

# SEP vice presidential candidate campaigns in Highland Park, Michigan

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2 July 2012

Over the weekend, SEP vice presidential candidate Phyllis Scherrer, a teacher in the Pittsburgh area, spoke to residents of Detroit and Highland Park, Michigan about the conditions in the city and the recent decision to turn Highland Park schools over to for-profit charter operators.

Scherrer and a campaign team distributed copies of a recent statement by Scherrer, “No to school privatization!”

One Detroit resident who has grandchildren attending the Detroit Public Schools said in relation to the transformation of public schools into charters, “I don’t go for that in Highland Park or in Detroit or wherever. You stop half the kids on the street, and they can’t read. It is always about the money and who controls it.”

Keith, who has a 12-year-old child in the Detroit Public Schools said, “They are closing schools in Detroit and I think it is bad. I am on your side. The rich are getting richer.”

Ron, a retiree, said he would support the bringing in of charter schools to Highland Park. “I would like to see a fiscal and comprehensive review of how they are doing. If the kids can get a better education, why not? If not, why mess up the public school system.”

Scherrer explained that charter schools are not better schools. The schools in Muskegon Heights and Highland Park will become holding pens. “It comes down to the ‘haves’ and ‘have not’s’. Education has to improve by allocating more resources. Billions of dollars must be made available to construct new, state-of-the-art schools and upgrade existing buildings. Hundreds of thousands of new teachers must be hired and all wage and benefit cuts rescinded.”

Ron agreed, “Yes,” he said, “We have to invest in the children.”

Debbie, a parent with two children in the Detroit Public Schools, explained that charter schools want to know up front if a child has any special needs. Scherrer said that what charter schools do is to weed out the children with special needs, which places a heavier burden on the public schools that they return to.

Debbie replied, “The education of young people is for our future. My kids need special education. It seems like they need help because they can’t read well.”

Scherrer spoke of her own experiences as a teacher. “One of the first things public schools do to cut budgets is lay off reading specialists and other special education teachers that would have been there to help her children learn to read. Now they expect the classroom teachers to deal with an entire array of children with disabilities. They call it ‘inclusion,’ but it is really a cost-cutting measure that hurts students.”

Debbie replied, “They want to put my son in a reading program, and they want to charge \$300. They are taking extracurricular activities like music out of the schools, and now they say they don’t even have special education available.”

A SEP campaign team visited an area of Highland Park to distribute Scherrer’s statement.

Charles MacKay is president of Veterans for Vets in Highland Park, an organization that works with homeless veterans in the Detroit area.

“Right now in the Detroit area they report over 500 people who need permanent housing and 480 who need emergency housing. And that is just veterans. A good portion are living on the street.”

MacKay complained about the existing programs set

up to help veterans. “Going through the Veterans Administration program I saw they were setting people up to fail. They were providing meaningless jobs at \$8–\$10 an hour and three months rent. Five months down the road, the veterans are back where they started. We are trying to set up a program where they can sustain themselves. We chose Highland Park because it is a blighted area.”

Scherrer commented that the resources existed to fund social programs and provide jobs for everyone, but that these resources were controlled by a tiny layer of the population, the super-rich.

Charles West, the founder of Veterans for Vets, said he agreed. “You see how much money they are spending on the campaign—\$3 billion! Now imagine what that kind of money could do for people. Romney is making negative remarks about Obama, Obama is making negative remarks about Romney. That’s a waste of money. Why not put it where it will do some good—back in society.”

“In my years of being in politics, I know that corporate America never loses. So, if it is a big time corporation they don’t care who wins. They’ll put money in the Obama camp and the Romney camp. Whoever wins has to answer to them. That’s how they work.”



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