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Roslyn High School

Roslyn, New York

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Good morning. I want to thank the students who are here, and I'm looking forward to this conversation now with you.

I want to say just a few things, sort of get the ball rolling, and raise some issues that I would consider hearing your views about, as well as anything else that might be on your Mind. I am delighted to be at the school because of the reputation, ah, that you have, and the work that is done here to provide opportunities for students to pursue their own interests and really develop themselves to the fullest of their own potential. That obviously rests on strong values, values coming from your family, values that are supported by the community, that support the school, and values that are fostered here.

But it's not just the values that are passed down by parents or teachers, it's also the values that each of you display, and how you feel about common issues like mutual respect and responsibility, like tolerance or empathy. It's these values that I wanted to spend a couple of minutes talking about, because I think it is these values that really underlie our challenge in trying to prevent violence, the violence that too often stops our young people, the violence that takes twelve lives of young Americans every day because of accidental or deliberate gun deaths.

And since we're fast approaching the first anniversary of the tragedy of Columbine, I think we should pause and try think to through what we've done, perhaps in the last year, individually and together, to make sure something like that never happens again, but also to think about what we have left undone.

I'd like to talk about a collaborative approach to making our schools safer by helping the schools and students develop and implement community-wide responses to the issues that young people present, at least the ones that they talk to me about, and about... [teen violence] and reaching out beyond the school to enlist the support and the work of people who have a role to play in keeping us safer.

I'd like to start by not only commending this school, but also

commending some of the other players in our society about what they have done and will be doing. First, we need to learn the lessons about what works in our schools. I know that values education is a critical component, whether it is explicitly taught, modeled, or implicitly taught.

And I think also that there are some course curricula that are being put in place around New York and around our country that can really make a difference. I have seen the positive effects of counseling programs which show the kind of support that young people give to one another and the successful intervention that grows out of. We have to put an emphasis on order and discipline, on doing what works in certain communities.

Some communities have found, for example, that requiring uniforms works in those communities. Others set curfew, others have enforced the truancy laws. Most now certainly have zero tolerance for guns or weapons, and every one of them is searching for a way to separate out those students who refuse to comply with the obvious order that's required and who continue to be disruptive.

We also have to face up to the fact that one of the serious problems we still confront as a nation is the easy access to guns. Young people, as we've seen tragically with the six-year old in just the last several weeks, have too many guns that are too easily available in their homes and in their communities. I think we all as adults and young people together have to stand against gun violence, and we have to ask our leaders to support initiatives that will reduce the access to guns and the violence that flows from them.

One of the positive steps that has been taken in the last several weeks is the agreement reached first at the White House, with one of the major gun manufacturers, so that they are now part of the solution, instead of just standing outside refusing to participate.

I was very pleased that we had leadership on that front from the Attorney General here in New York, who filed one of the very first suits against gun manufactures. I would like to see all cities including New York City join in that kind of an effort because if you follow the example of Smith & Wesson, one of the nation's largest gun manufactures when they agreed to join the Federal government and other cities and states, it

was a landmark decision for responsibility.

They agreed to make a clear commitment to redesigning guns and distributing and marketing guns in a different way, to prevent the accidental shootings, to agree to sales and distribution controls that will keep guns out of the hands of criminals and crack down on the illegal gun factories. I personally commend Smith & Wesson.

I know they're getting criticized by the NRA and some of the other manufactures, but I think all of us who care about trying to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and children, should commend this one company for doing so. I also commend the leadership of Attorney General Spitzer and of Secretary Cuomo who came up with the very creative idea to sue the manufacturers on behalf of all the guns that are smuggled into housing projects.

But that's just the only manufacturer that has reached it so far; we need the others to join in as well. We could get further with these negotiations if, more cities and states signed up with Attorney General Spitzer and had very firm rules about whether they would buy guns from manufacturers who did not agree with changing the way they design guns.

For example, if New York City joined in on that, they're a huge gun purchaser, it would make a very big difference. And it would bring a lot of force to bear on the other manufacturers. I would also like to commend Governor Pataki whom last week took a very strong stand when he announced a number of gun control measures that have been advocated on the federal level.

You know, this should not be a partisan issue. This should be an issue that goes beyond partisanship where every leader, every person who cares about it takes a stand and stands up for the kind of common sense changes like child safety locks or closing the gun show loophole and raising the age for gun purchases and better gun tracing.

So there is much that all of us can do to try to keep all of you safer, to keep all young people safer. And I'm particularly interested in ideas you have about what we all can do.

You know, some of you may recall or heard that I once wrote a book called, It Takes a Village to Raise a Child. And I had,

perhaps, a village like this in mind. Because a village that puts children first, that makes great sacrifices to provide quality education, is clearly a place that wants to keep children safe.

How do we do that? How do we play our role in making it possible for you to know that you will be as safe as it is humanly possible for us to provide for you? So, with that, what I'd like to do is to hear from as many of you as we have time for on issues of schools, or gun violence, or any other matter that is on your mind.

I have spent a lot of time in the last years going, speaking with groups of young people and trying to draw attention to what I know to be a fact, which is that I think we have the finest generation of young people in the history of our country.

But, too often, that is not the way you are portrayed or viewed. And the stereotypes about young Americans are just as disruptive as the stereotypes based on race, or ethnicity, or religion, or any other kind of status. So part of the reason I'm pleased to be here is to demonstrate clearly to as many people who would care to watch or follow this that I have a lot of confidence in our future because I have a lot of confidence in all of you.