

Visit To Jerusalem Puts Christie On World Stage

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From *The Star-Ledger*

Jenna Portnoy
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"In Gov. Chris Christie's first overseas trip since taking office, the Holy Land is rolling out the red carpet.

"Christie and his family arrive here tomorrow morning for the start of a whirlwind tour of Israel that winds through Tel Aviv, stops in Tiberius and ends Thursday in the Golan Heights.

"He will have a private dinner with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, meet with President Shimon Peres and cap the Holy Week trek with a personal visit to Jordan with King Abdullah II. ...

"Israel has welcomed New Jersey governors since the 1980s, when Gov. Tom Kean visited to witness Israel's Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, dedicate its eternal flame to his father, Robert Winthrop Kean, one of the few congressmen to rail against Nazi atrocities from the floor of the U.S. House in the 1940s.

"Kean, who has been a political mentor to Christie, said the trip is vital to Christie's ability to represent New Jersey, which has the second-highest population of Jews after New York among the 50 states, because it matters how American leaders react to threats to Israel.

"'Christie will have a voice in that because of his prominence,' he said. 'It's very important to be a knowledgeable voice. If he's not already, he will be when he gets back.'

"Christie stoked the fire last year with a private meeting with Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador to the United States, and in February with a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the powerful pro-Israel lobbying group.

"'And having America stand with Israel side by side, shoulder to shoulder,' he told the crowd, 'is one of the great responsibilities, and one of the great honors of the 21st century. We need to stand for it loudly and clearly today.' ...

"For example, Christie declined to delve into the Iran sanctions act authored partly by U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, but said he expects to have discussions about Iran and Syria during the trip. ...

"While many remarked on the condescending tone that Netanyahu seemed to strike with President Obama after a May 2011 meeting in the Oval Office, Christie said he sees himself getting along well with the prime minister. Both are headstrong.

"'I do think that we'll probably find a lot of common ground on things not only substantively,' he said, 'but stylistically as well. I sense we take at least in some respects some similar approaches to leadership.' ...

"Taking a page from [Governor Christie] Whitman's playbook of making international trade missions, Christie plans to visit Teva Pharmaceutical Industries, which he said is considering expanding to New Jersey.

"Christie said he hopes to 'appropriately exploit' the similarities between Israel and New Jersey — they are about the same size and both have significant high-tech sectors — and make deals.

"'Hopefully, we'll be in a position to be able to announce something at the time because they do have a real significant interest in New Jersey,' Christie said."

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