

IN depth profiles ON THE WHO'S WHO

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Photo courtesy of the office of Congressman Rush Holt

"For anybody who looks at my record, I've supported every resolution supporting Israel and every congressional action to strengthen Israel."

A Rush to Judgment!

Congressman Rush Holt®

By Aliza Davidovit

"When you are courting a nice girl an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder a second seems like an hour. That's relativity."

Albert Einstein

Is it any surprise that the Jewish person Congressman Rush Holt (D-NJ) admires most is physicist Albert Einstein? Holt, the eight-term congressman who is now running for the U.S. Senate, is himself a brilliant scientist and one of only two physicists in Congress. Frankly, there is even something "scientific" about his general comportment. Holt, by pleasant contradistinction to the gascons galore in government, is straightforward, matter-of-fact, honest and economical with his words. And now it all comes down to whether you like what he has to say. And with Einstein and his famous theory still in mind, *that*, my dear readers, is *relative*.

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As Holt told me in our interview: “We live in very polarized times.” For certain, that polarization exists when it comes to the State of Israel. The modern mindset is: You are either with us or against us; it’s black or white. But a symbolic look at the very source of wisdom—the brain—may reveal it’s all in the “grey” matter.

Congressman Holt says he is one of Israel’s best friends. He adamantly believes that a strong relationship with Israel is necessary, both for ensuring that Israel remains a democratic outpost in the Middle East and for ensuring stability in the region. “Israel, like all nations in the world, has the right and responsibility to respond in self-defense,” he says. And to help ensure Israel is indeed able to defend itself, Holt has voted, “aye” to ensuring Israel’s qualitative military edge and has approved \$35 billion since he has been in Congress to advance that end. The Congressman says he wants the message to be unequivocal: You don’t mess with Israel.

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But then came the “red-hot cinder” that burned up the Jewish State’s staunchest defenders and still has some fuming. Holt signed on to a letter with 53 other congressmen asking President Obama to advocate for the easing of the blockade in Gaza for humanitarian purposes. Many, including New Jersey’s own Rabbi Shmuley Boteach—who had a congressional run of his own—said “that letter falsely accused Israel of practicing collective punishment against the Palestinians and libeled Israel by fraudulently accusing the Jewish State of denying essential medicines and food from entering Gaza in the blockade.” In addition, some other signatories to the letter have not exactly been Israel’s best friends. Further, Holt’s affiliation and endorsement by JStreet, a left-leaning AIPAC-wannabe, has also left a tenuous taste on some tongues.

But that it is not the only letter Holt signed his name to. Following the Gaza Flotilla incident, when even the President figuratively pushed Netanyahu off in a precarious dingy to surf the rough waves of international opprobrium alone, Holt signed onto an AIPAC letter which strongly supported Israel and its then-response to the flotilla fiasco.

Holt also told me that he is deeply regretful for the backlash he got because of the Gaza letter: “I caught flack from people who didn’t understand it or who didn’t even read it,” Holt shares. “People felt it was encouraging Hamas against Israel, which was not what it was about at all. I believe in Israel and what it stands for, and I want it to survive and thrive.” Holt had a face-to-face meeting with Netanyahu in Israel and they spoke about the matter. “In the end, Israel ended up easing the blockade,” he points out. “The letter just urged them to do what they were already ready to do.”

But Netanyahu is not the only attractive site Holt saw on his visits to the Holy Land. Holt, who is the only Quaker in Congress, visited many kibbutzim which he says were his favorite part of Israel. And though he says a feeling of spiritualism pervades the entire country, he strongly admires the cooperative and effective communities they have built,



each with their own unique character. In fact Holt’s daughter, Rachel, lived on a kibbutz for a year and walked away with great admiration for them as well. She also walked away speaking a bit more Hebrew than her father. But among the few Hebrew words he does know is *shalom*, a word with multiple meanings, including the ever-evasive one—*peace*.

Holt is strongly supportive of the renewed peace talks led by Secretary of State John Kerry. “I think Israel is less and less secure year by year and the current situation is not sustainable,” the Congressman says.

“Peace negotiations are vital, and the only time we have made any progress in moving talks forward is when the United States has been actively involved. It depends on us to get things going for peace and security.”

But Holt is under no illusions and does not believe, like some do, that the Middle East will be the new Disneyland if the Israel-Palestinian issue goes away. “There are some countries that want to blame everything on Israel and point to the Palestinian problem as they profess to be concerned about Palestinians,” he says. “And yet those same countries do nothing to help the Palestinians.”

Their agenda is quite clear to this senatorial candidate who is well aware of the volatility of the region and the threat that Hezbollah, HAMAS and Syria continue to pose to the Jewish Homeland. As regards the Iranian threat, after the protracted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Holt will back Israel with bucks but not with boots. “I don’t advocate committing any American troops to any new foreign engagement now,” Holt says.

“I don’t think the public would stand for it.”

And of late, he has certainly become ever more familiar with the American public. For the past two months Congressman Rush Holt has been touring his state trying to do in that short time what usually takes candidates two years to do: sell their message and sell *themselves* to voters. Holt said jokingly that campaigning across New Jersey proved one thing to him: The state is much bigger than it looks on the map. As for the Jewish Homeland, he assures that despite others’ nefarious intentions, he intends to keep it on the map—with Jerusalem as its undivided capital.

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