

Pence roots administration's support for Israel in faith

July 19, 2017

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Vice President Mike Pence told evangelical supporters of Israel that God had a hand in creating the state of Israel, and Pence said his support for the country is rooted in his faith.

He also promised the Trump administration will move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

“Indeed, though Israel was built by human hands, it is impossible not to sense that just beneath its history lies the hand of heaven,” Pence told the annual summit of Christians United for Israel July 17.

The group, founded by San Antonio pastor John Hagee, bills itself as the largest pro-Israel organization in the United States. It is composed largely of evangelicals and met in Washington in part to celebrate a new administration its members consider far friendlier toward Israel than its predecessor.

Linked to dispensational theology

Many evangelicals look upon the founding of the modern state of Israel in 1948 and the “ingathering” of the Jews as a necessary step toward the end times, when they believe Jews either will accept Christianity or face eternal damnation.

Pence thrilled his audience, quoting from the Prophet Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones: “Ezekiel prophesied, and I quote, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you and you shall live.’”

“The state of Israel and her people bear witness to God’s faithfulness as

well as their own. How unlikely was Israel's birth? How more unlikely has been her survival and how confounding against the odds has been her thriving?" he said.

Since Israel's founding, Pence continued, "the Jewish people have awed the world with their strength of will and their strength of character."

American Jewish voters, however, preferred Democrat Hillary Clinton to Republican Donald Trump by a nearly 3-1 ratio. Few cited Israel as a top reason for their choice.

Move the embassy to Jerusalem

Pence also promised Trump would make good on his own promise to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. "It is not a question of 'if.' It is only 'when,'" the vice president said to cheers.

Although the move is a priority of Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu and many conservative Jews and Christians, Palestinian leaders have said it would stymie peace negotiations.

Congress passed a law in 1995 requiring the move, but every president since has found it practical to delay it for fear of damaging chances for peace. Trump did the same last month, signing the waiver—which expires every six months—that keeps the embassy in Tel Aviv.

Jerusalem is holy to Christians, Muslims and Jews and is claimed as a capital by Israel but also the Palestinians, for the future state they aim to build on disputed land now controlled by Israel.

At the summit, Hagee dismissed any Palestinian rights to Jerusalem, a stance even many Israelis consider too rigid and an obstacle to peace.

Trump has reneged on his promise to move the embassy, said Barbara Goldberg Goldman, a member of the executive committee of the National

Jewish Democratic Council.

Goldman, who listened to Pence's speech, said Pence also was wrong to claim the new administration is any more committed to Israel than the last.

"In terms of deliverables with respect to Israel, nothing has happened," Goldman said. And many, including former Israeli President Shimon Peres, considered President Obama a steadfast friend of Israel.

"To present this as a new day? No. It is a continuation of the strong unwavering bond that Israel has had with America and America has had with Israel," she said.