

SPEECH

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Good morning, everyone. When Israelis come to Los Angeles, so many claim the city as their second home. They feel welcome on our streets and in our neighborhoods, because immediately, instantly, we share so much, so many stories and so many friendships. And as a lifelong Angeleno, I can say with confidence no Israeli traveling to L.A. will ever be a stranger in a strange land.

Yet there's more to it than that. In a deeper sense, we share the broader perspective you achieve living by the sea. Together, we are people who have made deserts bloom. We're people who have sustained and been strengthened by our immigrants. And we've been served so fundamentally by so many of the same beliefs and values.

Israel's story is part of who I am as an Angeleno. The history of struggle, fighting for freedoms, an exodus from the bondage of discrimination, those echo my own community's struggle for civil rights. And on a more personal level, when it comes to Israel, my roots run deep. They go back to my mother, who believed in the power of diversity and the value of every human being; to my childhood in East L.A., where Jewish neighbors welcomed me into their homes and never turned a cold eye of bigotry toward my family; to Herman Katz, the Jewish teacher who saw potential in a high school dropout and set me on a course to college, strong education and a chance at success; and to the leaders in the Jewish and Israeli communities in L.A. who understand that the dreams of peace and freedom, justice and democracy extend from the shores of the Pacific to the beaches of Tel Aviv.

Now, standing before you here this morning, I recall my trip to Israel last year -- my third over the past decade -- I remember walking the streets of the Old City and dancing alongside complete strangers at the Western Wall. I remember the majesty, the humility of sitting next to Shimon Peres, a man who literally built a living, breathing democracy with his own two hands. And I remember the stunning views from Masada, the extraordinary diversity and the energy of Tel Aviv, the sights and sounds and tastes of a committed, determined, passionate community. Most of all, I remember thinking about the struggle of six decades, the fight to survive in the midst of countries dedicated to your destruction, the faith in the values of democracy and pluralism in a neighborhood filled with dictatorships.

The battle of 2000 years to live as one people and one nation, to thrive against all odds, to succeed when no one thought it was possible, to pray that one day soon, the children of Israel would usher in the age of peace and security. Now, Israel's hopes would no longer be bound by mortar fire and missile attacks; that the Jewish state would be able to live out its century-old creed: "If you will it, it is not a dream."

Still seared into my memory today are the images of Sderot, of students singing and dancing on a campus filled with bomb shelters, parents looking on with pride with the knowledge that another siren, another red alert could be imminent; of teachers imparting the knowledge of history and literature and math and science to the next generation and unsure whether their school or their home would be standing the next day.

These faces, the faces of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters of Israel reminded me of the characteristics of qualities that have long made the Jewish people a light upon the nations.

It is the story of resilience in the face of great danger. It is the tale of overcoming insurmountable obstacles and succeeding beyond anyone's imagination. It's the belief that the weapons of Israel's enemies cannot break the will of Israel's people, the attacks of terrorists cannot shape the determination of this community, and the voices of hate and intolerance, anti-Semitism, and injustice will not drown out the calls for peace and security.

And at a time when fear reigns supreme and bravery is a prerequisite to survival, when the threat of a nuclear Iran continues to grow by the day, when the tragic consequences of Hamas' actions are playing out in the real lives of innocent families, it is more important than ever to protect the Jewish homeland, to preserve the safety of Israel's citizens, and to state in a clear and unequivocal voice that Israel must and will remain a Jewish state.

That the U.S.-Israel relationship is unbreakable, that Israel's commitment to security is equaled only by its desire for peace, that Israel seeks a future of coexistence but will not sacrifice its right and responsibility to defend itself.

Now, beyond my personal experiences with Israel and its people, the City of Los Angeles and the Jewish state have far more that binds them together, ties of blood and family, connections of culture and commerce, relationships founded on religious convictions, on the pillars of faith, on the knowledge that Israel's struggle to live free from fear and persecution is our struggle.

And though that certainly would have been enough, we've also built partnerships that benefit Los Angeles and Israel in more tangible ways. We've exchanged ideas about high tech and green power, sustainability and environmental innovation. We've learned new techniques and strategies to counter terrorism, to secure our airport and enhance the safety of all of our residents. Our young people have hosted their Israeli brothers and sisters and shown them a side of Hollywood you may not see in the movies, and our students have traveled to Tel Aviv and learned that there's more to Israel than what you read in the news.

We recognized long ago that though we may not share a common history, we do share a common future. Though we may be separated by thousands of miles, we remain bound together by our hearts and our values. And though it may not make sense to the critics, though some may claim we have no place in a conflict continents away, we know that Israel needs our support. Israel has our support.

And Israel will always have a friend in the City of the Angels. And that's why it's absolutely critical we continue our ties that go beyond cultural exchanges and political

alliances, and as Iran continues to threaten the entire Middle East, as Iran's president spews lies about Israel and spreads falsehoods about the Holocaust, leaders at every level of government must take action, must recognize that that even a single city or county can play a role in isolating the Iranian regime and its economy. And in the City of Los Angeles, we will continue to work to make sure that L.A.'s investments steer clear of companies that do business with Iran.

This morning, at this extraordinary gathering of committed activists, this room of individuals who share a passion for the state of Israel, as a representative of Los Angeles, California, home to the largest AIPAC delegation in the building, as I understand -- I stand before you as a friend, as a partner, as a leader inspired by a nation founded on the belief that the values of faith could reinforce the promise of freedom, by a state shaped by the call to love peace and pursue it; to seek out justice and perfect the world, by a country so often besieged by conflict, so often scrutinized for its actions, so often vilified for its very identity; yet prepared to build on over six decades of success and ready to live out the home of Hatikvah, that it could reach a lasting, viable peace for the next generation. And the end of the day, whenever you're looking for a true friend of Israel, don't hesitate to call. I'll always be there. I'll always stand firmly behind the Jewish state.

Thank you for the honor of being able to come to visit you all today. Thank you.
Thank you very much.