

Virginians oppose taxpayer subsidies for Israeli business projects - VCHR

RICHMOND, Oct 23, 2018 /PRNewswire/-- A plurality of Virginians (38.1%) favor ending taxpayer funding for Israeli business ventures in the commonwealth according to a [Virginia Coalition for Human Rights \(VCHR\)](#) poll fielded by Google Surveys.

32.7% of Virginians were neutral about discontinuing subsidies, while 29.2% disagreed. The representative September 22 to October 4 poll of 2,110 Virginians is [available online from Google](#).

VCHR, a coalition of 16 organizations representing over 8,000 Virginians, is concerned unconditional funding for Israeli business projects fails to consider Israel's worsening human rights record and disengagement from peace efforts. In 2018 Israeli forces have shot, wounded and killed hundreds of mostly unarmed Palestinian protesters.

State Israel advocacy organizations [lobbied to create and staff](#) a taxpayer-funded state government office to exclusively promote Israeli business projects called the Virginia-Israel Advisory Board (VIAB) in [1996](#).

[VCHR has reviewed and publicly posted](#) disturbing VIAB internal files released by the Governor's office.

VIAB code-named an Israeli aquaculture bid "Project Jonah" to obtain \$1 million from Tazewell County, while Virginia Tech was asked to secure another \$500,000 from local and federal sources in 2015. VIAB worked unsuccessfully to bring El Al Israel Airlines into Dulles. A VIAB board member sought to promote an [Israeli energy company she ran](#). Successful or not, Virginia taxpayers cover the cost of VIAB operations and reimbursement of its officials. Internal governor's office email characterized VIAB success stories as "...[inflated without merit](#)."

Some Virginians may oppose subsidizing Israeli business ventures because, as stated in the poll "Virginia had a \$500 million trade deficit with Israel in 2017." The overall 2017 U.S. trade deficit with Israel was [\\$9.3 billion](#).

In 1984 the Israeli government lobbied the Reagan administration for [preferential export access](#) to the U.S. to boost Israel's struggling economy. A lengthy [FBI investigation](#) revealed the Israeli Minister of Economics surreptitiously obtained a classified International Trade Commission report detailing proprietary business information of U.S. industry groups which were overwhelmingly opposed to any trade agreement with Israel. Israel's U.S. lobby AIPAC used and circulated the report to overcome opposition. No charges were ever filed. The US-Israel trade deal passed in 1985 and is America's worst performing bilateral trade deal with an inflation-adjusted 2017 cumulative deficit of \$170.72 billion.

Other states also carry large trade deficits with Israel under the 1985 trade preferences, but only Virginia has a taxpayer-funded Israel business promotion office.