

3/4/97 DC School Const.
Grant Announcement, WDC

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PRESERVATION**

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
D.C. SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANT ANNOUNCEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.
MARCH 4, 1997

Thank you Principal Thomas. I am delighted to be here at Ketcham Elementary. This is a hopeful day not only for this school but for schools all across this city. I thank every one for joining us -- including Congressman Jim Moran and Councilman Kevin Chavous [CHAY-vis] whom I see sitting in the audience.

We are gathered here today to announce that the District of Columbia will be receiving more than \$18 million from the federal government for school repair and reconstruction. The funds come from a very unique source -- the proceeds from the privatization of Connie Lee, an institution established by Congress to insure college and university bonds. And I am very pleased that Oliver Sockwell, the president and CEO of Connie Lee, who is himself an alumnus of the D.C. public schools and active advocate for D.C. school children, could join us today.

As we have just seen this morning at Ketcham, the need for repair and reconstruction in the District's schools could not be greater. The school is overdue for electrical, gutter, window and plumbing repairs. Water fountains need to be replaced and the boiler room needs maintenance. Because of a persistently leaky roof, the teachers, students, and administrators live in fear of rainy days. Principal Thomas has had to close classrooms where mold has begun to grow or plaster ceilings are on the verge of collapse. I commend her, the teachers and students of Ketcham for making the best of a difficult situation.

But our children deserve better. They deserve safe and spacious schools, places where their greatest challenge is not to stay warm in a classroom without heat or to stay dry in hallways plagued by leaky ceilings, but to understand an algebra problem or perform well on a spelling test. Today's announcement takes us a modest, but certain, step toward that goal.

And many of the people standing here played crucial roles in making these funds available. I want to start by thanking Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, who has been one of the Administration's most passionate and innovative champions of the revitalization of America's cities, including the District. He and Undersecretary Hawke who is also with us today, led our efforts to privatize Connie Lee, making sure that the government received a fair price for its shares.

Secretary Rubin has also led efforts to reform the Community Reinvestment Act rules and to support the Administration's Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, an initiative that is bringing credit and opportunity to hard-working people living in some of our most disadvantaged neighborhoods, including here in the District.

I am also delighted that Education Secretary Richard Riley could be with us today. Secretary Riley has been working hard to make sure all of our children are equipped with the high-quality educations they will need to thrive in the 21st century. And he played a leading role in developing the President's national school construction initiative. As many of you know, the initiative, which is part of the President's balanced budget plan, will help communities across the nation, including Washington, finance much-needed school construction and repair.

It's pretty safe to say that without the leadership of our next speakers, we would not be standing here today. Senators Jeffords and Dodd were chief sponsors of the Student Loan Marketing Association Reorganization Act of 1996, which provided the framework for the privatization of Connie Lee, and shepherded the bill to passage in Congress. The senators, along with Delegate Norton, who is also here with us today, convinced their colleagues that there was no better use for the proceeds from the privatization than to help Washington make its schools safe for its children. I know firsthand that Senator Jeffords has worked tirelessly on behalf of D.C. schools, both as a Senator and as a citizen. Last June, I had the chance to visit Tyler Elementary, where the Senator mentors and reads with a student during lunch hours.

I am also pleased to be joined to today by Mayor Barry, General Julius Becton, the CEO of the D.C. schools and Dr. Andrew Brimmer, chair of the D.C. Control Board, who will tell us about the importance of these funds to the District's schools and their students.

It took many people to make today's announcement possible. It will take many more people to make sure that every boy and girl in this city is given the opportunity and the education to fulfill his or her God-given potential. And I believe every one of us has the time, talent and skill to contribute to that effort.

I have seen with my own eyes how different sectors of our community can make a difference. Just last month, at Cleveland Elementary, I saw how members of one law firm had helped reinvigorate an entire community by tutoring students, repairing school facilities, and helping parents with legal problems. A week later, I accompanied the President to Garrison Elementary, where he and General Becton announced a new commitment to bring universities, college students and Americorps members together to help elementary school students with their reading skills.

So I am confident that if we all pitch-in and keep working together, we can transform this city's schools into the nation's pride.

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