Mayor Mike Bloomberg Remarks (as prepared)
2020 AIPAC Policy Conference

Good morning!

I am so glad to be here at AIPAC!

Israel is small, but resilient—surrounded by adversaries.

And if you caught the last couple of presidential debates, you know I can empathize.

Let me thank President Fridman for inviting me to join all of you today.

And I want to congratulate the new president, Betsy Korn, and wish her well as she begins one of the easiest jobs in Washington.

Let me say hello to all the New Yorkers in the room!


And if you didn’t, well, you will have a chance to atone in 2020.

I want to thank all of you for being here, especially the young people in this room — more than 4000 students from all over the country.

America needs your voices.

And your presence here—and the pro-Israel identity you proudly bring to your classrooms and campuses—give me hope.

Because at a time when some try to make strong supporters of Israel feel unwelcome in social justice conversations, your refusal to be intimidated reminds us of the courage and integrity that we need in our political discourse.

So I could not be more proud or grateful to be here with you at AIPAC this morning!
The work that all of you are doing and supporting is very personal to me.

Growing up, my mother was our temple president and kept a Kosher house – but my parents taught me that Judaism is about much more than our rituals.

It’s also about living our values.

For my parents’ generation, that meant realizing the dream of a Jewish Holy Land.

And for us, it’s about revering the miracle that is now the modern state of Israel.

Now, my mother and father never had the means to visit Israel when I was a child, but I’ve been lucky enough to travel there many times.

More than once as an adult, I went with my late mother to see the Magen David Adom blood center in Israel that we named after my father, and the Hadassah Hospital wing we named after her.

And in 2014, when the FAA banned American carriers from flying during Operation Protective Edge, I traveled to Israel on an El Al flight.

In my own little way, I wanted to show the world that friends of Israel will never let fear of terrorism keep us out of our homeland!

That was true in 2014—when Israel faced attacks from Gaza. It was true when I had to take shelter in Sderot, as rockets rained down. And it’s still true in 2020, as rockets continue to be launched at innocent civilians in cities and towns across the Jewish State.

For as long as Israel has existed, terrorists have threatened our ancestral homeland.

Well, guess what?

The State of Israel, the Jewish people, and the pro-Israel community will never back down in the face of hatred!

If I am elected president, I can promise you:

I will always have Israel’s back.
Because Israel has a right to defend itself — by itself.

That means I will never impose conditions on military aid — no matter what government is in power.

That includes $3.3 billion in security assistance and $500 million in missile defense we provide Israel with every year, thanks to the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding.

Israel is on the front lines, countering American enemies in the region—and sharing valuable intelligence and experience with us.

So conditioning foreign aid wouldn’t only impair Israel’s ability to keep itself safe, but our ability to keep ourselves safe as well.

After all: America’s safety and Israel’s safety are inextricably linked.

And as president, I give you my word: I will never, ever compromise on the safety and sovereignty of Israel!

I also promise to always oppose the BDS movement’s pernicious efforts to delegitimize and punish the state of Israel—as I always have.

I will stand up to efforts to hold Israel to a double standard at the United Nations.

And while I believe it should’ve been done as part of a peace negotiation, I have always supported moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem — the eternal capital of the Jewish state.

And I will leave it there as president, because that is where it belongs!

Now, I will also never stop working for a peace plan that has as its foundation two states: one Jewish, and one Palestinian, achieved through direct negotiations.

Because Israel must remain a prosperous, secure, and stable Jewish democracy, and because Palestinians deserve dignity, democracy, and opportunity, too!

Bipartisan support for Israel has been a defining feature of American politics since 1948 – and this organization has played a critically important role in fostering it.
The relationship between our two countries has been so strong precisely because it has transcended partisan politics, both here and in Israel... and because it is built on our shared values:

Freedom and democracy... law and justice... integrity and compassion... innovation and ingenuity.

But in recent years, we have begun to see cracks in that bi-partisanship – and that is deeply troubling.

Unfortunately, not all of my fellow Democrats in this race have attended an AIPAC conference.

One of them, Senator Sanders, has spent 30 years boycotting this event.

And as you’ve heard by now, he called AIPAC a racist platform.

Well, he’s dead wrong.

This is a gathering of 20,000 Israel supporters of every religious denomination, ethnicity, faith, color, sexual identity, and political party.

Calling it a racist platform is an attempt to discredit those voices, intimidate people from coming here, and weaken the US-Israel relationship.

The reality is: AIPAC doesn’t fuel hatred.

AIPAC works to combat it — and the violence that it can produce.

And if more elected officials spoke to the people here, they’d understand that!

I’ve always believed that you should meet with people you may disagree with— and listen to them.

That’s how I’ve always led.

And if there’s one thing I know about Jewish people, it’s that we don’t agree on anything!
We can’t even agree on who is the funniest New Yorker—Jerry Seinfeld or Larry David…or me?

For the record, it’s probably not me.

But I did appear in Curb Your Enthusiasm and throw Larry David out of New York.

I don’t remember what he did, but I’m sure he deserved it.

Seriously: As strong supporters of Israel, we don’t need to agree with everything an Israeli government does – I certainly don’t.

And as proud patriots of America, we do not need to support everything our government does either – again, I definitely don’t.

Differences of opinion are healthy – even on big issues.

Let me give you an example.

Like many of you, I was against the Iran nuclear deal, because the deal should’ve done more to address Iran’s ballistic missile program, because we never should have unfrozen their money, without mandating that they end their financing of terrorism, and because many of the restrictions in the deal came with an expiration date.

Let me be clear: Our commitment to Israel must never sunset!

Now, I also know that unilaterally abandoning the deal, rather than leading our allies to strengthen it, was tantamount to giving Iran permission to re-launch its nuclear program.

And after years of compliance, Iran is once again marching toward the development of nuclear weapon capability.

As president, I will work to make the strongest deal possible to constrain the Iranian regime’s aggression and territorial ambitions and put an end to their nuclear program forever. Because the world must never allow Iran to threaten Israel and the whole region with a nuclear attack.
But the larger point I’m making is:

We can disagree with specific policy positions of presidents from both sides of the aisle without resorting to personal attacks or trying to claim Israel as the exclusive domain of one political party.

It’s not. And whenever an elected official suggests otherwise, we should be unequivocal in condemning them.

Because Israel should never be a football that American politicians kick around in an effort to score points!

Maintaining bipartisan support for Israel is more important now than it has ever been in my lifetime, because today, we are confronted by sights that we thought we would never see outside of old black and white newsreels:

Synagogues attacked — Jews murdered — neo-Nazis marching brazenly and openly by torchlight.

Not in some other country — but right here in the United States.

Tree of Life was the Synagogue that my sister Marjorie attended when she lived in Pittsburgh many years ago.

She has many fond memories of her time there, so it was an especially tragic day for her – and for our whole family, as well. And I know there are many people in the audience who were personally affected by the tragedy as well.

Since that attack, Jews have been targeted for murder in more than a dozen synagogues across America.

In the New York area, bullets ripped through a kosher store in Jersey City, the windows of a Brooklyn synagogue were smashed during Rosh Hashanah, and Jews have been beaten and harassed in the streets.

The fact is: Attacks on Jews have been taking place with horrifying regularity.

And here’s why that’s relevant to AIPAC’s mission: Because when hatred against Jews rises, so too does hatred against the world’s only Jewish state, and Israel always ends up paying the price.
So if we are going to defend our most important ally, then it’s not enough to stand up to their adversaries in the Middle East.

We also need to stand up to anti-Semitism everywhere, including here in the United States.

And when we look around America, it’s clear we are facing not only another epidemic of anti-Semitism, but a rising tide of hatred writ large.

Because the fact is:

There’s been an increase in attacks on all groups that have a long history of being scapegoated and repressed for being “other,” “different,” “lesser,” and “less than fully American.”

I’m talking not only about Jews, but also about immigrants, Muslims, black Americans, women, and the LGBTQ community.

We must stand up to these attacks—together!

You know, I remember visiting Auschwitz a couple years ago, walking the same paths our ancestors trudged down to the gas chambers.

And whenever I think about the Holocaust, I am reminded of a teaching from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of Great Britain.

Quote: “The hate that starts with the Jews never ends there.”

But we also know — don’t we? — that what starts with others so often ends with us, with the Jewish people, and with Israel.

So we need to stand up against all bigotry and hatred!

For 12 years, as mayor, I led the largest and most diverse city in the nation.

And I was never prouder than when I stood in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty and argued that Muslim New Yorkers had every right to build a mosque anywhere in our city—including near the World Trade Center.
This was the right thing to do—and it was also the smart thing to do.

Our city was safer because we declared loudly and clearly that everyone was welcome in New York, no matter what they looked like, who they loved, or to whom they prayed.

But in recent years, we have seen hate crimes increase.

Which raises the question:

What has changed?

There is no single answer.

And no single person or political party is entirely to blame.

Anti-Semitism is hardly the exclusive domain of any one group.

It can be found on both the right and the left – on town squares and campus quads.

But there is one fact that we cannot ignore:

Presidential leadership matters!

It sets a tone.

It is either inclusive or exclusive… divisive or uniting… incendiary or calming.

I believe the only way we can make progress as a country is by bringing people together... not tearing them apart.

And I will never stand by idly in the face of anti-Semitism… or in the face of hatred against anyone.

Because I know all of our fates are linked.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny.

So, I want to be clear:
If I am elected president, I will strongly condemn anti-Semitism wherever and whenever it appears.

And Americans will never have to choose between supporting Israel and supporting our values here at home.

I will defend both... because I know they always have been linked, and our strong relationship with Israel is based on our values.

At this moment in our history, we are called to stand up, not for a political party – but for our country, and for our values, and for the tradition of bipartisan support that has always defined our relationship with Israel.

This is about defining the meaning of America – and recognizing that all groups who have been marginalized, excluded, repressed, scapegoated, vilified, and far worse, rise and fall together.

Our best hope – our only hope – is in standing together, rejecting those who try to seduce us by dividing us, and uniting behind the only shield that can protect us: our common values as American citizens and our common humanity as God’s children.

That is what this moment is about.

And that is why I am here at AIPAC.

Because the people in this room can help lead the way in bringing America back together.

And here’s the bottom line: When America is strong, Israel is strong.

But as all of you know, the inverse is true as well: When Israel is strong, America is strong!

So thank you all, for everything you’re doing to make sure the relationship between the United States and Israel grows stronger, and more bipartisan, than ever before!

And I hope you know: I will be standing with you every step of the way.