

# Two Pastors With Histories Of Anti-Semitic Statements Spoke At The Jerusalem Embassy Opening, A White House Spokesman Had No Idea How They Got There

WASHINGTON, May 14, 2018 — White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Raj Shah told reporters Monday that he did not know how evangelical pastor Robert Jeffress was among those selected to speak at the opening of the United States' new embassy in Jerusalem despite his past derogatory statements about Judaism and other major religions.

"I honestly don't know how that came to be," Shah said when asked how Jeffress, who said in 2010 that following Judaism, Hinduism and Islam — as well as membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints — can "lead people to an eternity of separation from God in Hell," was selected to deliver an invocation at a ceremony officially marking the embassy's move from the Tel Aviv facility that has now switched places with what was a US consulate in Jerusalem.

"I know that Pastor Jeffress has had a strong relationship with many in the faith community as well as folks in the administration and Republicans on the Hill, and others — as well as Democrats as well," Shah explained. "I believe he has a longstanding involvement with public officials, beyond that I don't really have a whole lot to add."

Jeffress, currently pastor of First Baptist Church, a Dallas-based megachurch, is one of President Donald Trump's closest evangelical advisers. He often speaks of Jerusalem's significance to conservative Christians, which make up a significant component of Trump's base of supporters.

In addition to his aforementioned 2010 remarks, Jeffress also called the Catholic Church "an instrument of Satan" that same year and referred to the LDS Church as "a cult" the next year.

He extended his predictions of eternal damnation to include political beliefs during the 2016 election, when during an appearance on Fox News, Jeffress told Fox News analyst Juan Williams that backing former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (D) for president would send him to the lowest depths of hell,

Pressed further on whether Jeffress remarks about Jews made him an appropriate person to speak at an embassy opening in a country founded as a homeland for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust, Shah replied that he hadn't seen the remarks but they were "obviously...not remarks that the president believes."

## ***Jeffress wasn't the only controversial pastor at the ceremony***

Later on, Shah was asked how another controversial pastor — Christians United for Israel founder Rev. John Hagee — ended up giving a closing benediction at the Jerusalem ceremony.

Hagee is perhaps most infamous for remarks made during the 2008 election in which he suggested Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler was an instrument of God because the Holocaust persuaded many Jews to move to what became Israel after World War II.

Shah reiterated that he had no information to offer but stressed that such views "wouldn't be embraced by the White House."

A State Department official told *BeltwayBreakfast* that US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman consulted with “many faith leaders” when planning for today’s ceremony, but would not say whether anyone from Foggy Bottom had played any role in Jeffress’ selection or done any vetting of the controversial pastor.

“Jerusalem is a holy city for millions of people around the world,” the official said, “and we sought to reflect that in this event.”

***This story has been updated to include further background on Rev. Jeffress, Raj Shah’s comments on Rev. John Hagee, and background on Rev. Hagee. Paragraph 6 has also been updated for clarity.***