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Early of New Registered
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Unite! Rally of Newly Registered Voters

New York, New York

October 3, 2000

Every single American citizen needs to feel as enthusiastic about what citizenship means as all of you do today. Thank you.

I want to begin by thanking Jay Mazur - and UNITE! - for the work that you do, in organizing and working on behalf of immigrants and making it absolutely clear that you will defend the rights of all workers and that you will be a strong champion of the rights of immigrants. This union has such an important storied history in standing up for people. And I think that we ought to give a huge round of applause to UNITE! and to its leader Jay Mazur for the work that you do. I want to thank Dr Joyce Brown who is the President of this important Fashion Institute of Technology. She has done a wonderful job, she is a great leader and we are honored to be here and pay tribute to the many people who have made this institute so world famous, and to your leadership. Thank you so much, Joyce.

I want to thank my friend Brian McLaughlin for such a wonderful job as President of the New York Central Labor Council and the leadership that he's provided, Edgar Romney and everyone associated with UNITE!, Thank you so much for your leadership. Aren't they a wonderful team? ...(inaudible)

I want to thank Leonor Torres, Wilfred Narcistein and Tin Quin Xuan for their wonderful work and for their example. And to all of you, particularly to all of the new citizens - will all of the new citizens please stand up? I am so proud to see you here and I congratulate all of you. And I loved the song that the chorus sang for me written by (inaudible) I thank you for that song. We need a song about new citizens don't we? And nobody can sing it better than UNITE!...(inaudible)

You know, we are at the center of the American Dream here in New York City because it is this city, this state, this nation, which was built by the labor and sweat, the vision and hope, of generation after generation of immigrants. And that is no less true today. Today, we are welcoming the greatest wave of immigration to America since the early years of the

last century.

One out of five New Yorkers today was born in another country. And more than half of all children in New York City schools are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. So we have an extraordinary opportunity to recognize the contribution that immigrants are making right now to the revitalization of the city and to the strength of New York and America. I thank you - I thank all of you for bringing your energy, and your hard work, your love of family, your commitment to this union and your belief in America to this room tonight because your example of citizenship is one that I wish every American citizen could see and feel and follow. You are demonstrating what it truly means to be an American.

Now we all know that to be an American is to be an immigrant, by definition. We come from all corners of the Earth, speaking different languages, honoring different traditions -- but all of us are drawn and bound by a powerful faith we share in the American Dream.

As Americans, we believe that if you work hard and you play by the rules, then you can build a better life for yourself - and your children.

And it is that American Dream which is at stake in this next election. Because this election on November 7th will determine whether we continue the progress and prosperity of the last eight years. Or whether we walk away from it and do a U-turn back to the days of deficits and disinvestments. Whether we keep providing people with the tools of opportunity -- strong schools and quality, affordable healthcare, childcare and equal pay -- or whether we leave every American to fend for him or herself.

I am running for Senate because I want to be part of working with you to move New York and America forward. I want to honor the American Dream - by giving more people the chance to live it and to feel it and to know that they are part of it. I want to be sure that we have quality, affordable healthcare for every family, a world-class education for every child, and a strong economy that continues to create jobs and opportunity for every person who is willing to work hard. We have a lot of work to do in order to be able to say that we are honoring the American dream. But I know that you are the embodiment of

the American Dream and I will be on your side. I will be on the side of UNITE! as we fight to make sure that every immigrant in America gets fair treatment under our laws and a fair chance to work hard and become citizens of our great country.

That's why I'll work to pass the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act. All immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean must be treated the same when it comes to applications for admission, permanent residency, and citizenship.

All immigrants on the verge of gaining residency status should not be forced to leave this country while they wait for the INS to process their application.

I'll work to make sure the Immigration and Naturalization Service gets the resources it needs to do its job efficiently and effectively. Today, as you know a child can wait four years or more just to be reunited and in some cases seven years and I know from talking with people - ten years or twelve years. That is too long. It does not honor our immigrant tradition. So I will work hard to reunify our families. We should not just say we believe in family values we should value families.

I will also fight to restore the benefits that were unfairly taken away from immigrants in the last years. It is simply un-American to deny law-abiding, tax-paying immigrants the benefits available to any other person who takes responsibility in our society.

I'll fight to restore aid to legal immigrants with disabilities; to restore food stamps to elderly immigrants and immigrant families; and to extend health care to immigrant children, pregnant women and their families.

But there are those who don't agree with these positions - we know that. My opponent does not agree with these positions - he voted for the Gallegly Amendment - which was a mean-spirited law that would have punished the children of illegal immigrants by denying them the chance to go to public schools or learn English, or learn about the history of America or the kinds of tools that they need to succeed here.

I want to be very clear because I do believe strongly that our immigration laws must be strongly enforced and obeyed, but

we must not force children to pay for their parents' decisions.
...(inaudible)

I am proud of America's immigrant tradition. And I will fight day in and day out to keep the American Dream alive for all our people.

This is where I stand. I am grateful for all of the support that UNITE! has given me and that so many of you have personally extended to me. But I will need your help. I will need you help to talk to your families, to your friends, to the people that you work with so that everyone knows what is at stake in this election. And there are also days left, a few days left to register to vote so if you know citizens who have not registered to vote, please tell them how easy it is to register to vote and make sure that they exercise the most fundamental obligation of being an American citizen, namely the right to vote.

This November, those of you who are new citizens will be taking part in one of the most basic, important and powerful rights that America extends to anyone.

When you step into the voting booth on November 7, your vote will count just as much as mine - just as much as the President's, just as much as your neighbor's. It won't matter whether you've been a citizen for just a few months or a citizen your entire life.

No American is more American than the other. We are all created equal. Whether your ancestors came on the Mayflower or in the holds of slave ships, whether they passed through Ellis Island 100 years ago, or came through JFK just a few months ago, if you believe in our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution, if you accept the responsibilities of citizenship, then you are an American. And there is no one who can take that away from you.

You know there are many countries, including the countries that all of you have come from or that your ancestors came from, many countries with rich people and successful people and famous people but there is no country in the history of the world that has placed all people on the level of equality that the United States of America has. We have to fight to maintain those values. We have to be sure that everyone appreciates the price of citizenship and there are many in our

country who do not even bother to vote and yet they enjoy the blessings that come because of our democracy. We are all benefited by being Americans and we should give back so that this great country continues to be as strong and as dedicated to freedom and opportunity and equality as it always has been.

When you go to the polls on November 7, I hope that you will give me the honor of your vote because I will work my heart out to be the very best Senator that anyone could be and always to remember the faces that I see before me, the stories that we've heard, so that I will keep faith with the American Dream for all of you.

Thank you very much.