

## Wyoming Delegation Reports Observations in Israel

*By Senators Cheri Steinmetz, Stephan Pappas, Dan Laursen, Tim Salazar, and Representatives Jeremy Haroldson and Daniel Singh*

On September 13, a Wyoming delegation joined 250 state legislators from all 50 states on a diplomatic mission to Israel called **“50 States, One Israel,”** hosted by the Israeli government at no cost to taxpayers. The Wyoming legislators who participated received no financial benefit or compensation—this was an exercise in service and fact finding—as we joined the historic effort to strengthen ties with our closest ally in the Middle East and see the truth for ourselves first hand.

The assassination of our friend Charlie Kirk weighed heavily on our hearts, and we carried that sorrow with us across the ocean. Yet we knew his life had purpose—he never cowered in fear, and neither would we. Israeli leaders extended heartfelt condolences in every meeting, reminding us that friendship and faith transcend borders. Many also spoke of Charlie’s influence, noting how his bold voice for faith and freedom inspired not only Americans, but people in Israel and across the globe. When we returned home, his memorial service affirmed that the gospel of Jesus Christ is alive and well in our country.

The experience was profoundly moving. Today, more than **700,000 Americans live in Israel—more than the population of Wyoming itself.** That reality speaks to the depth of our bond. As President Isaac Herzog told us: *“We drink from the same fountain: the values of the Bible.”* Those values unite our nations at the deepest level, forging a partnership stronger than politics or treaties.

During our visit, we met with Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**, President **Isaac Herzog**, and Speaker of the Knesset **Amir Ohana**. Prime Minister Netanyahu reminded us that Israel’s defense is not only about its own survival but about the security of the free world. Speaker Ohana emphasized the duty of leaders to preserve democracy while defending innocent lives. Ambassador **Mike Huckabee** spoke with moral clarity: *“ Hamas has to go. Letting them stay would be like letting the Nazis stay in Germany after World War II.”* He also reminded us of Israel’s remarkable humanity in the face of hatred: *“No other nation on earth feeds the very people who openly seek to destroy them.”* In fact, Israel has allowed food, fuel, and medical aid into Gaza—even while Hamas hijacks those supplies, including aid delivered by the United Nations, to feed its fighters and fuel its war machine. The contrast could not be starker: one side seeks to preserve life, the other to destroy it.

The most sobering moments came as we visited the sites of the October 7 attacks. At the kibbutz near the Gaza Strip, we could see directly into Gaza and feel the ground quake as tunnels used by Hamas were destroyed. We walked through the bombed village and saw the pictures and stories of the dead and the hostages—faces of families, children, and neighbors whose lives were stolen or forever changed. The site of the Nova music festival was equally heartbreaking. Plaques bearing photographs and testimonies covered the wide open field with no place to hide. There, **364 young people were murdered by Hamas terrorists** in cold blood. To honor their memory, our delegation planted a tree—a small act of remembrance and hope that life will triumph over terror. Altogether, more than **1,200 people were slaughtered** and **251 hostages taken** across Israel that day, many still in captivity.

It is important to dispel the dangerous narrative that blames Israel for this war. Israel did not choose October 7—Hamas did. Israel does not target civilians—Hamas does. Hamas hides behind women and children, firing rockets from schools, hospitals, and neighborhoods, using its own people as human shields. Israel, by contrast,

warns civilians before strikes, provides humanitarian corridors, and continues to deliver aid even as its enemy steals it. No democracy on earth shows more restraint in the face of such relentless terror.

Even as we prepared to leave Israel, the threat remained clear. On the day of our departure, 15 missiles were launched. We sheltered in place at the airport until the all-clear was given. Thanks to Israel's missile defense systems, every rocket was intercepted, and we returned home safely.

Americans must recognize that Hamas's violence is not directed at Israel alone. Hamas leaders have openly declared their intent to destroy Israel first and then America. This is not solely Israel's fight—it is a fight for all who cherish liberty.

Yet amid sorrow, we also witnessed hope. Israelis shared stories of reaching out to Palestinians with jobs and opportunities, even as Hamas worked to strangle such efforts with violence. The vast majority of both Palestinians and Israelis want to live in peace. Israel has also shown generosity to its neighbors and the world through its contributions in agriculture, water technology, and medicine. From drip irrigation that has transformed deserts into farmland, to medical research saving lives globally, to cybersecurity innovations that protect nations far beyond its borders—Israel continues to bless the world even while defending its own survival. A recent report by the Israeli human rights organization Gisha noted that, following the October 7 attacks, Israel prohibited about 115,000 Palestinians with West Bank work permits from entering Israel for employment. This reality underscores how deeply intertwined the two societies are: thousands of Palestinian families depend on lawful work in Israel for their livelihoods, yet Hamas's actions robbed them of that opportunity. Israel has long extended opportunities for better wages and stability to its neighbors, while Hamas exploits those same people as pawns in its war of terror.

We also reflected on our differences. Israel is surrounded by hostile enemies, and its citizens live with the reality of bomb shelters and rocket sirens. By contrast, in Wyoming and across America, the **Second Amendment remains a non-negotiable right**—a safeguard that ensures our people can defend their homes and communities. This distinction reminds us that while our societies are different, the desire to live free and secure is the same.

For the people of Wyoming, this mission was not only about global diplomacy but about affirming the principles we hold dear at home—faith, family, and freedom. Standing with Israel means standing for those same values here in Wyoming, and ensuring they endure for generations to come.



(Photos can be enlarged)