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## **A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner**

Friday, December 10, 2021 ~ Parshat: Vayigash

### Remembering Senator Bob Dole

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

It was perhaps fitting that Senator Bob Dole, longtime leader of the Senate, passed away last Sunday, right before the 80th anniversary of D-Day. Whether you liked his politics or not, I think we can all agree that he was among the greatest of the greatest generation. His many contributions to American political life helped shape the post-World War II era and will continue to exert influence for generations to come.

Senator Bob Dole had a mixed record on issues and policies near and dear to most Jewish hearts. A full analysis of his relationship with the Jewish community would be the subject of a fascinating article which has yet to be written. I have found many articles and statements that attest to his friendship and respect for Jews and Judaism, as well as others that seem to betray a sense of unease, if not resentment, at the disproportionate influence of Jews in political life. I'll leave it to future historians to make the final determination.

But there was one issue of major significance to the American Jewish community that all agree Bob Dole championed. He was an early supporter of the movement to free Soviet Jewry. In his position as one of the most powerful men in the United States, he raised the issue of the freedom of Jews to immigrate to Israel with Soviet diplomats and championed Soviet dissidents who were jailed for their efforts to seek freedom under the oppressive conditions of the former Soviet Union. Indeed, he was part of the negotiations that led to the release of Natan Sharansky, among the most famous of Jewish activists unjustly imprisoned by Soviet authorities. He also personally lobbied then Soviet premier Michael Gorbachev on behalf of Soviet Jews as well.

At a rally in 1987, held at the US capital on behalf of 400,000 Jewish refuseniks, he made the following statements:

"The freedom of enslaved people is America's business and freedom is a task we must apply. I will not rest, and you will not rest, America will not rest until they are all free. Let every last woman and child, who wants to sleep under the same roof with their children and their family, or say a prayer in the synagogue, whether it be in Washington or Jerusalem; who only wants the chance of medical treatment — let them go, Mr. Gorbachev, let them go."

Interestingly, it's hard to assess the political value of this activism on American Jews. When Senator Dole ran for president against Bill Clinton in 1996, historians report that he received 16% of the Jewish vote. But by comparison, George Bush, who ran against Bill Clinton in 1992, only received 11%.

As I wrote earlier, Senator Dole had a mixed record on issues of specific concern to the Jewish community. But on perhaps the most significant Jewish communal priority besides the security of Israel, the movement to allow Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel and to the west, he was an ally, friend, and leader. There are those who in our highly partisan era will fail to remember his magnificent contributions to this effort. We must not.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner