

4-30-00
Cathodic Electrical Work

Address to the Catholic Electrical Workers

New York, New York

April 30, 2000

It's such an honor for me to be here. I was looking forward to this occasion. But after having sat through the presentations, heard the words of everyone who has spoken before, seen the young people come forward to receive the scholarships that you are so generously bestowing on them. I'm even more honored to be here with you. Because this morning is a celebration of three of the things that are most important in life, faith, family, and work. And this union, and what it represents, and this gathering this morning, is a great reminder about what really is important in all of our lives.

Now there are many reasons why this gathering is significant, because it does remind us of the importance of our faith, and I appreciate it very much. George reciting for us one of my favorite Bible verses, you know let us rejoice in this day, and we should. Anyone who has walked as you did or as I came into the City this morning and could see the glorious spring day that we have, would have to thank the Lord for this joyous day that we are able to share.

And this union, and the work you have done for so many generations, giving people the chance to have a decent wage to be respected for the work they do. To build the kind of families we celebrate, that indeed is a tribute to all who came before, and all of you for continuing that tradition. And then to be able to share this with families, as I look out and see so many children, very young children. Children who are old enough to be alter boys and those not yet. Children who now no longer we can call children, young men and women graduating from high school, graduating from college. That also is a very strong reminder of what it is we work for.

I would like to say just a few words about how politics fits in all of this. Chris mentioned politics and several others have made glancing mention as well. Because to me, politics is not or should not be about power, holding positions, having the perks of office. It should be about the work one can do to make it possible for even more people to have the kind of lives with the quality of opportunity that this union, that the faith that you celebrated at mass this morning really lead us to.

So to that end, I see politics as the art of making possible what appears to be impossible. And that is work that many of you do everyday. Many of you have made it possible for countless men and women to have a better standard of life. Many of you have made it possible of a young child to navigate through childhood into adulthood. And many of us have participated in the political process and have made it possible for us to change our state and country. To provide more support for people. To stand against those forces that would turn the clock back. That would try to make it somehow illegitimate for people to organize, to bargain collectively, to protect the health and safety of workers.

I think one of the great advances of our country in the last 50 years of the last century, was the way we made it possible for working people to organize and have their rights respected. But that is an on going struggle. It is not something that we just do one day and forget about tomorrow. Because in the political process, one is always having to organize, to make sure the rights we enjoy today will be there tomorrow.

And this union as much as any local in the country has stood for that proposition but what will we do with that strength of organization that you represent. How will we use the political process to make sure that everyone coming behind us these young children and so many countless others in this city and state have those same opportunities. I believe strongly that there are several critical issues facing us that we have to be paying attention to in this election season.

The first is the economy. How do we make sure it grows and produces jobs? I am very proud of the work our President has done in our country. I believe that we are a better country than we were in 1992, because we have expanded the economy. We have created now more than 20 million more jobs.

The labor movement I think is on a resurgent course. The work that so many of you are doing with the building trades, with the AFL-CIO is really beginning to demonstrate to people how important it that we have just as strong a labor movement in the 21st Century as we did in the 20th Century. And all of us have a stake the economy keeps growing and keeps producing more good jobs. I want to thank this union and the labor movement in general for the attention you have paid to helping those who are not your members.

When you fight for the minimum wage to be increased, you are not fighting for your members. You are fighting for millions of American workers who go to work everyday and do not bring home enough money to support a family out of poverty. We have to do more in the political process to raise the standard of living for all working people and I thank you for the leadership you have given on behalf of every working family in New York and in our country.

I thank you also for recognizing the importance of education. These scholarships were so touching to hear the descriptions of the recipients and to see the young people or the parents coming forward and I thank you for that. We know so well that education is the key to whether we or not individually or all of us together will be successful in this new century.

I am a very strong supporter for education, because I know what it has meant in my life and see what it has meant in the lives of the people in this room. We must remain committed to insuring that every single child, who works hard and is willing to do what it takes can go to college regardless of financial pressures. That is why I support making college tuition tax deductible. And that will go a long way to help a lot of the children here. But I want to say just an additional word about education, because I know that you have run apprenticeship programs that are so critical to taking young people and moving them from high school, the life of a youngster into the life of a working person.

As much as I support opening the doors of college to every single child who was willing and wants to go, I want to be sure that we do not lose respect for all of those young people, who do hard work and don't go to college. It is very important that we continue to respect work. Not every important job in our society requires a college education.

I would like to see us once again as a nation respecting the hard work that people do if someone wants to be the very best electrician, the very best lawyer, the very best teacher, lets respect all the work that of our children and all of our adults in our society do so that we when we talk about education, we see it not just in terms of an institution and a degree but as a life long learning process so that as people acquire skills to become the best they can be at whatever they do, we make sure that they get the compensation and

the benefits that should go with a job well done no matter where that job comes from.

I also want to thank you for the strong support you have given to making health care affordable and accessible to every New Yorker and every American. You stood with the President and me back in 1993 and 1994 when we tried to figure out a way that our country could provide quality affordable to every citizen. You may remember we weren't successful then. But I have not given up on the goal, but I have just decided to come from the school of smaller steps, steps that we can take one by one, to improve coverage, to provide the children of working families who are not so fortunate as to be represented by you with health care coverage to provide a prescription drug benefit for those of our parents and grandparents who are on Medicare, to lower the costs of prescription drugs for all of us. That is one of the big problems that we face. I have people coming up to me all the time as I travel around the state telling me they cannot afford their prescription drugs or that their mother can't, they show me their prescriptions sometimes.

They tell me stories about they have gone to the doctor, but they know that they will have to go back and maybe even go to the hospital, because they cannot afford the drugs that would keep them healthy. Yet we in our country, we are the ones who pay for the research that creates the drugs that are so miraculous. We are the ones who pay for the FDA that tests the drugs and tells our doctors that they are safe for us and yet we as American tax payers pay the highest costs for drugs of any consumers in the world. That is not right.

For example if you were to go to Canada, you can buy drugs that were made by American manufacturers and approved by our FDA for anywhere from one half to one third of the cost. For example there is a drug called Tamoxifen, which treats breast cancer. A three month's supply of that drug in Canada costs fifty dollars, a three month's supply in the United States costs three hundred and ninety dollars for the same drug. I do not think that is right. I would fight for legislation that would permit us to re-import American made and approved drugs from Canada into the United States so that New Yorkers could buy them at the same cost that they are sold in Canada. I think that is what we should be doing.

Now all of these issues and so many more that I am talking

about as I travel around the state meeting with people from one end of the state to the other. I am staying in people's houses; I am talking with them in their backyards and on their porches. I am in workplaces, in their supermarkets, I am in and out of every place you can imagine. I am having the most wonderful time, because I can see all of the concerns that people have and what we could do in the political process to try to meet those, to make sure that we stay on the right track with the economy that we do not go back to exploding deficits. The Republican plan for the economy and the very large irresponsible tax cut that is proposed by Governor Bush I believe would send us back to the days of the 1980's, where we would have those exploding deficits, we would not have the kind of job opportunities so these are political choices that we are all going to make in these next months.

I appreciate so much how many of you have welcomed me and given me opportunities to come and speak and given me good advice and asked me questions but as I talk about all of these issues and as I put forth ideas and as I work with you to strengthen the labor movement and protect the hard won rights of labor in the Congress. Because you know every single day the Republicans are proposing bills that will turn the clock back 50 years. They want to do away with the forty hour work week, with OSHA to protect health and safety. I believe we should support the NLRA, I believe we should Davis-Bacon without exceptions for every job that is funded with Federal funding. I will stand with you on these fights.

Let's remember what politics is really about. It is about making it possible for us to have healthy babies born. It is about making it possible for every child to have a first class education. It is about making it possible for every elderly citizen in this state and country to have the health care and medication that he or she deserves. It is about the quality of our life, so that we can all pursue our faith, our work and our families in a way that we believe, will give us the highest quality of life together.

Five years ago, I wrote a book called "It Takes a Village." In this book I talked about what I think it takes to help raise children, because I do not think there is a more important job that any of us have than being a parent. It is our primary job once we are responsible for that young child. I put in my book, something that I believe as much today as when I first read it years ago. It is something that the Catholic

Conference said some time ago now about eight or nine years ago. Let me just read a part of it, because to me it sums up what we are trying to do today.

The most important work to help our children is done quietly, in our homes and neighborhoods, our parishes and community organizations. No government can love a child and no policy can substitute for a family's care. But clearly families can be helped our hurt in their irreplaceable roles. Government can either support or undermine families as they cope with the moral, social and economic stresses of caring for children.

The undeniable fact is that our children is shaped by both the values of their parents and the policies of our nation. Now we as a nation will do everything we can to support our families and it is imperative that families take responsibility to be the very best they can be for all of our children, but as the Catholic Conference noted, the economic policies, the health care policies, the education and environment policies - all of these policies will impact on how well a family can cope with the stresses of life.

That is why as we think about this election season. It is not enough just to compare what the candidates say or who looks good on TV, or who has the fastest response to the question, but instead to get below the surface and think very seriously. Are the policies going to help or hurt my family and are the policies going to help or hurt my union. Are the policies going to help or hurt my community and state?

What this union has long stood for is the belief that we can be stronger together, than we can be individually. The union is a very important part of the village that I envision that will create the very best possible futures for our children. I am honored to be among people who know how important it is that we celebrate faith, work and family and the role that politics plays in our country in insuring all three of those. Thank you all very, very much.