

Forum on Education
Nassau Community College
October 19, 1998

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
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It is such a pleasure and honor to be here. You know, Nassau County Community College is the largest public institution in the state of New York and the second largest community college in the United States of America. I also like your motto, "Where success begins." And I think if the comments that we heard from Nicole are any indication, there is a lot of success beginning here right now and going forward. You did an excellent job. Let's give Nicole another round of applause.

I would like to thank Nicole and Len Rubin and all the officers and workers on behalf of the student government for making this event possible. I want to thank you, Professor Nicholson, for your comments and for representing the faculty here. I want to thank all of you who are a part of making this community college available as an institution of excellence for the more than 22,000 full and part-time students who are working to enhance their own educations and provide for their future job prospects and professional pursuits.

There is no doubt in my mind or that of the President's, about the importance of community colleges and the entire higher education system in our country. It has always been said that the United States had a higher education system because of our wonderfully deep reach with all of the different public and private institutions that we have that provide places for so many different kind of students -- people of all ages. And for that reason, have the best system in the entire world.

Well there is no doubt that is true, but as Chuck Schumer and I, and so many of you know, we have to make sure that the dream of higher education is affordable to everyone. And there is no more important issue for New York or America than making sure education is excellent and accessible. We cannot afford to have any student find higher education unaffordable. And I was very pleased when I was invited to come here on behalf of Chuck Schumer. I really feel that I am here on behalf of students and faculty and the citizens of this area who have supported this institution, who understand how important it is, not only to the futures of those who are actually studying here, but it is critical to the future of this entire region.

Out of community colleges come future business leaders, workers and citizens that will continue to build a strong economy and a strong area for the raising of children for the pursuit of our individual interests. What do we need to do in order to ensure that college remains affordable? Well, you have already heard Chuck Schumer mention some of the important issues that we have been struggling with in Washington.

We have to do all that we can to follow up on Chuck's priority to make education affordable. Now Chuck Schumer was truly one of the very first members of Congress to take on Gingrich's Contract for America. There were a lot of people who couldn't be found in those days. They

were intimidated. But there is one thing you can count on with Chuck Schumer. He does not intimidate and he does not get bullied around when he sees an issue that he thinks is important at stake. So there he was, often a lonely voice as I remember, showing that the cuts in student loans that were a part of that Contract for America and the elimination of the interest subsidy would cost 300,000 New York State college students more than \$3,500 in increased loan repayments.

Now why on earth would the Republicans under Newt Gingrich want a Contract for America that would make it more difficult and more expensive for students to go to college? I thought about that a lot and I just never could understand it because it seems to me that the one thing we all have a stake in is encouraging bright students like Nicole and Lynn and their peers who are here to do all that they can to build a better future for themselves.

But there it was. And it took Chuck Schumer, the President and others to defeat that Contract for America and to continue to provide the kinds of loans and subsidies our students need. But of course that wasn't enough. We need to do more. And one of the centerpieces of Chuck's campaign is to make college tuition fully deductible. I think that is one of the most important legislative agendas that anyone can bring to the Senate because we want to send a message to all of you -- young people and not so young -- who are finding their way back to this community college that we believe that investing in your education is a good investment for New York and for America.

Chuck Schumer also had success in passing legislation to require colleges to accurately and openly report crime. And that earned him an award from the United States Student Association and other student groups because he wasn't just concerned about whether college could be affordable, but whether it was safe. Now that may not be a problem here but it is a problem on certain campuses around New York and around the United States.

No student should have to worry that on the way to and from class, in the hallways or taking a coffee break, that there is any danger. We have too much on our minds to worry about that. And the Student Association recognized and thanked Chuck Schumer for listening to them.

He was also one of the very earliest supporters of the President's proposal to allow families to deduct up to \$1,500 from their tax bills for the cost of college tuition. Now that was an important battle. And Chuck will remember that once again, the President and Democratic leaders like Chuck Schumer had a very difficult time persuading the Republicans that deducting college tuition was a worthy effort.

Now they are more than willing to spend our surplus that we should save for social security on tax cuts, but they are not willing to give students the kind of deductions that they require. That is why building on that accomplishment, Chuck now wants to make all tuition deductible.

I must say that his opponent, as far as I have been able to determine through research and talking to Chuck's campaign staff, has never said a word about the cost of college. He has never seemed to recognize that it is a real stretch for many families, like the family Chuck grew up in. It is a real stretch for many young people who are on their own and trying to balance the cost of

everyday living and the cost of going to school.

And although the tuition here at this community college may be less than it is at other institutions of higher education, I know by the show of hands that there are many of you that have had to take out loans and get other financial assistance to be able to afford the tuition here at Nassau Community College.

I want you to recognize that you have in Chuck Schumer somebody who is not only aware of the issues surrounding the affordability of college, but who listens to students, faculty and citizens who tell him that we cannot allow the doors of college to be shut to any young person.

Now that is particularly important because as Nicole was introducing not only some of the members of the student government, but calling on the various clubs and association that students are a part of, I could see all the diversity that is part of the student body here. I imagine that there are not only international students but there are first generation Americans. There are students here that are the first in their families ever to go to college. These are young people we want to encourage to be part of the American Dream.

It is not enough that the families of the affluent can send their children to college, but with Chuck Schumer, the families of every American student can send their children to college. That is the kind of choice you have in this election.

On the one side you have Chuck Schumer. He is not only a strong believer in higher education, but a strong supporter of public education as you just heard him say. He has worked hard to support the public schools. He has supported our teachers, not bashed them. He has talked about the need to put more teachers in the classrooms to lower class sizes in the early grades so that children get the individual attention that they need.

He has talked about preparing our schools, modernizing them and building more. I have been privileged to be in public schools around New York and I have been in some absolute first-rate schools. But I have also been in schools where windows were broken and boarded and plaster was falling off the ceiling and they weren't wired for modern technology because they were built in the 1920's or earlier.

I have also been in districts where students are going to school in trailers because there are not enough classrooms. Chuck Schumer knows that if we don't invest in our public school system, we are really betraying our American legacy because I think it is fair to say that America is what it is today in large measure because we have always believed in public education both in elementary and high school and in higher education.

I was recently in Belfast, Northern Ireland and I was attending a conference that brought together women and men to talk about how they could be a part of this peace that we are all so grateful for. And I was so surprised that so many of them who had never ever met before, and had never sat down with Catholics and Protestants in the same room, began to discover how much more they had in common than divided them, how they all cared about what happened to their families

and their children's education.

A person then said to me, "One of our biggest problems is that we don't have a public education system in Northern Ireland. Catholic children go to one school, Protestant children go to another school. From the very earliest ages there is no interaction. They believe the worst about each other." And person after person said that if there is going to be a stable, long-lasting peace we have to do what you did in America: open the door of public schools to children of all backgrounds where they can learn to live and work together.

I don't think we value enough how important our public education system has been to building the kind of country we have today. And I want someone in the United States Senate who will stand firmly behind public education and do everything he can to support it.

That is the record that Chuck Schumer has. We have another record to contrast it with. His opponent, Senator Al D'Amato, has consistently, not just once, but consistently supported cuts to student loans, to Pell Grants, to state student incentive grants and to work study.

I don't understand that. Why would you want to pull up the ladder of opportunity after you had already climbed it? Why wouldn't you want to leave it down for young people of all different backgrounds to see how far they could get up? And one of the tools we give is the federal aid to education -- Pell Grants, student loans, incentive grants. The President has consistently fought to increase all of those and Chuck Schumer has consistently fought with him. And Al D'Amato has been against educational support.

He has also voted against increases in Head Start. In fact, he voted to cut Head Start in the past. He voted to cut education funding for our public schools. He has used teachers and students as very cynical ploys to try to get votes from people who don't understand how important education is for our future.

So I hope that when all of you think about the choices that we are facing in this election in just 15 days, those of you who are here and part of this great institution will recognize that you, more than many, have a real stake in the outcome of this election. It is a very clear, even startling choice.

Now Chuck Schumer cannot do any of the things he talked about: protecting programs like Pell Grants and work study or making all college tuition tax deductible -- if he doesn't get elected. Then, they are just good ideas that sit on a shelf somewhere. He cannot get elected unless people who understand how important education is vote for him. And I would argue that the young people of New York have more of a stake in this election than maybe ever before because we are going to be charting the course in the next few years for where we go in America.

Are we going to make education a priority? Are we going to provide opportunities for people who would otherwise be shut out of the system? Will we make it possible once again for physicians and patients to get the health care they need and not have it determined by HMO bureaucrats and bookkeepers? Will we protect social security for the future? Will we do all the

things that we have seen have made a great difference in the last five and a half years in our country because of presidential leadership and leadership from people like Chuck Schumer? Or will we begin to dismantle our systems of financial support for students, dismantle our public schools system, go in a very different direction that is not anywhere America has ever been before or I believe we would want to go.

So I urge all of you, be sure you vote in this election. Don't take it for granted. You know, I didn't know about this ad that Senator D'Amato was running, but I want to tell you something about Mongolia because I have actually been there.

There was a communist country oppressed for years located right between China and Russia. And we have, I would argue, a strategic interest in making sure a country between China and Russia has American ideals and is a friend of America's. Now that little country, after it came out of those terrible years of the worst kind of authoritarian communism all of a sudden found that it was a democracy. And they had to learn all the things you have to learn in a democracy like how does a democratic leader respond to the people who put him in office? And because the United States helped Mongolia, they are a democracy today; they are a friend of the United States.

But more than that, what I want to emphasize is that when they had an election, all those nomadic herders who were out in that far wilderness with their yaks and camels, they found their way to the polls. They knew that voting was important because America had taught them that voting was important.

Americans went to Mongolia to teach people what it meant to be a citizen of a democracy. I am proud of that because we want democracies because democracies are our friends. They support our values and they stand with us in hard times. And those people who understood how important their vote was because they had been deprived of it for all those years, no hardship was too great for them to get to the polls and vote for freedom and the leaders they wanted. For goodness sake, if a person in Mongolia could get on a camel and make it to a polling place, I sure hope the people here in New York can get to a polling place.

Sometimes we take our blessings for granted, don't we? We just assume that America will continue along the path it always has been. Who on earth would ever think that you would have a Senator who would want to make college less affordable. So why do I have to go vote? It is only because of the president and members of Congress like Chuck Schumer that it hasn't happened.

If we don't have Chuck Schumer in the Senate to stand up for the needs of most of us and not just for special interests then making college less affordable could happen. I hope that you all realize how important this election is. Don't be diverted by misrepresentations and ads that are going to make you think things that are not true. Let's instead focus on what is important and we know that there is nothing more important than education -- you heard Nicole eloquently testify to that.

Let's listen to our young people. Let's vote for education and let's vote for Chuck Schumer and make him the Senator who will support us. Thank you very much.