

*The International Association  
of Conservative/Masorti Rabbis,  
established 1901*

December 2, 2016

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The Honorable Keith Ellison  
2263 Rayburn Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Ellison:

As members of the Rabbinical Assembly, the association for Conservative rabbis, we note with interest your candidacy for chair of the Democratic Party.

We are pleased that you have close ties to the St. Paul/Minneapolis Jewish community. Indeed our local colleagues speak positively of your accessibility to the Jewish community and they, like us, thank you for your comments rejecting the notion of using U.S. foreign aid to pressure Israel.

We also thank you for your statement last week in support of a strong and secure Jewish Israel, including its right of self-defense, and in opposition to the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

As the organization which represents 1700 Rabbis internationally, with over 1400 here in America including 9 in your state of Minnesota, we take our role seriously as it relates to the public square. As you are well aware, the Jewish community has a long and distinguished history in speaking out for the common good, promoting justice and equality. We continue to be at the forefront of those battles that are still being waged. At the same time, and with no less urgency, we take our responsibility for our fellow Jews seriously—be they living in America, Europe, South America or Israel. In that regard, we are proud of being in the vanguard of protecting the bi-partisan support for Israel inside of Congress. To that very point, we take seriously our responsibility in protecting and growing that support inside both political parties and are interested in understanding your views on a variety of issues as they pertain to the bi-partisan support for the State of Israel.

In light of your candidacy, many colleagues have raised some questions about your record and we are interested in hearing directly from you in response to those concerns. We are hopeful that you would respond to our letter with written responses to these concerns—enabling us to better understand your vision for the future of the US-Israel relationship. We will be sharing this letter with our colleagues on Monday. Since we have been approached by so many people as to our reaction to these questions, we want you to be aware that we consider this letter a public document. We are happy to share your response at such time as you would offer it.

- We are interested in understanding how will you affirmatively work to ensure that the Democratic Party condemns any and all efforts to delegitimize Israel, including efforts to deny the historic Jewish connection to the Land of Israel including Jerusalem.
- Can you explain your vote during the summer of 2014 against emergency supplemental funding for the Iron Dome defensive missile system for Israel, an American ally whose cities were being barraged with rockets from Gaza?



- You have criticized Israel's naval blockade of Gaza, which has decreased the amount of arms flowing into Gaza. How do you square this criticism of Israel, a nation that is trying to protect itself from an illegal and life-threatening importation of weapons pointed against its citizens with your stated support of Israel?
- Can you better explain your role in drafting the Democratic platform this summer? We are quite appreciative of your support for the final version, but it has been reported that you and the other Bernie Sanders appointees worked hard to change the tone and tenor of the historic support of the Democratic Party for the State of Israel.
- The Anti-Defamation league has pointed to your 2010 remarks in which you say: "The United States foreign policy in the Middle East is governed by what is good or bad through a country of 7 million people. A region of 350 million all turns on a country of 7 million. Does that make sense? Is that logic? Right? When the Americans who trace their roots back to those 350 million get involved, everything changes." You issued a public letter stating to ADL that these remarks were taken out of context. Could you please explain what you meant?
- Some have observed that a number of your strongest supporters are among the harshest critics of and opponents to the State of Israel in the Democratic party, including people who have supported a one-state solution or who speak the language of anti-Zionism. If you become the head of the Democratic party, how will you actively maintain your stated support of Israel when faced with the clearly stated opposition to these views on Israel by your strongest supporters?

We understand that your priorities for leading your party no doubt involve grassroots organizing, party building and winning elections, but we look forward to your answers and to getting a better understanding of your positions on these important issues. Thank you again for taking the time to respond. Again, on behalf of both our local colleagues and our international body we look forward to working with you in whatever capacity the future holds.

Respectfully,

Rabbi Philip Scheim  
President  
Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbi Julie Schonfeld  
Executive Vice President  
Rabbinical Assembly