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The White House

Office of the Vice President

For Immediate Release

April 23, 2015

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Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden the 67th Annual Israeli Independence Day Celebration

Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium
Washington, D.C.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Ron, Mr. Ambassador, my name is Joe Biden, and everybody knows I love Israel.

I was thinking as Ron was saying that he doesn't know what it's like in Catholic families -- whether we argue as much as allegedly occurs in Jewish families. Well, I settled all that. Two of my three children married Jews. (Laughter.) And you want to see what happens then. (Laughter.)

As a matter of fact, my daughter -- I -- the dream of every Irish-Catholic father is for his daughter to marry a Jewish surgeon. (Laughter.) And she did.

But I want you to know I think the only time on record, at least in the state of Delaware, in the oldest Catholic church in the state, the second oldest -- 1842 -- we signed the ketubah in the Catholic rectory. (Laughter.) Not a joke. (Laughter.) Not a joke. I think that's a first. We had a chuppah on the altar, handmade, magnificently, beautiful chuppah. And we had a Catholic priest, Father Murphy, and a rabbi, and it was hard getting a rabbi, by the way. (Laughter.) I had to go up to Montgomery County to find one. (Laughter.) And the reason why -- Montgomery County, Pennsylvania -- and the reason he came is his mother loved me. (Laughter.) But -- and my daughter asked me, she said, Daddy, what do you want played at the wedding? I said, just one -- maybe the concluding hymn could be "On Eagles' Wings".

And so the rabbi was a wonderful guy, literally presided over 75 percent of the wedding. The vows were administered by the Catholic priest. And as the wedding party was departing, as the bride and groom were departing down the aisle, they played the hora. (Laughter.) So I figured it out. One way to end arguments is to marry. (Laughter.)

Look, the fact of the matter is that 77 years [sic] ago, at midnight on May 14, 1948, against all odds, in the wake of searing tragedy, defiant in the face of overwhelming military numbers massed on its borders, the modern State of Israel was born. (Applause.)

What you did next was no less than miraculous. You were blessed with one of the greatest generations of founding fathers and mothers of any nation in the history of the world -- Ben-Gurion, Meir, Begin, Sharon, Rabin, Peres. They all fashioned Israel into a vibrant, vibrant democracy.

And in the process, you built one of the most innovative societies on Earth. In the process, you defended your homeland and became the most powerful military in the entire region. And all these years later, things have changed, but the danger still exists. But the people of Israel still live in a dangerous neighborhood. And just to be an Israeli -- it still demands uncommon courage.

Much has changed, but two things have remained absolutely the same: the courage of your people and the commitment of mine. (Applause.)

So today, we celebrate your independence and our friendship, which was born just 11 minutes after Israel's founding. And President Obama and I are proud to carry forward the unbroken line of American leaders -- Democrat and Republican -- who have honored America's sacred promise to protect the homeland of the Jewish people.