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US SENATOR BENJAMIN CARDIN CALLS OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S CHOICE OF CHARLES FREEMAN "A POOR DECISION," BUT BACKS PRESIDENT'S VIEW OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Maintains that charges of "Jewish Lobby" influence are anti-Semitic

April 1, 2009 (Fort Lee, NJ) -- On the heels of Charles Freeman's withdrawal for consideration as chair of the National Intelligence Council in the Obama administration, US Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) tells Shalom TV that while he opposed the selection of the former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia to the important security post, he remains confident in the country's national policy toward the Middle East.



"This was a poor decision to go forward with his appointment, but I am very comfortable with the president's judgment as it relates to the Middle East," notes Senator Cardin, who serves on the Committee on Foreign Relations. "His two most important appointments to date are Secretary of State Clinton and Senator Mitchell as the Special Envoy [for the Middle East]. And we have two individuals there that are well-experienced in the Middle East and have demonstrated a knowledge of the circumstances in the Middle East, which should give Israel comfort."

When asked by Shalom TV President Mark S. Golub how someone who characterized Israel as "the obstacle to peace" in the region would be considered for such a sensitive position, Senator Cardin relays the mechanics of building an administration.

"First of all, the president has to appoint thousands of individuals to important positions that are presidential appointees. Some require confirmation from the Senate; some do not. There are tens of thousands of appointments.

"Now I must tell you, the president of the United States does not spend a lot of time laboring over each one of those appointments. These are positions that need to be filled...and the vetting process is not as complete as many of us would like to see for individual positions."

However, when pressed for details on the Charles Freeman nomination, Senator Cardin claims "no knowledge as to how this appointment was made."

"Since it's been withdrawn, I haven't given it much thought--but I have no knowledge as to how it went forward," he admits. "As I've said before, the person never should have been appointed, but I don't think it's a reflection on the president or the administration."

On rumblings that the "Jewish Lobby" was somehow responsible for having Charles Freeman withdraw his name, Senator Cardin responds that he considers it anti-Semitic to place religious overtones on the work of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

(MORE)

"In some cases, it ['Jewish Lobby'] is code words for language that clearly promotes anti-Semitism. Look, you can voice your views as it relates to the American political process--that's certainly fair game. But to try to bring religion into the politics here is wrong.

"[AIPAC is] broadly based as far as its representation in the community. It recognizes the importance of Israel's strength to the United States; it is a pro-American organization that understands the importance of an ally that shares our principles, our views of democracy--a western democracy--in a very critical part of the world where we don't have too many friends that share our philosophy.

"There's clearly a strong interest in the United States and that's been shown by the type of activities that they've been involved with. That's perfectly appropriate; that's what the First Amendment of our Constitution protects, the right to petition your government. But to equate that to an ethnic community in the United States is wrong, and that's where you cross the line.

"You can disagree with Israel--and God knows there's Israelis who disagree with their government all the time; but when you start to place that based upon the Jewish People generally then you are crossing a line of what is appropriate. So you've got to be very careful when people make that view; I think it does invoke anti-Semitic types of activities."

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