

Please Widen the Discussion

Editorial

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As the 2008 presidential campaigns move forward, it is deeply gratifying that most candidates in both parties are supportive of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship and sensitive to the daunting challenges Israel faces in these perilous times.

Support for Israel has become a given in American politics, a testament not just to the pro-Israel lobby but to a Jewish state that has so much in common with democratic America.

Jewish voters are appreciative, but that doesn't mean Israel is the only issue we want to hear about. Too many candidates seem to miss the fact that we are fully engaged in a wide range of other issues, both domestic and international.

Jewish voters care about international human rights and want to hear how candidates will deal with a world in which genocide has not yet been banished. It was no accident that several Democratic candidates, speaking at the recent National Jewish Democratic Council forum, received the strongest ovations when they talked about the crisis in Darfur.

Jewish voters on both sides of the issue want to hear candidates talk about the laws and policies that are changing the church-state firmament in our country. Israel is critical to our souls, but the decisions being made in Washington on First Amendment issues will affect our freedom and security in America for years to come.

Jewish voters want to hear plain talk about how our candidates will deal with critical budget decisions that influence our economy and the economic burden we will leave to our children and grandchildren.

How many times do you hear a candidate stand before a Jewish audience and start a speech by talking about global warming? Or Medicare and Medicaid? They matter to many Jewish voters, but politicians seem to think we are a one-issue constituency.

Look at the agendas of the groups holding meetings in Washington this month -- the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League. Israel is prominently featured, but so are many other issues, including immigration, energy independence, human rights abroad and civil liberties at home.

While we appreciate the commitment of so many politicians to the Jewish state, it isn't exactly complimentary when they behave as if our votes can be swayed solely by a few well-chosen talking points about the support for Israel, including empty pledges about building a U.S. embassy in Jerusalem, as if our other concerns are secondary.