is a robustness, a toughness that Israel will naturally have to have in order to protect its survival and deal with existential threats that it confronts...”

“The second thing that we can do, and all of us can spend more time talking about how progressive a society – on the domestic front – Israel is today because I think that quite naturally is something that would appeal to a lot of progressives within the Democratic Party, and it has the benefit of happening to be true. It is not what we would call alternative facts (laughter). Israel is the only country in the Middle East that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It has a tremendously progressive environmental agenda as it relates to conservation and a whole host of other things related to its use of energy. We know that Israel, unlike the United States of America, has universal healthcare... We know that Israel is a society that has embraced gender equality, and women have been very successful both in the military context and outside of the military context. Golda Meir is obviously an example of that. Israel has broken the barrier that we still haven’t broken. Here in the U.S., there was none back in 1969. Israel is a very progressive society, and progressives should embrace and acknowledge that fact. And if we promote that dynamic, I think it will go a long way in terms of dealing with this issue (of waning support for Israel).”

“I think we’re going to have to be supportive when the relationship between Israel and the U.S. is advanced by the Trump Administration, but also be critical when necessary.”

Suozzi: “We Democrats from New York need to a better job of communicating with our fellow Democrats throughout the country about the importance of this relationship.”

Engel on U.S. policy on Iran: “I voted against the Iran deal... I don’t believe that canceling the deal now is the right thing to do because Iran has stolen money and laughed all the way to the bank and yet the restrictions that we have imposed on Iran have not yet been carried out. So I want to make sure that Iran lives up to every obligation it’s supposed to live up to under this deal. I think it’s very important that we speak in one voice.”

On Jerusalem embassy: “The state of Israel was founded in 1948, and there are people always telling Israel what it can’t do, what it shouldn’t do. I believe in moving the embassy to Jerusalem because Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. I don’t accept the fact that people say, ‘Well, you know if you move the embassy, it’s going to cause problems.’ Too bad. No one is suggesting that the embassy be moved to East Jerusalem. The part of Jerusalem that it would be moved to wouldn’t be far from the Knesset and is a part that has always been Israel since its founding in 1948, and will be Israel if and when there will be a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The fact of the matter is, every other country in the world declares where its capital is, except for Israel, and I am tired of it. I don’t think it’s fair to say to Israel, “Well, you know if we move the embassy, the Arab street is going to be upset.’ I mean, if that were the case, you wouldn’t have had an Israel in 1948.”