

315-00
Central Islip H.S.

Central Islip High School
School Construction

Central Islip, New York

March 15, 2000

Thank you very much Andrea, Mr. Smith and superintendent (inaudible) and all of you who are gathered here I especially appreciate representatives from the board, the teacher, and especially the students. I want to thank the school choir for your fabulous performance and also have kind legislators, Judy Biehls and Steve Levy, I thank you both for being here. You know I am very impressed to see what I see going on in this school, the energy and the enthusiasm I feel as I am walk in the front door walk corridors and meet with the students and the teachers is something that I really respond to and because I can tell that there is a lot of good feelings and energy packed into this building every single day.

But I also know that the challenges that you face are ones that are really pretty serious and as principal superintendent walked me around the school, they opened door of what used to be closets and locker rooms and they showed me the divided classrooms.

And I heard from the superintendent how the enrollment is expected to increase by 30% in the next five years, now I look back on the thirty years that I had spent on behalf of children and education and it coincides with the life of this school which was built in 1970, and I have been involved in many activities designed to improve opportunities for our children. And I know very well that it is a constant struggle to stay ahead of where you need to be in order to provide the services and opportunities for the young people. This particular situation here is not only a Central Islip problem or not even a Suffolk county or Long Island or even New York problem it is an American problem.

You know too many classrooms across America, and right here in this County, are bursting at the seams. I've been in and out of schools that were built for a 1000 and we already have 2000 and more kids on the way. Because we've what you call the baby boom echo or the baby boom boom lift

where we now have more children in school than we've ever had at any point in our history. And as both the principal, the superintendent and all of you recognize, we're really asking our schools to do more than we did ten or twenty or thirty years ago. It's not just the regents exams. It's also special ed and resource rooms and labs and new courses-everything that we want a first class school to be able to offer which you offer here. I've also seen a lot of schools around the state that are in desperate need of repair. School buildings where there's literally plywood or cardboard on the windows, where ceiling plaster is falling down, where whole corridors are barred off because it's too dangerous to walk down them.

Well, thankfully, that is not the case here. But the kind of stretching at the seams that is going on here is something that I don't think can go too much further. I don't know that you can divide those classrooms that I was into one more time. So, we have to face up to the fact that there isn't anything more important, not only to our children's future but to all of our futures, than providing a world-class education. You're doing an excellent job of that here, in this district. But we know that our children cannot get the attention they need for the regents exams if there aren't enough hours in the day and teachers in the school to go around to give them that special attention in a lab or a class. We know that you have to keep up with technology so that every classroom, as you do have in this district, is connected to the Internet. But you got to keep adding on to that because you don't want any youngster to fall behind on the wrong side of the digital divide.

For all of these reasons, I believe we need a national school modernization initiative. I would like to give local communities, like this one, a tax break to help you build the schools that you need, to modernize the classrooms, and to build the new science labs. If I am elected to the Senate, I would fight for school construction bonds to help communities across New York afford what they need in the modernization, repair, and building of new schools. I would work to pass what the President has proposed, which is 24 billion dollars in federal dollars that would come to local communities. Because there are many communities, here, in Suffolk and Nassau County, and throughout New York, that cannot afford to tax themselves too much more.

You know, what Andrea said is true for a lot of places. And it's especially challenging to figure out how we're going to help

meet the needs of education in fast-growing communities like this one. If we were to pass that 24 billion dollar school construction bonding plan, 2.7 billion of those dollars would come right here, to New York. And our children deserve nothing less. But this measure has been bottled up in Washington for years. Congressional leaders say that local communities shouldn't get the help. Well, I think they should. I believe that New York families need a tax break to help all of us build the schools that our children need. So I would fight to pass this school modernization initiative, so we can give 21st century children a 21st century education.

When this help comes from Washington, it could relieve the pressure on local property taxes. You know, in the 1995-96 school year, which is the last I have full figures for, local districts paid 1.6 billion in school construction, mostly through their local property taxes. If we could bring more federal dollars in to help relieve that burden, that would relieve the pressure on local taxes.

You know, schools in New York are literally transforming themselves. You know, I was talking to the Superintendent and I said, well, you've been in education 33 years, what are the big differences? And he said, you know, the programs we offer now, the opportunities we make available, just weren't there 33 years ago.

But that is not done for free. It costs money. It requires qualified, well-trained teachers. And so we have to make a commitment to first-class educations. And we have to be willing to not only adopt high standards but to meet those high standards by providing the kind of rigorous curriculum and making sure that we stand behind our teachers and students as they move forward with the resources that they need.

I would like also to address the teacher shortage. We have in the country figured out that we will lose 50% of our teachers in the next ten years to retirement. In New York City, the figure is 70% in the next five years. This is a problem nationwide. I would propose that we create a national teacher corps so that some of these young people who might decide they would like to be teachers but don't think they can afford to do it because they have to take on so much debt to go to college, I would propose they get full scholarships in return for promising to teach for four years in schools that need good

teachers. I also think we should provide more opportunities for people to go into teaching mid-career. You know, we've done that with the military so that we have something called Troops to Teachers. And as people retire from the military, we try to persuade them to begin to teach. And it's been a great success where it's worked. I think we should do more of that, as well.

We have to reduce class size, we have to turn around failing schools or shut them down, and we have to ensure that our students come to school ready to learn by providing good preschool education and supporting families who are, after all, a child's first teachers. All of these kinds of challenges are ones that we certainly can take on. There is nothing magic to them or so complex we can't figure it out. We know what needs to be done. But we need to make this a national commitment. And that's one of my primary reasons for running for the Senate. Because I don't think there is a more important issue for New York or America than public education. So I would like, very much, to be your voice and your vote in the Senate to stand up for what we need to do to make sure that this school and this district continue to provide the kind of high-class education that I've seen for myself today. Thank you all very much.