



2009

## Acceptance Speech, Tikkun Olam Award Ceremony, November 27, 2007

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### **Cover Page Footnote**

Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein has been a member of the United States Federal Communications Commission since 2004. He was honored by the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University with the Tikkun Olam Award at the Nostra Aetate Awards Ceremony on November 27, 2007, for his humanitarian leadership and advocacy for access to communication services for all Americans.

JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN

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*Acceptance Speech*  
*Tikkun Olam Award Ceremony*  
*November 27, 2007*

Thank you so much. Who would have ever dreamed a Jewish kid from South Dakota would grow up to get an award at the same ceremony as the Holy Father, Pope Benedict, himself. What an honor. I appreciate Pope Benedict's tireless work to promote love and charity, and to explore the deeper meanings of life. I also respect his efforts to build bridges across religious divides, and applaud you for recognizing his efforts tonight.

I'm truly grateful to the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding and Sacred Heart University for bestowing this award on us. The Center's mission is as noble as you'll find, and we all owe our gratitude for your contributions.

I am even more honored to be in the presence of the Speaker of the House herself, the incomparable Nancy Pelosi. Our Speaker embodies the spirit of compassion and social justice represented by the religions this Center joins together. She's not just a devout Catholic. She brings the values of her faith into her leadership and

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into our national life. She brings countless blessings on our children, our families, those in need, and our country as a whole. Thank you so much for being here and supporting the work of this great Center.

I'd also like to recognize my Chairman, Congressman Ed Markey, who is also a great hero of mine. Given his many contributions to our country, I'm thrilled he could join us.

It's an honor to receive this award with my friend and colleague Mike Cops. Together, we make a dynamic Catholic-Jewish duo, drawing the best from both our traditions in striving for social justice: protecting the weakest among us, and protecting our freedom of expression that is a cornerstone of our nation's religious life.

Of course, there's Vin Roberti, who certainly had something to do with our receiving this award tonight. He is a great person, a great friend to this Center, and a great friend to me. Thank you, Vin. And it's nice to see so many friends out there from the telecom and media world. Your support helps the vital work of this Center immeasurably.

My family is here. My mother-in-law, Anita, is here. My wife Karen who supports me in everything I do, makes a loving home for me and our kids, and makes possible anything good I might have done to merit this honor tonight.

And my father is here, who flew out all the way from South Dakota to sound the call of the *shofar* at the opening reception. He is so talented on that horn that when an important rabbi from New York City heard him play, he invited him to a great synagogue to perform on the High Holy Days. My dad declined, saying "Then who would sound it for our little congregation in Rapid City?" He has done far more than I could ever imagine to enhance Jewish-Christian understanding. As outnumbered as he is in South Dakota, maybe he has no choice.

There are more stories than I can tell. Most recently, he sounded the *shofar* at the installation of the new Lutheran Bishop of South Dakota. As a state legislator, he changed the very laws and the

very sensitivities of our state's leaders to interfaith issues. Most profoundly, he embodies the Jewish spirit of *tzedakah*. Justice, justice that he pursues for the native Americans, for tolerance, for charity, for his state, for our military, for our country, and for his family. Truly, it is his values I represent. It is his legacy I will strive to extend. It is his understanding about how to further Jewish-Christian relations that I will carry forward. Dad, I dedicate this award to you. You deserve it far more than me.

My mother, who can't be with us tonight, also gave me the values that brought me here. Her health is failing her, and I ask for your prayers in her time of need. She fled Nazi-occupied Poland in 1940, her family barely escaping with their lives from unspeakable horror. It is from her I learned how special and rare this life is. It is from her also that I learned the importance of giving something back to the great country that took us in. I've dedicated my life to public service for the United States, the nation that stood up to the Nazis and continues to fight for the principle that all people are created equal. She is having some health challenges recently, and given the spiritual power assembled in this room, your prayers for her recovery are deeply appreciated.

Everything I do is to help us live up to our highest ideals, to help our government do its best to improve the quality of our freedom and democracy, especially right here at home where the FCC plays such an important role.

My dad told me a story once. It was not far from where my Mother grew up in Poland, shortly after the war in 1945, that a young priest found a famished Holocaust survivor by the side of the road. He asked how he could help. She said she just wanted to go home. The priest lifted her up in his arms, carried her to the train station, and set her on the path homeward. Years later, that woman recognized that same face she never forgot on television. It was the then-newly appointed Pope, His Holiness John Paul II. That is what this evening is all about.

My beliefs are that if there is a God—and I believe there certainly is—it represents truth. If there is truth, it is the same for

all people and all religions. If there is a God, there is the same God for all the world. We just have different ways of expressing our devotion and our love for God. I love the truth it represents. In my work, I try to bring as much truth into the process of government as I can muster. I try to listen to that still, small voice that tells us what is right. Not just the loud voices of the many petitioners who daily call upon me, each with their own valuable perspective, not the many conflicting voices in my own mind, but the truest, most profound voice of all.

If this award means anything, it means maybe I've tried to bring just a spark of truth into a world badly in need of it. For this recognition, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.