

01.14.12 Project 351 Town Hall

Governor Deval L. Patrick
Project 351 Town Hall
Great Hall, State House
Saturday, January 14, 2012

Thanks again to the chaperones and the bus captains. And all of you ambassadors, let's give a shout-out, whether they are here or not, to your parents and teachers who inspired you to become the kids that you are.

Thank God for them, because we need citizens like you. We need what you do and who you are. And they helped create that. And I honor them too. All of your moms and dads and grandparents and uncles and aunts and teachers in particular who are the unsung heroes, I think, of any great civilization. Who care about you. Who do more than just tell you what to do and when to do it. Clean your room. Eat your dinner. Do your homework. But who care about the character that's being developed and the future that you will help shape.

Every one of you today is here, as I said at the outset, because you already demonstrated that you understand the stake you have in your neighbors. You understand that a small gesture sometimes can make a profound difference in somebody's life.

We haven't done it, but I hope someone will add up the numbers of young people, the numbers of seniors, the numbers of people who are homeless or hungry, whose lives you have touched by what you did today. And it was just one day! And I hope you will take away is both that sense of impact, how much you can do in one day, and also how it turns out there are people who care about making that kind of impact, just like you, in the eighth grade, in every city and town in this Commonwealth.

You also need to know you are part of a community of servers. And take joy and pride in it. Because that's how we will build a better world.

You know, we have a way, sometimes I think, sometimes when we talk about the importance of service, of letting guilt not creep into it, where you feel like if you have enough to eat, if you have great clothes and a place to live, and a family that's intact, that somehow the answer to that is guilt.

That is not my message. The answer to good fortune is responsibility. Not guilt. Responsibility. To relish in your good fortune, to thank your God and your family for that good fortune is entirely appropriate, but passing it on by the gestures you did today and have done before is essential. Otherwise, everything's up for grabs.

I was home at, I think I was sixteen years old back in Chicago and I ran to get a bus, a city bus, I was late going to meet somebody. And I got to the bus stop just as the bus was arriving and I jumped on the bus and I had been at school here, I had been away, I was back on school vacation.

So I jumped on this bus and the bus started to pull away and they had coin boxes. You folks don't even know what I'm talking about do you? They had the coin boxes where you would put your fare. And I reached into my pocket just as the bus was starting off and I realized at that point that I didn't have enough money for the fare. And I stood there looking ridiculous while the bus driver looked at me and saw I didn't have enough money for the fare and pointed at me and the nearest seat and said "Sit down, son." And I knew I was going to get it.

I was sure that he thought that I was trying to beat Chicago Transit Authority out of their fare. And I started to explain to him I said, "Sir, I'm sorry. I've been away. I didn't know the fare had changed. I was in a rush. I apologize." And I knew that he was going to put me off at the next stop after a round scolding.

And he gave me that once-over look that you get from people who serve the public a lot. They know how to size you up really quickly. He gave me that look and he turned back to the road. He looked back at me for a second then turned back and kept driving. He said simply, "Pass it on, son."

Pass it on. A simple act of grace and it made me want to be a better man. You have no idea just how profound your service is. I know you get that you are helping someone who needs school supplies, or clothes, or a meal. I know you get it. But I want you also to understand that the gesture of grace itself has power. It's transformative. It's lasting.

Some smile or sense of warmth, or sense or sense being just a little less alone in the world that you have left with somebody today or through your service, maybe just the thing that person needs to help build a better life for his or herself.

That's what you're about. That's what we ask you to take back to your communities. That's what we ask you to be about, not just what you do, but who you are. And through you and those gestures of grace, we will build a better Commonwealth and a better world.

God bless you all and safe travels home. Thank you for being a part of this.