

Bill Richardson for President

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Speech to the National Education Association

07/03/2007

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Thank you Reg! You sure know how to whip up a crowd. Doesn't he? Let's give Reg a hand for his leadership with team NEA!!!

I'm honored to be here today and to be in the presence of a group that I admire and respect very much.

America's educators are the glue that holds this country together, and it's time that you are given the recognition and praise you deserve.

Public education is the backbone of this country, it is what makes America great!!

I really like the slogan "Team NEA" because it recognizes the contributions of all of our educational employees and their importance in a strong system of public education.

You are the unsung heroes of this country;

Whether, you're the teacher in the classroom;

The educational support professional that supports our teachers and kids,

The bus driver that carries our children to and from school; the cafeteria worker

That nourishes them;

Or the custodian that ensures our kids are in clean classrooms each of you deserves our

Respect, and not just rhetoric, but fair and decent compensation!!!

Too often you've been ignored, taken for granted, underpaid, and blamed!!!

When I'm President, I promise you ...that will change!

I'm Bill Richardson and I'm running for President to bring people together to solve our nation's challenges.

I have spent my whole life bringing people together to get things done, as a negotiator, as a Congressman, as a U.N. Ambassador, and most of all as Governor.

We broke the partisan gridlock and transformed New Mexico...I was able to get 40% of the Republican vote in a red state.

I will use those skills as President, to restore our national standing,

Last week, I complained that people always ask how we are going to pay for education - but they never ask how we are going to pay for the war. I think education is AS or MORE important than anything government does.

It was Aristotle twenty three hundred years ago who wrote that the fate of nations depends more on educating youth than any other factor. Not the military. Not the political leadership. Not the economy.

America's future will most be determined by how well we educate our kids.

We need to get out of Iraq where precious lives and needed dollars have been wasted. We could be using these

resources to improve our schools and make the economy -- once again - work for the middle class.

In New Mexico I brought back collective bargaining; because I believe in my heart that it is important!

Our next President must also improve our country's public education system to ensure that it remains strong and supports our global competitiveness. My record makes me the best prepared to get it done.

Candidates have already come here to ask for your support.

I know that you are not going to make a decision based on a media profile or fame. You're going to support the person who has always stood with you.

You're going to support the person who does more than just talk about making change-but has actually made it happen.

I'm proud of what we have achieved for educators, for students, for our families and for all citizens in New Mexico!

In New Mexico our Educational Reform Initiative, which is ranked number 2 in the country, is called "Making Schools Work"

It has included many factors that have been left out and ignored by the nation's current reform effort: No Child Left Behind!

I believe that school reform should improve schools; but our nation's school reform has made our schools look more like Reform Schools with all the mindless testing and bureaucratic rules and regulations!!!

I couldn't agree more with the slogan on your convention tee-shirts: "A Child is More than a Test Score." Because it captures the very heart of New Mexico's "Making Schools Work" the well being of children...not the testing corporations.... Who are the heart of this program and I know when you elect me President we can "Make our Nation's Schools Work". Our school improvement agenda recognizes that it is unfair to blame and point the finger at our educators when we have neglected other important factors such as

- School readiness
- Health and nutrition
- Parental involvement
- Teacher quality
- Safe and clean school facilities and access to technology

Unlike the current administration,

You and I know better;

We know we can't improve our schools with unfunded mandates;

And unfair accountability,

And punitive sanctions!

We have a moral responsibility, to ensure that our educators and our students have the support they need to be successful!

It makes me sad to say that public confidence in our public schools has been eroded because of, and I quote, "the soft bigotry of low expectations".

While nationally there's been some small improvement in test scores, you have to ask at what cost?

In New Mexico there is a wonderful high school in the southeast part of the state. That one high school didn't make AYP because two kids got into a mishap and were unable to take the test.

This is unfair, and this is crazy!!

Are unfair and crazy things happening in your schools, too?

Well, it's got to stop! And I'm committed to bringing fair accountability and support to our schools.

Let me tell you my plan for "Making America's Schools Work":

First we must focus on Quality Teachers: In New Mexico we raised teachers' salaries and created a three --tiered licensure system. Under this system a beginning teacher can see that in seven years he or she can make a salary of fifty thousand dollars.

As a result 94% of our teachers are highly qualified. We've moved from 30th to 17th in teacher quality and our salary rankings have moved from 46th in the nation and are projected to be 29th and we're aiming even higher!

As President I would move the country to an average starting salary of \$40,000 a year for teachers!

Second, it is clear that school readiness is key to children's future educational success. In New Mexico we implemented the Pre-K Act for four year olds. Our program recognizes the importance of addressing the emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development of these young children. We must also fully fund Head Start Programs.

Third, we must take action to improve our children's health and nutrition!

Our children can't learn if they aren't healthy.

In New Mexico we now provide access to free health insurance to every child under the age of five.

We have expanded our state immunization program.

We've been ranked second and fourth in the nation for nutrition policies and quality of food.

We've implemented statewide breakfast programs for our neediest kids.

And we've gotten junk food out and put physical education back in.

In New Mexico we are Making Schools Work, our PUBLIC SCHOOLS WORK! Let me tell you right now, vouchers are not the answer! I've never supported vouchers and I will NOT SUPPORT VOUCHERS IN THE FUTURE!

We were ranked 2nd in the nation for school choice. I support school choice through public charter schools. We have many wonderful charter schools, but to ensure quality education for all of our children they must be held to the same standards of accountability as the rest of our public schools.

Parents are critical to Making Our Schools Work not only for New Mexico but for Our nation! You as educators cannot do it alone.

We must fund innovative parental involvement and education programs.

In New Mexico we've provided every school with an online parental involvement tool kit that provides innovative ways to work with parents. This fall, every elementary school parent will receive a very simple handbook that explicitly tells them how they can support their child's success.

You need their support and they need your collaboration. When schools and families work together the child is the winner...and this is what it's all about...our children!!

One of the most important tasks facing us today is making sure our schools are preparing our students for the 21st century. Our students need more access to relevant, flexible learning environments via on line learning and greater access to higher education through concurrent and dual enrollment. We must also ensure that our high schools are preparing more math and science students and I will fight for the creation of new math and science academies across the country...and i'll make sure that girls and children of color know they're welcome there as well.

Let me close with what's at the foremost in your mind...No Child Left Behind...The Act has a noble goal but has been implemented unfairly, and is still under-funded...

It can be improved

It must be improved

And when I'm elected it will be improved, or it will be abolished!!!!!!

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not against accountability, but I believe in accountability when it is fair and when schools' are funded and given the support they need.

President Bush promised to be the education President. But like many other promises and things this administration has said it was going to do, after the photo-ops -- the policy got stuck in a drawer and forgotten. Well, we can't afford to forget our children.

In the interest of time here's the short list of the many issues that need to be addressed:

- Get rid of the pass/fail model of AYP
- Provide a more meaningful and honest picture of a school that utilizes more than a single test score
- Use fairer tests and realistic timelines for our English Language Learners and Special Education Students
- Provide more funding to help our students succeed. For example: extending the school year, or extending the school day
- Provide financial incentives for districts to attract high quality teachers to schools of highest needs, not only in cities, but suburban and rural areas

Here's the bottom line, I'm not an educator, you are!
I'm not in the classroom everyday with kids, you are!
I'm not the expert, you are!

For that reason, when you elect me president I will create a blue ribbon panel for educational excellence and I promise that NEA members will be represented on this panel. In New Mexico, NEA was at the table when we created Making Schools Work!

I believe we need to create educational policy from the bottom up, not the top down! It needs to be created from those whose hearts and souls are committed to quality education for all our children...from those who are committed to public education....that is you, and that is me.

Very few things motivate me more to want to be President of the United States than a chance to make a difference in the lives of our kids.

And together we can make public education strong...you'll hear from presidential candidates who want you on their team. But you need to ask yourself three things:

- Who has been there for me in the past?
- Who will be there for me in the future?
- And who has the skill to bring this country together, and not drive us apart?

For the answer to those questions; just look at my record. I got it done, and I will get it done.

But I'm going to need your help to do it!

Thank you, God Bless you, and all of our educators, God Bless our System of Public Education, and God Bless the United States!

