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LIBI B'MIZRACH: TRUMP'S PLATFORM OF STRONG SUPPORT FOR ERETZ YISROEL RESONATES

Shmoozing with Jeff Ballabon, CEO of B2 Strategic
and Chairman of the Iron Dome Alliance

As frum Yidden, it is important to us to ensure that we elect a President who will support the safety and security of our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisroel; we have long turned to particular candidates views on Israel as one of the deciding factors in our decision to vote for them or not. Concerned citizens couldn't help but notice the powerfully pro-Israel platform adopted by Trump and his campaign, as unveiled at the Republican National Convention.

The Lakewood Shopper spoke to the man who was instrumental in introducing this unprecedented language into the Republican platform, noted askan and government relations expert Yehoshua (Jeff) Ballabon.

Mr. Ballabon, from Long Island, never planned to go into askanus per se.

"I was working on Capitol Hill when I received a phone call from Rav Neuberger of Ner Yisroel," says Jeff Ballabon. "It was a life changing call. He told me, 'You are not there for yourself; you are there because Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants you to be there. Now you have to figure out what you can do for the Klal.'"

And figure out he did. Jeff began working on what is now the platform back in 2011.

"I met in Yerushalayim with a state legislator from South Carolina, Representative Alan Clemmons a religious man and an oheiv Yisroel," says Ballabon. "We began discussing the issue that it was time to change the Republican party platform from pushing for a

two-state solution, which puts tremendous pressure on Israel and allows Arabs to incite terror with the support of the rest of the world."

They attempted to move forward with the proposed platform in 2012, but they faced opposition by Zionist pro-Israel group AIPAC, preventing the success of the endeavor.

"I knew that would happen and figured that 2016 was

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a more likely opportunity to actually make headway. In advance of the convention, I and a number of insiders drew attention to the role that AIPAC had played last time to make it more difficult for them to interfere again," says Ballabon.

Together with a number of groups, including powerful Christian pro-Israel groups and Washington

insiders, the language was crafted and presented. As the convention neared, Trump's people himself got involved with the platform, most notably the co-chairmen of his Israel advisory committee, who are both frum.

"They were completely with us philosophically and they informed us that Trump was 100% behind the platform as well. And when Representative Clemmons introduced the platform, it passed unanimously and he was met with a standing ovation," says Ballabon.

The language itself was clearly crafted in a way to make it very difficult to fight while still claiming to be pro-Israel.

"For example, instead of laying claim to Yehuda and Shomron, which will cause people to debate our rights to that land, we made the blanket statement that Israel is not an occupier. The reason why this is important is because pro-Israel groups are largely comprised of liberal Jews who want to keep up the illusion that their party is pro-Israel. But the Democratic party is arguing to label Israel an occupier. This accusation simply is legally and morally false. You can't be defined as pro-Israel while falsely libeling Israel as an occupier," Jeff says. "And just look at where the Democrats are today. There were more Palestinian flags inside their convention than American flags. Meanwhile, Israeli flags were being burned right outside. This hostility is built on the lie that Israel is an occupier."

COMEDY IN CLEVELAND WITH ASSEMBLYMAN JON BRAMNICK

Jon Bramnick leads the Assembly Republican Caucus and represents the 21st Legislative District.

During an austere event such as the RNC the crowds the convention look to let out some steam during the downtime between events. Some lucky attendees needed to look no further than NJ's Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick who hosted a comedy routine on Tuesday.

Part of the routine included his guide to New Jerseyans in Cleveland for the convention which contained advice such as "When in a restaurant, do not ask 'where is my food.' There is a midwest 8-10 minute delay on everything," and "Speak slowly and enunciate, especially if you're from Hudson or Bergen County." Referencing Melania Trumps plagiarism accusations, he laughed that he got the entire rulebook "word for word" from New York but that it wasn't plagiarism to do so.

Bramnick joked about politics explaining that the first ethics rule for New Jersey politicians is never to take money in an envelope, humorously adding "I never take the envelope." He also poked fun of potential governor bid of his own "I am not making any announcement but all my advisors... say to tell all of your bad stuff up front. I am now going to tell you all the stupid stuff I have done since I was five-years-old. We should be out by seven o'clock."

Bramnick stepped down to roomful of applause and the small crowd left the venue with smiles on their faces. Bramnick has been known for his comedy for a long time at one point winning a contest to be named "The Funniest Lawyer in New Jersey."



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The language also makes it very clear that we support Israel in making the decisions that it feels is right for the country and her security.

"A Pew study shows that American Jews largely believe that the so-called two-state solution leads to peace while the overwhelming majority of Israelis disagree, with Israeli Jews also stating that they don't feel settlements are a barrier to peace but actually are critical to Israel's security. And yet, American Jews are the ones pushing for a Palestinian state over here in Washington, so there is a huge disconnect. We want Washington's policy to be to support the Jews of Eretz Yisroel on their own terms," says Jeff.

This disconnect is part of the reason why Mr. Ballabon has been pushing to create a Jewish pro-Israel organization that is run al pi daas Torah.

"People have this conception that Chareidim in America don't care about or even hate Israel, which simply is not acceptable," says Ballabon. "The Chareidi community is profoundly pro-Israel, because it has a profound sense of areivus. Who cares more than frum Jews about the plight of our brethren in Eretz Yisroel? The problem is that there is currently no outlet for it al pi daas Torah. Most American Jews call themselves Zionist, but they have an ill-educated and often confused or even twisted sense of what it means to help Jews in Israel."

That also is the goal of his organization, the Iron Dome Alliance.

"We have a super PAC and are starting a non-profit," he says. "The point is to promote a very different point of view of what the US-Israel relationship should be. We want the legislators

we support to make it clear that they wouldn't force Israel to take measures that go against Israel's own judgment. J Street and the rest of the Left says that the new Zionism means to pressure Israel from the outside to give the Palestinians their own state. Even AIPAC demands a Palestinian state. We say Israel is America's ally, not the PLO; let Israel decide. Even if you do believe in the two-state solution, the only way to get there is to stand behind Israel as our ally, not break its back. That is the essence of the new Republican platform, and it's where the frum community should stand."

As he brings his position to the attention of leading Rabbinic figures in the chareidi world, Jeff says the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive.

"Not all politics is transactional. The vast majority of Americans who support Israel do so out of faith and values. It is important for the frum community to realize how much influence we can have when we stand for Torah ideals; we often are so busy with our own domestic causes and we don't realize the importance of getting involved on bigger issues. But tens of millions of Americans support Israel out of simple decency and morality or because they believe in Hashem's promise to Avrohom "va'avorchah mevorchecha umekalelcha a'oir". We have the capacity to be the tip of that enormous spear. Leaders in Washington want to see the frum community's input. They are looking for leadership and they want to see it from people who believe in the Bible and lead religious lives."

New Platform Language

Our Unequivocal Support for Israel and Jerusalem

Like the United States of America, the modern state of Israel is a country born from the aspiration for freedom, and standing out among the nations as a beacon of democracy and humanity. Beyond our mutual strategic interests, Israel is likewise an exceptional country that shares our most essential values. It is the only country in the Middle East where freedom of speech and freedom of religion are found. Therefore, support for Israel is an expression of Americanism, and it is the responsibility of our government to advance policies that reflect Americans' strong desire for a relationship with no daylight between America and Israel. We recognize Jerusalem as the eternal and indivisible capital of the Jewish state, and call for the American embassy to be moved there in fulfillment of U.S. law.

We reaffirm America's commitment to Israel's security and will ensure that Israel maintains a qualitative military edge over any and all adversaries. We support Israel's right and obligation to defend itself against terror attacks upon its people, and against alternative forms of warfare being waged upon it legally, economically, culturally and otherwise. We reject the false notion that Israel is an occupier, and specifically recognize that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement ("BDS") is anti-Semitic in nature and seeks to destroy Israel. Therefore, we call for effective legislation to thwart actions that are intended to limit commercial relations with Israel, or persons or entities doing business in Israel or in Israeli-controlled territories, in a discriminatory manner.

The U.S. seeks to assist in the establishment of comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, to be negotiated among those living in the region. We oppose any measures intended to impose an agreement or to dictate borders or other terms, and call for the immediate termination of all U.S. funding of any entity that attempts to do so. Our party is proud to stand with Israel now and always.