

Howard Friedman
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Good evening; just two weeks ago I had the great privilege of being in Israel during President Bush's historic visit in honor of the country's 60th birthday.

On a sunny day filled with pride as musicians performed and children sang I felt like I had a sense of what it was like on that date in 1948 when Ben Gurion declared Israel a State and a modern Jewish nation was born.

Then in one moment the mood shifted. All of us were reminded that Israel was not an easy birth and that the country still struggles against the hatred of worrying neighbors and willing terrorists six decades later. Cell phones began to ring at once; the modern day warning system that Israelis have come to know--news of a Katyusha rocket smashing into an Ashkelon Mall served as a grim wakeup call. The struggle for the Jewish State continues. As AIPAC's President these past couple of years I have been privileged to work with so many of you to insure that in times of song and celebration and in the times of pierce and devastation, America always stands by Israel.

And America remains her partner in securing a secure future and we pray one day a peaceful one as well.

I have been especially gratified to work closely with my colleagues on AIPAC's Board, a group whose dedication to our community and the US Israel relationship knows no bounds. I have been especially grateful for all the advice I received from my dear friend, our Chair, Bernice Manocherian. Three members are completing their service and will be rotating off the Board this month. Please show me your appreciation to these three members for their hard work and devotion over the years; they are Mort Friedman from Sacramento, California; Howard Jonas from New York; and Mark Sullivan from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Torah tells us that Rivkah was always there for our forefather Isaac to make sure that he stayed in the right path, that he gave the blessing to Jacob and not to Esau. I am fortunate to have a wife like Rivkah. Chaya has been there for me every step of the way since we were married almost 18 years ago. I want to thank her for everything she does for our family and for me that allows me to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to serve AIPAC; thank you Chaya.

Pirkei Avos, Ethics of Our Fathers, describes for us the characteristics of what a leader should be like and I quote--*the roots are deep and plentiful and with all the winds of the world blowing they cannot be budged from their place.* AIPAC is incredibly lucky to have professional leaders like that; I have been fortunate to work hand-in-hand with Howard Kohr, AIPAC's Executive Director and Richard Fishman, AIPAC's Managing Director. Thank you both for the partnership we have created together and for the great opportunity to learn from and with you.

Now the person succeeding me is someone who I have great admiration for. I have had the opportunity to work closely with AIPAC's new President for many, many years. I know that the expectation of him is high; but I also know how very much he has to offer. I want to extend my best wishes to David Victor and his wife, Kelly.

Now many of you know I'm pretty devoted Baltimore Orioles fan but just to show you how much I like and admire David I came across a quote from the legendary Detroit Tigers Manager, Sparky Anderson that I'd like to share with you this evening. His words sum up the obligation I feel; *to be engaged in the world around us and I know David shares that sentiment. Anderson said and I quote; those of us lucky enough to be part of the game have a tremendous responsibility.* All of us are indeed lucky to be active participants, privileged to have had the chance to make some small difference in our world, and blessed to live in a time where there is AIPAC to help us shoulder our responsibility. AIPAC is fortunate as well to have the leadership of a man with the integrity and dedication of our new President, David Victor.