“Good evening, AIPAC!

"I want to congratulate incoming President Betsy Korn and outgoing President Mort Fridman for their leadership. Thank you as well to Howard Kohr for his continued efforts to make the U.S.-Israel relationship strong, resilient, and enduring. Let me also extend my thanks to Jeff Snyder, who is stepping down from the AIPAC board this month. He has been – and continues to be – both a friend and a highly effective advocate for Israel.

"And I also want to thank Howard Friedman from Baltimore, past president of AIPAC. He has been a close friend of mine for many years, accompanying me on my trips to Israel and serving as a trusted advisor. Howard and I made our most recent visit to Israel in August – my fifteenth. But we didn’t come alone. Forty-one of my fellow House Democrats joined us on that visit.

“We stared out from the Golan Heights and stood in solemn memorial at Yad Vashem. We met with Israeli doctors producing miracles for so many, including Syrian refugees. We met with Israeli innovators developing irrigation technology to benefit people across the world. We gazed into Hezbollah-controlled villages and saw tunnels for terrorists along the Lebanese border. And we tucked our prayers for Israel’s peace and safety into the crevices of the Western Wall.

"One of the freshman Members who came with us had been anxious before our departure. She wasn’t sure what to expect from her first visit. But on the last day, she tearfully told us that she understood what Israel is all about. That it is a land of complexity, a special place like America whose diversity is reflected in its vibrant democracy. Whose politics, as we have seen, are far from monolithic, where disagreements expressed through civil discourse make the country stronger. An ally whose American supporters are liberals, conservatives, and moderates united by their faith, passion, commitment, and memory.

"When Members of Congress visit Israel, they are reminded about what is at stake for Israel, for America, and for the Jewish people. It is unfortunate that we can’t bring all 325 million of our fellow Americans to Israel to remind them of its history and help them appreciate the country’s unique challenges, dangers, and importance to America. So, we must bring Israel to them. That’s why AIPAC is so important. AIPAC brings Americans together, from across the political spectrum, to understand the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship and to strengthen it.

"In Congress, I’m proud to be a leader in this effort to maintain and grow the broad, bipartisan consensus supporting Israel and the U.S.-Israel relationship. To be frank, however, there has been a lot of heated talk lately about Democrats and from some Democrats with regard to Israel. I have spent the past fifty years supporting the U.S.-Israel relationship. Let me make it clear: as a party, Democrats in the House stand solidly with Israel and the right of every Israeli to live in peace and security.

"Consensus among Democrats and Republicans in support of Israel continues to be the reality – and to suggest otherwise misstates the facts and weakens Israel. One of AIPAC’s most critical missions is to make sure everyone understands that. We cannot allow Israel’s fortunes to ebb
and flow with the waves of political change in any given election in either country. The relationship between America and Israel is not one of personalities but of principles, one of shared values and mutual interests.

"It is up to all of us to ensure that our fellow Americans – in communities across the country – understand that our bipartisan support for Israel in Congress is a strategic asset for Israel and for America. It is also vital that we make sure they know the history that requires and demands support for Israel’s sovereignty, survival, and success. When they forget how Democrats and Republicans have stood unequivocally against anti-Semitism, bigotry, and hate – those pernicious diseases that made the modern Jewish state so critical – we must remind them.

"And, lest they forget that people who march with those carrying swastikas and shouting Nazi slogans are not ‘very fine people,’ we must remind them. When others forget the campaigns of terror that have targeted Israel since before and after its independence, we must remind them. If they forget how Democrats and Republicans together protected Israel with an Iron Dome and the latest in anti-tunneling technology, we must remind them.

"If they forget that Democrats and Republicans in Congress stand up for Israel’s right to defend itself and help maintain its qualitative military edge, we must remind them. When others forget that Democrats and Republicans have worked hard to provide Israel with crucial defensive security aid and loan guarantees, we must remind them. And we must remind them that we’ve done so and will continue to do so with no conditions. Because these are not just investments in Israel’s security but in America’s as well.

"There must never be conditions on protecting America’s security by maintaining the strength of our ally, Israel. When others forget that Democrats and Republicans are standing up to Iran, we must remind them of that too. Congress is standing together to send a message to the President, to the United Nations, and, critically, to Tehran that the U.N. arms embargo against Iran must not be allowed to lapse.

"And as long as I am House Majority Leader, I will do everything in my power to ensure that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. Israel’s security and strength are linked to the United States being a global leader, one that is credible, one that values our alliances, one that keeps its word. When others forget the importance of our alliances and the strength that comes from international engagement and their benefits to Israel’s security, we must remind them.

"We remind them too that Democrats and Republicans are working together to oppose BDS – both here in America and at the United Nations. That’s because we see BDS for what it is: a discriminatory movement. One that rejects the right of the Jewish people to live in a Jewish, democratic state in the land of their ancestors. Last July, the House passed a bipartisan resolution condemning BDS with the overwhelming support of Democrats and Republicans.

"I will read you a excerpt, because the words we used are important. It says: ‘Whereas, in contrast to protest movements that have sought racial justice and social change, the Global BDS Movement targeting Israel is not about promoting coexistence, civil rights, and political reconciliation but about questioning and undermining the very legitimacy of the country and its people.’
"America will not be fooled by BDS. Nor will America’s students be fooled. I’m told that there are more than 3,600 high school and college students at Policy Conference this year. Thank you, and welcome. You are on the front lines of this battle. As surely as Israel relies on the extraordinary young people of the IDF, it relies on you for steadfast support and success. You are here this week to gain knowledge that will help you in your mission to go back and share Israel’s story with your schools, your communities, and your peers across the country.

"Is there anyone here from the University of Maryland? My Maryland colleagues in Congress and I, including the late Elijah Cummings, were proud to support you when the student government considered a resolution to divest from Israel last year. That resolution, because of your hard work, was resoundingly defeated. No one should ever be made to feel threatened or ostracized for being pro-Israel. Not on campus, not anywhere.

“And when others forget what America and Israel strive for together, we must remind them. Both of our countries have struggled, over time, to live up to our founding ideals, and neither America nor Israel is perfect. Together, however, we both strive to make our countries more perfectly reflect our values. And where other nations might stifle criticism of policies or governments, together we welcome it. That is the hallmark of democracy. We should never fear it, and we should never let it become personal. That is how, together, we continue the march toward justice, equality, and opportunity for our people and for all people. Whether we are Democrats, Republicans or independents – together we must bear witness for Israel and explain why its security is so important, why history matters, and why bipartisanship matters.

"We can never let our fellow Americans forget why Israel matters. It too is a land of the free and a home of the brave. And we must remind them."