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Subject: JNS: The grassroots, interfaith effort behind the GOP's Israel policy

Date: Fri, 15 Jul 2016 20:17:30 +0000

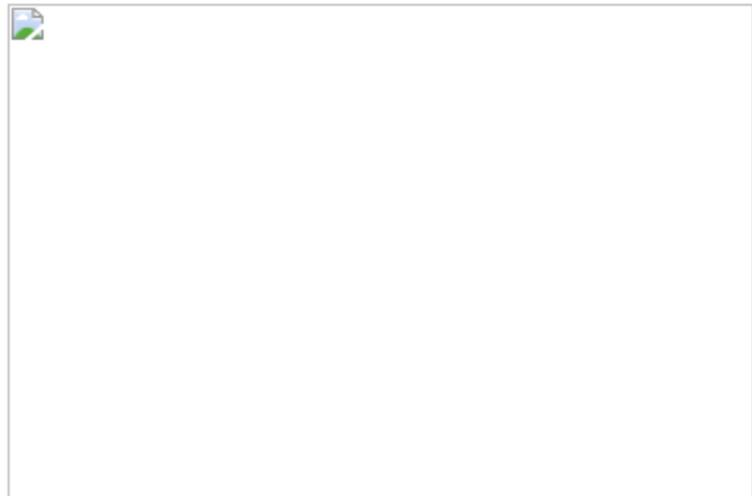
JULY 15, 2016

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**The grassroots, interfaith effort
behind the GOP's Israel policy**



Presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump

The grassroots, interfaith effort behind the GOP's Israel policy

By Shalle' McDonald/JNS.org

Amid the intrigue and speculation over the upcoming Republican National Convention (RNC) in Cleveland, one item that the party has settled is its firm support for Israel and opposition to a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On Tuesday, the Republican Platform Committee unanimously approved a number of significant changes to its platform in an attempt to further set the party's pro-Israel credentials apart from the Democrats, who are facing concerns over their party's future support for the Jewish state. The GOP's platform changes included removing language encouraging a two-state solution as well as reinstating a reference to an "undivided" Israel that was previously included in the party's 2008 platform, but was removed in 2012.

"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," the approved amendment said. "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."

Alan Clemmons, a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives and a Republican convention delegate, conveyed his disappointment over the 2012 GOP convention, when the platform committee chose not to recognize Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel.

"I was a delegate at the last RNC, but was not on the platform committee. I observed the platform committee process and proposed language similar to the language that was passed today (July 12). Unfortunately, that language gained no traction and it went nowhere on the platform, and as a matter of fact the platform regressed in terms of support for Israel," Clemmons told JNS.org.

The push to bolster the Republican Party's language on Israel follows a four-year effort by Clemmons and Joseph Sabag, the former executive director of the Israel Allies Foundation. Both leaders sought to reach out to the party's base—evangelical Christians—as well as to Jewish and other ethnic groups to reach a consensus on the GOP's pro-Israel stance.

"Between Joseph and myself, we talked to pastors that represent literally millions of evangelical Americans," said Clemmons.

Although evangelical support was a significant factor in crafting the 2016 RNC platform, Clemmons said the party "didn't leave the Jewish population out of that mix."

"We met with many of prominent movers and shakers in the Jewish community throughout the United States, and Israel as well," he said.

According to Clemmons, two more recent alliances that made a significant impact on drafting and approving the platform's Israel language were with David Friedman and Jason Dov Greenblatt, senior Israel advisers for presumptive nominee Donald Trump's campaign.

"Those gentleman appreciated what we were doing. They

appreciated the language that was being offered and presented it to Mr. Trump, who likewise was very interested in being of assistance in this process," Clemmons said.

Clemmons, in his platform committee speech prior to this week's vote, said that along with Trump's advisers and leading policy experts, he "was able to present platform language that captures the true sentiment of pro-Israel supporters everywhere."

The Trump campaign's Friedman told JNS.org that getting the pro-Israel language on Jerusalem reinstated "was a collaborative effort with a lot of people whose hearts were in the right place with respect to Israel. I think the outcome speaks for itself."

"It's the most pro-Israel platform that either party has ever issued, so we're obviously very proud of the accomplishment," he said.

The Trump campaign's involvement in reinstating the platform language may also signal a move by the candidate to bolster his pro-Israel credentials, amid questions over his past statements on remaining "neutral" about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and accusations of anti-Semitism stemming from his recent Twitter post featuring what critics called a Jewish Star of David.

Friedman said that Trump has been working very hard to "lay that issue to rest over the last couple of months."

"Mr. Trump himself has said, over and over again, that he is a highly pro-Israel candidate—not just in comparison to Hillary Clinton, where the differences are stark—but even in absolute terms, he's a very pro-Israel candidate," he said.

The GOP platform "should lay that issue to rest," said Friedman, who argued that the Trump campaign's work on the Israel language highlight the candidate's ability to work with leaders across different faiths and ethnicities to achieve a common goal.

"When people criticize [Trump] for being polarizing, I think just the opposite is true. This was an effort which unified people of different faiths, all united behind a desire to support Israel," Friedman said.

One of the groups that the Trump campaign worked with closely on the platform was the Hispanic Israel Leadership Coalition (HILC), a group that seeks to engage Latino

Christians in support of Israel. HILC is a subsidiary of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC).

Pastor Mario Bramnick, president of HILC, told JNS.org that Trump and his advisers "were very strong on the importance of this language [on Israel]. And through discussions, the language was finalized...[and] ultimately approved by a unanimous vote."

"We are very encouraged by the resolve and support of Mr. Trump and his advisers on the issue," said Bramnick, who is also a regional vice president for the NHCLC. "We had worked with the platform committee leadership regard the reinserting of the language as a united Jerusalem as the eternal capital of the nation of Israel, and the moving of the embassy to Jerusalem should the Republican candidate win the presidency."

Clemmons, the South Carolina state lawmaker, affirmed the roles of Bramnick and HILC, calling them a "very big part" of the process to reinstate the platform language.

"[Bramnick] certainly has a large congregation and a prominent following, and a good feel for the respect that evangelical Christians have for Israel. He was certainly a partner in all of this. That's not unlike the other pastors around the country who were a part of it as well," Clemmons said.

The push for the revised platform language was also backed by Pastor John Hagee's Christians United for Israel (CUFI) non-profit through its separate 501(c)(4) lobbying affiliate, the CUFI Action Fund.

In a letter (first reported by JNS.org) that was sent to Republican convention delegates on July 6, former Ronald Reagan administration official Gary Bauer, director of the CUFI Action Fund, called for the Republican platform to "strengthen its language in support for Israel with Jerusalem as Israel's 'undivided, eternal' capital."

Bramnick praised CUFI's role in the process, saying the group "worked very hard behind the scenes to make sure that a very strong supportive platform language came forth from the Republican Party, especially as it pertains to a united Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel."

For evangelical Christians, support for Israel is not only a political stance, but a theological one. As such, working to

strengthen the Republican Party's ties with the Jewish state is a highly prioritized process for that faith community moving forward.

"There was a Pew [Research Center] report back in 2013 that said that 82 percent of the evangelical community believes that God has given the land of Israel to the Jewish people, and we read that literally," Bramnick said. "We believe that is a biblical covenant and mandate that really no person has the right to revoke....For the evangelical community, this is very important."

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