

Senator Shawn Hamerlinck
Forty-second District
Statehouse
515-281-3371

Home
802 Davenport St.
Dixon, IA 52745

H: 563-388-6338



The Senate
STATE OF IOWA
Eighty-third General Assembly
STATEHOUSE
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Committees

Economic Growth
Education
Local Government
Rebuild Iowa, *Ranking member*
Ways & Means

Transportation,
Infrastructure, and Capitals
Appropriation Subcommittee

Recently, I returned from a trip sponsored by the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The ACPYL program is designed to promote a mutual understanding, respect, and friendship to cultivate long-lasting relationships abroad.

Maintaining allies abroad is much like fostering personal relationships. We have the best friendships with those we make time to see. With this thought in mind in 1968 Congress approved the ACPYL program. Since then, a handshake has proven to be more powerful than a postcard.

Though I was honored to be recommended for this opportunity by my legislative colleagues, I was also excited about having a chance to watch my years of Sunday school and Catechism come alive. Growing up, I could barely make it through the twelve stations of the cross without yawning. Two weeks ago, it was difficult to do it in Jerusalem without crying.

The schedule during the trip was jammed full of forums, meetings and formal discussions. In these meetings the Palestinians and the Israelis both admit the driving force in peace negotiations is brought on by pressure from the United States. Imagine an adult holding a kicking and screaming toddler in each hand and asking them to at least try to play nice.

There is an abundance of claim and blame over who owns the land which is now Israel, the Palestinian Territory of the West Bank and the Holy Land of Jerusalem. The Gaza Strip which is controlled by the terrorist organization Hamas is a completely different story. Hamas is the governing organization profiting \$30 million a month on running tunnels between Gaza and Egypt. It is tough to support the recent flotilla and the claim that it was for humanitarian aid when everything from new cars to zoo animals are moving through these tunnels.

What was sixty years ago a desert has become today the world's fastest growing economy at a sustained annual growth of nearly ten percent. For the Palestinians, peace and freedom of movement is the number one goal. For most of the Israelis, the need for peace comes after jobs, infrastructure, housing, reforming education, changing marriage law, military enrollment and finding a sustainable source of water. In fact, the day we saw Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speak before the Knesset (their Congress,) we met with a coalition who claimed to have the votes to oust him if he agreed to any peace deal.

On the other side, politicians in Palestine are putting all their cards in President Obama. Before a scheduled meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, I heard his chief of staff and his secretary of commerce proclaim they have no faith in Israel but they believe in the political will of Obama. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is in a huge pickle. If he goes with Obama and agrees to peace, he loses his job. If he closes the door to peace, he risks another war.

Both sides compliment Senator George J. Mitchell for his work in Northern Ireland, yet they feel he is fighting an uphill battle in Israel. Both sides are in proximity talks with Senator Mitchell. This is where they talk with the Senator and not with each other. As I heard from five different Palestinian leaders, "How does marriage counseling work when you never talk to your spouse?" This statement is interesting when we note, it is the Palestinians who are refusing face-to-face talks at this point.

As politicians push for a political solution (which is not on the horizon) there is a larger problem for Israel. Secular and moderate Jews are not reproducing at the rate of Orthodox Jews and Palestinians. The peace process is like having a fly in one hand while the issue of demographics is an elephant in the other. For the most part, Orthodox Jews do not participate in the military. Many do not work and most are subsidized by the government in new settlements. These families average ten children each and a traditional Palestinian family averages eight.

Forty percent of the country of Israel works, participates in the military and subsidizes the other sixty percent, which does not. Those working average less than two children a piece. Those not working are reproducing at a rate faster than the infrastructure and financial resources will be able to sustain current conditions. The U.S. issue with funding social security looks like small beans compared to the complete population shift in less than a generation which is affecting Israel.

The quick and easy answer for this problem would be to lift subsidies and increase the workforce for the fastest growing economy, right? Well, actually, it would make the issue even worse. The United States subsidizes Israel at roughly \$2.97 billion each year with most of the funds going to the military. The U.S. also funds Palestine at roughly \$1.2 billion. New construction and technology are fueling the massive economic push for the 40% which are working. The economy is growing for the 40% of the working population with the help of U.S. taxpayer backing. Long story short, they are growing too fast through subsidies they can't provide on their own.

Imagine the economic problem in Greece and California on steroids. Note, the last person to broker real peace was President Carter when he threatened to pull U.S. backed subsidies from both sides unless both sides moved. Though I am not a fan of President Carter, I am less of a fan of throwing U.S. tax dollars to the wind.

Here are some things to think about: Israel is a geographic asset and a political ally of the U.S. in the Middle East. Having this military asset in the region offers long-term assets against Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. The Palestinians now wish they would have accepted the Camp David Accords brokered by President Clinton. President George W. Bush has over a 50% approval rating in Israel. President Clinton's is well over 75% in Palestine and many want him for President in Palestine. President Obama's approval rating is currently at 12% in both territories.

The solution will not come tomorrow. I fear the problem may get worse before it gets better. If the terrorist organization Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, is successful in turning this conflict into an issue of religion, it would be like taking our discussion thus far and setting it on a barrel of gas.

On a positive note, Israel has fostered one of the strongest education systems in the world. Their push for academic excellence has fostered attention from some of the worlds leading high-tech corporations and they have begun to rival Silicon Valley in California. The next time you use a flash card, your cell phone, a lithium battery or use solar power know it came from Israel. Also know, their healthcare system is so strong it is now being advertised to Western nations as a vacation-care destination. Think about it, see Jerusalem and have major surgery.

I have to admit I was shocked when I got the phone call asking if I would join the delegation of six from across the country. ACPYL could have invited anyone. I owe many thanks to our hosts in Israel, Palestine and from the U.S. Consulate.....and to the General I met in Ramallah who said, "There are people who bust kneecaps for a living," thanks for letting me keep my kneecaps.

Shawn Hamerlinck
State Senate 42nd District