

Supreme Court to weigh 'Israel' on U.S. passports

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JERUSALEM (RNS) The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to tackle the question of whether American passports issued to children born in Jerusalem should include the word "Israel."

Until now, passports issued in this disputed city have designated the children's birthplace as Jerusalem, but not Israel.

American officials have long maintained that replacing Israel with Jerusalem would constitute recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the city, which Israelis and Palestinians both claim as their capital.

The U.S. maintains that the future of Jerusalem, which was designated as an international city by the United Nations in 1947, must be decided in negotiations.

The case before the Supreme Court was filed by the American-born parents of Menachem Zivotofsky, an American Israeli born in 2002. Their petition was denied by lower courts.

Although Congress passed a law in 2002 that permits consular officials to list Israel as a birthplace, then-President George W. Bush reserved the right not to enforce the law on the grounds that it could prejudice the outcome of Palestinian-Israeli peace talks.

Nathan Lewin, the family's lawyer, told the JTA news agency that they are gratified that the Supreme Court has agreed to hear their case.

"Once the State Department's passport practices and policy are closely examined," he said, "the court will see that the argument that Congress has interfered with the president's constitutional authority is unjustified, and that the State Department's policy simply discriminates

against American citizens who are proud to have been born in Israel," Lewin said.