

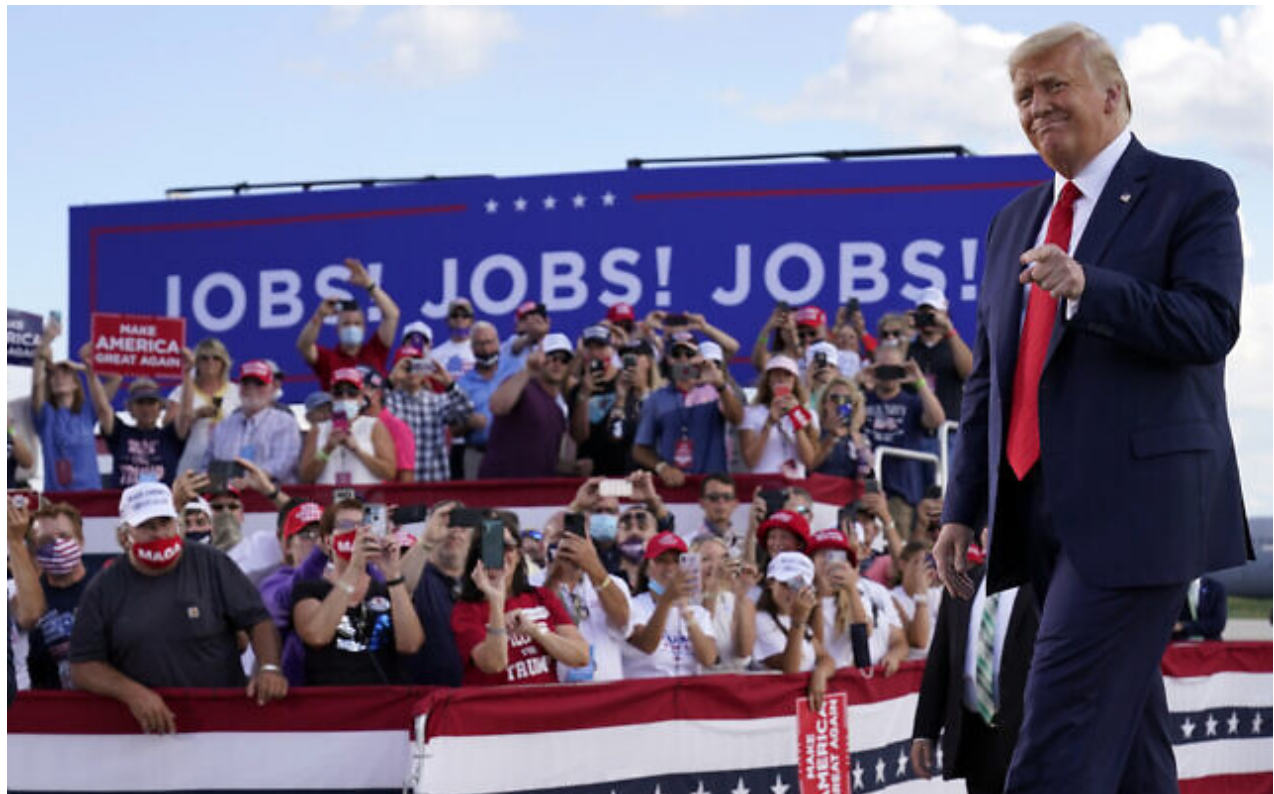


Trump says he moved US embassy to Jerusalem 'for the evangelicals'

US president, on campaign tour of battleground Midwest states, says evangelical Christians 'more excited by that than Jewish people'

By **TOI STAFF** and **AGENCIES**

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US President Donald Trump arrives to speak at a campaign rally at Wittman Airport, Monday, Aug. 17, 2020, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

US President Donald Trump said Monday that his 2017 decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and recognize the city as the capital of Israel was done for evangelical Christians.

“And we moved the capital of Israel to Jerusalem,” Trump said at a rally held at an airport in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, apparently referring to his decision to move the embassy from Tel Aviv. “That’s for the evangelicals.”

Jerusalem has been Israel’s capital since its founding in 1948, although much of the international community does not recognize it as under the initial UN Partition Plan, Jerusalem was to be an international city.

“You know, it’s amazing with that — the evangelicals are more excited by that than Jewish people,” he said to cheers from the crowd. “That’s right, it’s incredible.”

Trump formally recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in December 2017, when he announced plans to move the embassy there. In May 2018, his administration opened the new facility — a move that was met with intense controversy, both in Washington and in the Middle East.

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Following the move the Palestinians, who claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state, cut ties with Washington, calling the Trump administration biased toward Israel.

At the time, Trump said that the decision was made to advance US interests and peace in the region, and out of respect for Israel's sovereignty.

"I've judged this course of action to be in [the best interests of the United States](#) of America and the pursuit of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. This is a long-overdue step to advance the peace process and to work towards a lasting agreement," he said in a video message played at the 2018 inauguration of the embassy.

"Israel is a sovereign nation with the right like every other sovereign nation to determine its own capital. Acknowledging this as a fact is a necessary condition for achieving peace," he added.

However, it was clear from the start that the move was also aimed at the evangelical community, who have been some of Trump's staunchest supporters.

Large number of evangelical Christians in the US [believe that God has chosen Trump](#) to advance the kingdom of God on Earth. Several high-profile religious leaders have made similar claims, often comparing Trump to King Cyrus, who was asked by God to rescue the nation of Israel from exile in Babylon.

Prominent Christian supporters of Israel were involved in the embassy inauguration and US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman noted at the time that he believed evangelical Christians "[support Israel](#) with much greater fervor and devotion than many in the Jewish community."



In this Monday, May 14, 2018 photo, American pastor Robert Jeffress shakes hands with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu following Jeffress' speech during the opening ceremony of the new U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem. (AP Photo/Sebastian Scheiner)

Israel is a key issue for many Evangelical Christians, whose vote could be crucial in the election.

Gallup — citing the proportion of people who answer yes to the question “Would you describe yourself as ‘born-again’ or evangelical?” — says evangelicals have for decades comprised just over 40 percent of the population. And a 2017 poll commissioned by pro-Israel evangelicals found that the percentage of evangelicals who believe that the establishment of Israel was a fulfillment of prophecy was 80%.

Elizabeth Oldmixon, a University of North Texas political scientist who studies evangelicals and their relationship to Israel, has estimated that about a third of evangelicals are likely to put Israel policy at the center of their electoral decision-making. (Other issues that drive evangelical voting include abortion rights and religious liberty.)

Trump's remarks came as he toured Midwest battleground states on Monday, holding a series of airport tarmac events, trying to counterprogram former vice president Joe Biden's show at the Democrats' national convention.



Supporters cheer as US President Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally at Wittman Airport, Monday, Aug. 17, 2020, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

Biden has said that the US embassy in Israel [would remain in Jerusalem](#) if he's elected, even as he called Trump's decision to move the diplomatic base from Tel Aviv “short-sighted and frivolous.”

In Mankato, Minnesota, Trump stepped up his rhetoric against Biden, calling him a “puppet of left-wing extremists trying to erase our borders, eliminate our police, indoctrinate our children, vilify our heroes, take away our energy.”

He alleged that Biden a victory would “replace American freedom with left-wing fascism.”

"Fascists. They are fascists," Trump continued. "Some of them, not all of them, but some of them. But they're getting closer and closer. We have to win this election. But the proud people of Minnesota will not let this happen."

Fascism, though, is a form of far-right nationalism.

On the tarmac in Minneapolis, Trump addressed about 150 supporters — half of them wearing masks — who chanted "Four More Years." Trump told them that the Democrats would take away the constitutional amendment to bear arms.

He also criticized Biden for supporting an expansion in refugee asylum admissions including from "terrorist hot spots," in apparent reference to Minnesota's large community of Somali refugees.



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"I'm going to be so politically correct," Trump said, before taking credit for his ban on travel from some Muslim-majority countries, saying "we want people to come into our country who love our country."

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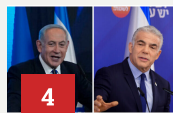
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