

Today, Congressman Quigley delivered the following remarks on the House floor:

Madam Speaker, this month marks Jewish American Heritage Month, so now seems a fitting time to look back on the history of the State of Israel and remember it accurately.

In recent weeks there has been much attention paid to an announcement of new construction in East Jerusalem.

But lost in the debate were some basic facts about settlements and their historical context that must be remembered.

Today I want to set the record straight, and outline six key facts about settlements.

#1. The construction under debate is not in Arab east Jerusalem, but in a Jewish neighborhood

in northern Jerusalem.

Not only has this area never been governed under Palestinian authority, but there has never been a question of to whom the land belongs.

Under every possible two-state plan, including the plan proposed by President Clinton at Camp David in 2000 and the scenario in the letter from President Bush to Prime Minister Sharon in 2004, this area would be part of Israel.

#2. Jerusalem is not a settlement.

Jerusalem has had a Jewish majority since 1870.

And every Israeli government since 1967 has recognized Jerusalem as the sovereign capital of Israel, not part of the West Bank.

To reduce Jerusalem to anything less undermines the very foundation of Israel.

#3. Settlements are not an obstacle to peace.

This is where remembering history is especially important.

Twice Israel has given up land and removed settlers in an effort to make peace, and each time peace was rejected.

In 1980, after its peace accord with Egypt, Israel removed settlements from the Sinai Peninsula, but peace was rejected.

Again in 2005, settlers were forcibly removed from Gaza, but peace was rejected.

Settlements can be dealt with in any future negotiations through land swaps and border adjustments, but the issue of settlements should never prevent the two sides from sitting down to negotiate.

#4. The ten month moratorium on new construction in the West Bank issued by Prime Minister Netanyahu is unprecedented.

Despite staunch domestic criticism and incredible political risk, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced a ten month moratorium on new construction in the West Bank.

The move was praised by the Obama administration.

And U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell called the move “significant,” stating that “for the first time ever
, an Israeli government will stop ... all new construction ... in West Bank settlements.”

Yet the Palestinian Authority continues to refuse to resume peace negotiations.

In the past, settlement construction did not prevent negotiations, in fact both Yasir Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas negotiated with Israel even while building in settlements continued.

#5. Only the Israelis and Palestinians together can create a lasting peace agreement.

The U.S. must continue to play a central role in peace negotiations, but ultimately the conflict must be resolved through direct talks between the two parties.

Requiring preconditions for negotiations simply allows the parties to avoid direct dialogue and ultimately a resolution.

And any rhetoric that prevents the parties from resuming negotiations must be tempered.

#6. This constant focus on settlements distracts us from the greater threat: A nuclear Iran.

The most significant threat to Middle East security is Iran attaining a nuclear weapon.

Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would surely spur nuclear proliferation throughout the Middle East, and could even result in terrorist groups obtaining nuclear weapons.

Our focus now must be on preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power, not on debates about Jerusalem's construction policies.

Yes, settlements must be addressed.

And they will be addressed in any peace process negotiations.

We know this because over the years numerous proposals to solve the settlement issue have been floated, and Israel has twice shown it is willing to take action, pulling its citizens out of Sinai and Gaza.

But settlements cannot be an excuse not to negotiate.

Settlements cannot be considered an impediment to peace.

And settlements cannot distract us from the looming threat of a nuclear Iran.