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Selveto Army's Golden Age

Salvation Army's Golden Age
Senior Citizen Center

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I feel so welcome. I can't thank all of you enough for welcoming me here. And I have had a wonderful time going around greeting everyone. I thank you all for letting me come and visit with you for a few minutes. I thank you for the many kind words that you shared with me. Mayor, thank you for telling that story, because usually, no matter where I travel, Eleanor Roosevelt was there first.

When I come to a place like Tonawonda, and she has not been here, I feel especially privileged, because I enjoy the fact that I get to come and meet with all of you. And that I am in a part of New York, of really of the United States, that is so historically significant. This part of New York, with all of the history that we have here, going back for so many years is a very important part of this state.

And I hope that we will be able to work together to bring a lot of the economic opportunities and prosperity that the state deserves to have, particularly here in Western New York. I am delighted to be here with Chuck Flonig, who is the Chair, who is from Erie County. I think he has been introduced and I am glad he could be here. Steve Pigeon, who is the Chair of the Erie County Democratic Party. I want to thank Lt. Garrett, and his wife Heather and everyone associated with the Salvation Army.

I have been a very big supporter of the Salvation Army for many years and I appreciate all the good work. I know that this nutrition program is a county program that is using the facilities of the Salvation Army. It's that kind of partnership that makes such a difference in providing services to people. You know it's a pleasure to be here with your mayor. I want to congratulate her on her leadership and service. I am delighted that her husband and son are with her as well. Mr. Roth and their son Winthrop are back there. And I thank you for being with us.

You know I am very pleased that I could come to this meeting and have a chance to see all of you, because there are a few things that I want to mention about the importance of this campaign and why I am running for the Senate and the issues

that I would work on if I were in the Senate.

Of course, one of those is to make sure that we provide the kind of support and services that older New Yorkers need and this is the kind of program that needs to be supported. Now I know that many people are wondering why I am running for the Senate. Several of you were kind enough to say that you would support me and I am grateful for that. I am running because for over 30 years, I have really worked on issues that I think are important to people, particularly the children and families, on behalf of public education and health care. I have worked on behalf of issues that affect seniors like Medicare and Medicare benefits, particularly for diseases like breast cancer for older women. I think that it is very important that we have people in the Senate, who listen to people, who work with people and try to solve problems, which is what I would do if I were privileged enough to represent you in the United States Senate.

As I have said on many occasions, I may be new to the neighborhood, but I am not new to your concerns. Those are the concerns that I have been devoted to for my entire adult life. I have thought about them a lot, when I was last here in Buffalo a few weeks ago, I announced my economic plan for the advanced training center, and I was very excited by the possibilities that exist for really getting the economy in Western New York performing the way it should for people. There are many of you in this room, I imagine whose children and grandchildren, who have had to move away to get jobs.

How people have lost children, or grandchildren, or nephews or nieces to somewhere else because they have to go somewhere else, outside the state, outside the region, they could not find good work here. Well we need to change that. I have outlined a plan to do that in the United States Senate to make that possible. And I was pleased to talk with a lot of people here in Western New York, who understand what we need to do together.

I have also been working very hard to improve health care. You may remember that we tried to do that in 1993 and 1994. We weren't totally successful, but I did not give up. I will not give until we do provide quality affordable health care for every New Yorker and every American. And one of the policies I feel strongly in supporting is Medicare, because if we do not have a strong Medicare system, then we are really turning our

back on the health care needs of my mother, and older Americans.

So I think we should have a prescription drug benefit that would give Medicare recipients a chance to pay for the medication and the drugs they need. I think that would be something that we could all fight for. But we also have to do something about lowering the cost of prescription drugs, because they are just too high. You know prescription drugs are going up 12-15% a year and I am concerned, because there are people I know here in Erie County and Niagara and throughout Western New York and further north, who go to Canada to buy drugs. I do not know if any of you have done that yet, but there are people there who can't afford the drugs that we manufacture here in the United States so they cross the border to buy those drugs.

I don't think that's right, and I believe that we should have a law which says that if there are FDA approved drugs that are manufactured by FDA-approved companies, namely American drug companies that are sold more cheaply in Canada than they are here in the United States, they should be re-imported to the United States to our pharmacies so you can pay the cheaper costs. I would fight for that kind of bill in the Senate, because I do not think that it is right that the American taxpayer, who pays for the research that helps create a lot of these drugs and pays for the FDA that tests these drugs, pays a higher cost than the people living in Canada. So I would very much fight for that and I think it would make a very big difference for a lot of people who have very big drug bills.

For example, I know many women who are fighting drug cancer. My mother-in-law, we lost to breast cancer and the highest percentage of breast cancer, though it strikes terribly in young women, but the highest number are in women who are over sixty-five who come down with breast cancer. Well, tamoxefin, which is the drug that can best treat drug cancer, a three month's supply of that drug would cost under \$50. The same drug in the United States would cost almost \$390, so we are talking about really big differences in terms of what those drugs cost in Canada and what they cost us in the United States.

I think that if we fight for what I am calling the access to Affordable Prescription Drug Act, it's only fair that we would lower the price of drugs. And by the way, if we lower the price

of drugs generally, that means the cost of our Medicare dollars will go further when we get that Medicare drug benefit, which I think is very important for everyone.

But today I want to talk to you about another problem facing us and that's the sky rocketing price of heating oil. Ever since Bill and I bought our house in Chappaqua, it has been heated by heating oil, so we know how much the price has gone up in a short period of time. This is a problem that is affecting all New Yorkers; but particularly, those who are on fixed incomes are seniors, and those who are lower-income working families. The cost of a gallon of home heating oil in New York has hit an all-time high. It's gone up sixty-one cents per gallon since the holiday season.

And we have a lot of families here in New York who are reliant on home heating oil. When the price rises or when the weather gets really bad, they have a lot of financial pressure. That is why today I am announcing a comprehensive, bi-part plan to address New York's home heating costs. First I think that we ought to be willing to stand up to OPEC when it engages in a coordinated effort to cut production and starve us of oil. That cartel is hurting New York's families by lowering the supply of oil worldwide and that has to stop.

We also we have to be sure that we do everything possible to get the additional funding that the President has recommended from Congress. The President has called on Congress to provide \$600 million in additional funding for a program called LIHEAP, which stands for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Now that program provides support to 515,000 New Yorkers so they can pay their home heating bills. I applaud the New York Assembly, the Senate Democrats and the Governor for raising the eligibility level of LIHEAP so that even more people can be reached.

I also support creating a system for what are called SWAPS in order to release oil from a strategic petroleum oil reserves. We think that would lower the prices by getting more oil into the market. The Federal Government would loan out oil to companies in exchange for a commitment that they would pay it back with even more oil in the future. I also would fight to pass legislation that creates an oil reserve for the Northeastern states including New York if I am elected to the Senate. That reserve could be tapped when fuel oil prices sharply rise during a shortage or during periods of extreme

winter weather. The reserve would protect New York families against sudden price spikes, by insuring that oil is available in the Market place. And that would keep prices down.

I also would fight for legislation to require the heating oil industry to keep minimum inventory levels. Many of you know that if you keep a higher level of inventory then you can fill the needs of people before you have to go and buy more expensive oil. That has been one of the problems that we have faced this year. So I think that distributors of home heating oil should have to keep some minimum level of oil on hand for cold weather that we have experienced here the last few weeks.

Finally, I support targeted tax incentives and investments that are aimed at increasing energy efficiency and making it possible for use more renewable energy right here in New York. You know we are very reliant in New York on foreign oil. And that means that they make a decision in the Gulf or in Latin America or somewhere else in the world to raise the price of oil. We feel it more quickly and deeply than people in the rest of the country. There are businesses here in upstate that are leading the way in alternative energy, places like Plug Power, which is working on something called fuel cells. We have the most incredible hydropower in the country and we ought to be able to use that more cheaply right here at home.

So I think it is time to stop playing politics and grandstanding with our home-heating oil prices and roll up our sleeves to get to work to secure lower prices for all New Yorkers. I think we need real solutions for real problems and that's the kind of Senator that I would like to be.

I have been in public service for more than thirty years, and I have not yet held public office except when I was in school. And that was a long time ago. But I have done a lot of work in both the private and the public sector on helping to bring jobs and create jobs and improve schools and expand health care and protect our elderly. If you give me a chance to serve the United States Senate, I will be on your side every single day. I will work my heart out to make it easier for you to enjoy these years by making it possible for you to afford everything from prescription drugs to home heating oil and continue to enjoy programs like this nutrition service provides.

Thank you very much. (applause)