

Thank you, Michael.

Good Evening, Friends,

I am grateful to be here tonight to accept the

**Gerald A. Gerash Leadership Award** on behalf of my partner,  
Governor Jared Polis.

Who would have imagined this moment possible?

In 1992, Colorado became known as the 'Hate State'.

Today, we have so much to celebrate, including this past November  
**THE FIRST OPENLY GAY MAN TO BE ELECTED GOVERNOR IN  
THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES.**

None of this would be possible without the bold and visionary work of  
activists and luminaries of civil rights, many of whom are with us  
tonight.

First, to Gerald Gerash, a pioneer in fighting for LGBT civil rights, and  
an original founder of The Center.

Jerry was born in 1934 in the Bronx, to Jewish parents who fled Europe  
to escape antisemitism.

Is it coincidence that Governor Polis' father, Stephen (and my mother,  
Wendy) were also born in the Bronx? That, like Jerry's, our families are  
also Jewish? Maybe. Maybe not.

Is it coincidence that oppressed people, whoever and wherever they may  
be, understand better than anyone the need to fight injustice in all its  
forms? Yes.

In 1976, Jerry's work on behalf of gay Coloradans achieved a  
monumental success: the coming-together of many gay-rights groups to  
form 'The Center'.

And just look at what 'The Center' has accomplished since its founding.

It has been an invaluable resource in our community, a constant defender of our rights not to be treated differently, but to be treated the same. It has soothed us in our hardships, and given us courage when the odds were against us.

We are joined by Representative Brianna Titone, Colorado's first openly-transgender Legislator.

Representative Leslie Herod, Colorado's first LGBT African-American Legislator.

Our extraordinary allies, Denver's first woman District Attorney, Beth McCann.

Representative Alec Garnett.

And Former House Speaker Crisanta Duran, Colorado's first and only Latina Speaker of the House.

We are surrounded by friends:

Franklin Azar

Brownstein Hyatt

Feldman Nagel (like bagel)

Johnson Knudson

Messner Reeve

Recht Kornfield

Sawaya (Suh-why-uh)

Squire Patton Boggs

And so many others.

I want to thank tonight's Corporate Sponsors:

The Vinnik Companies, Super Farm, Buddy Boy Brands, Good Chemistry, Native Roots Foundation, and U.S. Bank.

Last but not least, when I was invited by The Center to accept this award on Jared's behalf, I immediately reached out to see if I might bring two guests honor-worthy in their own right: 13-year-old Judah Ruscha (Roo-Sha), who co-founded his school's GSA right here in Denver, and his wonderful mother, and dear friend of mine, JoyAnn Ruscha.

Happily they said yes.

Judah and JoyAnn, your presence here is an inspiration to us all. Proof that this work matters.

Friends, in just over 25 years, we have shattered our former image of the 'Hate State'.

Indeed, we have become a model for representative democracy.

Look around this room. When we fight for each other, we make America what it was always meant to be: a place for everyone.

It is an honor to be with you tonight, and to accept this award on behalf of Governor Polis.

He sends his profound gratitude to The Center, to the activists on whose shoulders we proudly stand, and to the allies who continue to fight for equality for all.

Thank you.