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House of Representatives

Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Act (H.R. 221)

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. MCCAUL for yielding and for his very strong support of this legislation. And ELIOT ENGEL, the new chairman, I thank him as well. I thank Brad Schneider for being the original Democratic cosponsor.

This is a bipartisan bill. In the last Congress, we had 86 cosponsors. Even in this Congress, we already have gotten up to 80 cosponsors. It shows that we can reach across the aisle and fight this pernicious evil called anti-Semitism.

In 2004, Mr. Speaker, I authored the provisions of law that created and required this position and the office it leads at the State Department.

H.R. 221 upgrades and strengthens the position to better anticipate, prevent, mitigate, and respond to threats against Jewish communities worldwide. H.R. 221 elevates the Special Envoy to the rank of Ambassador, reporting directly to the Secretary of State. This would enable sufficient seniority and access inside the U.S. Government and when engaging foreign governments.

The bill requires the President to nominate a candidate no later than 90 days—and all the Presidents from Bush to Obama, and now, sadly, under President Trump, have been very late in coming forward with that nominee. There was a nominee for the Special Envoy, but because of illness or a health crisis, that person was not named. But we—all of us—have asked the President to name that person and to do so immediately. This bill requires, as I said, to do it no later than 90 days after the bill becomes law and no later than 120 days thereafter whenever that position is empty.

H.R. 221 prohibits double-hatting of the Special Envoy with duties irrelevant to combating anti-Semitism. The legislation

also mandates the Special Envoy to be the primary adviser to the U.S. Government on monitoring and combating anti-Semitism.

Far too often, Mr. Speaker, over the decades, the U.S. Government has put combating anti-Semitism, human trafficking, and religious freedom violations in the back seat of our foreign policy. That is why Congress has created offices and positions to ensure the United States was focused on fighting these evils.

Over the past decades, there has been an unprecedented rise in anti-Semitic acts and rhetoric all over the world: Jews harassed, assaulted, and even murdered; synagogues attacked; graves and cemeteries desecrated; anti-Semitic slurs; plus targeting the State of Israel itself with the three Ds—demonization, double-standard, and delegitimization, as my good friend, the great Soviet Jewish refusenik and religious prisoner Natan Sharansky named them. The so-called BDS movement to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel is one of the most pernicious examples of what Sharansky called the new anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitic hatred is hardwired into the ideology of violent Islamist and White supremacist groups, but the evil goes beyond those perpetrators.

Politicians, entertainers, and public intellectuals across the philosophical spectrum have exhibited anti-Semitism. Strong American leadership, therefore, is essential to battle this bigotry.

Combating anti-Semitism, as I said earlier, has always been a bipartisan effort. This bill did pass the last Congress 393–2. The text before us in the legislation is identical. I hope we have very strong support for it and the Senate, hopefully, will take it up, consider it, pass it, and get it to the President.