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Maker: The Partnership for
Jewish Life

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Thank you so much Rabbi and I am delighted to be here and there are empty seats that we will be sure to point out so that everyone has a place. I deeply appreciate the invitation and I thank you for the opportunity to have a conversation and so I think the best way to do that is for me to just say a few things and then to have a dialogue for as long as we can stay.

I know that many of you, like me, are going to be racing off to see the debate and I am looking forward to that. Michael Steinhardt is going to Carnegie Hall which is also a good choice. (laughter) But I appreciated very much what the Rabbi said about the oldest and youngest efforts about defining what it is to be human and how we put our values into action.

I am running for the Senate because for more than thirty years I have worked on behalf of children and families and improving education and expanding health care and on behalf of civil rights and human rights here and around the world. And in this last 8-year period I have been part of an administration that I think has brought our country forward in significant ways.

Not just economic ways, though there is certainly a very strong argument that without the economic good fortunes that we enjoy today much else that we would want to do either individually or through our society would not be possible. But the work that has been done to improve education, to expand economic opportunities for all people.

The Census Bureau the other day said that we are now seeing the economic prosperity literally affect every group in our society. We have the lowest child poverty since 1979 and the lowest poverty among the elderly every recorded. We have the highest African American employment, the highest Hispanic employment -- those to me are also very good news, as important in many respects as how the successful the stock market has been because it shows that America is keeping faith with not only our desire to life, liberty, and pursue happiness but also to expanding and extending and deepening our commitment to justice.

I had the unique honor last week of being with several people whom I most admire and respect greatly: Eli Weisel, a friend of mine for a number of years who appeared with me to talk about a very serious issue having to do with the continuing anti-Semitism in the latest edition of the Palestinian textbooks and how that betrays the kind of commitment to peace that is required if there is to be any agreement that is both long lasting and guarantees the security of Israel and the hope for that region.

Today I spoke out to call on Chairman Arafat to immediately end the violence and to make a very clear statement that it was unacceptable for violence to be considered a political act or statement and instead they had to end the violence, maintain the ceasefire and that only true peace can be found at the negotiating table.

But I think that the kinds of concerns that are being raised about what's happening in the Middle East really do go to the heart of what it is we mean when we talk about peace. I was also with Bob Rubin and Warren Buffett, two moderately successful Americans. In their support for me they both spoke about the importance of continuing our economic prosperity and why they favored the approach that the President, the Vice President, Joe Lieberman and I and others who agree with that approach had taken.

But I was particularly struck that with both of them they were not only talking about the economy and the need, in their view, to really use the surplus wisely to take care of significant problems like paying down the debt to secure social security solvency and modernizing Medicare. But they both said that we had a continuing obligation to not simply be the richest nation in the world, but to be the best and to be committed to justice.

And certainly the idea of justice is traced as many of you could impute from the Rabbi's comments to the traditions and values of Judaism and the contributions that have been made throughout the ages to what it is to be human and what it is to be a just society.

So I bring those ideas and those values to the work that I do on behalf of issues. They inform what I think should be done in the Senate; they inform what I believe should be the

direction we continue to take in New York and America; they inform the kind of leadership that I think our country has to demonstrate and exemplify around the world.

So it's been for me an extraordinary privilege to travel throughout the state, to go to all 62 counties and to meet with tens of thousands of New Yorkers about everything you can imagine and some of you probably can't imagine, and to see the beauty of this state which really is unique in that I don't know any other state that has the Great Lakes, a great scenic river like the Hudson, mountains, rolling countrysides, and oceans.

I mean I am trying to think of a state that has all of that and I don't think there is another one. So then it's been a unique and extraordinarily pleasurable experience which I certainly commend everyone.

A friend of mine said to me the other day, she said, "You know I was born and raised in Manhattan and I haven't even been to all 5 boroughs." So it has been an eye-opener not only for me but for my friends who I sometimes drag along and tell stories to.

So, obviously, I am hoping to have your support in this Senate race, to be able to go to the Senate, to build on the work of the last eight years. But more importantly, to keep focused on what our mission is and the role that New York plays because I don't think there is a place in the world right now that is better positioned or called upon to be more concerned about what happens in the entire world because of our extraordinary diversity.

So I will end by just saying that right before I came I was at a large celebration of new citizens and it was sponsored by a union called UNITE! which represents mostly people in the garment industry, increasingly people doing other work.

But it has always been an entry way for immigrants, going back to the beginning of the last century. It is the way so many people got their foot on the ladder of opportunity in the United States. And we were celebrating all these people who thanks to the union had been taught English and had applied for and been given their citizenship and three people spoke about what that meant to them.

And it was very touching because the first woman was from Ecuador. She's been in this country for 12 years, 7 years separated from her children because she couldn't bring them while she worked to try to send money home to support them. And she said that the proudest moment in her life was when she could tell her children that she was now an American citizen.

Another man from Haiti has been here 21 years, worked in a laundry for all of those years and he said, "you know, there is a big tree in front of the house that I live in and the roots are destroying the sewer system and I used to call and complain but nobody paid attention to me because I wasn't a citizen. I became a citizen last year and I got on the phone and I called up and I said, 'I am a citizen and there is a big tree ruining the sewer in front of our house,' and they came and fixed it."

And it was one of those really sort of touching moments that gave you the feeling that it was maybe a small thing in the great sweep of history, but you have someone who came to this country from a place where he was without a voice, in a dictatorship without any real opportunity and now they can call up City Hall and say, "you come fix my tree. I'm a citizen."

And I hope that those of us who have been lucky enough to be citizens and blessed by growing up in this country all of these years will be reminded from time to time about what really it means and what's at stake and be committed to doing everything we can to make sure that we pass on those blessings to generations in the future.

Thank you all very much.