



Middle East Spotlight

Saying Goodbye While Looking Forward

When the 113th Congress convened in early January, several stalwarts of the pro-Israel community were missing. Among those gone from the House of Representatives were veteran Reps. Howard Berman (D-CA), the ranking member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Mike Pence (R-IN), vice-chairman of the committee's Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee, Gary Ackerman (D-NY), the ranking member on this subcommittee, and Steve Rothman (D-NJ), a member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. Absent from the Senate were Sens. Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) and Daniel Inouye (D-HI).

All of these members of Congress had an enormous impact on the U.S.-Israel relationship. As leaders on the Hill, they worked to ensure that America's greatest ally in the Middle East, Israel, remains strong and secure. Congressman Berman authored numerous pieces of Iran sanctions legislation, urged the Obama administration to hold the Palestinians accountable for their unilateral action at the U.N., and was a longstanding advocate for U.S. loan guarantees to Israel.

Rep. Ackerman championed the cause of kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and he did not shy away from excoriating Arab officials over officially sanctioned anti-Semitism in their countries. Rep. Pence, a member of the Congressional Israel Allies Caucus, was a leading voice of solidarity with Israel and a central proponent of sanctions against the Iranian regime. Congressman Rothman, as a member of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, was crucial in approving record funding for joint U.S.-Israel missile defense programs.

Sen. Daniel Inouye, who passed away last December, was not only a strong supporter of Israel, but also a visionary who recognized the value of the U.S.-Israel relationship for both countries. In his role as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, he transformed Israel's foreign aid program, ensuring that the Jewish state had the necessary resources to defend herself, and he promoted numerous joint U.S.-Israeli programs that have saved the lives of American troops.

Sen. Joe Lieberman, who retired after 24 years in the Senate, left behind a legacy of leadership in strengthening the ties between America and Israel. He rallied bipartisan support for Israel's right to self-defense during difficult times of war with Hizballah in 2006 and Hamas in 2009, and sponsored key legislation meant to stop arms sales to Iran.

While the new Congress still includes many longtime pillars of support for Israel and the U.S.-Israel relationship, it also features dozens of new faces, many of whom have little or no knowledge of the issues affecting the relationship between the countries. To guarantee that support for this relationship remains unwavering, it is incumbent upon us in the pro-Israel community to build relationships with new members and educate them about our issues.

To learn more about how you can have an impact, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.