



## Legislator Montano Media Alert



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### **Bi-Partisan Delegation of American State Senators and State Representatives Visiting Israel**

*Project Interchange-Sponsored Educational Seminar Includes Focus on Economic  
Development, High Tech Innovation, and Immigrant Absorption and Integration*



Pictured (from left to right): Palestinian and African patients treated by Israeli humanitarian surgeons with Project Interchange/AJC delegates Ohio State House Representative Connie Pillich, Suffolk County Legislator Ricardo Montano, New York State Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow, Ohio State Supreme Court Justice Yvette McGee Brown.

(Jerusalem, ISRAEL) – A bipartisan delegation of prominent American state officials is visiting Israel for intensive dialogue and briefings this week through Project Interchange, an educational institute of AJC.

The officials, mainly State House and Senate leaders, represent New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Hawaii. Participants include New York State Senator Eric Adams, who represents Brooklyn neighborhoods, and who co-founded an advocacy group for African-American police officers during his 22-year career with the New York Police Department prior to election; Justice Yvette McGee Brown, the first African-American woman to serve as a supreme court justice in the State of Ohio; and Marcus R. Oshiro, Hawaii State representative and chairman of the House Finance Committee in the Hawaii State Legislature, named by Hawaii Business Magazine as one of “20 People to Watch Over the Next Two Decades.”

The seminar, which is funded entirely by Project Interchange and not taxpayers, is intended to provide these policymakers with a first-hand understanding of Israel, its rich and dynamic society, and often-times complicated reality. The trip includes meetings with influential figures across Israel's political and social spectrum, including senior Israeli, Palestinian, and Israeli Arab leaders.

The delegation will traverse much of Israel, including Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the Northern border, the Dead Sea, and Sderot for a first-hand look at Israel, "beyond-the-headlines". Discussion topics will range from Israel's strategic environment to the country's position as a worldwide high tech leader, to sharing best practices on fostering economic development and absorption and integration of immigrant and minority communities. Several sessions dealing with diversity issues are on the agenda, including Israeli high-tech initiatives that foster effective coexistence between Arabs and Jews.

Sam Witkin, Executive Director of Project Interchange noted, "We are tremendously pleased to host this delegation of prominent American state officials." Witkin added, "These officials represent a diverse set of states and constituencies from across the United States, but they share a common interest in job creation, high tech innovation, and immigrant issues. As these are key priorities for Israel as well, we hope participants will return home with a better sense of the similarities between their communities and those in Israel."

Justice Yvette McGee Brown of the Ohio Supreme Court said, "I am excited to be joining this delegation to learn more about the economic and political climate of Israel. Technology makes our world smaller every day, so I always welcome the opportunity to learn from other leaders and discuss challenges. With all the changes going on in the Middle East, this is an incredible opportunity to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leadership."

New York State Senator Eric Adams noted, "I look forward to visiting Israel in order to gain an extensive understanding of Israel's political, social, and cultural structures."

Hawaii House of Representatives Finance Chairman Marcus Oshiro said, "Hawaii may be a small, isolated chain of islands, but it is a place renowned for appreciating ethnic diversity and maintaining peace between cultures. I hope to establish relationships for future trade in the areas of renewable energy, agricultural, bio-technology, and cultural exchange, and beyond that, to bring the Aloha Spirit to this part of the world."

Suffolk County Legislator Ricardo Montano said that because he spent eight years as executive director of the Suffolk County Human Rights Commission, he understands that "the ability to interact and learn different perspectives leads to a more productive dialogue. Through Project Interchange, we'll bring back to our communities a better understanding of how to resolve these emotional and complex issues."

Pennsylvania State Employee Retirement System Board Member Wallace Nunn said, "I hope to better understand how a small nation surrounded by enemies and short on natural resources has developed such a vibrant economy. In my role as a Member of the Board of the Pennsylvania State Employees Retirement System this understanding should be very helpful as I evaluate investment opportunities."

Ohio State House Representative Connie Pillich said, "I am very pleased to visit Israel for the first time. As a veteran, I appreciate the military significance of Israel's geographic location and the historical unrest in the area. But I am also interested in learning about Israel's economy and its interaction on a global scale – particularly opportunities for Ohio companies and entrepreneurs."

## Project Interchange State Officials Seminar Participants

- Senator Eric Adams, New York State Senate
- Justice Yvette McGee Brown, Supreme Court of Ohio
- Mr. Ricardo Montano, Legislator, Suffolk County
- Mr. Wallace Nunn, Board Member, Pennsylvania State Employee Retirement System
- Representative Marcus Oshiro, Hawaii State House of Representatives
- Representative Connie Pillich, Ohio House of Representatives
- Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow, New York State Assembly

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