



JCRC CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON RELIGION AND ELECTIONS

Approved by the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

August 12, 2008

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), representing nearly 80 synagogues and Jewish organizations, joins with the Anti Defamation League in expressing concerns about the growing prominence of religion as a part of the political election process. For JCRC, these concerns are built upon a foundation of more than six decades of tireless efforts aimed at ensuring that freedom of religion is protected and that there is no state endorsement of or excessive entanglement with religion.

The ADL's October 12, 2007, letter, to presidential candidates stated in part, "Freedom of religion is one of our nation's most cherished liberties, and, as a Jewish organization, safeguarding that freedom is one of our highest priorities." The letter "supports and respects the right of any candidate for public office to believe and to worship as he or she chooses. Candidates should feel comfortable explaining their religious convictions to voters and commenting about their own religions perspectives. At the same time, however, we believe there is a point at which an emphasis on religion in a political campaign becomes inappropriate and even unsettling in a religiously diverse society such as ours...Appealing to voters along religious lines can be divisive, and contrary to the American ideal of including all Americans in the political process, regardless of whether they are in a religious minority or ascribe to no faith tradition."

The letter urges candidates not to invoke words that are aimed at appealing to voters based on the candidate's religion; that appeal to any voter's religious, racial or ethnic bias; or that advocate for a greater role for government in religion or religion in government. It urges candidates instead to "be a leader for all Americans, of all faiths and no faith. Public profession of religious beliefs should not become a central part of our political campaigns."

The JCRC welcomes this important and timely statement and echoes the position that it is essential that candidates and their supporters remain mindful of divisive religious discourse throughout the election process.