



The CSA led its 4<sup>th</sup> annual trip to Israel joined by DEPA. The trip was co-chaired by CSA Co-Chair, Fred Zeidman and CSA-DEPA Board Member, Mike McDonald.

Our group arrived March 7<sup>th</sup> for one week to learn more about Israel from both a historical and security angle. This included briefings from a variety of current and former government officials, thought leaders, and military experts, while crisscrossing the country—border by border.

The mission kicked off with a busy first day, which included a breakfast briefing by Ambassador Yoram Ettinger, former Counsel-General to the South West and a veteran of the CSA since its inception. This followed by a full-day Shabbat walking tour of the Old City, a festive lunch in the Old City hosted by philanthropist Pamela Fox Claman, and exploring the excavated Jerusalem Western Wall Tunnels at night. We saw the holy sites and learned about the important Jewish connection to Jerusalem and its diverse religious demographics.

Not to be outdone, the group helicoptered to the Golan Heights on Sunday and saw policy in the making— as Senator Graham arrived in Israel one day later to announce that US policy towards the Golan Heights has been officially recognized under Israeli control. This was particularly noteworthy as Senator Graham is a longtime friend of Fred and some members our group met him for drinks at the King David later that week.

Prior to our trip to the Golan Heights, we began the day with a private briefing by Energy Minister, Yuval Steinetz to learn about Israel's exciting developments in the energy sector. We then flew North to Mount Bental for a security briefing about Israel's border with Syria and learned about this strategic border, with Lt Col (Ret.) Sarit Zehavi of ALMA. We then enjoyed a working lunch in Majdal Shams, while learning more about the complex relationship re: the Druze in the Golan Heights. Following that, we helicoptered to Elyakim base, for a briefing and live simulation.

Monday, we started the day with a very detailed briefing by former UN Ambassador Dore Gold, followed by a somber visit to Yad Vashem, where we participated in a very moving wreath-laying ceremony. This followed by a visit to the city of David, a briefing with Bashar al-Masri, and dinner with Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser.

Tuesday, we were especially privileged to meet with US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman for a very candid and informative breakfast. Afterwards, we made our way down to Masada and the Dead Sea. Wednesday, we kicked off a jam packed day with a Seam Line tour of Jerusalem's borders, hosted by Lior Shilat of the Jewish Institute for Policy Research—followed by a slew of meetings including, Minister of Tourism, Yariv Levin, Speaker of the Knesset, Yuli Edelstein,



Deputy National Security Advisor, Reuven Azar, and dinner with former Director General of the PMO, Eli Groner.

On the final day of our trip, we drove down to the Gaza border and learned about the hardships and terror that residents faced in Southern Israel. We saw this firsthand with a visit to a kindergarten that also doubled as a bomb shelter. We were hosted by former COGAT Official, Col. (Res) Grisha Yakubovich. We changed hats with a visit to the Noble Energy Facility and culminated our trip with a dinner with former Israeli Ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren.

In short, it was an outstanding week for CSA. The group left Israel with a deep understanding of the threats Israel faces daily and the ongoing threat of Iran. More importantly, as I am sure many of you heard, two rockets were launched from Gaza into Tel Aviv on our ride to the airport. Thankfully, Iron-Dome helped intercept and destroy these rockets ensuring that no one was harmed. This is especially noteworthy as we were in proximity and had only just visited the Gaza border that morning. This only emphasizes the critical importance of our work in helping enhance the strong US-Israel relationship and gives new understanding to how vital that partnership and cooperation is to both countries.

Best,

Jennifer

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