US House overwhelmingly passes GOP resolution backing Israel, meant to rebuke Dems

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The US House on Tuesday overwhelmingly passed a symbolic resolution reaffirming support for Israel that was introduced by Republican lawmakers in an implicit rebuke of a leading Democrat who called the country a “racist state” but later apologized.

“The State of Israel is not a racist or apartheid state, Congress rejects all forms of antisemitism and xenophobia, and the United States will always be a staunch partner and supporter of Israel,” read the resolution that passed 412-9-1.

The vote came as Israel’s President Isaac Herzog was in Washington for meetings with President Joe Biden and other administration officials, with a handful of progressive Democrats planning to boycott an address to both chambers of Congress slated for Wednesday.

The resolution does not mention Representative Pramila Jayapal of Washington by name, but was introduced days after she criticized Israel and its treatment of Palestinians at a conference on Saturday.

Jayapal, the 100-member chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, walked back the comments the next day, insisting they were aimed at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government and not the Jewish state as an entity.

But Republican Rep. August Pfluger pushed forward the resolution forward with the support of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy who ostensibly eyed an opportunity to divide Democrats over the issue.

Democratic Reps. Jamaal Bowman, Cori Bush, Andre Carson, Summer Lee, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, Delia Ramirez and Rashida Tlaib made up the “no” votes and fellow progressive Rep. Betty McCollum casted the lone “present” vote.

Among those voting in favor was Jayapal herself, as well as several progressive Democrats normally harshly critical of Israel, such as Raul Grijalva and Chuy Garcia.

Just about all “no” votes were members of the progressive Squad, five of whom have also announced plans to skip Herzog’s speech to a joint session of Congress on Wednesday.

Among those five is Tlaib, who spoke from the floor in opposition to the resolution ahead of the vote.

“Israel is an apartheid state,” Tlaib said, citing several rights groups, including Israeli ones, that have reached that conclusion. “The government is deeply problematic in the way that they are proceeding in the structure of oppression.”

Much of Tlaib’s speech was littered with poorly attributed quotes and half-truths as well as a blatantly false claim that Herzog opposes “interracial marriages,” based on a statement he made bemoaning Jews marrying out of the faith.

Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries avoided referencing the “no” votes entirely, saying in a statement that “The decisive vote by House Democrats in support of the Israel resolution once again demonstrates our strong commitment to the State of Israel and her right to exist as a homeland for the Jewish people.”

“House Democrats will remain steadfast in our ironclad commitment to Israel’s security, as well as to a robust two-state solution where the Israeli and Palestinian people can live side by side in peace and prosperity. I look forward to welcoming President Isaac Herzog to Congress for the Joint Address,” he added.

Others in the party were quick to criticize House Republicans for turning Israel into a political football.

“Kevin McCarthy and House Republicans rushed this resolution to the House floor for the most cynical, most repugnant of purposes: weaponizing antisemitism and the US-Israel relationship to score political points,” said Jewish progressive Rep. Jerold Nadler, who voted in favor of the resolution.

He accused the party of paying lip service to Israel’s actual needs, noting McCarthy’s refusal to cancel testimony from fringe presidential candidate Robert Kennedy Jr. to a Republican-controlled subcommittee, after Kennedy suggested that COVID-19 could have been “ethnically targeted” to spare Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese people.

“Kevin McCarthy eagerly put this resolution to a vote, all while his party invites an antisemitic conspiracy theorist to testify before a House Select Subcommittee this week,” he said. “The Republican Party is working to undermine the United States’ historic bipartisan support for Israel all while supporting efforts that stoke tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”