

#SkipTheSpeech Campaign Update

Grassroots support from JVP and our allies showed 59 Members of Congress that we have their backs when they take a principled stand on Israeli policy. Working with American Muslims for Palestine, Code Pink, Sabeel and the US Campaign to End the Occupation; JVP's 65 local chapters demonstrated the grassroots power to support members willing to speak out for peace and American diplomacy in the Middle East. Key elements of the campaign included:

- ✎ **110,000+** letters and emails sent to members of Congress using our platforms.
- ✎ Numerous additional calls, letters and emails were submitted directly by our supporters.
- ✎ Over **37,000** individuals sent one or more letters or emails.
- ✎ Local JVP activists in **30** districts delivered petitions to district offices.
- ✎ Over **2,000** telephone calls to Congressional offices were generated using our JVP platform.
- ✎ Activists in Washington DC delivered petitions and letters to **65** offices in the Senate and House.

In addition to wide-spread media coverage of #SkipTheSpeech, 10 op-eds and numerous letters to the editor by JVP activists were printed in major publications around the US. The op-eds included:

- **The Washington Post:** [“Netanyahu doesn’t speak for all American Jews”](#) (February 20, 2015)
- **Huffington Post Religion:** [“Dear Congress, Please #SkiptheSpeech”](#) (February 16, 2015)
- **The Detroit News:** [“Congress needs to cancel Netanyahu’s speech”](#) (February 17, 2015)
- **The Chicago Sun-Times:** [“Durbin and all the Dems should boycott Netanyahu’s speech”](#) (February 25, 2015)
- **The Santa Barbara Independent:** [“Bibi Go Home”](#) (February 25, 2015)
- **The Albany Times Union:** [“Skip the Speech. Lose the Lies. Counter Corruption. Peace, not politics.”](#)(February 27, 2015)
- **The Durham Herald-Sun:** [“Netanyahu not a man Congress should applaud and cheer”](#) (February 28, 2015)
- **The Democrat and Chronicle:** [“Israel is not always right”](#) (February 28, 2015)
- **The New Haven Register:** [“Connecticut’s members of Congress should join move to ‘Skip the Speech’”](#) (March 1, 2015)
- **Mondoweiss:** [“In Praise of Mr. Netanyahu’s Political Theater”](#) (March 5, 2015)

With over 190,000 online supporters Jewish Voice for Peace is very pleased that our leaders and members stepped up to demonstrate that Netanyahu does not speak for all American Jews.

The Washington Post, February 20, 2015

Netanyahu does not speak for all American Jews (COMMENTARY)

By Rebecca Vilkomerson / Religion News Service February 20

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing unexpectedly strong pressure to withdraw from a planned March 3 speech to a joint session of Congress. The invitation from House Speaker John Boehner bypassed President Obama entirely. Intended to sway U.S. policy on Iran and support Netanyahu's re-election bid, the invitation is eliciting unprecedented opposition.

Netanyahu, in defending the visit, has indicated that he is coming to Congress to speak as the representative of the "entire Jewish people." American Jews are largely appalled by the notion that Netanyahu, or any other Israeli politician — one that we did not elect and do not choose to be represented by — claims to speak for us.

The math is clear: While 69 percent of American Jews (population 6.8 million) voted for President Obama in 2012, only 23 percent of Israel's Jews (population 6.1 million) voted for Netanyahu.

This isn't the first time that Netanyahu has claimed the mantle of the representative of the Jews, nor is it the first time that Jews around the world have been affronted by the idea that the prime minister of Israel would claim to speak for them. What makes this moment unique, however, is the unprecedented cracks in the bipartisan consensus that usually sustains unquestioning support for Israel.

Thus far, at least 25 members of Congress have publicly pledged to skip Netanyahu's speech, including the heads of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Staunch Israel supporters, from Thomas Friedman to Jeffrey Goldberg, have expressed concern that the current brouhaha threatens the bipartisan consensus on Israel, while even the leaders of the Anti-Defamation League and the Union for Reform Judaism have called on Netanyahu to cancel his speech.

For years, some political observers have noted that there is an alliance of true belief between the Republican Party and the Likud-led Israeli government, while Democratic party principles should at least in theory require some criticism of Israel's settlement building, human rights violations, and discriminatory policies. Of course, it hasn't until now played out that way, as the pressure from donors and the skillful Israel lobby has enforced a virtual, if superficial, consensus on Israel.

Now, under the guise of supporting Obama and inter-party wrangling, some Democrats have the opportunity to express a little of their deep anger not only toward Israeli policies, but their perception that they've been forced to support those policies even when they didn't agree with them to ensure their re-election.

This partisan split is why staunch supporters of the Israeli status quo want Netanyahu to cancel the speech — they fear this initial crack in the consensus could lead to a permanent split, with Israel becoming a partisan issue.

While coverage of the controversy over the speech has focused on violations of diplomatic protocol and Israeli officials attempting to play Democrats and Republicans against one another, the stakes are actually much higher. Netanyahu is not only trying to dictate American policy toward Iran, but is also using the issue of Iran as a way to avoid hard questions about Israel's policies toward Palestinians and its own citizens.

The current controversy around Netanyahu's speech has revealed what we have known for a long time: that the increasingly oppressive and hawkish policies of the Israeli government do not reflect the values of American Jews, nor of Democrats. Israel's right-wing leadership — which justified a brutal war against Gaza last summer, continues settlement construction in the face of international censure, and allows ongoing attacks in the streets of Israel against Palestinians and anti-war activists — is not worthy of our support.

The long-standing bipartisan support for Israel even as it continues to flout international law and undermine the possibility for peace has long been an anomaly in U.S. politics. That's why those of us who have long advocated change in U.S. policy towards Israel see the growing backlash against the speech as a hopeful sign.

A couple of weeks ago, Jewish Voice for Peace and a coalition of allies initiated an online campaign to ask our elected officials to skip the speech as a strong statement against warmongering and electioneering. Over 55,000 people have since taken action. Other progressive groups have issued similar calls.

Trends indicate a growing discomfort with Israeli actions among many Americans, including people of color and young Jews. Elected Democratic officials may increasingly find support among their base for taking a clear stand against warmongering and Israel's assumed unconditional support by the U.S. Skipping the speech is turning out not just to be good policy, but good politics.

(Rebecca Vilkomerson is the executive director of Jewish Voice for Peace, the largest grass-roots Jewish organization working for equality and human rights for all the people of Israel and Palestine.)

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