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Elie Wiesel / Enckersment

Elie Wiesel Endorsement

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Good afternoon. One of the greatest privileges and blessings in my life, for a number of years now, has been my friendship with Elie and Marion Wiesel, and I'm delighted that Marion is here with us, she'll be leaving to go to another appointment, but I wanted specifically to thank her for her friendship and support. And, like so many people around the world, I am gratified and humbled by the work and life that Elie Wiesel has led. And how he has become our most vigorous guardian and nurturer of memory. He has been our teacher enlightening all of us about the peril of indifference. He has been our conscience - prodding us to listen to the victims of indifference, hatred and evil. And he has been our prod to act - to stand up to hate and to punish hate crimes wherever we see them.

Elie and I are here today, first and foremost, as citizens who believe that we all have an obligation to work for a world that is truly a world at peace - a world in which people understand and respect our differences, in which children are taught the lessons of tolerance and respect for others from an early age. As we stand here, at the dawn of this new century we have to work together, to learn from the terrible lessons of the last century, and to end all forms of discrimination and hatred.

That is why I believe that the Congress of the United States should act now, to pass hate crimes legislation that has been pending, as we know. And this legislation is essential to strengthen current law by making it easier to prosecute crimes based on race, color, religion and national origin and to expand coverage to include crimes based on sexual orientation, gender and disability. The Senate, with the leadership of Senator Edward Kennedy, has passed legislation. With just a few weeks left in this session of Congress, it is time for the House Republican leadership to action now, and pass it, and send it to the President for signing. Elie and I are also here today, as citizens whose most fervent hope is that there will be a lasting peace agreement in the Middle East that will secure a safe and guarantee peace for all the inhabitants of Israel. But we are also here to call attention to a stubborn obstacle to that

peace. We are here because we believe do not that the world can afford to be indifferent to the lessons being taught to the children of Gaza and the West Bank. This is an issue that I raised last year at the Orthodox Union -that I talked about since then, and which concerns me greatly. Because what the children of Gaza and West Bank are learning in their schools today will not free them from the shadow of war and violence - but shackle them to the hatred and racism of the past.

In the last decade -- with the Oslo and Wye Accords -- we have moved closer than ever to realizing the dream of a real and lasting secure peace in the Middle East. The end of the negotiations at Camp David this summer was a disappointment for those of us committed to the belief that Israel's security is best achieved by a lasting secure peace. We cannot falter on the road to peace. We must continue to support the leaders in their effort to reach an agreement at the negotiating table.

But we all know that significant challenges remain.

A vital provision of the Oslo and Wye Accords was an agreement by the Palestinian Authority to remove anti-Semitic rhetoric from their school textbooks and government publications.

For generations, lessons of hatred and violence have been a vital part of the curriculum in Palestinian schools. Not only history books, but maps, grammar exercises, and language lessons have been deliberately infused with incendiary ideas and images. Ideas and images designed to deny the legitimacy of Israel, to encourage violence, and to foster racist attitudes among a new generation of Palestinians.

It has now been seven years since Oslo - and two since Wye. And we have not yet seen compliance with this provision.

This September, for example, the Palestinian Authority introduced new textbooks for the first and sixth grades. But maps in a sixth grade textbook do not identify Israel or Tel Aviv. A chapter on tolerance speaks of tolerance for Christians, for different sports teams and political parties, but not of Jews. When Israel is mentioned, it is as an "occupying" force. Even more disturbing is the fact that the textbooks in all the other grades remain unchanged. A

newly-published fifth grade textbook includes the lesson, and I quote, "Reading Comprehension: Why must we fight the Jews and drive them out of our land?" Another lesson: "Remember: The Arabs and the Muslims are fighting the Jews who killed them and drove them from their homes unjustly... the final and inevitable result will be the victory of the Muslims over the Jews." A twelfth grade textbook, published just last year, teaches, "The clearest examples of racist belief and racial discrimination in the world are Nazism and Zionism." These words, these lessons -these omissions are in direct violation of the Oslo and Wye Accords. It has been seven years since these agreements were made. I understand that the first and sixth grade textbooks represent a pilot effort - and that a full overhaul of textbooks is on the way. But you should not need a pilot program to erase hate. And it should have never take seven years to excise hatred from school textbooks. Elie Wiesel has told us that, "Hate starts with small things... and it ends in death." We cannot ignore even small lessons in hate.

And so I call upon Chairman Arafat - who also holds the title of Education Minister in the Palestinian Authority - to act immediately to remove all anti-Semitic rhetoric from all Palestinian school textbooks in all grades. If the Palestinians truly seek peace for their people, then they should honor the commitments that have already made at the bargaining table. And that first and foremost includes- stop teaching hate to your children. This is a provision we must enforce vigilantly. I believe that all future aid to the Palestinian Authority must be contingent on strict compliance and an immediate good faith effort to change textbooks in all grades - not just two at a time. I believe, and I think everyone of us would have to admit, that no child is born with hatred. Children must be taught to hate. What they learn from their parents, from their teachers, from their peers and from their governments, during their most formative years can set their attitudes and beliefs for life. That is why we cannot allow another year to pass, and another generation to grow to adulthood with messages of hatred, racism and distrust. President Kennedy said, "Peace does not lie in charters and covenants alone. It lies in the hearts and minds of the people."

One of the many reasons why I admire Elie and Marion Wiesel, is the work that they have done through their foundation to send a clear message that hatred is a subject that we have to pay attention to, and the anatomy of hate is

an issue we all have to study. I participated in some of the seminars that Elie has run and in 1992 the Elie Wiesel foundation for Humanity sponsored a conference titled " the anatomy of hate: saving our children." Elie said there that we have no hope of turning those who hate into tolerant and loving beings, the hope lies with the children. We have to get them before they are 3, that is when they learn to hate. Once hatred is there, it is very, very complicated and difficult [inaudible] that hate. We know that peace has to take hold in one's heart. It depends upon how people treat and talk about one another; upon the messages broadcast by their media, and that children learn in their classrooms and the ones their parents teach them as they tuck them into bed at night. And most of all, it depends upon the collective efforts of the world to refuse to be indifferent to hatred and racism; violence and intolerance wherever and whenever we see it.

In April 1999, I was privileged to hold another one of the Millennium evenings that the President and I sponsored as a way of marking the Millennium, and our guest speaker was Elie Wiesel. This happened to be in the middle of the war in Kosovo so the timing could not have been more extraordinary as we met in the East room of the White House to listen to Elie lecture on the subject "the perils of indifference - lessons learned from a violent century." He said a lot of things that evening that really made a strong impression on all of us but one that he said was how important it is that we teach our people to except the stranger who is no longer the stranger and seeing him or her the messenger with so many stories with lessons, with memories, with kinds of experiences that are not ours. That it is a matter of communication and education starting in the earliest years. For decades, Elie Wiesel has been educating us. He has borne witness to the world's most horrifying atrocities - and the evil fruits of hate. But he has also been a messenger of hope - reminding us that the future is in our hands - and in the hands of our children. At the end of that Millennium lecture, he said, "We walk towards the millennium, carried by profound fear and extraordinary hope." It is with the hope that we can change attitudes, change hearts, change minds, change textbooks, that I am privileged to welcome to the podium now, Elie Wiesel.