

# AIPAC Policy Conference 2016

*Editor's Note: AIPAC held its annual policy conference in Washington, DC, March 20-22 this year. Many Charlotteans were in attendance. Here are some of their impressions.*

**Harry Lerner:**

My wife, Gloria, and I attended our tenth American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) convention in Washington, DC, on March 20-22. AIPAC organizes annual policy conventions with impressive speakers and thought provoking break out discussion sessions. AIPAC consistently gives a unique bipartisan perspective on how to best support Israel, and this year was no different. But what made our experience so inspiring was how this singular and

spectacular message was conveyed by both parties during a time when our country is in a deep and divisive partisan struggle.

Israel, indeed, is a great unifier. There were fantastic (and some brilliant) addresses by Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump, and John Kasich. And these were only a few of the many fascinating speakers we heard at the conference. The overall message of supporting Israel stayed constant, though the tenor of how to do so was sometimes filtered differently.

And in addition to these larger forum speakers, we were all invited to join breakout sessions on topics ranging from the American response to the Iran Nuclear

Treaty to the current and future developments in the Middle East. These more intimate forums where we were able to ask panelists questions and join the follow-up discussions, created a more interactive experience. We couldn't help but feel more informed and energized. And though not political, I was nonetheless mesmerized by the daily discussions and demonstrations of the latest Israeli innovation in health care and medical research.

We were 18,000 strong in attendance this year - including 4,000 college activists selected because of their leadership positions at their respective college campuses, and 2,000 Christian supporters of Israel. Together, though from different places, different political parties, different generations, and even different religions, we entered the Capitol to lobby Congress with one vision, divided into three big messages: 1) strict enforcement of the Iran Nuclear agreement, 2) support and extension of the security assistance provided by the \$3.1 billion foreign aid request, and 3) support for direct negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians for a two state solution.

The power of AIPAC is our ability to collectively take small steps - just once a year, for three days. Because even small steps when we do them together can be massive movements that change the future. Join us next year and become a part of ensuring Israel's bright and powerful future.

**Robert Adler:**

This was my second consecutive AIPAC convention. Last year was so exciting that I signed up for 2016 before it was over. It's an

incredible feeling to know that you'll be in a place with 18,000 Jews and Christians, blacks, whites, men, women, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, all gathering together for one cause; to support Israel.



Knowing we would have politicians in office and those running for office coming to speak, I knew there would be more than usual hyperbole and political rhetoric. While AIPAC is non-partisan, I knew that all of the politicians would be up there with their best pro-Israel rhetoric but that there would probably be a few barbs thrown by the candidates either at each other or at the current administration. There are some who believe that the Obama administration has at times not been in Israel's corner and Trump was the one person who brought that point forward to a rousing standing applause. AIPAC later on sent an email apology to all attendees in case anyone was offended. Well, it's an election year and politicians will say what they need to say to get votes.

One of the greatest things about the convention is the Innovation Showcase. Both on stage and then in the AIPAC Village, several Israeli companies and organizations showed off how their products and services not only help Israelis but people around the world. From a device which can allow doctors to perform ob/gyn exams in remote areas of the world via a video device attached to a cell phone, to Israeli baseball, to a more stable wheelchair capable of going over rough terrain, Israel continues to lead the world in innovation.

During the days there were a wide variety of breakout sessions to choose to attend. Among others I attended one on Economic Development in the West Bank which focused on US efforts to help spur economic growth, and one about Boko Haram in Nigeria where my daughter Danielle Adler did the speaker introduction. It focused on how they are the deadliest terrorist group on Earth today with little publicity about that compared to ISIS or Al Qaeda. There were sessions on everything from Israeli culinary scene to LGBT rights to BDS on campus. The only downside is not enough time to attend them all. Another two days would have been great.

Finally, there were the protesters outside. Maybe because it was an election year versus 2015 there was a larger anti-Israel pro-Palestinian contingent along with ultra-Orthodox Jews who protest against Israel's existence. I ventured into the crowd but knew enough to not say anything and was just there to see what people were saying. Unfortunately, none of it was about trying to achieve peace. Much of the rhetoric was about claims of Israeli war crimes, apartheid, genocide, economic slavery, and eventually a fight broke out after I had left. If the protestors would only put that much effort into pushing the peace process along maybe it would happen.

Like last year, I signed up for 2017 before 2016 was even over and will bring my son to his first conference. It's not enough for each of us to understand the issues but our children need to also. Policy conference is a great platform to learn about how we can all support Israel in our own way and together ensure its continued existence and prosperity. ✨

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## Eat Pizza & Raise Money for Familial Dysautonomia

By Natalie Cohen

Many of you know my sister, Frannie Cohen, and for anyone that does not know her: trust me, if you did, you would admire her almost as much as I do. She has a rare genetic condition called Familial Dysautonomia (FD). FD affects her autonomic and sensory nervous system, impacting practically every major system within her body. I could go on and give a long list of what people with FD cannot do and everything that is impacted by the condition, but that list is not nearly as important as what people with FD can do. Frannie works hard on a daily basis to overcome any obstacle that comes her way and continues to thrive in her life and be an inspiration to everybody who crosses paths with her.

FD used to be categorized as a fatal disease, but advances in treatment have dramatically extended the lives of people with FD, giving them more and more opportunities to thrive. Nonetheless, there are still many symptoms that prevent my sister and her friends from living normal lives and every day is a new challenge; against all odds, they always overcome these challenges

and prove to be stronger than they are accredited.

This year I am holding my third annual fundraising event in honor of my sister. I have raised over \$5,000 for the Dysautonomia Foundation and I would like to see that number grow. Please join my family and me at Brooklyn Pizza Parlor located at 7725 Colony Rd, Charlotte, NC (Colony Shopping Center at the corner of Colony and Rea Road) on Wednesday, May 18 for the event. When you order at the counter say that you are eating there in honor of Frannie and 15% of the proceeds will be donated to the Dysautonomia Foundation. The more people that go, the more fun it will be so bring your friends and family and eat for a good cause.

**What:** A Fundraising event for the Dysautonomia Foundation in honor of Frannie Cohen

**When:** Wednesday, May 18 from 4-9 PM

**Where:** Brooklyn Pizza Parlor (7725 Colony Rd, Charlotte, NC 28226)

For more information or if you would like to make a donation please visit [www.famdys.org/eat-forfd](http://www.famdys.org/eat-forfd). ✨