

Harsharger Event  
Somerville, Massachusetts  
October 20, 1998

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton  
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Thank you. It is just wonderful to be here with all of you. I want to thank you for your welcome and reception of us today, but more than that I want to thank you for what you are doing on behalf of the children in your community. I want to thank your superintendent. I have been to many schools where the students are coming from families that have many many children for whom English is not their first language. And this is the first time that I have seen a superintendent address his parents both in English and Spanish as a sign of respect.

That says volumes to me about how this school district feels about all of its children. And that is one of the reasons you have had so much success in really focusing on the needs of every child.

I want to thank your mayor -- soon to be your congressman -- because he has truly been a model and an example. And I cannot tell you, Mike, how excited the President and I are to know that you are going to be in Congress come January and we are going to have a strong voice for education in the halls of Congress.

Someone who is not up here with me but someone who I know is very important to this school is Frank Ferraro. I want to thank him. And I started my visit off right by walking into a large group of three to six year olds and they were excited and they had that bright face that children have when they are glad to be where they are and filled with curiosity.

And the real heroes of what we celebrate today are the teachers and those parents of those children and the children themselves. And it made me feel so good to look into their faces. It is something I do at every school I visit.

Now you would think that most 4, 5, 6 year olds would be happy to be in school. But there are places where I go and you can see their little spirit just dribbling away. You look at their eyes and you don't see the brightness that you want to see in a child's face. But today I can guarantee you that the children at this school, based on my relatively short exposure to it, the children are happy to be here, they are being well taken care of and they are being prepared to do the hard academic work that lies ahead.

And that is the a great tribute to the entire community, but I particularly want to thank the Somerville School Committee, and I hope some of its members are here. And I want to thank the Edgerly School parents and teachers because when we talk about Edgerly Village, when we talk about Somerville, when we talk about education as being a priority, we know that this is not the responsibility of any one group of people, it is all of our responsibility. Whether or not we have children or grandchildren, all of us have a stake in how well this school and every other school across the country does.

Because now more than ever we have to count on our children being educated to be able to compete in the global economy, and Somerville has put enormous resources and made great sacrifices to prepare its children and I salute you.

I am also pleased to be here with Joan Menard about whom much has been said and much more could be. She has done a very good job leading the Democratic party here and has now assumed national responsibilities. And Joan, I want you to eat every meal on that table so that every Democrat will be elected on November 3rd.

It is always a treat to be here with Vicky Kennedy. Vicky has become a great friend of mine and she and the Senator and my husband and I always have a great time whenever we get together whether it is on the Senator's sailboat off of Cape Cod or in Washington. And I admire Vicky a great deal and I know that the people of Massachusetts have come to love and respect her as well. But I want you to know that she has assumed a leadership responsibility on behalf of very important issues, not only here in the Commonwealth but throughout the country. She has courageously stepped forward to put herself on the line to advocate against the wildly accessible amount of guns in our country. I cannot imagine how anyone could be against what Vicky is for but of course they are.

She knows that we need safety locks on guns and responsible laws that prevent adults from leaving guns around and there are many who oppose that very sensible, prudent measure that Vicky supports. So this is not a cause which she has taken on that is 100 to nothing and everyone is happy to see her advocating it. It is a controversial cause and I want to commend her for being willing to use her authority on that behalf.

So it is a great pleasure for me to be here and especially to be here to support your candidates for governor and lieutenant governor. You heard just now from your attorney general, soon to be your governor, Scott Harshbarger, on what needs to be done in the area of education.

He is absolutely committed to making education his first priority. Now we have an election in two weeks and I have seen all kinds of polls and research and the election in Massachusetts is a dead heat. It is very very close. I want you to know how important it is that you and your friends and neighbors and colleagues all vote on November 3.

We have a very clear choice in this race in the Commonwealth. And Scott has laid out a very detailed plan about what he would do for education and he has made the very important point that this is not about the past, it is about the future. But he needs your help to get his message out. He needs your help to encourage people to get out there and vote for him because what he has advocated, which is so important, is that every child in the Commonwealth has a safe and orderly school to attend and one that presents high standards and provides the resources that every child needs to learn.

He has also made it a point to support and uphold teachers. We all owe a debt to our teachers, and we have to make sure that our teachers are given the tools and the environment they need in which to work.

Now I have been all over our country and I have been with many different people -- many different candidates who are running for office. And it won't surprise you that education is an issue everywhere and I am glad for that. Education needs to be the first priority in these upcoming elections because education is the way that we can make a different future for ourselves and our children.

In this school, that has been recognized. It is a pre-school through first grade. You have very young children, as young as 3 -- that is very unusual in public schools. You have Head Start program's because we now know based on research that what happens in the first years of life before a child ever gets to school is so important to how well that child develops.

We now know through brain research that it is not just a nice thing to read to a baby or sing to a child, but by doing that you are actually building brain cells. We know by research now that it is not just a good thing and a fun thing to do with young children like the three and four year olds I saw downstairs -- to encourage them to play and cooperate, but we are building all kinds of skills that will enable them to do better in school and in life later on.

So early childhood education such as you have invested here in Sommerville is a crucial part of Scott's program to improve education across the Commonwealth. He also knows how important it is to have good, high standards that enable everyone to know where we are headed and how we are going to get there. And he has been a staunch supporter of hiring more teachers to lower classroom size.

You know it is very important that we give our teachers the opportunity to teach our children to learn and you cannot do that if you have 28 or 35 6 - and 7 - and 8 - year-olds in a classroom. There is no way that they will be able to get the attention they deserve. That is why Scott has made putting more teachers in our schools, especially in the lower grades a priority and that is why the President and Senator Kennedy fought so hard to get that done.

Now I would like to expand a little on something that both Vicky and Scott referred to because you know in the past few days there has been a blizzard of activity between the White House and the Congress. The President's agenda which was introduced in the State of the Union back in January could not even get a hearing by the Republican majority. They wouldn't even have a hearing on the President's education agenda.

Leaders like Senator Kennedy stood up day after day and said "Why can't you even have a hearing on how we can lower classroom size and repair our schools and set national standards to follow?" But they were too busy dividing us and diverting us from the important business of the country.

But then all of a sudden they had an election-year conversion. They thought, "Oh my goodness, we can't go back to the people and tell them we have done absolutely nothing but rename the airport in Washington. We have to think of something to do." So they began to talk and argue with the Democrats in Washington about what they wanted to get done. And the White House and the Democratic leaders like Senator Kennedy stood firm.

They said, "No, we are not going to let you put some window dressing on this and claim that you are a friend of education. You are going to have to really do something for education." So as a result of that hard bargaining, education funding will go up by more than 11 percent. And more importantly, they have agreed in this budget agreement to go ahead and start making the down payments on the President's plan to put 100,000 more teachers in our schools. Now that means 2,500 teachers for Massachusetts alone. That can do a lot to create the small classes that you have been able to create here at Edgerly but which are not common throughout out Commonwealth.

But let me just ask you something. How much can we trust an election-year conversion? If we don't have Democrats in Congress to protect those gains and if we don't have Democrats in Statehouses to implement those programs, can we really count on getting what this agreement promises? Well, I believe that we should be very very vigilant.

We have to do more to make sure that we get Democrats in Congress who believe that we need these teachers and we have governors like Scott who will make sure that those teachers actually get in the classroom and the money is not just siphoned off and spent on bureaucracy.

So this is not just a victory we can do a victory lap about. This is a first step, as Scott said, in making sure that education reform is real. So don't be fooled by the headlines about a budget agreement that was an election-year conversion. It was merely the Republicans realizing they had to give in so they wouldn't be punished at the polls. But believe me, they would be back in a heartbeat to undo it if they thought they could get away with it. So we have to make sure that they don't have the votes to get away with it which is why we need your mayor in Congress. and a governor like Scott would be able to make sure the teachers get in the classrooms.

One of the issues that the Republicans would not give in on was to fix our schools -- to repair, maintain and fix our schools. Now no state needs that more than Massachusetts because you are one of our earliest states and you have been committed to public education longer than many of our states have even been states. And you have a lot of buildings that need to be converted and you have a lot of buildings needing repair and maintenance.

So this initiative that the President put forth in his agenda to make sure that the federal government supports communities like Sommerville that are doing the right thing, we still have to fight for. And we need strong advocacy in Congress and the Statehouse to make the case as to why the federal government should make funds available to local school districts like Sommerville to fund your local construction projects.

And another point I would make is that Sommerville, which has already committed itself to doing what it needs to do and is making progress on school construction and maintenance, you should be rewarded. And one of the ways the construction and maintenance money should be distributed is to look hard at different communities. And if you look at a community like Sommerville which has already made sacrifices and has already committed resources but still has a way to go because of your school's infrastructure and you take a comparable community that hasn't made the sacrifices, the money should go to the people of Sommerville first because you

have made the local commitment.

But we can't get any of this done, we can't protect the gains that we have made in this budget agreement for education unless we have leaders that really care about education and make it their first priority.

This election will be very, very close in many races around the country. The races should not be close based on the issues. But the other side always has a lot more money and resources to fill the airwaves with all of their ads and try to persuade people not to vote against somebody with negative attacks. And so we have to work even harder to get a positive message across -- a pro-education message across.

And that is why Scott needs your help. He needs your voice. He needs your vote. He needs you to talk about the importance of who sits in the governor's chair when it comes to education. And he needs the people who are supporting him to spend as much time as you can in the next two weeks talking about why this election is important.

Now I know that there are many good, hard-working citizens in Massachusetts and Americans across the county who just don't vote. They are too busy or think politics doesn't matter. They just don't see the point of going and standing in line and passing their vote, and they missed the deadline for absentee ballots and because they are counted their needs don't count -- their children's needs for education, their families' needs for better and more affordable health care, their parent's needs to protect social security. Those needs don't get counted because the people who are defenders of the status quo and even in favor of turning the clock back -- they always show up for elections. They get up real early. They just can't wait to vote against somebody. They are really motivated because they don't believe in public education. They want to privatize social security. They want the HMO's to decide your health care.

And someone else who has a lot at stake for this election gets up and tries to get the kids ready for school and packs a lunch and gets to work. There is so much going on that that person has forgotten to vote. Well this election is going to make such a difference in the future of Massachusetts and America that I hope every single person in this gymnasium will do everything you can to tell everyone you know this is an election you cannot afford to sit out.

This is an election where you have to get up early and get to those polls. You have to make the time to be there to vote because believe me, your children's education and their children's education rests in who makes the decision in the next few years about whether we really make education a priority or not.

The people of Sommerville have already spoken. They believe that. Now you need a governor who will make sure that remains a reality. So please, vote November 3rd. Vote to make Scott Harshbarger the next governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Thank you very much.