

The week ending May 15, 2015

IRAN

Overwhelming House Majority Adopts Iran Review Legislation

AIPAC applauds the House of Representatives for its overwhelming passage of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015. The adoption of this important, bipartisan legislation following Senate passage last week provides Congress with a critical mechanism to evaluate a nuclear weapons agreement with Iran.

AIPAC continues to support diplomatic efforts to reach an agreement that prevents Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability. However, we have many serious concerns about the framework agreement that have only deepened since it was announced last month. These concerns include the issues of infrastructure dismantlement, pace of sanctions relief, disclosure of prior weaponization efforts, inspections procedures and the duration of restrictions on Iran's nuclear program.

The Iran review legislation assures Congress a means to scrutinize and evaluate how these issues are addressed in any nuclear weapons agreement. While we hope the negotiations will result in a good agreement, we agree with the president that "no deal is better than a bad deal." Given the Iranian regime's flagrant disregard for international restrictions on its nuclear program, we fear that Tehran would seize the opportunity offered by a weak agreement to attain a nuclear weapons capability—ultimately leading to a regional nuclear arms race.

As the negotiations continue, Congress will continue to have an important role. We urge members of Congress in the coming weeks to address the concerns that have been raised by the framework and the standards by which an agreement must be judged. And we urge that they prepare themselves to evaluate an agreement so that they can vote in accordance with the provisions of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act.

Senate Calls on Iran to Release Detained Americans

On May 11, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution calling on Iranian officials to release three American citizens currently detained in Iran. Passed 90-0, the non-binding measure advises the Obama administration to utilize all available resources to locate and secure the return of American detainees including Pastor Saeed Abedini, Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian and former U.S. Marine Amir Hekmati. Iran charged Rezaian with four crimes last month including espionage, which could lead to potentially 20 years in prison. Abedini was sentenced to an eight-year jail sentence on charges of undermining national security, and Hekmati is accused of espionage. The resolution also calls for Iran to "cooperate with the United States government to locate and return" retired FBI agent Robert Levinson, who disappeared in Iran back in 2007. Discussing the importance of the resolution, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said he hoped the measure would send a strong message to Iranian leaders. On the Senate floor, McConnell discussed how Abedini has been jailed for more than two years for the "supposed crime of building and operating an orphanage." "Beaten, denied access to medical care, and locked away in solitary confinement—that's apparently how the Iranian regime deals with those who dare to show love and compassion to others,"

McConnell said. Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD), the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urged the Iranian government “to do the right thing... and immediately release these citizens and send them home to their families and communities as soon as possible.” Echoing Cardin’s remarks, Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) said “Iran has a long track record of arresting Americans and using trumped-up charges to hold them.” She hailed Hekmati “a hero who proudly served his country.”

U.S. – ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

Senate Letter Advises Investigation into Reported Discrimination by Middle Eastern Airlines

A group of Democratic senators sent a letter to Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx and Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker urging them to commence an investigation of several Middle Eastern airlines following recent news reports and complaints of discrimination against U.S. passengers based on dual-Israeli nationality and sexual orientation. “Within the last two weeks, two individuals—one who is a dual citizen of the U.S. and Israel and one who is openly gay—filed complaints with the Department of Transportation detailing resistance they received from Saudi Arabian Airlines when they tried booking flights with a short layover in Saudi Arabia,” the senators write. “As alleged by these individuals, the airline told the dual U.S.-Israeli citizen he would need special permission from the Saudi Arabian government, which he would have been unlikely to receive.” The airline reportedly informed the passenger that he should refrain from wearing Tefillin, a customary Jewish article, on the flight. “...It is troubling that two airlines possibly could be allowed to profit from serving U.S. passengers, benefit from infrastructure paid for by U.S. taxpayers, yet simultaneously infringe on the rights afforded all passengers,” the senators wrote.

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Israel Gears Up for International Hummus Day

May 13th has been a day dedicated entirely to an international celebration of a staple of the Israeli diet: hummus. International Hummus Day is easily celebrated by doing the obvious: eating hummus, reports [The Jerusalem Post](#). For most Israelis this does not come as a challenge. Hummus is consumed by the ton across Israel on a daily basis. Hummus style restaurants, known as *hummusiot*, can be found all across the country, serving the creamy spread in different styles and flavors, with warm bread or the traditional pita. Hummus was first recorded in ancient cookbooks found in Egypt and the Levant. While not a native Israeli dish, Jews emigrating from Arab countries brought their food culture with them, turning hummus into a national food symbol. The health benefits of hummus have contributed to its success. Made from a base of chickpeas blended with spices, olive oil and *tehini*, hummus is an excellent source of protein. Chickpeas contain no cholesterol or saturated fats. In fact, chickpeas have been found to help prevent the buildup of cholesterol in blood vessels. Another major ingredient in hummus is olive oil, a health food superstar that is rich in heart beneficial monounsaturated fats as well as garlic, another nutritional all-star that has been linked with fighting infection and improving immune function. Although it is not difficult, producing a good Israeli style hummus takes patience and dedication.