

STATEMENT OF DAVID M. FRIEDMAN, OF NEW YORK,  
NOMINEE TO BE AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL  
FEBRUARY 16, 2017

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. It is a great privilege to address this Committee, which has done so much to advance America's interests around the world and which, together with the entire United States Congress, has, for generations, maintained unwavering support, on a bipartisan basis, for the State of Israel.

I am grateful to the President of the United States for nominating me to the post of Ambassador to Israel, and I am humbled by the trust and confidence that he has placed in me to strengthen the unbreakable bond between our country and Israel and to advance the cause of peace within the region.

I would like to thank Senator Graham and Senator Lieberman for their kind words of introduction and for their leadership on so many critical matters affecting our nation.

I would also like to introduce my family members who are here today and thank them for their support and encouragement: My beautiful bride of 36 years, Tammy, and my children Daniel, Aliza and her husband Eli, and Talia. Watching at home are Daniel's wife, Jana, my son Jacob and his wife Danielle (who just had a baby boy), our daughter Katie and our 7 beautiful grandchildren. Whatever success I have achieved in life would have been unthinkable without their love and support, especially that of my dear wife. I would also like to wish good luck to our youngest child, Katie, who is litigating her first "mock trial" today in her high school trial advocacy program.

I could not continue without reflecting upon my father, Rabbi Morris Friedman, who passed away some 12 years ago. He was my mentor, my hero and my closest friend. The child of poor immigrants, my father was a great patriot who felt an enormous debt of gratitude to our beloved

country for its essential goodness in giving his parents and so many others the enormous opportunities embedded in American citizenship.

In 1948, my father and mother sat nervously by their radio listening to a session of the United Nations, then headquartered in Queens, NY, and rejoiced as the United States became the first nation to recognize the nascent State of Israel. From that day forward my father dedicated much of his professional life to fostering the extraordinary relationship between the United States and Israel. My father cared deeply for Americans of all religious and political stripes – he marched in the civil rights movement, convened prayer vigils to mourn the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, and, in the 1970's, often handcuffed himself to the Soviet mission to protest the Kremlin's refusal to allow Soviet Jews to emigrate. My father led a congregation of 1,000 families, as well as the New York Board of Rabbis, at that time the largest cross-denominational rabbinic organization of its kind.

In October, 1984, my father had the privilege to host President Ronald Reagan for lunch in our home in Long Island (my mother actually did the cooking) and to later introduce him as he addressed our synagogue. I was fortunate enough to have been able to participate in that incredible event.

Those were dark days for Israel at the United Nations. It was operating under the cloud of a General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism. President Reagan, in his remarks to my father's congregation, was unambiguous. He said, "If Israel is ever forced to walk out of the United Nations, America and Israel will walk out together." It was an unforgettable moment, and a watershed in U.S.-Israeli relations. Seven years later, with the overwhelming bipartisan support from Members of this body, America led the effort to repeal the infamous UN resolution. I want to thank Senator Cardin, who was serving in the House at the time, for his leadership in advocating for that effort. To think that my father played a role in setting that whole process in motion is of great pride to me and my family

My father's values are my values. I could never replicate the contribution that he made to his community and country -- he was certainly of the greatest generation. I have never been called upon to

sacrifice in the same manner as so many of that generation, and I have been blessed beyond measure by the vast opportunities that America has bestowed upon me. But I have sought meaning and fulfillment in life through my faith, my incredible family, and through various philanthropic endeavors. Let me describe one of those endeavors now.

I was an early supporter of United Hatzala, an Israeli organization of volunteer first responders that uses advanced technology and “ambucycles” to weave through traffic to provide emergency services and save lives. Here’s what makes Hatzala so special: It is comprised of volunteers from the entire spectrum of the Israeli population – Jews, Muslims and Christians, religious and secular, right wing and left wing. They all operate under a single credo: treat patients in the order of the severity of their affliction and never let any other considerations – political, religious or otherwise – influence your commitment to saving lives. Hatzala represents the best of the Israeli people – all the Israeli people – and gives me a strong sense of optimism that peace will one day come to this region of conflict.

As you know, our nation’s support for Israel is longstanding, steadfast and strongly in our national interest. Israel provides critical intelligence support to the United States, cooperates extensively with the United States in military initiatives, and acts as an “incubator” for many cutting edge strategic projects. Most importantly, Israel shares America’s values and is of enormous religious and cultural importance to tens of millions of Jews, Christians and Muslims. Because Israel is surrounded by hostile enemies and has no friend in the world like us, I share the President’s view that, notwithstanding the inevitable disagreements that may arise between our two countries, there should never be any “daylight” between the United States and Israel.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed by the Senate, I will dedicate my mission to two things: 1) advancing the national interest of the United States in strengthening its relationship with Israel, and 2) working tirelessly to bring peace and stability to the region. I will bring to this mission a deep understanding of Israel’s history, culture, geography, commerce and politics, developed over a lifetime of study and at least 50 visits to this extraordinary country. I will bring to this mission a close relationship with the President and a demonstrated

ability to carry out his directives and strategies. Finally, I will bring a negotiating skill-set developed over 35 years of resolving multi-lateral disputes involving complex transactions, an unshakeable commitment to advance our national interests, an ability to positively engage with the people of Israel and a working command of the Hebrew language. I approach the prospect of this engagement with unbridled excitement and optimism.

Some of the language that I used during the highly charged presidential campaign that ended last November has come in for criticism – and rightfully so. While I maintain profound differences of opinion with some of my critics, I regret the use of such language and I want to assure you that I understand the important difference between a political contest and a diplomatic mission. Partisan rhetoric is rarely if ever appropriate in achieving diplomatic progress, especially in a sensitive and strife-torn region like the Middle East. From my perspective, the inflammatory rhetoric that accompanied the presidential campaign is entirely over, and, if I am confirmed, you should expect that my comments will be respectful and measured. If confirmed by the Senate, I also intend to faithfully observe the directions given me by the President and the Secretary of State, without regard to any personal opinion I may hold.

Again, I would like to thank this Committee for permitting me to appear today. I look forward to answering your questions and, if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I look forward to working with you to enhance our relationship with the State of Israel.