

Opening Statement of Mike Huckabee, Nominee to be Ambassador to Israel

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the privilege of coming before you today as you conduct your Constitutional obligation of “advise and consent” of those nominated by the President to serve as an Ambassador of our beloved nation. I am mindful that the Founders recognized that Senate approval was not Senate agreement with the President, his policies, or with those he selected to represent him. But it was decreed that the Senate in its solemn duty, would make sure that those nominated for federal duty would be thoroughly examined to determine moral and legal fitness to serve. I have no illusion that everyone on this committee agrees with President Trump’s policies or his choices for roles in his administration. It is simply my hope that we will be able to engage in a meaningful discussion. I am not here to articulate or defend my own views or policies, but to present myself as one who will respect and represent the President whose overwhelming election by the people will hopefully give me the honor of serving as ambassador to the State of Israel. I’m indeed grateful to President Trump for being asked to serve and will do so willingly and joyfully if confirmed.

I am blessed to have a wonderful and supportive family, most especially my wife of almost 51 years, Janet who is with me here today; and my children John Mark Huckabee, David Huckabee and his wife Lauren, and my daughter Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders and her husband, First Gentleman of Arkansas Bryan Sanders along with our 7 grandchildren who are watching. Their prayers surround me, and their presence sustains me. Perhaps I should be suspicious of how eager they seem to be for me to post halfway around the world, but I surmise that it is genuine support as they realize what an honor and challenge I’ve been tasked by President Trump to fulfill.

For me to even be here is a bit overwhelming. I grew up in a small, orange brick shotgun rent house in a little town called Hope, Arkansas that few people had ever heard of until Bill Clinton ran to become the 42nd President of the United States. When he was President and I was Governor of Arkansas, it was the first time in American history that a sitting President and a sitting Governor of any state were both from the same hometown, in our case a small town of 8000 people tucked away in the far southwest corner of a small southern state.

Many people say they are the first in their family to attend or graduate college. No male upstream from me in my entire family lineage ever graduated high school. The very notion I would one day be Governor of my state, run twice for President, or be nominated to serve as an ambassador would have been laughable in my childhood. I stand grateful to God for His grace and goodness. It’s the only explanation for my being here.

In many ways, I would say the same for the nation I have been nominated to deploy to in service of my country. Israel is a tiny nation the size of New Jersey and the only rational explanation for its existence in various forms for the past 3500 years and its resilience through repeated attacks and attempts to annihilate it are the grace and goodness of God.

I first visited Israel almost 52 years ago in the summer of 1973, just 3 months before the Yom Kippur War. I was 17 years old, freshly graduated from high school and a month before my 18th birthday and entering Ouachita Baptist University as a freshman. Despite growing up in poverty, my soon to be college roommate came from an affluent family. We truly were the “Prince and the Pauper” but have remained close friends as now have our children and even our grandchildren. My friend wanted to take a senior trip to the Middle East. His father was only willing to let him go if I went along and offered to pay my way to make it possible.

We went to Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, and Israel. All were fascinating to a boy who never thought he’d travel more than 100 miles from where he grew up or fly in an airplane. I will never forget the absolute splendor of Beirut with its dazzling architecture and antiquities, or the ruins of Ephesus in Turkey or the tranquility of the beaches of Cyprus, but it was Israel that had an impact on me that 52 years later I still find hard to explain. I started taking groups of people to visit there in 1981 and have led tens of thousands to visit the Bible Lands leading them from Dan to Beersheba. I’ve lost count of the number of trips I’ve made there but it probably approximates 100. I’ve made deep and lasting friendships there among Jewish and Arab populations. After all these years and trips I still believe it is the Promised Land—holy ground to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

It's certainly a complicated part of the world, and the tiny sliver of real estate carved out of the British Mandate from the Ottoman Empire in 1917 to again be “a national home for the Jewish people” remains the most contested bit of land on the planet.

Since 1948 when Israel was finally recognized as an independent Jewish State, it has been under attack for its existence. It is noteworthy that the first nation to recognize Israel was the United States, when our President Harry S. Truman did so within minutes of its being constituted as an independent state. President Truman had been taught in his Independence, Missouri church the lessons of Genesis 12 that those who bless Israel will be blessed and those who curse Israel will be cursed. President Truman would later say that he believed the teaching of his mother and grandmother and desired for America to be blessed. And we have been.

Israel faced an immediate war in 1948 from the nations that surrounded it. Another one in 1956, another in 1967, another in 1973, and yet others in 1982, 1990, 2014, and most recently the most vicious one launched on October 7 of 2023 which continues to this very day.

President Trump’s first term was the most consequential for Israel and the Middle East ever with his historic Abraham Accords, and finally moving our Embassy to Jerusalem, the ancient, indigenous, and Biblical eternal Capital of the Jewish people. He recognized the Golan Heights as sovereign territory of Israel, and his leadership throughout the Middle

East brought major diplomatic breakthroughs in large measure by not continuing to push failed policies but looking at entirely new ways to bring lasting peace to the region.

The challenges facing Israel and the United States in this part of the world are enormous. The ongoing war and situation with hostages, including American citizens makes this assignment urgent. This body acted with bi-partisanship and great dispatch when our most recent Ambassador Jack Lew was nominated by President Biden because of the October 7 massacre and vicious rape of Israeli civilians by the savages of the terror group Hamas. That sense of urgency has not dimmed. And for that reason, I respectfully ask your thoughtful consideration for confirmation as expeditiously as possible. Whether you vote to confirm me or not, I will stand ready to work with you in your role on this important Constitutional role you have as members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I further pledge to serve the President and the people of the United States with my whole heart and soul, and above all, I pledge to be mindful of the grace of God to afford me this privilege.