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Syracuse University

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Thank You. Thank you so very much. I am delighted and honored to be here and I especially want to thank my friend, Mike Bragman for his support, his wise counsel, his enthusiasm, his willingness to be there on so many occasions as I've traveled throughout the state; and I'm delighted that his wife, Sue, and his daughters, Heather and Leslie, could be with us as well. I don't know that any place, not just anywhere in New York, but anyplace anywhere in the country, has someone who represents them who is as devoted as Mike is, and I especially recall when I went with Mike to New Venture Gear and we were in a golf cart, going around that huge plant, one of the most successful plants in the entire world right now, running three shifts; the kind of plant that demonstrates that upstate New York and Syracuse and central New York in particular have some of the best workers that America has to offer the global economy; and I think Mike knew the name of every single person who worked in that plant.

So, I am delighted to be here with Dean Wells and to thank you and the university. I want to thank both Anthony and Christina for their words and for your commitment to the political process. I very much echo what was said about the importance of young people being involved in politics, not being turned off by the process, recognizing that in our democracy, it is the price we pay for the progress we've made and the citizenship we enjoy and I'm always pleased to be with young people willing to commit themselves to be part of making this great democracy move forward by being involved in politics. And I want to thank Marissa for becoming a teacher. I thought Marissa was eloquent and practical at the same time in describing what it is like to be in that classroom. There's a lot of talk about education but we don't pay enough attention to the words and experiences of those who are there on the frontlines day in and day out. I think there are going to be some very very fortunate young people who have Marissa as their teacher in the years to come.

And being back here at the university reminds me of the times that I've been here before, particularly in 1994 when I

was here with Senator Moynihan and I was able to visit some of the cutting edge research projects that are being carried out right here at Syracuse University. I could see for myself the well-deserved reputation for academics and research, for service to the community, and, yes Mike, for success in athletics that has made this university such a premier institution around our country and the world.

As I was looking at some of the statistics that gave me a snapshot of the student body and the faculty, this is not only a great national university, this is a world class university; and I thank and congratulate everyone who is committed to insuring that the education that is carried out here is done so for not only the students who are here now, but for generations to come.

And that's what I want to speak about today. I want to talk about the issues that New Yorkers talk to me about. As I said Sunday when I made my formal announcement, I have been a believer in the importance of people joining together to bring about change ever since I was a very young girl. When I gave my own speech at my college commencement more than 30 years ago, I said something then that I still believe today- that politics is the art of making possible what appears to be impossible. And I have seen, in the last 30 years, evidence that has made me believe that just as strongly today as I did then.

Now clearly, since 1969 when I graduated from college, I'm a little older and I am a little blonder, and I'm a lot humbler, but I am no less convinced that the effort to use our political system to improve the lives of our fellow citizens is what has continually rejuvenated America from generation to generation as we have accepted to burden of meeting our challenges of our time. And, in the last seven years, I've had even more evidence that has convinced me of the importance of this conviction. When I look at the progress that we have made as a nation, I can see how if people are committed to the right strategies, and they bring to their work, that vision and action that Mike talked about, we can see progress being made.

Who would've thought back in 1992 when I campaigned for the presidential ticket of Clinton and Gore, if I had stood before a crowd and said, "If you elect this new team, if you let them play on the court of the public area in Washington, we will eliminate our budget deficits, we will reverse the fiscal

policies that drove us into debt, we will come up with tools for communities to use to lower the crime rate, we will end welfare as we know it, and give people the respect and dignity and opportunity to be self sufficient." Many of you would have shaken your heads and thought, "That sounded impossible."

Well, seven years later we know that it was not, because we had the right team; we had the leadership; we had the strategy. Well now I want to build on that kind of progress. I want to take what we know works and begin to use the ideas and the energy of the accumulated wisdom of the people of New York to be on a team that will face the challenges that lie ahead, because I do believe we can strengthen families, we can protect children; we could improve our schools and we can provide healthcare to all of our citizens and we can bring good jobs to every corner of New York.

In Buffalo on Monday, I laid out some of the plans that I would take to the United States Senate to try to generate those good jobs here and central New York and Western New York and throughout upstate New York. Yesterday at University of Rochester Strom Memorial Hospital, I spoke to a large crowd of doctors and nurses and health care professionals and community leaders about what we could do to lower the cost of prescription drugs and provide healthcare to all of our citizens that was high quality and affordable and accessible.

Today I will be speaking about public education. Tomorrow in Albany, I will be talking about how we strengthen families and how we make it absolutely clear that the most important job any person has is the job of being a parent and doing the very best any of us can do to raise our children to be good, productive, kind, caring, citizens. On Friday, I'll be at Long Island University with Senator Schumer laying out some of my plans for targeted tax cuts that will help middle class and working families and in particular talking about why it is so important we make tuition tax-deductible so that every young person in New York can afford a college education. And on Saturday and Sunday, I will be in New York City talking about how we bring this state together, how we unify ourselves around our common objectives.

There is no reason why New York, which was the leader in the nineteenth and twentieth century about what it was we as Americans believed in, how to create good jobs, the industrial economy which owes its beginning to the people in New

York, why New York cannot be the leader for the twenty-first century. But in order to do that we have to confront the issues that lie in the way of that progress. We have to have leaders who bring people together to address them, and we need to have strategies that we know will work to bring progress to all the people.

Now I know that some people are asking why I am doing this here and now, and that is a fair question. I understand why anyone would ask that. And this is my answer and why I hope you will put me to work for you. I may be new to the neighborhood, but I am not new to your concerns. For more than thirty years, in both the public and the private sector, in my professional and volunteer activities I have worked on the concerns that New Yorkers talked to me about. I look out on this audience and I see people whose homes I've been in, whose homes I've stayed in, whose neighborhood restaurants I've been in, whose backyards I've stood and talked in, whose porches I've sat on, and I've learned so much from these conversations, and what I've learned is that the concerns of New Yorkers are the concerns that I share. I know something about them, I understand them, and I believe I know how to make progress about them.

You know when I sit around a table in a teachers lounge in Queens and talk with the teachers and the Principal and have a chance to hear about their concerns trying to teach two thousand kinds in a building built for a thousand. I know that we have to change that. When I travel as I have from one end of the state, and listen to young people talk about what they want from their educations and the opportunities that they need, I can see in their eyes the dreams that they have that we cannot let be deferred. I have worked on these issues for a lifetime, and now I want to make sure every child in New York has the best possible public education in smaller, well-equipped classrooms, with well-trained teachers.

I've seen the same dreams as I have visited businesses, from Jamestown to Great Neck and talked with business men and women about the struggles they face and providing and keeping good jobs here. And I've thought about all the work that I did, first in Arkansas, and then as First Lady, in America and around the World, sitting on corporate boards where I was privileged to serve, trying to help be part of decisions to place and create jobs, and I know that there aren't any people, anywhere in America that are better

workers, more committed to the work ethic than the people here in New York. Now I want to work to improve the training and the skills and the education for workers and to provide credit for entrepreneurs and to make sure that New York is connected, so that we have the technology available to compete in the new economy. I want to be sure that we bring the prosperity of this new economy to all New Yorkers from upstate towns and farms to inner city neighborhoods.

When I talk with children and teenagers particularly they often talk to me about a turning point in their lives. I was in a school outside of Buffalo a few months ago, and a young African American woman told me how her life had been turned around by an after school program. And she admitted on the front end of the conversation she used to get into a lot of fights, she caused a lot of trouble. She didn't think anybody cared about her. She had absentee parents. Her grandmother was doing the best job she could, but in this after school program it just clicked. There was a young woman there that really believed in this young girl, and it made all the difference.

I know what we could do to provide such opportunities for young New Yorkers through pre-school and after school, and summer school, and mentoring programs, and I want to part of making it possible to give every child in New York a chance. Because after all, they are all our children. And I believe there is no more important challenge to any society than how we raise our children. Everything else is obviously important, but there isn't anything more important.

The first time I worked on an issue related to public schools after I myself had a great public school education in the schools outside Chicago, where I grew up, was when I went to work as a young attorney for the Children's Defense Fund. It was right after I had graduated from law school. I had interned there during my summers. I had gotten to know the lawyers and the extraordinary leader of the Children's Defense Fund, Mariane Wright Edelman, so when I went to work, I was part of a study looking at why children weren't in school.

Now for many of you who are students, this might seem like ancient history, but it wasn't so long ago. It was 1973. And what we had discovered is that if you took census tract figures about the numbers of school age children and you compared it with school enrollment, there was a big gap in lots of places throughout our country. Where were these

children? So I went door to door in several communities, literally knocking on the door, asking the people who answered whether they had children in their home, and if the children were in school.

I met children who weren't in school because they had been taken out of school at the age of ten or twelve to help the family earn a living. I met children who had what we now consider very minor disabilities confined to a wheelchair, hard of hearing, very bad eyesight, maybe being blind, having the loss of a limb who were kept out of school because the schools didn't know how to accommodate their disabilities. I met children who were kept out of school for a long time because their families were too poor to buy them the warm boots and the warm coat that they needed to go to school in Massachusetts. Time and time again I saw first hand that we were not educating all of our children.

Thankfully we have worked hard over the last years to begin to eliminate those kinds of barriers. We've opened the doors of our schools, we've opened the doors of our colleges, and we have some good results. You know, yes we do face challenges in public education, but for a minute, we in America ought to take stock of what we try to do and how well we do it. No other country tries to educate all of our children. No other country believes that all children are entitled to a free public education and that all children can continue to go through the process.

Even some of our friends in Europe and elsewhere begin to divide children off at the age of eleven or thirteen or fifteen, some are permitted to go on, and others aren't. No other country has the fail safe system of higher education, that includes technical schools, community colleges, four year colleges and universities that are there to educate people who wake up at the age of eighteen or twenty-five or fifty and decide they want to learn something, and that they are now willing to really study. We have a simple system, that is unparalleled not just in the world today, but literally in the whole of human history, in our belief in the importance of public education.

Yet we also know that we have problems. And it is because of those problems that we need to be recommitted again to the idea of public education and the belief that all children can learn. Because just as we heard from Marissa, I too have

been in schools where children are crowded into classrooms where one teacher could not possibly get around to even talking to all of her students in the course of a day. I've been in schools where the plaster is literally falling down, and where whole parts of the school building are barred because a child or a teacher would be possibly in danger if they went past the barricades. I've been in schools where the textbooks that are being used still talk about the Soviet Union. I've been in schools where the lessons that are being taught haven't been upgraded or changed in thirty years. I've been in schools where there is no sense of the excitement of learning, where there's no commitment to the idea that all children can learn, where people are still making excuses- "Look at where we get our kids," "Look at how poor they are," "Look at who their families are," "Look at what side of town they're from."

But for every school I've been where that is going on, I've been to schools that take the same kids, from the same part of town, the same kinds of families, the same level of poverty, where they are performing miracles, where you walk into the school, and you know that this a place where children are glad to be in the morning. Where teachers are happy to go to work, where learning is occurring. Now what is it we must do to make more of our schools reflect that kind of excitement?

Well I said on Sunday, that I believe in the six 'R's- Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Responsibility, Respect, and Results. And I would like to see all of us, not just those who are educators, but parents, and business, and labor leaders, and academia, every one of us commit ourselves to making it possible for every school to be the kind of school we would want our daughter or son to attend.

How do we do that? How are we going to meet the challenges posed by public education today? Well first, let me say what I have seen work. Right after the National Report, A Nation at Risk came out in 1983, I was asked to chair a committee in Arkansas aimed at improving the education system in that state. And I traveled throughout the state talking with a lot of people, just as I am doing here in New York, because there are a lot of good ideas from people who had been in our classrooms and understood what it would take.

And in the face of some significant opposition, we brought people together to implement new teacher testing, to raise standards, to increase accountability, and to update the

curriculum to meet the goals of a modern education. We did so based on two principles. First, that we only cheat our children when we expect less of them than we should, when we lower our expectations. And secondly, we cannot raise standards, increase accountability, and expect more without making sure that our schools and our educators have the resources to meet those new standards.

I called for the end of social promotions seventeen years ago, and I still believe, there is no doubt in my mind we only cheat a child if we promote that child into the next grade into the next grade, and the child cannot get a job because he or she cannot read or write, or cope with the demands of the new economy. So there is no doubt in my mind that we have to end social promotion.

But if we raise the bar, as I believe we should, then how do we make sure we help kids meet those new standards, not just be pushed down, marginalized, and left even further behind? If we're going to make sure every child can learn then we have to start not in school, but in those pre-school years. Because I believe that parents are a child's first teachers, and that the home is a child's first school.

I think we have to do more than we currently do to help parents understand their responsibilities. I'll be talking more about that tomorrow, but I want to be sure that there is no misunderstanding. Even if we do everything I would like to see done in our schools that will only make the difference we need to see if children arrive at school ready to learn. That's why we also need to support programs like Head Start, and pre-school so that children are given the kind of help in those very early years that will equip them to be successful in school.

And then when they get to school, we have to be sure that they are being taught by well-trained committed teachers. We have to be sure that they are in class sizes that are small enough, especially in the early grades that they don't just get lost. We have to be sure that we equip our schools with the new technology so that no child is left on the side of the information superhighway.

If I were in the Senate right now I would be supporting the president's proposals to improve education. There isn't any greater priority. I would be supporting the kinds of programs

that we know work & evidence that they make a difference. I would stand very firmly on your side in the fight to make sure that we do add one hundred thousand new teachers to America's classrooms, which would mean that New York would get around nine thousand more teachers that it desperately needs for our children.

For five years in the Congress we have tried to persuade the Republican leadership to support the idea of providing federal funds for school construction. That is an especially important issue here in New York, because most communities in New York cannot afford to build the schools they need, to provide the technology they need without some help. If I go to the United States Senate I will be on your side on the fight to stand up for school construction bonds so that local communities can equip and build the classrooms they need without having to raise their property taxes, which is not a possibility for most communities.

But you know, when it's all said and done, when we hopefully get more teachers, when we equip our buildings, when we make sure they're connected to the internet, we still face a huge problem in New York and America, and that is the impending teacher shortage. More than half of the teachers in this state are eligible for retirement over the next decade. New York City alone is expected to lose nearly seventy-two percent of its teachers over the next five years. And so many of our children in our poorest schools will be the first to lose their teachers, because if those teachers have other opportunities that are offered to them they will take them or they will not postpone retirement.

I've met a lot of teachers in my travels around New York who tell me they love to teach, and they love their children, but they don't believe they get the help or respect that they need to stay in the classroom. They certainly don't think they get the help with discipline. Assaults against teachers have unfortunately gone up in parts of our state. That is just unacceptable.

No teacher should be afraid of her students, and no student who cannot control his or herself should be kept in the classroom. Students who cannot behave should be in alternative classes and schools where they can get the help they need without disrupting the learning of all the other students. So we need to address not only the teacher

shortage, but the salary shortage, the support shortage, the quality shortage, and the discipline shortage that hurt our schools and make it very difficult for a lot of teachers to teach.

So how will we do that? Well, we need a recruitment campaign to fill America's classrooms with first-rate teachers. Just like in the military, when we deplete the ranks of our teachers we threaten our security and our future. If I am the United States senator, I will be on your side to fight to create a National Teacher Corps so we can put more than seventy-five thousand talented teachers every year into our schools that need them the most.

With a National Teacher Corps, I would provide college scholarships to sixty thousand young people annually, who would commit to teach at least four years in high need schools. This will ensure that teachers are certified, and that students will get the highest quality of instruction. It will also ensure that students in college who would like to be teachers could afford to be teachers. Because I hear from many students that they would consider teaching, but they can't afford to do it because they have such a debt load when they get out of college that they have to go to work doing something else in order to pay off their debts.

In addition to the sixty thousand young people that I would like to recruit into teaching through this initiative, we would also like to provide bonuses and training for fifteen thousand mid-career professionals to become teachers every year. This program would promote alternative pathways to certification, so that people from fields like engineering or computer technology or foreign language or a host of other areas, would feel that they could enter the teaching profession.

Now we have seen this work with the program that we started a few years ago, the Defense Department's Troops to Teachers program. That is sending retired military men and women into our neediest schools, and I have seen what a difference it makes. There is nothing like a former United States Army sergeant to bring order to a lot of our schools around New York. And I've also heard and seen a lot as I've traveled around about the difference these military professionals are bringing because of their broad range of experience. Many of them have traveled broadly. They've been in many different cultures. They can relate to the broad mix of

students that we now have in New York schools. It is a program that is working, I would like to see it expanded so that we can take people who at the age of thirty, thirty-five, forty or even fifty or fifty-five say you know I'm just not satisfied doing this anymore, or I now have enough money that I know I'll have a secure retirement I would always, I have always wanted to be a teacher. So let's make it possible for more people to do that.

To often, people who are interested in teaching don't even know where to go to get information that they might need. They don't know what jobs are open, even in their own community. They may not know how to get certified, either in a traditional or alternative certification rout. And a lot of schools tell me they're having trouble-finding people to put in their classrooms.

I would like to create a National Clearing House so that people could go on-line to learn about teaching jobs, and the skills they'll need to succeed in that job. Prospective teachers could get on-line information about certification requirements, teacher education programs, alternative certification routs, and schools could put on-line all of the jobs that are available. If this were a national program we could connect people up so much more, easily and quickly with the jobs that are available.

Because it is not enough just to open up the classroom doors. We have to make sure people know about the jobs, and even more importantly, that they are well equipped with the experience, and the expertise, and the knowledge and the skills needed to meet the those higher standards. I think every state should follow New York's lead, and test every new teacher to ensure that they are prepared to educate our children. No child should be in a classroom with an unqualified teacher. That should be the very basic condition that we set for putting anyone in any classroom anywhere in the state. Because if we want quality teachers we have to recruit, train, test, and ensure that they are prepared to teach.

But I don't think we will get the quality teachers we need if we vilify our teachers, if we criticize and rebuke, and point fingers, and call names when it comes to being a teacher. And if we want quality teaching we should reward quality teaching. That is why I support initiatives to reward high quality teaching through bonuses that recognize performance.

We know what it takes to ensure quality teaching. It takes that commitment from teachers to teach and work for higher standards, it takes training, it takes mentoring. It takes a peer evaluation process that rewards good teachers, helps those who need it, and frankly, removes from the classroom, anyone who is not making the grade.

Let me be clear. When teachers fail our children, there is no place for them in the classroom. Now there are some who reject this, what I consider to be, balanced approach. They would turn to gimmicks like vouchers, claiming that would help cure everything that ails public education. But I think they are dead wrong. We have tried voucher experiments, and we've seen no real evidence that they make a difference in student achievement.

Instead, vouchers leave communities more divided, schools with fewer resources. And they distract us from the real work that we have to improve all public schools. I do support charter schools that are done the right way. Accountable public schools with well-trained teachers. I believe in giving parents more choices in selecting from among public schools. I've seen what can happen when citizens and teachers are empowered, and when people feel obligated to be a part of the school and the community. If we want every child to learn, then every adult must share the same goal, to raise up our public schools, not tear them down. I have been committed to public education my entire life.

We now have debate going on about the future of our schools. It's being debated in school boards and state houses and in the United State Senate. And when it comes to education we should demand action, not rhetoric or political pandering. And so we have to ask ourselves and we have to ask our leaders.

What kinds of solutions will we offer? Will we spend our time firing people or fixing our schools, working to sell off a school board building, or investing in our children, resorting to teacher bashing or engaging in problem solving?

You know, I was told a very long time ago that real leadership means rolling up your sleeves and getting to work, not pointing your fingers or clenching your fists, because if you'll notice that if you point your fingers or clench your fists you can't roll up your sleeves. I want to be a senator that brings people together to do what is right by our children and their

education.

And I also think that it is critical for every one of us to understand that public education is the bedrock of our Democracy. We have lasted as a Democracy that is as diverse as America is for so many years because the public school system was there to serve all children.

I've done some work on behalf of peace in Northern Ireland, which we all fervently pray for. And one of the events that I sponsored was a community meeting in Belfast where people came together to talk about what needed to be done on the ground, person to person, to bring about peace. And over and over again people said to me you know, one of our biggest problems is we don't know each other. We don't go to school with each other; we live in totally different neighborhoods.

What can we do have a public education system like America? Well it was the right question. Because it is this public education system that is like America, that has made America what it is today. Public service has been my life. Now it hasn't as yet included public office, and over the next nine months all of you will decide whether I've earned the privilege of representing you.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate the support and the encouragement that so many of you have given me over the last months. I want this to be a people's campaign, a grassroots campaign, and I especially want it to be a young people's campaign. Because much of what will be debated in the United States Senate will have far more to do with your life, and the life of my daughter than with my life, with Mike Bragman's life.

The decisions that we will be making at the beginning of this century will set the tone for what it is we can achieve as a nation. In the summer of 1998 I went on a bus trip through upstate New York as part of our White House millennial effort to honor the past and imagine the future, and I remember so well warm July afternoons as we traveled through the beautiful countryside. I stopped at George Washington's Revolutionary War headquarters in Newberg, I traveled onto Harriett Tubman's home in Auburn, and I ended up in Seneca Falls, where we commemorated the first women's rights convention.

As I visited all of those places I could see visibly, symbols of

the greatness of New York's past. But what was more moving to me, as it is today was to see in the eyes of young people the dreams for their own futures, and what we could all do to make those dreams real. To people all over the world, New York is more than just a great state. Immigrants are still flooding in, not just to New York City, but also to upstate New York, to Syracuse and Rochester to find jobs and to take their place in the American Dream.

We need to define what happens in the twenty-first century, just as New York defined what happened in the twentieth century. And if we believe we can make possible what appears to be impossible, than I have no doubt that is exactly what we will do.

We will improve our schools. We will recruit and keep high quality teachers. We will ensure that every classroom is connected to the Internet and every child is not on the wrong side of the digital divide. Will do all this because we believe how important it is that we give every single child in New York a chance. And if you'll give me a chance to serve I will work my heart out to make that happen, and that is why I want to be your Senator.