

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

1540 Kuser Road, Suite A9
Hamilton, NJ 08619-3828
(609) 585-7878
TTY (609) 585-3650

108 Lacey Road, Suite 38A
Whiting, NJ 08759-1331
(732) 350-2300

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

<http://chrissmith.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEES:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**AFRICA AND GLOBAL HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE**
RANKING MEMBER

**WESTERN HEMISPHERE
SUBCOMMITTEE**

**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**
RANKING MEMBER

**CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE
COMMISSION ON CHINA**
RANKING MEMBER

DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Excerpts of Remarks by Congressman Chris Smith
American Jewish Committee
New York, New York, January 9, 2008

I want to begin by thanking the American Jewish Committee for this honor, but more importantly, for your extraordinary, principled leadership and successful advocacy not only for Russian Jews and Jews worldwide, but for all who yearn for freedom and the rule of law.

I especially want to express my deepest respect and thanks to David Harris for having made—and continuing to make—a huge difference in the cause of human rights. For 27 years as a Member of Congress, I've admired his commitment, determination and skill.

And to Rabbi Andy Baker, who among other things has led international efforts to combat anti-Semitism—especially within the fifty-five OSCE countries—through enactment and enforcement of hate crimes legislation and holocaust remembrance and education. Thank you for your outstanding leadership as well.

In Jerusalem two days ago, Congressmen Frank Wolf of Virginia and Joe Pitts of Pennsylvania and I had breakfast with Natan Sharansky.

It was—as it always is—an honor just to be with Sharansky and benefit from his wit and wisdom.

While most of our conversation centered on peace, justice, security, and reconciliation—or more accurately the absence of those things, especially with the ominous rise of Hamas—it was yet another opportunity, like tonight, to recall the bravery and tenacity of Jewish refuseniks.

And, in like manner, to remember the indefatigable advocates like the AJC, who never ceased striving, never grew weary (if you did, you didn't show it or let it affect your work) and never gave up in the pursuit of freedom.

In 1982, during my first term in Congress, Davis Harris, Mark Levin, Jerry Goodman, and a few others put together a congressional delegation trip to Moscow and Leningrad to meet refuseniks in their homes and to engage Soviet leaders.

For hours on end, our delegation heard stories of Soviet physical and mental abuse, systematic harassment, gulags and psychiatric prisons and an array of seemingly wanton brutal acts of anti-Semitism.

To apply for an exit visa—a universally recognized human right, which on paper at least, the Soviet Union had acceded to—was to invite the cruelty and wrath of the KGB and other small minded, morally-stunted communist thugs. Of course, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know, you experienced it.

To courageously seek freedom—as you did—rendered you ineligible for employment in Lenin's farcical "workers paradise."

The Soviet system, militantly atheistic and morally incoherent, wouldn't let you leave, but didn't want you to stay either—a bizarre paradox.

To a new 27 year old Congressman, it was bewildering and deeply troubling—why do they hate the Jews? Why the anti-Semitic obsession?

In Dr. Lerner's Moscow apartment, our delegation heard Sharansky's mother admonish us to do more for her son, for she feared his life was in jeopardy.

"Raise Anatoly's situation with the highest officials," she asked us. Which of course, we did.

A few years later, and shortly after Sharansky's release, Congressman Wolf and I visited Perm Camp 35 in the Ural Mountains—a horrific gulag filled with prisoners of conscience. To the utter dismay of Lt.Col. Osin—the Perm Camp's KGB warden—we interviewed and videotaped most of the prisoners and pushed for their release. When Sharansky saw the prisoners we had interviewed on the video, he told us, "they are my friends."

On that first of many trips back in 1982, we also met with Yuli Kosharovsky, who explained to us how he taught Hebrew, notwithstanding persistent threats, searches and arrests. I was amazed. He just defied them.

In meetings with Soviet leaders, I got to experience firsthand and for the first time, duplicitous, mean-spirited government officials. I thought the IRS was bad. These men would listen to you but not hear. Like robots, they all said the same thing and had the same "talking points."

The deceit, lies, and doubletalk was both numbing and motivating. I remember thinking, and screaming in my mind, these guys are jerks.

So many of us got angry and motivated.

We resolved first to pray—Psalm 37 and 73 were particularly helpful for me—and to work to secure the release of Soviet Jews, however long it took.

Good intentions by scores of Congressman, Senators and Presidents, however, needed direction.

It is clear to me that absent the expertise, well-honed strategies, reliable information, and actionable intelligence provided by AJC, NCSJ and others, little would have been accomplished.

In human rights work, hyperbole and falsehood are lethal. The bad guys know when you're faking it, or acting out of ignoble intentions.

The Jewish groups were accurate—painstakingly accurate. My colleagues and I in the Congress always had supreme confidence in the information we received.

The Jewish groups wrote the book on turning advocacy into success, in large part by linking human rights with trade.

The incalculable wisdom of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment—linking Most Favored Nation (MFN) status with Soviet Jewish emigration—was pure genius and enabled the freedom of more than 657,000 Soviet Jews between 1975 and 1991, alone—1.4 million over forty years.

And not only that, but the success of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment revolutionized human rights policy *for the better* on multiple fronts.

It seems to me that all but the most naive know that diplomacy and moral suasion has only limited appeal or efficacy in dealings with dictatorship.

Mere talk—especially the niceties of diplomatic chatter—is often cheap.

Jackson-Vanik proved that the judicious application of economic rewards and punishment yields positive human rights results—and freedoms for many who are oppressed.

(I have authored numerous human rights laws over the years, including the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 2003 and 2005—laws designed to combat sex and labor trafficking. The lessons learned from Jackson-Vanik are the reason why I—and others, despite considerable opposition—insisted that foreign aid penalties be applied to nations complicit in or indifferent to human trafficking. Predictably, such linkage has and is working well to mitigate and combat this modern day manifestation of slavery).

Linkage tells bullies we mean business!

So tonight, I hope every former refusenik knows how deeply respected, cherished and admired you are.

You stood up to a Goliath-like, tyrannical, anti-Semitic dictatorship that seemingly held all the cards, had all the power to destroy, including a brutal secret police—and you prevailed.

You inspired generations past, and inspire today, all who seek freedom, human rights, the rule of just laws and liberty. You are heroes. The world is forever in your debt.