

AIPAC President Howard Friedman
AIPAC Policy Conference 2007
March 11, 2007

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome once again to the largest AIPAC Policy Conference ever! We are more than 6,000 strong from all 50 states. This year, not only has the conference grown in size, it has also grown more diverse.

This year, not only do we have a record number of rabbis, from congregations around the nation, but I want to welcome the record number of pastors who are with us.

This year, not only do we have 1,200 college students, but we have 150 high school students, 150 students from historically black and Christian campuses, and more than 160 student government presidents.

This year, not only do we welcome friends and dignitaries from Israel, we are pleased to have with us nearly 100 international delegates to our Policy Conference – guests from The United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Mexico, South Africa, Ukraine, Lithuania, Turkey, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. I don't need to remind this audience that in many of these countries rising anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism often go hand in hand. I know my fellow AIPAC members join me when I say to our international friends: We recognize that these are difficult times for you, and we will continue to offer our support. Thank you for being with us.

To all of you assembled for this AIPAC Policy Conference – welcome to three of the most important days affecting America and Israel's future. The future is a popular topic of discussion in this town. Washington insiders relish in predicting what tomorrow will bring.

But this is not why we are here. Good friends, you and I gather in this city, at this time and place not to wonder what the future might bring. Rather, we gather to determine what the future must bring. This is a time like none other.

And you and I must play a central role in shaping tomorrow. Just look at the dangers – “Iran denies one holocaust, while desiring another.” This sobering headline from *The Weekly Standard* plainly states the threat facing Israel. At the same time, Hamas leaders on one border

and Hizballah on another promise to put an end to the Jewish state. "Israel and its allies are at their most difficult hour," stated Hamas Leader Khalid Mashal, "and victory over the Jews is near."

Ladies and Gentlemen, the same powers that threaten Israel's very existence make no secret of their deadly desires toward America as well. "The Zionist regime is on the verge of death," Iran's President Ahmadinejad proclaimed recently, "and we advise you to start thinking about your long-term interests and long term relations with the people of the region."

Because of the scale of the dangers we face, the Middle East has already emerged as the center stage topic in the American presidential race. Clearly, 2008 will be an election like none other, and the stakes for our community are higher than ever.

Commentator and writer Bill Kristol, stated that "If midterm elections are about the past, then presidential elections are about the future." What is the future for American involvement in the Middle East? How should an Israeli-Palestinian peace process move forward? And how should we stop Iran? These are a mere sampling of today's looming questions.

How America's leaders decide to answer them will determine the future of our country, the future for Israel and the future of our world. A long line of candidates who say they want to lead the most powerful country on earth are formulating their foreign policy views at the very moment that America faces these complicated questions. Look at the nature of the campaigns already. During the 2000 presidential elections, less than 2 percent of American voters said they took the foreign policy views of the presidential candidates into consideration at all.

Yet today candidates' foreign policy views are being used as a litmus test for whether they deserve to lead the world's greatest nation. Ladies and gentlemen this is a pivotal time for the next President of the United States to shape his or her views about the U.S.-Israel relationship.

In addition, this election has heated up very quickly. The first time Bill Clinton sought the office of President, he threw his hat into the ring just four months before the Iowa Caucuses. This year, fierce foreign policy debates began in Iowa an entire year before that state's famed caucus.

For the first time in eighty years, neither the President nor the Vice President is on the ballot. This is one of the most unpredictable campaigns in decades, yielding a wide array of candidates on both sides of the political aisle.

And there is another factor that makes this next election so critical for our community. In 2008, in addition to the White House, every single seat in the House of Representatives and at least 33 seats in the United States Senate are in contention. Virtually everything is up for grabs.

While the Presidential campaign will take up the ink and the air in newspapers and television, Israel's first line of defense in this country has always been Congress. The discussions that take shape on the Presidential path will filter down to every congressional race and define how the next Congress views America's relationship with Israel.

In the words of one-time presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, "If we do not grasp the future in our hands, then other hands will." You and I have a direct role in shaping this national debate and ensuring that whoever wins, the American- Israeli alliance will remain strong.

To do that, we must help candidates for office establish their policy guideposts. That is why this year's AIPAC Policy Conference is so very important. Being here is not a passive exercise. As we listen to speakers articulate their views, we must enhance our ability to communicate that information to our nation's leaders.

But at the end of the day, we are not simply looking for candidates to utter the words they think we want to hear. We are not looking for platitudes. What we seek, what our country needs, and what our world demands are leaders who will give a detailed articulation of their specific plans for America's engagement in the Middle East. These are issues that affect all Americans.

Therefore the candidates' answers to questions must be consistent in every speech, in every crowd – regardless of who is sitting in the audience. We need to know that they understand the nature of the dangers and are willing to take specific steps to keep America and Israel safe.

Do they believe in the primacy of the U.S.-Israel relationship? What steps would they take to ensure Iran does not become a nuclear

power? We are looking for a detailed accounting of the criteria they would use to judge the kind of relationship the United States should have with the Palestinians. And we want to hear from them how they would ensure Israel's qualitative military edge in a region growing more dangerous by the day.

These are the specific areas that our community needs to focus on in order to sculpt the debate and ensure that we know exactly what the candidates stand for. How do we do that? How do we ensure that our concerns, viewpoints and core principles are shared by those seeking to lead our country? The process begins Tuesday. But it does not end with this conference.

Each of us in this room must make the commitment to meet with our members of Congress and candidates for congressional offices at least twice more after Tuesday's lobbying appointments and before the next Policy Conference. We can be sure that the debates taking place in Congress will color the views of Presidential candidates. Therefore our Capitol Hill meetings carry more weight than usual. Providing a member of Congress or Presidential candidate with access to AIPAC's reliable information is key.

And there is another important way that we can help. In 2006, Senate and House candidates, parties and outside groups raised close to 20 percent more than what was raised in 2002. This election cycle will not only be one of the longest, but it is predicted to be the most expensive as well. Good friends we must increase our political giving this election cycle.

Second, each of us must ensure that when a Presidential candidate speaks in our hometowns that they are asked specifically about their views on Israel and the salient issues related to her quest for security and peace. Each of us must be willing to share our concerns and ultimately make them a vocal part of why we choose to support one candidate over another.

Finally, we must do more to expand our base. Everyone seated here today should ask at least two more friends and family members who are not yet engaged in pro-Israel political activity to become involved in a meaningful way. Ask them to match your membership contribution to AIPAC. And ask them to match your commitment to politics. Our community is indeed fortunate. We do not have to begin to invent ways to make a difference.

We know the formula. We know how to shape the future. We have AIPAC.

Because of the past support of members like you, AIPAC has been incredibly effective. Working with Congress this year, we have been able to put into place legislation that has slowed Iran's nuclear plans. We helped define the criteria used to determine the nature of America's relationship with the Palestinians, and strengthened Israel economically, militarily and diplomatically. I want to thank each of you for the role you played in making this happen.

The strength of AIPAC lies in the partnership we have among members, our devoted Board of Directors and our remarkable professional staff. I've had the pleasure of working with people like AIPAC's extraordinary Managing Director Richard Fishman and day in and day out with our incredibly talented Executive Director Howard Kohr.

I feel especially fortunate to work with the men and women who serve on AIPAC's National Board of Directors. They are among my closest friends and I greatly admire the special qualities and commitment each of them brings to AIPAC and to our community.

Bernice, I especially want to express my admiration for the incredible hours you continue to give to AIPAC. Ladies and Gentlemen, AIPAC is indeed fortunate to have Bernice Manocherian as Chair of the Board. On a personal note, though I am only half way done with my term as AIPAC President, I want to pause to thank my wife Chaya for the tremendous support she has given me always, but this busy year most especially. Chaya, thank you.

Every two years, AIPAC announces its next president and elects that person to work closely with the current leadership in the year running up to his or her service. Last month, the Board of Directors unanimously elected AIPAC's next president who will take office at the Policy Conference in 2008.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honored to announce that AIPAC's President-elect is David Victor, of Detroit, Michigan. I've known and been friends with David for almost two decades, and I am looking forward to working with him in his new capacity and for many years to come. David's presidency will mark an important "first" for AIPAC – a "first" that is indicative of the kind of organization we have built – an organization of grassroots citizen advocates, an organization that

involves neighbors, friends and family, an organization that is always about the future.

For the first time, our president will be a second generation AIPAC activist. If you ask David who got him involved, the answer would be his mom Arlene, of blessed memory, and his father Steve Victor, who is with us at this conference. The Victor household was home to parlor meetings, congressional briefings and AIPAC dinners at the same time it was home to David and his sisters.

Today, David and his wife Kelly continue that tradition for numerous AIPAC programs. David served as Michigan Council Chair for close to a decade, sharing that title with his Dad for many years. He became a member of the National Board, and most recently has been AIPAC's National Political Chairman.

It has been said that "What we call our future is merely the shadow that our past projects in front of us." David, as you, along with Kelly, carry on your great tradition of family commitment to pro-Israel political involvement, may your parents' examples continue to inspire you.

May the shadow of your past guide you toward tomorrow. Ladies and Gentlemen, in just a few weeks, we will gather with family and friends, and the shadow of our past will inspire and guide us once more as we remember the Exodus from Egypt, and celebrate Passover. On each of your chairs is a special AIPAC supplement to use with your Haggadah at this year's Seder. It offers each of us the chance to tell our own stories.

The story of Passover is timeless in its message. In every age individuals have been called to step forward and take action to help our people during difficult moments – moments of decision. Like Moses, we are commanded to answer "Heneini – Here I am." Like Moses, we are asked to speak truth to power, to step forward, to assume responsibility for our people's fate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at this time of decision, each of us will be asked to stand up, to speak up, to get involved, to aid our nation's leaders along a path that secures America and Israel's futures. And when asked, we must have the commitment to answer as did our ancestors in every generation – Heneini – Here I am.