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Central Conference of American Rabbis Annual Conference
Program Thanking Steve Fox
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We are grateful for what Steve Fox has brought to the CCAR. And I am grateful that I have the honor of articulating some of those gifts. We can go back to when I sat on the search committee that chose Steve as our chief executive, but actually we can go back much further to Steve's ordination. A couple of blocks from here at the Plum Street temple in 1980. You may not know this, but Steve and Karen Fox and Michael Weinberg and I were the first brother/sister rabbi teams in the history of the Jewish people.

[Cheers and Applause]

So at our brother's ordination, Karen delivered the invocation and I gave the benediction. Many of you know that Karen and Steve's parents came as refugees from Europe. And they were justifiably proud of both of their kids. Karen recalls when Steve was inaugurated as the CCAR chief executive, our parents beamed with pride. David wore his sunglasses inside so no one should see him cry. And Santa cried tears of joy freely. For them to see the Jews could lead in such public ways was a miracle. What Steve represented was so beyond their hopes and dreams. I was an officer for the first several years of Steve's tenure and worked closely with him as he guided the reshaping of the conference into a mission-driven and financially sustainable organization. He harnessed the talents of members and friends of the conference, to restructure our governance, to bring the best professionals to raise our publications to the next -- -- whether benefiting from his personal intervention or serving on a conference committee or task force or serving and the CCAR board or making use of the wide array of educational and professional enrich. Opportunities that has expanded exponentially under Steve's guidance.

One of the ways we plan to thank Steve is the establishment of the Steven A. Fox fund for rabbinate leadership. The CCAR fund will help our members access in-person leadership programs other than convention. A special focus on programs that

enrich rabbinic capacity and skills required -- that enhance rabbinic capacity and skills required to enrich Jewish life and that promote --

>> Well, friends, colleagues, we are gathered here today to express our gratitude to Steve Fox for 13 years of inspired leadership, of outstanding leadership of this historic conference. So Steve now stands in that chain of tradition, that chain of leadership that goes back to Isaac Mayer Wise whose birthday we're celebrating here in Cincinnati, in his city. Steve came to the CCAR when its future, our future was very much in doubt and he breathed into this patient new life, this patient that was on life support. I know Steve has been looking forward to this tribute with a mixture of -- with the mortuary and the cemetery. Then he even delivered the main eulogy for Matt at the funeral. That is a leader, that is a [Speaking Hebrew] and that is a friend.

[Applause]

Many of you in this room know what it's like to have Steve by your side, to have Steve in your corner, and to have Steve advocating for you. Steve, for 13 years of rabbinic leadership that you have shown us in the CCAR, we say [Speaking Hebrew] for making rabbinic leadership the center piece of your rabbinic -- we say [Speaking Hebrew] for making along with Hara, our preeminent Jewish publisher in America we say

[Speaking Hebrew]

For your tireless advocacy for all of our rabbis we say --

[Speaking Hebrew]

For nurturing and mentoring our next chief executive, we say --

[Speaking Hebrew]

And finally Vicky, for accompanying Steve on this journey, for sharing him generously with the conference for the past 13 years, Vicky to you we say --

[Speaking Hebrew].

Now Steve, with the help of Carly Linden, we have a video to present. Dan, roll it.

>> God, our source of freely flowing love, love us and give us as redeemed, as Jews and as rabbis. The capacity to listen, to discern, to understand, to learn, to teach and to uphold all the teachings of your Torah in this place and in every place. Endow the words of their mouth with creative power, for it is with words, not brick Norma sheen that they will build. Let them continue your work of creation by speaking words of conscience and transforming ideas into action.

>> Steven Alan Fox.

[Music]

[Music]

[Music]

[Music].

>> It's really with a sense of tremendous gratitude for our friendship over the years that I wish you a mazel tov on the milestone occasion in your life. You came into CCAR with the leadership that we required at that time, and the strength of the conference today and the central role that it plays, not only in the lives of all of us who were rabbis, but in the life of the reform movement and the larger Jewish world is due so significantly to all the contributions that you have made. Kathy and I cherish our friendship with you and Vicky, and we wish you only strength as you move onto this next step in your journey and your chapters together. We look forward to many years of friendship, and we wish you only happiness in the years ahead.

[Music]

[Applause]

>> Steve, when you became professional head of the CCAR, you asked the question: What do rabbis need? And your answer was: Deep learning, clear thinking, unflinching courage, and abiding faith. Your answer also was standing against the latest idolatries and you set out to create a CCAR that would serve these needs. I believe that you have succeeded. I believe that we are far better rabbis and the CCAR is a far better organization as a result of your efforts. So [Speaking Hebrew] to you. And thank you. For all that you have done for the rabbinate and the reform movement.

[Music]
[Applause]

>> What a privilege it has been to serve with Rabbi Steve Fox during these last years when he has left such a powerful and important imprint on our movement and particularly our Central Conferences of American Rabbis. I know Steve since I was a teenager in orange county. Can you imagine two guys from orange county picking these roles in Jewish lives? Steve came to CCAR at a critical moment, and things were not as rock solid as they are now. He has given of himself, his mind, his heart, his clarity of vision and his incredible gift to make very, very solid the core and the foundation of this Central Conferences of American Rabbis. We will remember his imprint for decades to come. It is out of love that we appreciate him today and celebrate his incredible legacy and gift to all of us. Rabbi Steve Fox, you have done magnificently and we all appreciate and love you.

[Applause]

>> The mission teaches us that when two people sit together and share words of Torah, the divine presence rests between them. We extrapolate this to mean that when we speak and we study and we learn together, and when we hear the Torah of our personal lives honestly and openly with each other, the divine presence dwells among us. So I hope and pray today that we open our minds, our ears and our hearts to each other, and that we commit to renew our efforts for a just and fair society, one conversation at a time, one rabbi with another, and from there with those we serve and those we lead.

[Music]
[Applause]

>> RON SEGAL: I'm going to invite Steve and Vicky to join me on the dais for just a moment. All of your dear friends who have been involved in organizing this moment of tribute have been trying to think about what would be an ideal and meaningful way of expressing gratitude for your years of service. And so on behalf of this conference, it's a joy to share and your bride, I think, was really, really helpful in guiding this. It's a joy to be able to present on behalf of your colleagues who are so grateful for you and your leadership two certificates for cooking classes in Italy.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

>> STEVE FOX: Thank you.

>> RON SEGAL: Where and when will be your decision, but we look forward to tasting the fruits of your effort.

[Applause]

>> STEVE FOX: Thank you. Thank you. I just want to say yes, indeed, what a long strange trip it's been. And how much fun I've had. That's the bottom line. I love what I do. Many of you heard me say this over the years. I love what I do and I've had lots of fun doing it with each and every one of you. We've had ups, down, moments of tension, moments of celebration, and every one of those moments is for the betterment of the rabbinate and the Jewish community. I will indeed enjoy the gift certificate. It's going to undermine my first goal of retirement, which is to lose all the weight I gained these 13 years, but that will be okay with me, too. So thank you very much, especially to these wonderful presidents, everybody who served in any capacity at the CCAR, those who welcome me on the first day and those who thank me today. I'm so appreciative to each and every one of you. Thank you.

[Applause]

>> ELLEN WEINBERG DREYFUS: I wanted to invite up all of the past presidents of the CCAR who are present. And I should comment that all of the past presidents are wearing Jerry Garcia ties in honor of the occasion.

[Laughter]

[Speaking Hebrew].

>> May God bless you and keep you.

[Speaking Hebrew].

>> May God's light shine upon you as your light continues to loom in the world you inhabit. You have enlightened us during your years at the CCAR with your wisdom and grace. And we ask God's grace upon your journey ahead.

[Speaking Hebrew].

>> May God's countenance be lifted towards you. May you continue to garden and continue to grow. May you continue to cook and may you continue to be nourished. As you have loved us and loved your family each step of the way, may all of the loves in your life deepen. May you gain well earned rest, dive into much desired reading, say yes every time we ask you to do something.

[Laughter]

May all of those pads for you be pads of blessing. May all of those pads for you and for the holy one who blesses you be pads of peace as together we say amen.

[Applause]

>> ELLEN WEINBERG DREYFUS: Mazel tov. Before we dismiss you to the reception, I just want to mention our thanks to the licorice subcommittee which will be providing Steve's favorite, black licorice from Mazel's. Steve is allergic to licorice, but he loves it anyway. So you get to help yourself to licorice. Announcements you wanted to make? Thank you to everyone.

>> I don't know how to follow that. So I'm just going to remind us about our evening program at 8:30 with Roberta Kaplan and Amy Spitalnick. One of our goals of convention was to celebrate meaningful transitions and all those who were part of this celebration have contributed to that.

Now it is time to celebrate upstairs in pavilion and caprice ballrooms where the exhibitors are. Thank you to Dodd educational exhibitions and world travel for sponsoring our reception in honor of Steve.

[Event concluded at 5:54 p.m. ET]