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## **Congressional Junkets To Israel - Paying Homage To Israeli Lobby Power**

By Stephen Lendman

8-13-11

Eighty-one House members, one fifth of the chamber, will visit Israel during the traditional summer recess, instead of addressing festering local issues at home during the nation's gravest economic crisis too serious to ignore.

Arriving first were 26 Democrats together, including Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (MD). Another 55 Republicans will follow in two groups, including 47 freshmen.

Heading each are House Minority Leader Eric Cantor (VA) and House Whip Kevin McCarthy (CA). Spouses are also going at an estimated cost of \$8,000, including business-class flights, first-class hotels, meals, transportation, side trips, guides and incidentals.

Red carpet treatment is assured along with considerable pro-Israeli messaging, especially for new incoming freshmen. They'll meet with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres, as well as PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in Ramallah. Legitimate Hamas leaders are excluded.

Their entire week is choreographed and full, from early morning to late evening, including breakfast and dinner speakers, as well as meetings with other government officials.

For security reasons, their schedule isn't known, but while there, they'll get walking tours of Jerusalem's Old City, the Western Wall (Wailing Wall or Kotel), as well as visits to Masada, the Dead Sea, Holocaust memorial,

Golan, Lebanese border, and Tel Aviv, with moments to relax by the Mediterranean.

Most of all, they'll get intensive pro-Israeli messaging to assure one-sided support, reinforced by party leaders back home. At the same time, out of sight and mind will be:

- daily Israeli state terror;
- its planes bombing Gaza;
- extreme unaddressed needs of over 1.6 million besieged people;
- fishermen interdicted and, at times, shot at sea;
- Israeli snipers murdering farmers in their fields;
- regular security force incursions into Palestinian communities;
- almost daily arrests, detentions, and horrific treatment in Israeli prisons;
- children beaten and arrested;
- peaceful protests attacked viciously;
- bulldozed homes and dispossessed residents;
- Israel's Separation Wall, stealing about 12% of Palestinian land when completed; and
- severe repression, poverty, and misery of millions of Palestinians whose only offense is not being Jewish.

Whether or not they know or care, If Americans Knew Executive Director Alison Weir said not every congressional member is enthused about going. One congressional wife, in fact, who's been there before, said she and her husband never before experienced such pressure.

Another representative's staff member said those invited had no choice. If they don't go, AIPAC will target them for removal, and most likely succeed. "The staffer said that the Israel Lobby is far too powerful to ignore and that American voters have no knowledge of what's going on" because major media reports won't say.

The Jerusalem Post covered this story. So did Lebanon's Daily Star, other foreign media, Commentary magazine, and the Los Angeles Jewish Journal, explaining the elaborately planned "dog and pony show" messaging.

In contrast, it was practically ignored by America's corporate media, including The New York Times. The Washington Post discussed it on page 13, omitting important details.

It's typical of how America's media diss their regulars, excluding everything they most need to know.

At issue is why congressional members are in Israel or heading there shortly, on expense-paid week-long junkets, funded by an AIPAC affiliate - the American Israel Education Foundation (AIEF).

Created in 1990, its web site says it "provides grant monies to educate opinion leaders about the US-Israel relationship, to expand public awareness about issues affecting the Middle East and to encourage participation in public affairs, especially by students on college campuses where anti-Israeli propaganda is rampant."

In fact, nowhere in the world is pro-Israeli propaganda more scandalously intense than in America, especially from distorted one-sided major media reports, leaving Palestinian issues entirely excluded.

Mondoweiss co-editor Philip Weiss said pro-Israeli "liberal foundations" fund organizations like AIPAC and its AIEF spinoff. For example, the Kimmel Center gave AIEF \$3.5 million in recent years, according to its Form 990 filings.

Weiss said his research "shows that AIEF is getting tons of money from the same people who fund good liberal institutions," including universities, the arts, and issue-oriented groups like the Center for Reproductive Rights and ACLU.

AIEF also gets generous contributions from right-wing organizations. "And that's the point," says Weiss. "When you" examine who's paying for one-fifth of the House to visit Israel, it's coming from rich and powerful pro-Israeli foundations, "know(ing) which side their bread is buttered on," wanting Congress in tow supporting them.

At a time when millions of Americans are in dire need, Weir noted how angry they might be to learn that Congress gives tiny Israel "over \$8 million per day of American tax money" during the nation's greatest ever economic Depression when all available resources should stay at home helping them and ending it.

It's why America's media are silent, betraying their loyalists instead of serving them, especially on war and peace, corporatism, lawlessness, domestic repression, and all issues affecting Israel.

It's why everyone needs alternative sources to stay informed and join the fight for justice. It's the only way possible to get it.

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Also visit his blog site at [sjlendman.blogspot.com](http://sjlendman.blogspot.com) and listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network Thursdays at 10AM US Central time and Saturdays and Sundays at noon. All programs are archived for easy listening.

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