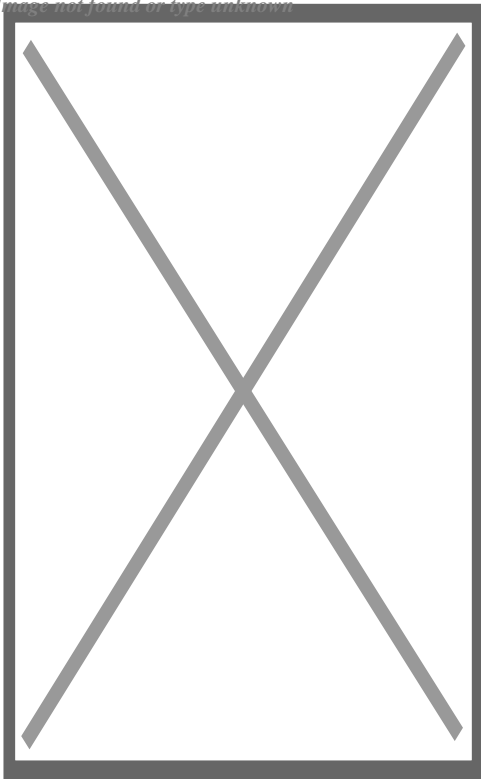


Netanyahu's U.S. Congress address to be marked by protests, boycotts, road closures

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By Ivan Kesic

Washington, July 23 (RHC)-- Israeli war criminal and prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to address a special joint session of the U.S. Congress on Wednesday to lobby for more support for his genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza.

Netanyahu landed in Washington late on Monday on a three-day official visit, during which he plans to address the U.S. Congress and meet senior U.S. officials from both parties.

A meeting between the visiting Israeli premier and U.S. President Joe Biden, who is still recovering from COVID-19, appears to be back on track, according to American media reports.

Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, reportedly has so far refused to say if he'll meet the his friend, Benjamin Netanyahu. And Kamala Harris, who is likely to be the Democratic presidential nominee, has decided to skip the Israeli premier's address to the U.S. Congress.

U.S. Senate foreign relations committee chairman Ben Cardin is going to preside over the address along with U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson after Harris decided to head to Indianapolis on the day.

This is the fourth time Netanyahu will be addressing the U.S. Congress, more than any other foreign official in history. Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill spoke there three times.

The speech comes ahead of the November election in the U.S. with calls mounting on the Biden administration to stop its support for Netanyahu's regime amid the genocide in Gaza.

The day Netanyahu landed in Washington, the death toll in the besieged Palestinian territory surpassed 39,000, most of them children and women, according to the Gaza media office.

Netanyahu's speech before the U.S. Congress this time will be marked by widespread protests outside the venue as well as a boycott by U.S. senators who have been critical of the Israeli-American war on Gaza.

When he addressed the U.S. Congress nine years ago, 58 Democrats had boycotted him because he came with what was announced as sharp criticism of then-President Barack Obama's Iran policy and because they found his collusion with congressional Republicans as disrespectful.

John Boehner, the Republican speaker of the House during the Obama presidency, timed the announcement of Netanyahu's invitation a day after Obama outlined his Iran policy in the State of the Union address, which angered Democrats.

Netanyahu is expected to criticize the policy favored by a Democratic president and his party once again, even though Biden has been a staunch supporter of the Israeli regime and has offered, by his own words, an "ironclad" assistance during its war on Gaza.

Several Democrats have already announced a boycott of Netanyahu's Wednesday speech. Senator Bernie Sanders released the statement saying he will not be attending the address of Netanyahu to Congress, citing Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

"No, Netanyahu should not be welcomed into the U.S. Congress. On the contrary, his policies in Gaza and the West Bank and his refusal to support a two-state solution should be roundly condemned," he said. "In my view, his right-wing, extremist government should not receive another nickel of U.S. taxpayer support to continue the inhumane destruction of Gaza."

Brian Schatz, the Jewish Democrat from Hawaii, said he will also not attend the speech, criticizing it as a "partisan address to Congress just months ahead of the US presidential elections." "As a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I welcome a substantive discussion about the future, not political rhetoric that will do nothing to bring peace in the region," he said. "I therefore will not attend Wednesday's address."

Elizabeth Warren was among the first Senators from the Democratic Party to publicly announce a boycott of Netanyahu's speech, criticizing him for causing the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

Senator Jeff Merkley also said he would be absent from the event, explaining that Netanyahu's war strategy has killed over 12,000 women and children in the Gaza Strip, inflicted widespread starvation, and prioritized his political survival over the release of captives.

For these reasons, Merkley stated, Netanyahu should not have a platform in Congress at all, echoing Sanders' earlier words that he, as a war criminal, should not be invited there.

Pramila Jayapal, a Democrat, in early June remarks said the boycott is expected to be "large" because there are "a lot of people who are extremely upset" that Netanyahu is coming to the United States.

An unnamed Democrat told news outlets that many of Netanyahu's opponents from his party will attend the speech because they see it as an opportunity to disrupt the speech.

Numerous organizations and individuals have announced protests during Netanyahu's visit, demanding an end to the Israeli regime's genocidal war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Large protest marches are expected on Washington's 3rd Street NW and Pennsylvania Avenue and around the perimeter of the U.S. Capitol where they will demand his arrest for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Organizations that have announced their participation in the protests include the ANSWER Coalition (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), the anti-war organization Code Pink: Women for Peace, the Palestinian American Community Center and Jewish Voice for Peace.

Code Pink has mobilized support nationwide, organizing buses to transport human rights advocates from various US states to Washington DC, according to Reuters.

Furthermore, more than 230 anonymous Capitol Hill staffers from 122 offices signed a letter urging their bosses to either protest or boycott Netanyahu's speech.

Amid anticipation of protests, police in Washington have said that "intermittent street closures and traffic delays" should be expected near the Capitol and downtown, according to the Axios.

"All street closures and listed times are subject to change based upon prevailing or unexpected conditions," reads the police statement.

"We anticipate a large number of demonstrators to show up. Our plan includes adding more officers – including from several outside agencies."

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