

Op-Ed

Advocacy groups criticize AIPAC 's recent endorsements

BY CHUCK TAUMAN

AIPAC, the largest pro-Israel lobby in the United States, recently formed two political action committees to give financial support to partisan candidates. One of these PACs released its first Congressional endorsements – 120 candidates, including dozens of Republicans who voted against certifying the 2020 presidential election results. These endorsements were made despite warnings from Jewish community leaders and former AIPAC officials that officially entering the campaign fray endangers AIPAC's declared political neutrality and bipartisanship.

One prominent endorsee on the list is Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, one of 37 AIPAC-endorsed Republicans who voted against certifying the election of President Biden. Rep. Jordan also refuses to testify before the Congressional committee probing the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, despite evidence of his involvement in events leading up to the violence that day. Another endorsee, Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, has compared Democrats to Nazis and has promoted white supremacist conspiracies of "population replacement."

Despite criticism, AIPAC is standing by its endorsements of these supposed pro-Israel lawmakers regardless of their anti-democratic positions on other issues. As AIPAC spokesman Marshall Wittmann said in a March 6 Haaretz article: "Unlike other groups which have ideological and partisan agendas, we are a single-issue organization that is focused on our mission of building bipartisan support in Congress to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship."

According to Haaretz, former AIPAC Executive Director Tom Dine and former chief lobbyist Douglas Bloomfield stressed the need to combat the perception that AIPAC has drifted toward the Republican Party. They warned against endorsing fringe candidates from either party, underscoring the need to judge candidates by their record

beyond Israel-related issues.

Other organizations that support Israel, such as J Street, Democratic Majority for Israel and Jewish Democratic Council of America, have pledged to not endorse candidates who support the "big lie."

"AIPAC's support for these candidates endangers American democracy and undermines the true interests and values of millions of American Jews and pro-Israel Americans who they often claim to represent," said J Street's national political director, Laura Birnbaum.

The CEO of Jewish Democratic Council of America, Halie Soifer, added that "this shouldn't be a tough call. We don't have to choose between our values, our democracy, our decency, what we know is right and support of the U.S.-Israel relationship." She said that the overwhelming majority of American Jews rejects this false dichotomy. Former Anti-Defamation League chief Abe Foxman criticized the endorsements as a "sad mistake," adding that "those who undermine America's democracy undermine America, and a weak America will not be able to stand and support its ally, Israel."

The bottom line: for generations, AIPAC and others have described Israel as "the only democracy" in the Middle East – indicating that they understand the importance of defending democracy. But how can AIPAC claim to defend democracy when it endorses lawmakers who clearly don't believe in democracy? Financially supporting those who opposed the peaceful transfer of power in 2020 is shameful political pandering. AIPAC owes its supporters a reasonable explanation for its anti-democratic positions, or face loss of support from Jews who support democracy – both here and in Israel.

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