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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

June 18, 2015

Remarks by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice at the Anti-Defamation League

Dinner Honoring Abraham Foxman

National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice
Anti-Defamation League Dinner for Abraham Foxman
New York City, New York
June 17, 2015
Remarks As Delivered

Good evening everyone. What a night this is. What a gathering of leaders from across the nation. And what an honor to say a few words about my friend, Abe Foxman.

For more than 100 years, the Anti-Defamation League has been the conscience of America, challenging us to live up to our ideals and to keep pressing forward toward that more perfect union. And, for almost half that time, Abe has lent his steady hand, his mighty heart, and his distinctive voice to the cause.

We all know the story of Abe's early years—surviving the trauma of the Holocaust, living as a Catholic before being reunited with his parents and finding his Jewish identity again, crossing the ocean to begin a new life in a new land. Those experiences set him on his path. But, if Abe is a man shaped by history, he is defined by hope. And for Abe, each day at the ADL has been not just an act of optimism that tomorrow will be better, but an expression of faith in humanity—that we can make it so.

50 years. 50 years fighting prejudice, injustice, and the darkest evils in our world. 50 years standing as a bulwark against the creeping and insidious threat of anti-Semitism. 50 years of extraordinary service to humanity. Jewish tradition teaches that “according to the effort is the reward.” And Abe, for your lifetime of effort, tonight's celebration is only a small taste of the reward you have earned. *Mazel tov.*

We've already heard from several folks about Abe's accomplishments and his character, and we're only just getting started on the tributes. For me, the thing I most value about Abe is his candor and integrity. He holds everyone to the same high standards, and I can always count on him to tell it to me straight, even when he knows I won't necessarily like what he has to say. Especially then. Abe never sugar-coats his counsel. He's tenacious when he's fighting for what he believes is right. But, he makes the time to give public encouragement when he thinks you're on the right track, too. He picks up the phone when he senses you might need a private word of support. And when we agree, which is most of the time, Abe wants to know how he can help.

I've felt personally what it means to know that Abe Foxman has your back. I got to know Abe pretty

well when I was serving as Ambassador to the United Nations, where I spent a lot of time battling spurious resolutions and initiatives designed to isolate Israel. We were in the trenches together often. He was once good enough to call me a “gladiator” in defense of Israel. And earlier this year, when I was the target of an ugly attack ad in the newspaper, Abe was one of the first voices to call, to come out in support of me, and to condemn poisonous, personal assaults. Abe, I can’t tell you how much your support means to me and my family, not just in that difficult moment but over the years. I so value our friendship and partnership.

Our nation was founded on the belief that we are all created in the image of God—*b’tzelem elohim*—and so we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. We are all connected. When anyone is targeted because of how they worship or what they look like or whom they love, it diminishes our shared humanity. Abe knows that better than anyone. So it doesn’t matter whether you’re Jewish. Wherever there is hatred and intolerance in the world, Abe and the ADL have been right there—calling it by name and fighting back.

Abe defends the rights of black and Latino Americans, of women and religious minorities, because the work of protecting civil rights is never ending. Since it’s Pride month, I want to especially highlight the work Abe has done to advance equality for our LGBT brothers and sisters. For much of the past 30 years, the ADL has been at the leading edge of the fight to pass hate crimes legislation and to extend anti-discrimination protections to include sexual orientation and gender identity. During my time at the UN, Abe was also a steadfast ally as we sought to protect the human rights of LGBT people around the world and to beat back harmful resolutions. Abe, you’ve opened minds and educated people, and that in turn has helped drive the incredible shift in attitudes toward the LGBT community that we’ve seen in recent years. And we’re all better for it.

When Abe’s son married his partner last December, Abe thanked the grooms for affording their guests the opportunity to be sensitive. And really, that’s what Abe has modeled his whole life. Abe wears his heart on his sleeve. He doesn’t hold anything back, and he asks us all to be sensitive—to the world around us, to the needs and struggles of others, to the stories of those who may not look or think or believe exactly as we do. As Abe himself would remind us, tolerance is only the first step. Being sensitive means embracing all that binds us together—the values that we share, the commitments we make to one another, the love we owe to each other as friends and neighbors and fellow children of God. Abe always offers a full embrace. That’s why he’s such a good hugger. You all know what I mean.

Unfortunately, as we all know too well, we still have a great deal of work to do. We have to continue pushing back against intolerance wherever it arises. Whether it’s taking on shameful bias against Israel at the United Nations, where Ambassador Samantha Power is now doing battle, or speaking out and condemning acts of anti-Semitism, as when Jews are singled out by terrorists, synagogues

are attacked, and Jewish cemeteries are defaced. That kind of hatred harkens back to the most terrible chapters of human history, and it has no place in a civilized world.

So, we must also remain vigilant against quieter forms of anti-Semitism and bigotry. The ones that sneak by, too often unnoticed, in a culture inured to harmful stereotypes. Abe, you've taken on the challenge of combatting old prejudices as they proliferate through new mediums—the 24-hour cycle of the Internet and social media. You've reminded us that we can't grow complacent, even for a moment.

Tonight, Abe, on behalf of President Obama, I assure you that the United States will never be complacent when it comes to seeking a world that is more free, more just, and more equal. A world where all children can live safely in their own land. That's why we are unwavering in our commitment to the security of Israel.

The United States and Israel share a profound friendship that transcends politics and grows stronger with each generation. In fact, the security partnership between our two countries has never been stronger. As both President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu have repeatedly said, it's unprecedented—and that's not going to change.

That's why I couldn't be prouder that ADL has chosen Jonathan Greenblatt, my former White House colleague, to carry on Abe's work. I know that Jonathan will do an outstanding job and make all of us proud. And Abe, I know he will continue to be just as candid and straightforward in his advice as you have been. So even though you are retiring, we will soldier on.

In the coming months and years, Abe, I expect to still count on you for support and counsel. Because I know you will continue to be a clarion voice bringing people of every background together in common cause—for the betterment of us all. Thank you, Abe, for your lifetime of service. *Ad meyah v'essreem*—may you live to be 120!

Before I go, I do have one last brief bit of business. There is someone I work with...every day...his office is just down the hall...who couldn't be here, but who very much wanted to send his greetings. Can we please play the video? And thank you very much.

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