

Statement of Senator Jamie Raskin, March 23, 2010

[Read at the Resolving the Food Fight: Community Forum on Lunch Trays & Healthy Schools
Piney Branch Elementary School, Takoma Park, MD]

Dear Members of the Young Activist Club, Parents, Friends, Neighbors, Mayor Williams, Councilmembers Leventhal and Ervin, Board of Education Members Barclay and Kauffman, Mr. Burke, Ms. Katz Miller, Ms. Bloch, Ms. Platt:

I am very sorry that I am unable to be with you tonight. The President of the Senate has called us into night session so I am still on the Senate floor working for the same kinds of changes that all of you are championing right now. Indeed, I am happy to report that the Senate just voted unanimously on second reader this afternoon for the Green Maryland Act, the bill I have introduced to require all state offices, departments and buildings to use at least 90% recycled paper, to make recycling containers available to employees and the public, to avoid Styrofoam purchases, to engage in composting and to develop plans for moving to all biodegradable materials and adhering to the best green practices. When we started, everyone was skeptical about whether the state could make these changes and a number of industry spokespeople came to testify against it, but the environmental community rallied around, the Governor endorsed the bill a few weeks ago and we are now very close to passage. I hope all of you will write to your Delegates and Senators telling them to support it on final passage.

In this bill and in my environmental work generally, I have been tremendously inspired by the work of the Young Activist Club, the irrepressible and visionary young activists who have raised the consciousness of our whole community, children and grown-ups alike. I remember when I saw them at the Takoma Farmers' Market last summer and they presented me with their petition; I was so impressed at their passion for the cause and their lucid explanation of a very complicated issue. They have pushed us to break from old ways of doing things in order to bring our practices into line with both our values and our interests in protecting the environment. They have also shown us how to begin change in our existing institutional contexts so we can move beyond green gestures to authentic green practices in how we live and work.

I will be eager to hear about the products of your deliberations this evening. I trust that the students, being clever and flexible, will work with their teachers, our excellent Board of Education Members, and the school system to come up with some good resolutions that will include creative compromises and perhaps some unexpected new alternatives. One thing I have learned during my first Term as a Senator is that you have got to take your victories wherever and whenever you can find them. Politics is the art of pushing and pushing hard until finally you make something happen, even if it is not exactly what you first anticipated. Look at President Obama and health care—the bill he signed today wasn't exactly the bill he started with and the process wasn't pretty, but we are the much better off because of the hard work everyone did.

Please forgive me for being stuck in Annapolis and please let me know what I can do to help you all achieve a common-ground victory and then move on to the broader environmental agenda that awaits all of us. I have asked my aide, Kate, to stick around to take careful notes about your proceedings and brainstorming. I look forward to seeing you when my session is over later in April—and you are always welcome, of course, to come see me up in Annapolis. I hope to see you all soon.

With all best wishes, Jamie