

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks at a Hanukkah Reception

December 11, 2019

The President. Thank you very much, everybody. Wow, what a crowd. You know, I did this a little while ago with a very similar group of people. Some are here for the second time—Ron—but that's good. That means you love Israel, and you love everything we're doing. And I'm very honored to have you all here. Thank you very much.

And I want to thank our great First Lady. She's done the most incredible Christmas decorations. And we're excited to welcome so many friends to the White House as we wish you all a very happy Hanukkah.

We're delighted to be joined by our great Vice President, Mike Pence. And, Mike—where is Mike? Thank you, Mike. And we're thrilled—

Audience member. We love you!

The President. Thank you. I love you too. Thank you. And I love Ivanka.

Audience member. We love Melania!

The President. And I love Jared.

Audience member. We love Melania!

The President. And I love our First Lady. And our three great grandchildren are with us as well as Jared's incredible parents, sisters, family. And where is Charlie? Where is the great Charlie? Come on up here, Charlie. Come on up. Both of you, come on up. Come on up. Great people. Tremendous people. Great, great businessman. Very successful. And he loves—come on. Come on, Seryl. He loves—he loves our country and he loves Israel. I'm truly grateful to have the Jewish faith woven so deeply into my family.

I also want to recognize Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Steven? Where's Steven? Secretary Dave Bernhardt. Where is David? David is the largest landlord in the country by a factor of about 50. [*Laughter*] By a—when we think we big landlords, he controls half of the United States, actually. Secretary of the Interior. So, David, thank you very much for being here. Come on up, David. Steven, come on up. Come on up.

Special Envoy Elan Carr. Thank you, Elan. Thank you. Great job. Great job. Along with Representatives David Kustoff, Michael McCaul, and Lee Zeldin. Come on up, fellas. Come on up. What a job they have done. What a job. They're warriors.

Thanks as well to Sheldon and Miriam Adelson for the incredible love and affection. We are forever grateful to all that you do to strengthen the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel. Sheldon, Miriam, thank you very much. Thank you. You are great people. Incredible. And he's got no cash problem, that I can tell you. [*Laughter*] He's a fantastic man, a great visionary. He always wants to have a longer lease, a longer everything. I say: "Sheldon, it can be less than 50 years, okay? That's okay." Sheldon, thank you. So great.

I also want to extend my appreciation to Israelis' Ambassador—Israel's Ambassador to the United States, Ron Dermer. And Ron has been an incredible, tireless fighter for Israel and happens to love the United States very much.

And, Jason, thank you very much for being here. Your family, I've watched them grow. Jason was with me for how many years? Twenty-three years with me and then came down here,

and he's working on some tremendous things like peace in the Middle East. And thank you very much. And the family looks so beautiful. Thank you. Jason Greenblatt.

Here for this special occasion are two faith leaders who have tirelessly served our country. Thank you, Rabbi Moshe Margareten. Where is Rabbi? Where are you, Rabbi?

Audience member. Behind you!

Audience member. He's behind you.

The President. Oh, hi, Rabbi. [Laughter]

And Rabbi Zvi Boyarsky. Thank you, Rabbi. Thank you.

This evening we come together to commemorate the remarkable story of Hanukkah. More than 2,000 years ago, an oppressive dictator defied [defiled]* the Holy Temple and persecuted the Jewish people. But a group of brave Jewish warriors rose up, defeated a powerful army, and reclaimed their glorious destiny. As the Jewish patriots searched for oil to rededicate the temple, they only found enough to light the menorah for 1 day. They needed a little help from Sheldon, I think, right? [Laughter] Sheldon would have found a lot of oil immediately.

However, that small batch of oil kept the flame burning for 8 days, an eternal reminder of the Jewish people's resilience, endurance, and faith. And that's so true. Across the centuries, the Jewish people have endured violence and oppression beyond measure. But no cruelty can overcome the might of your spirit, and no destruction can crush the eternal strength of your resolve. And that is so true.

This evening—that's true. [Applause] Go ahead. Let's give you a hand on that. Wow. It's true.

And we have a man that I have, by the way, great respect: Mark Levin. Where is Mark Levin? What a show. Where is Mark? Where is Mark? He's over here. Lee, send him up here, will you, please? Mark, come on up. Come on up here. Mark—the great Mark Levin. What a show. You know he had a very successful radio show. Who knew that face was going to work so well on television? [Laughter] Number-one show.

Come on, Mark, wherever you may be. Where are you? I saw him. Is that Mark? Come on, Mark. Get your way up. Make a path. Like we used to say in the military, "Make a path." "Make a path." What a great guy. What a great show.

So who thought this guy was going to be a television star? Right? [Laughter] Hot as can be on radio. All of a sudden, he tries the television thing—the number-one show. Mark, I don't know how—come on. Both of you come up here. Come on. Come on up, Mark. Yes, come on, on the dais. See? He hasn't gotten used to being a star yet. [Laughter] He's so big. Right, Mark? Come on over. And by the way—come here. Get over here. Say a couple of words. Come on.

Radio and television show host Mark R. Levin. It's an honor to be here with the first Jewish President of the United States. [Laughter] And if he isn't, he should be. [Laughter]

I want to thank you. I want to thank you for everything you have done for the Jewish people. I want to thank you for everything you've done for the Jewish people's ancestral homeland. You are going to be remembered there for a thousand years. And I want to thank you for what you've done for the United States of America. And I want you to know that we will not leave our general on the battlefield without our support, period. God bless you.

The President. Thank you, Mark.

* White House correction.

Mr. Levin. Thank you.

The President. Fantastic guy. Thank you, Mark.

So this evening we are profoundly honored to be joined by Leonard Gordon. Leonard is a Holocaust survivor who endured the depths of evil in the Nazi genocide that murdered 6 million Jewish men, women, and children.

In 1944, he was imprisoned in a concentration camp when he heard the Allied victory in Normandy. That was a big, big day. It was then that he knew the Allies would defeat the Nazi regime. He held on to that hope until he was liberated by the American soldiers.

Soon, Leonard came to America, got married, and helped build submarines for the United States Navy. And today, Leonard is 94, and he doesn't look a day over 90, I'm telling you. *[Laughter]* I'm only kidding, Leonard. And, Leonard, you lift up our entire Nation.

My administration stands in unwavering solidarity with the Jewish people, Leonard. Where is Leonard? Where is Leonard? Where are you, Leonard? You're a good-looking man. Wow. You're looking good.

Well, we do; we stand in absolute joy of you, Leonard. And what you've done is fantastic. And where the Jewish people are cherished and, really, our great friends and our allies. And we want to thank you for being with us. And keep living well. Okay, Leonard? Keep living well. Great job.

Two years ago, I recognized the true capital of Israel, and we proudly opened the American Embassy in Jerusalem. Right? And then, I called up your great Ambassador, David Friedman, and I said, "David, give me a little, 1-minute-or-less lesson on the Golan Heights." And he said, "What are you thinking about?" I said, "Well, I'm thinking about doing sovereignty by Israel over the Golan Heights. Give me a little about it." We talked about the safety, the security. I think he told me everything he knew. It took a little more than a minute. And I said, "Let's do it." So we got the Golan Heights—sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

And then, I asked Charlie Kushner. I said: "Charlie, let me ask you, what's bigger for the Jewish people: Giving the Embassy to Jerusalem—it becomes the capital of Israel. What's bigger? That, or the Golan Heights?" He said, "Neither." I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "The biggest thing of all is what you did by ending the Iran nuclear catastrophe." I think that's true. *[Applause]* I think that's true.

So we did that. And then, earlier today we took another historic action to defend the Jewish people. And a few hours ago, I signed a groundbreaking Executive order to combat anti-Semitic prejudice.

And you know, our politicians have been trying to get this through Congress. For a long time they've been talking about it. And finally, they had a watered-down version of it, and it didn't get through. So I authorized a very strong version of it, because I deal with myself. *[Laughter]* And Jared was so helpful. And we got something done that's much more powerful, much stronger, and I can sign it myself. *[Laughter]* And we're very happy with it. And here it is. Here it is.

[At this point, the President displayed the signed Executive order.]

Okay? So we figured we got to get it done. You know, I learned a lot from Mark. That was good. Right, Mark? He said: "Just do it yourself. It's a lot easier." It's true. *[Laughter]*

But my Executive order prohibits Federal funding to any college or university that spreads, promotes, tolerates, or supports anything having to do with anti-Semitism. We're delivering a powerful message to American academia. Not all of it is very good. Some of it's wonderful, but not all of it. And it seems to be going in the wrong direction. Although I will tell you, a lot of

strides have been made over the last year. There's a lot of enthusiasm for what we believe, what we think.

But they got out of control. I said, "If you want to receive Federal dollars, you must reject anti-Semitism." And if they don't, they don't get hundreds of millions of dollars. You have to see the money that we pour into these colleges, and then they do what they were doing. So we will not permit anti-Jewish bigotry on our college campuses. And if they want to do that, it's going to be extremely costly. It will be amazing how quickly they stop.

My administration also forcefully condemns the so-called boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement, the BDS. My administration will not stand for these malicious attacks upon the State of Israel. Discrimination against members of Jewish faith—and the Jewish faith, it has to be confronted at every turn. And we will confront it at every turn. There is no tolerance for hate.

In the wake of yesterday's horrible shooting at the New Jersey kosher supermarket and a sinister attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Poway—you know, the Poway synagogue; that was so terrible—we pledge to be vigilant, determined, and united in defense of Jewish Americans. That's what we're doing. This should have taken place a long time ago.

So this evening we give thanks to the Jewish community for its irreplaceable contributions to science, art, music, medicine, culture, philanthropy, public policy, and every other aspect of our national life. Incredible job. Incredible people.

Last year, Rabbi Moshe and Rabbi Zvi helped lead thousands of Jewish Americans in urging Congressmen, judges, prosecutors, and Jewish communities to support the First Step Act. That's—you know what that is? Criminal justice reform. I don't know why they called it the First Step Act, because everyone knows it as criminal justice reform, which they were unable to get.

Jared Kushner got involved. Ivanka got involved. I liked a lot what I saw. A lot of the most conservative people in Congress, Mark, got involved: Ted Cruz and Mike Lee and many others. Many others. Chuck Grassley. And we have it at both sides—liberal, conservative. It was a really an amazing thing. It was an amazing thing how it came together.

Rabbi Moshe and Rabbi Zvi, we salute your leadership, and we thank you very much for the job you did. And you helped us greatly.

This evening we once again show our appreciation to the Jewish American community for the immeasurable ways you strengthen and inspire our Nation. We stand in awe of your extraordinary contributions to our county and to humanity.

And now I invite Rabbi Zvi to say a few words before Rabbi Moshe lights the menorah. Thank you all. And may you all have a truly blessed Hanukkah and a fantastic year. Thank you all very much.

Please. Please.

Aleph Institute Director of Constitutional Advocacy Rabbi Zvi Boyarsky. Thank you. Beautiful remarks. Beautiful.

Audience member. Four more years!

Audience member. Four more years!

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you very much. Please.

Rabbi Boyarsky. Thank you. Mr. President and Madam First Lady, thank you for hosting this stunning pre-Hanukkah party. It's truly an honor to be here. And God bless you for today's signing of the Executive order "Combating Anti-Semitism."

Let us begin with a short prayer in memory of the victims of yesterday's horrendous shooting in Jersey City. Let us say, together: *Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad.*

The Hanukkah lights are symbolic of the flame of Godliness, the essential goodness embedded within each human being. Mr. President, back in the seventies, the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, called to nurture this goodness and allow its free expression also among those incarcerated in our prison system.

There's an essential human dignity in the ability to produce and accomplish, to emulate our Creator, the Rebbe taught. There's a basic divinity in the freedom to soar, to transform, to bring good to the world without confinement or constraint. The Rebbe advocated that, through good behavior and participating in educational programs, by demonstrating remorse and a will to lead a life of honesty and integrity, prisoners should be able to earn a reduced sentence and the ability to contribute goodness maximally to the world.

Mr. President, through the monumental First Step Act, you have helped countless worthy individuals reach their potential and share their unique divine light with the world. A long, elusive goal, but thank God, and with a huge thank you to Jared and his relentless team, this administration got it done.

Mr. President, in a recent speech, you said: "My vow from the beginning has been to stand up for those who have been forgotten, neglected, overlooked, and ignored. My goal is to give a voice to the voiceless." With God's help, you have delivered, big time, just as you promised.

To Uzel Rubashkin, who spent much of his childhood praying that every knock on the door was his father's miraculous return, and to so many children like him, you have been God's angel and the answer to their heartfelt prayers. This includes Stet Frazier and his family. After serving 25 years for a first-time nonviolent offense, Stet learned that he was due for immediate release under the First Step Act. Inspiringly, Stet actually petitioned the court, and successfully so, to remain in prison for another 10 days so that he could finish teaching a self-help course for his fellow man. In the company of his eight overjoyed children, Stet now continues to spread a message of hope and personal accountability at schools throughout North Carolina's Mitchell County.

Mr. President, by championing reform and by using your executive powers for clemency, you have highlighted your innate belief in the human capacity for change and redemption. So, on behalf of Aleph's founder and chairman, Rabbi Sholom Lipskar, and on behalf of Gary Apfel, who is here with us today and who altruistically and successfully worked tirelessly on this and other vital efforts, and especially on behalf of the countless Americans who were given a new lease on life, thank you, thank you, thank you. We are deeply grateful for this miracle and blessing.

Mr. President, with your permission, I'd like to salute Attorney General Barr, an inspiring beacon of light in the war to dispel the darkness of anti-Semitism, as well as the entire DOJ and BOP for their remarkable work in ensuring that the human soul is treated with dignity and can shine, even in limited environments.

Rabbi Moshe Margareten, founder of Tzedek Association, will momentarily prepare us for Hanukkah by demonstrating how the menorah will be kindled on the holiday. Since 2009, he spearheaded the effort to introduce effective prisoner reform through mobilizing community leaders and laymen around the country to meet the Members of Congress and garnered support

from more than 150 former prosecutors and judges. These tremendous efforts ultimately came to fruition with the First Step Act.

Mr. President and Madam First Lady, may God Almighty shower his blessings upon you. And through our collective increase in acts of goodness and kindness, may we soon merit a world filled with everlasting peace and light with the final redemption.

God bless you, and God bless America.

The President. Please. Please.

[*At this point, Tzedek Association Founder and Director Rabbi Moshe Margareten lit the menorah.*]

The President. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Have a great Hanukkah. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:32 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Adviser to the President Ivanka M. Trump, her husband, White House Senior Adviser Jared C. Kushner, and their children Arabella, Joseph, and Theodore; Nicole Kushner Meyer and Dara Kushner Orbach, sisters of Senior Adviser Kushner; U.S. Special Envoy To Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Elan S. Carr; Sheldon G. Adelson, chairman and chief executive officer, Las Vegas Sands Corp., and his wife, Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Miriam Adelson; U.S. Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt; and Silver Spring, MD, resident Leonard Gordon. He also referred to Executive order 13899. Rabbi Boyarski referred to Jersey City, NJ, Police Department Detective Joseph Seals and Jersey City residents Leah Mindel Ferenz, Douglas M. Rodríguez, and Moshe Deutsch, who were killed in the shooting at a cemetery and kosher grocery store in Jersey City on December 10; Sholom M. Rubashkin, whose 27-year sentence for bank fraud and other charges was commuted by the President on December 20, 2017; Camilla, GA, resident Steffany "Stet" Frazier, who was released from prison on August 2; and Gary Apfel, special counsel, Pepper Hamilton LLP. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 12.

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Names: Adelson, Miriam; Adelson, Sheldon G.; Boyarsky, Zvi; Carr, Elan S.; Cruz, R. Edward "Ted"; Dermer, Ron; Friedman, David M.; Gordon, Leonard; Grassley, Charles E.; Greenblatt, Jason; Kushner Meyer, Nicole; Kushner, Arabella R.; Kushner, Charlie; Kushner, Jared C.; Kushner, Joseph F.; Kushner, Seryl; Kushner, Theodore J.; Kustoff, David F.; Lee, Michael S.; Levin, Mark R.; Margareten, Moshe; McCaul, Michael T.; Mnuchin, Steven T.; Orbach, Dara Kushner; Pence, Michael R.; Trump, Ivanka M.; Trump, Melania; Zeldin, Lee M.

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