

November 29, 2017

Rep. Jeffrey Sanchez
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St.
Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Rep. Sanchez,

It has been reported that you are planning to join a JCRC-sponsored and funded trip to Israel next month. If this is true, we respectfully urge that you reconsider.

We, members of Massachusetts Peace Action, have long opposed these lobby-paid Israel trips for public officials as providing a one-sided view of a conflict that is important for American citizens and their elected representatives to understand. The JCRC may call this a “study trip” but the plain fact is that the itinerary and programs are organized to support the official Israeli view, regardless of whatever token attention may be paid to other voices. Further, the trips will likely include visits to Israel-occupied parts of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights, whose annexation by Israel is recognized neither by the international community nor by the United States. There is nothing objective about this “study.”

Opinions may differ about the foregoing general objections, but there should be little doubt that such a trip also raises serious issues of conflict of interest.

JCRC – a registered lobbying organization – has been pressing the legislature to pass H.1685/S.1689. As you probably are aware, H.1685 is aimed at penalizing supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This is a movement aimed at pressuring Israel to live up to its obligations under international law and human rights principles. Claims by the JCRC that there will be no “lobbying” during this trip are disingenuous when the JCRC itself has drafted and is actively promoting a bill to be voted on by legislators who are on an all-expense-paid trip costing JCRC many thousands of dollars.

We understand that you may view the trip disclosure forms as alleviating the conflict of interest. However, these forms do not require disclosure of the fact that JCRC is a registered lobbying organization, that JCRC is actively lobbying for the anti-BDS bill currently under consideration in the State Administration Committee, and that you are Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee where the bill would go next if reported favorably out of the State Administration Committee. Since the form does not ask about these basic elements of a conflict of interest, it seems rather to avoid than to alleviate the conflict. But the conflict is real and to many Massachusetts citizens disturbingly so.

We believe that participation of our elected representatives in such a lobby-paid trip damages the credibility and reputation of the legislature. We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues at greater length.

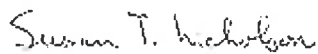
Yours truly,



Cole Harrison
Executive Director
25 Cotton St, Roslindale

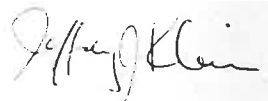


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