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H.R. 1911 Floor Remarks

Rep. Chris. Smith (R-NJ)

September 12, 2018

Floor Remarks

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Chairman for his leadership on this legislation and on the issue itself. Elliot Engel, of course, who has been a great friend and part of this Bipartisan Caucus on Combating Anti-Semitism. And you, Mr. Presiding Speaker, you're one of the cosponsors. We've got 83 bipartisan cosponsors, and this is an idea whose time has come. I want to thank Leader McCarthy, for making sure the bill got to the Floor today, for his leadership and strong support for it.

Anti-Semitism, Mr. Speaker, is exploding. Just look around at any country in the world, look at the human rights reports that are out there and it's a problem here in the United States as well. It is exploding.

My first trip to the Soviet Union was in 1982, on behalf of Soviet refuseniks. And when I saw what that country was doing to individual Jewish men and women and families, I became committed then—and Alcee, you know, we worked on this for many, many years with the Helsinki Commission to try to combat this ever-escalating scourge of anti-Semitism. It's an age-old scourge, it is bad, and it is getting worse.

There is a persistent anti-Semitism that has, I think my colleagues know, that historically has manifested itself throughout European history, from pogroms in Russia, through the Dreyfus affair, to Nazism in the 1930s, and of course the Holocaust right up until modern-day iterations.

This has been joined, however, by two other streams of hate, one emanating from the world of militant Islam, and one which is sometimes fomented by countries such as Iran.

Strains of this “new anti-Semitism” can be heard in the demands of the BDS movement – Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions – which always singles out Israel, and rarely other countries like China who engage in pervasive human rights abuse.

My friend and former Soviet refusenik, Natan Sharansky, testified at two of my hearings on combating anti-Semitism. He proposed what he called a simple test to help us distinguish between legitimate criticism of Israel from anti-Semitism. Sharansky called it the “three Ds: demonization, double standard, and de-legitimization.”

First—demonization. When Israel’s actions are blown all out of sensible proportions, while comparisons are made between Israelis and the Nazis—which is absolutely sick and pathetic—this is anti-Semitism, not a legitimate criticism of Israel.

Second—double standard. When criticism of Israel is applied selectively, when Israel is singled out, libeled and slandered by the UN Human Rights Council, for example, while the behavior of other egregious violators like China, Iran, Cuba, and Syria are largely ignored, that, too, is anti-Semitism.

The third D is delegitimization. In other words, “Israel does not have a fundamental right to exist.

In light of this, there is a need for a comprehensive approach.

In 2004, I offered an amendment that became law to create the Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, and also the amendment that created the Special Envoy—and I do call on President Trump to name that Special Envoy.

This elevates it to Ambassador, so there will be additional gravitas, and so that this individual, whoever he or she may be, will have the ability to have direct access to the Secretary of State on the issue of combating anti-Semitism.

The bill also prohibits the position from being double-hatted. We know how that happens. All of a sudden one person has all these different kinds of portfolios and becomes the master of none. And it also requires, as Eliot Engel said a moment ago, that within 90 days of the enactment of this act and thereafter we need this name, we need this to be put forward so that we can get that person on the job and doing this great work.