



Supporting Maryland's Teachers

An Address to the Maryland State Teachers Association

Martin O'Malley
October 22, 2005

Introduction

- Thank you for inviting me to join you here today. And thank you for the work you do every day for our children and our state. This is sort of the opposite of Senior Week – all the teachers are here in Ocean City. And all the kids are back home dealing with the homework you left for them.
- A few weeks ago, Katie, the kids and I went home to Rockville to start the day I announced for Governor. And I had the chance to spend some time with my parents, my brothers and sisters, and some old friends. As I was thinking about the decision of this day, and the days ahead, I thought back on the important things my parents and my teachers taught me that I still use every day.
 - I learned from my teachers about Toynbee's theory on the progress of man: that we progress – as a people and as individuals – in response to adversity. We can overcome challenges.
 - I learned that expectations become behavior.
 - And I learned that it isn't enough to have faith. You also have to have the courage to risk action on the faith that one person can make a difference – and that each of us must try... The very value that motivates educators.
- Based on these lessons, I believe that Maryland has a responsibility to lead. And that is why – with faith in the power of our people – I am running for Governor... because a stronger Maryland can do better. And I'm here today asking for your help to move our state forward.
- Maryland's past has been shaped by strong values and strong leadership.

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- Honesty, fairness, tolerance, and respect for every individual... strength, compassion, the courage to take responsibility and the wisdom to accept compromise... these are our true American values. They are revolutionary values. They call upon the best in each person.
- And these values have guided our state's traditional future preference – we make sacrifices and investments today... in education... in higher education... in the environment... that will benefit the state we hand over to our children.

Securing Baltimore's Future

- Over the last six years in Baltimore, these are the values that have fueled our progress. We came together realizing that if we wanted greater security and greater opportunity, then we must have the courage to take responsibility to change our own future.
- In Baltimore, rather than running away from adversity, we chose to tackle our toughest problems, in the realization that there is more that unites us than divides us. We talked honestly about our problems and fears, and we set public goals. We stopped making excuses and we started making progress.
 - We chose to take responsibility for making Baltimore a safer, cleaner, healthier city.
 - We chose to take responsibility for making our city a place where people want to invest in jobs and neighborhoods to create greater opportunity for all.
 - And, yes, we chose to take responsibility for making Baltimore a better place for children to grow up – to ensure a better education for our young people.
- There are some who are quick to make judgments and political attacks without understanding the challenges our children and their teachers face – or acknowledging the progress they have made together, with our children getting ever closer to reaching their God-given potential, despite the odds.
- We know our test scores and graduation rates don't mirror those of Maryland's wealthiest jurisdictions – yet. But due to the hard work of teachers and parents and students, we are progressing as fast as any big city. And we continue to improve.
- When we took office in 1999, not one grade scored majority proficient in reading and math. Now, a majority of our first, second, third and fourth graders have scored proficient or advanced in reading and math.
- In 1999, just 49% of our children graduated from high school. Last year, our graduation rate was 61%.
- Since 1999, we've increased our local per-pupil funding, as well as our local school construction funding. We've gone from one full-day pre-k class to more than 90, and from

109 full-day kindergartens to almost 300. That investment in early education is largely responsible for our test score gains. It proves the value of investing for the future.

- I'll be the first one to tell anyone that we're not satisfied – as will any teacher in our city. We still have a long way to go. But we are proving that higher expectations, and hard work – and investing in education – our children will succeed.
- Baltimore still has work to do. Challenges remain. But we've gone from being ridiculed on the Tonight Show to being recognized by Time magazine, the Wall Street Journal, Business Week and Nightline – just this year – for the progress we've made. Today, crime is down, test scores and graduation rates are up. And a city that had been shrinking for 50 years is now creating jobs, attracting investment and beginning to grow and rebuild again.

For Maryland

- What does Baltimore's progress mean for Maryland?
- Well, I believe the way we've achieved it says a lot about Maryland values – even under difficult circumstance.
- Last year, our school system faced its toughest test to date – when a \$58 million deficit threatened its ability to meet payroll. And what occurred in the weeks that followed paint a clear picture of how our style of governing differs from the Governor.
- In Annapolis, we saw press conferences. We had televised meetings. We heard rhetoric about how the problem couldn't be solved unless there was a state takeover. And it was all was just cover for a plan to tear up teacher contracts and cut teachers' pay... to make our most important public servants pay the price for others' mistakes.
- In Baltimore, we decided that we could solve the problem if we took more responsibility, rather than less. We said no to the takeover. We determined that we would find a solution if we pulled together and made tough choices, rather than looking for scapegoats. We developed a plan. And we rolled up our sleeves and got to work.
- We loaned our schools \$42 million – to avoid even more disruption that would harm our children, and to save our teachers' contracts. Some said it was too risky. We thought it was more risky to leave our children in the hands of people who didn't care about our teachers.
- We pulled together and saved our school system from bankruptcy. And Baltimore's schools just got a clean bill of health from their auditor. Now, we are on track to eliminate that deficit – the one the Governor and his advisors call unfixable – by the end of this school year.
- And we didn't just talk about getting our community and parents involved in our schools. Through our Believe in Our Schools campaign, we enlisted 9,200 volunteers from more than

200 community and corporate partners to make more than \$8.5 million in improvements in 167 schools – just over the last year.

- That's how we do things in Maryland. The quality of life we enjoy in Maryland is not just a byproduct of our state's wealth. It's the result of vision... of commitment and of perseverance toward our common goals... It's the result of the sweat and collaboration between people of different races, classes and regions. Together, Republicans and Democrats, we have made investments over the years that have built our Maryland way of life – that have made our state strong – setting goals for the future and doing the hard work of today.
- The choices we make in the year ahead will determine our state's future course... will determine whether we move forward or slide back. We are not a people who should ever be content to drift or slip backwards. When given the option of standing still or moving forward, Maryland moves forward.
- Are we moving forward or sliding back when Lt. Governor Steele's commission on education meets behind closed doors – with no representation from our teachers or urban schools – producing a disjointed laundry list of rhetoric, rather than a plan? Even the commission members weren't allowed read it – like one of those bad movies that gets rushed into theaters without letting critics see it first.
- Now, it costs about \$20,000 to go to the University of Maryland for one year. So let us ask parents with children at College Park and Salisbury, are we moving forward or sliding back if we choose to raise college tuition by 40%, making college unaffordable for working families – or young people who want to work their way through school?
- Are we moving forward or sliding back when our teachers' pensions are the worst in America – in last place, here in Maryland – and Pennsylvania does nearly twice as well?
- And are we moving forward or are we sliding back when we cut school construction by hundreds of millions of dollars as children and teachers try to excel in trailers and crumbling classrooms?
- These are the choices we share the freedom of making together. We all share responsibility for meeting the challenges we face. We all share the credit for the progress we make. And we all benefit, together, from the new opportunities we create.

A Stronger Maryland Can Do Better

- As citizens of Maryland, we are responsible for making choices that better our future. Our surrounding states are planning for their future, investing in higher education and economic growth. These are our competitors for jobs, for smart, educated people and for investment – to say nothing of India and China.

- While other states and nations are moving forward, with leaders who bring people together to solve problems, Maryland is adrift. It's time to get Maryland moving again, because we know... a stronger Maryland can do better.
- You and I see a stronger Maryland where we retain our valuable educators:
 - By significantly increasing the percentage of salary that our teachers receive in retirement – ending the exodus to Pennsylvania. And I pledge to work with you this legislative session to get it done. Our teachers have waited long enough.
 - By improving working conditions with smaller classrooms, providing proper supplies and equipment, and making use of our state's AAA bond rating to invest in getting our students and teachers out of trailers and crumbling classrooms. It has to happen.
 - And by making our school administration more efficient and accountable – to get more dollars into our classrooms.
- You and I see a stronger Maryland where teacher recruitment is a priority, not an afterthought, and where:
 - We work to get more college graduates with education degrees into our classrooms – more than half never become teachers.
 - We invest in recruitment, putting greater effort into job fairs, and reaching students in high school to let them know the rewards – like no other job – of being an educator.
 - We strengthen loan repayment programs, doing a top to bottom analysis of what works here and in other states.
 - And we increase support for first and second year teachers with the best mentoring and coaching program in the country; with assignments within their areas of expertise and not disproportionately in troubled schools; and with more behavior management support.
- You and I see a state where full funding for the Thornton reforms – all of it – is a given, not a subject for negotiation... regardless of what happens on slots.
- And finally, you and I see a stronger Maryland where educators are paid their true value to our society – and given the respect they deserve as the shapers of our future – because any retention or recruiting plan isn't worth the paper it's written on unless we deliver on this basic promise.
- Education is the basis of our state's future – the foundation of a stronger Maryland. It's time that our state started to act that way. Please visit our website, www.martinomalley.com, to get more details about our retention and recruitment plan, or make any suggestions. We will address other education issues in the months ahead. Consider this an invitation to get involved. We need your advice and wisdom.

Conclusion

- My friends, all of us are responsible for reaching that Maryland we so clearly see. Each of us is called to find opportunity for ourselves, our families and our neighbors. And each of us must find the way we will make a difference – as all of you already have.
- And if we work together, Maryland will be the strongest state in the nation, once again... An economic power based on first-rate education, technology and creativity... A state where all families and seniors are treated with fairness when it comes to taxes, retirement security and healthcare... A state in which those who have been left behind will have real access to education and opportunity – for themselves and their children.
- The time for politics and attacks is past. Now, is the time to get to work. Now, is the time for progress.