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Chaka Fattah (D/PA) - Philadelphia: June 12, 2000

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- This was the trip from hell. Planned on getting a senior coupon book at airport, going standby on one of the half-hour flights. Forget it. Plane was 1/2-hour late taking off from P-town, total fog. Got in to USAir and there was a waiting line of about 200 people. What to do. I wait for 1/2-hour. Then an airline person says, "Anyone for Philadelphia 10:30 flight?" I jump out of line and go to the front! I get fast track to counter, where I ask woman, "Can you get me on the 10:30 flight?" "Do you have a ticket?" "No." "You're in the wrong line." "I didn't know that." "You shouldn't be up here." "Is there anything you can do?" "Well, let's see." "The 10:30 flight is sold out." "How about the 11:30." "No, it's sold out, except for one first class seat." "I'll take it!" "It will cost you a lot." "I don't care, I have no choice." (I'm to meet Rebecca at 12:30 for lunch!) "It will cost you \$750.00. That's a lot of money. I can get you a regular ticket for the 12:30." "No, I can't wait." (It was foggy out and the airport was a mess when we came in--all backed up.) She makes out the first class going down and coach coming back, and she says, "you came to the right person." I agree and thank her profusely. I had planned to spend \$300. Now I'm in for \$750! I go down to look at the 10:30 flight boarding. A woman says "we have 40 stand-bys for this flight." I take the 11:30. It pulls out of the gate at 12:30. And I get to Philly--Fattah's office at 2:30! He's not there, but he's coming in, says Rebecca. The first event of the afternoon has been cancelled.

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- Rebecca talks to me and fills me in and eventually he comes in. We talk, fast as always--with interruptions, as usual. I got in maybe one good hour plus. Then he takes me to a fund-raiser for a city councilwoman for maybe a half-hour of standing around. Then we go to the main event--for "gear up" his program to move 9<sup>th</sup> grade kids to college. Overbrook cluster. It's a long program. I tape it. Rebecca says Thera will take me to the hotel. I say goodbye to CF and I'm at the hotel by 8:15. An expensive hotel to boot. I will have paid about \$500 per hour to be with him!! And the interview was not great. Problem is, I know him pretty well, and he's not going to say much more that's new. Also, Rebecca sits in on the interview, and that's no help.
- I've asked him for another trip to the NW part of the district

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and for a one year schedule. "We'll do it. We'll get it, he says."

- I say that when I last saw him, he was just about to go deal with Jim Jeffords on High Hopes.
- "We got it, the whole thing, except for the name. My entire concept is in the bill, just the way we wanted it, except it's called 'Gear Up.' That's the only difference."
- When he called Jeffords and suggested they get together before Senate took up the bill, "he asked me 'are you going to bring staff?' I didn't know him. I have never met him. I thought 'that's a funny question' but I took a guess and I said no. We agreed to meet and when I got over to his office, he said 'let's get out of here and just walk around.' And we walked and walked and talked all around the Capitol. He told me that he had read my legislation and that he agreed with everything I wanted. In fact, he said that he had been interested in the same thing and that he had a provision in the previous higher education authorization bill providing for grants to states to help kids move toward college--a competitive grant program, authorized at \$3 million. But it had never been funded. He also told me that the Republicans were opposed to starting any new education programs and that he would be very uncomfortable supporting any new program such as HH, even though he agreed with the idea. Well I'm not dumb. He didn't say it; but I knew what he was saying. So I said let me go back and work up some language, and I'll get back to you. We went back to the previous authorization legislation and sure enough, there was his little program. So we devised a single program with two parts--one was his state grant program and one was my high hopes. Politics is such a funny business. If you think of my life in Philadelphia, and his life in Vermont, and him being around a long time and me a newcomer. And here we were affecting the lives of millions of kids, just walking around the Capitol together. It's like--argues in metaphysics and madness--that in the long run, policy analysts and politicians come out just about at the same place; they just go about it in very different ways."
- The Senate bill called the two-pronged program "Connections." "House conferees didn't like it; some said we should fight for the original, High Hopes. But the Democrats said it had been the theme song of the Kennedy campaign and they didn't want to

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start a new program that would bring Kennedy back into higher education. So it came down to "Gear Up." I didn't care what name it had, so long as my program stayed intact. And it did. The President himself gave a "White House signing ceremony." "Rose garden?" "Or indoors, I don't remember!!"

- He talked about Appropriations Committee. "We had done everything possible to make sure that we had it. We were 99.95% sure we did. But in politics, 99.95% is not 100%. We thought that the big battle was winning the nomination inside the Pennsylvania delegation. People in the delegation did not believe that the eleven Democrats would vote for a black man from Philadelphia in a secret ballot. But they did. We thought that was the critical vote. And we held a premature celebration. We were assured by everyone that it had been decided that Pennsylvania would get a seat to fill the seat we had just lost. [I began to worry a little when the Steering Committee postponed its meeting from 9:00 to 10:00 and then to 11:00. Obviously there were moves being made. There were more promises made than there were seats. There were pivotal necessities to be taken care of. States had to be accommodated. There were seven seats and seven stories to tell.] I had it all lined up. In politics you always depend on other people. And power is so dispersed in the party. I've often said that the best campaign I ever ran was the one I lost. [In the end, the only thing that mattered was that I didn't get it. So I had a choice, concede or try again. I'm a big boy. I understood the process. And I had a nice talk with Gephardt the other day. I'm convinced more than ever, 99.99% that I will.]"
- Why keep at it? He went into: "I'd be happy on E&L, getting it in first place was an accomplishment."
- But he's had two successes now in education. Gear Up and a college retention bill (passed today or tomorrow on suspension of the rules.)
- He cites all the authorizations that don't get funded, five to six programs in education (I think) that need funds. Appropriations Committee "sets national priorities" and "is a superior choice."
- But getting Appropriations, he says, "is a 'right now' issue, either accomplish it or flush it."

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- "If this conversation were being held two years from now, I wouldn't be making the same decision." At some point, the seniority balance shifts--you are giving up too much on E&L to get too little on Appropriations. He went through the seniority picture on E&L and Appropriations--who's leaving and how long it might take him to get key subcommittee on E&L, getting on Labor subcommittee in Appropriations.
- He thinks a lot about his relatively young age; that he'll be around a long time. At the cocktail party he talked about redistricting as favoring him because he'll be around longer than Borski or Brady. When PA delegation picked him for Appropriations, he thought his youth and longevity were a big reason (vs. Doyle). "Someone said I had the safest seat in Congress. I don't know about that, but I'm in a pretty good position."
- (In redistricting conversation, he said Dems thought they might have a shot at Greenwood via redistricting.)
- I asked him about the district and the city--that it was hard to separate them and I wondered if the district had any identity or history apart from the city. He differentiated the two city districts--First and Second.
- "It is not a coincidence that the First District sent Bill Barrett to Congress. He was a ward leader from South Philadelphia. The nicest thing you could say about his legislative interests was that he didn't have any. Every night he came home and went to the clubhouse and people came to see him. He would see them all and sit there till the last person had been seen. I grew up in that district. I remember my grandfather going to see him. His business was constituency service. His interest was in political patronage and jobs. He didn't care about the judges, but he cared about all the people on the judge's payroll, all the clerks and court attendants. The other congressman could have the judges, so long as he had the employees, the staff. There was a real sense of who he was. The congressman now, Bob Brady, is the party chairman. He focuses on the needs of the local constituents. To that degree, the district has a character that dates back--Ozzie Meyers. Foglietta wasn't like that, but the party ran against him--Jim Tayoun, Joe Smith."

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- "The Second District has been the centerpiece of independent politics--not just black politics, but all politics--liberal white politics. The party there isn't interested in street money; they are interested in the editorials in the Philadelphia Inquirer. People in the district are more independent-minded. Bill Gray was a part of that. And it goes way back to Hardy Williams who beat the machine for state representative in the 1960's and the Mayor in 1971 and state legislation seats Richards, Evans and myself. All of us represented people who challenged the party establishment. They were not part of any organization--there were several different ones. Gray was superior among equals.

The Second District does have a character, but it's not all black and white. It's a mixture. I helped Brady win the chairmanship. I introduced Brady to Wilson Goode. Lucien Blackwell couldn't have lasted in this district for long. He was almost beaten earlier by a weak candidate. But if Lucien had been in the First District, he might have been in forever."

"It's character but..." he said yes it's character, but... "There is a character to the Second District. Maybe it's 70% identity and 30% merged. It's not 50/50. It's more character than anything else. That's what I'm trying to say."

- I could get him to talk more about this.
- "My strength is in the district. But I'm comfortable in the city. For many problems, we are one and the same." The problem of disentangling the city and the district.
- When I tried to get him to talk about learning over time, he centered on his organization. "There are bookmarks and sign posts and directions that come from past experience. I have a very substantial political organization. The more competitive an election is, the more likely it is that we can influence the outcome. In the mayor's election--both the primary and the general, people have very different expectations about the outcome. My work and my political organization upset those two expectations."
- "That's something I've learned over the years, that the candidate is not as important as the organization, that you have to have the ability to do a lot of simple things and

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complex things at the same time all at once. You need a combination of experience from people who have been around a long time and the enthusiasm of people who have been in it for a shorter time."

- "I ran my first race in 1979. Two of us ran as a team for city commissioner. Everyone says that we were the smartest and the most capable candidates ever put forward for the job. The commissioners control the election process; and we had studied it and knew all about it. Both the newspapers endorsed us. There were 22 people running for two slots. I came in fourth and he came in sixth. We were 21 years old--just kids running against some heavy hitters. We didn't win. And my learning curve began there. I learned that you couldn't make speeches if no one was on the phone to take the requests. I learned that you couldn't compete and build an organization at the same time. I learned that the organization comes first."
- "My organization has been in a period of self-correction because we have had no fight since my primary. Vincent Hughes ran for state rep and state senate, but he's had no competition for two elections. We supported Blondell Brown--she was my legislative assistant--for city council last year and we folded that effort into our work in the mayor's race. John Street came to me and said 'Chaka, I want you to come aboard and I want your people to run the whole thing.' Everyone thought Street would lose. Katz went home for lunch on election day believing he had won. When people spoke confidentially, they said our organization won the election. The Street race is the kind of race you want your organization to be in on. It tests the organization. If you don't test it, you won't have an organization worth its salt. It takes a lot of time and effort. When people move off the scene, you have a fleeting organization. I've learned over the years that so long as my organization is strong, I can focus first and foremost on my legislation."
- Have you put your stamp on the district? Has Gray and his influence disappeared. "Yes, I have put my stamp on the district. I've had a great deal of publicity--more than any Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania. The President has been in my district twelve times. He came during the campaign to kick off the Gear Up program. He came to my church. He gave me a White House ceremony in Gear Up. Those visits have

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given me unusual exposure."

- \*He sees himself as a phenomenon in the city. He outshines all the others and is something new. But Gray did, too. His publicity has driven Gray out of people's minds. But those who go way back (Mary at the cocktail party) see Gray as starting a North West Alliance and CF had his organization separately, and he "jumped across the river" to join Gray in some electoral efforts.
- When I asked people at the cocktail party about him, they emphasized his "consistency," "ideology," "keeps his word," "street smart and issue smart," "great memory" and "never forgets his friends or enemies." (Mary did mention Bill Gray a lot in our brief conversation, as starting to organize in NW area.) *It's in NW area that he is Gray's territory.*
- "I've had two front page articles in the Inquirer in the last two weeks. And I've had two others in the last five years--four articles is not bad. No one else has even come close to that coverage."
- At Gear Up ceremony, all comments were laudatory. Students encouraged to come up and shake hands with him because he was so special. And many did afterwards and had pictures taken.
- He talked quite a lot about his China trade vote. "A tough vote." [Rebecca called him a free trader with a conscience "and soul that he talked with David Wu (Ore.) The only Chinese-American in Congress and decided that if Wu could vote vs. it, he could too.] His story was similar in that he told a story of a relationship years ago with a Chinese embassy official who, when he protested the harsh treatment of African students in China, told him, "it's none of your business." He remembered and cited that story.
- "The President took me on Air Force One so he could needle me. He took me in his limousine so he could needle me. He came to Gear Up ceremony so he could needle me."
- Said it was tough because he was a free trader, had always voted for the yearly MFN for China. "We trade with everybody. EU was trader now, why not do it. People in my district, Cina and Boeing, have jobs because of trade. The unions are not

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all being hurt." And he had once argued that it "made sense" to pass a multi-year bill and get it over with, than drag it out year by year. But he said he had voted to support divestiture in order to pressure South Africa on a human rights issue and looked at China the same way. "If I could exert leverage on behalf of human rights in South Africa, why shouldn't I exert leverage against child labor, intellectual property and human rights in China. It was one of those contradictions in legislative life that Rosenthal writes about. It was a tough vote. When you approach these votes, you are thinking about everything. At the end of the day, I decided it was better to do it year by year, than it wouldn't make all that much difference, that I didn't want to put a stamp of approval on the regime in China, and that I couldn't forget that conversation I had with that Chinese friend long ago."

- He asked Alona to come in when I asked him some question about constituents. She does his constituent stuff. He left the room.
- What do constituents think of him, I asked her. "They are comfortable with him. They see him as knowledgeable. They know that he keeps company with kings and queens, but they think of him as a home boy. He talks with them on their level. He cares."
- 7 They'll say, "I knew him when he was a little boy. He comes by church. Their church may not be in his district, but we serve them anyway."
- CF asked her: "Do they call and ask about issues?" A says, "You know what? Not much."
- "They are very needy people, elderly, worried about taxes."
- Do they call in to give their opinions on what he does? "Yes they do." They say, "I like what he does, he's got guts."
- Do they talk about his work on education? "Yes, all the time. They know he's working on education."
- Where do they come from? "All over, Yaden, West Philly, Germantown, Darby."

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- He commented again that the district was 40 percent West Philly, and 40 percent NW area, and the rest "little pieces"--most of them think they belong to some other congressman, Brady or Weldon or ?
- Re ministers: As we drove to the Gear Up ceremony, we passed his old church. "That's the church I was raised in. This is my old neighborhood. It's not a church anymore. I moved with my church."
- Then I asked about ministers. Very perfunctory compared with LS for Stokes ministers were central. They are not central for CF. "I meet with them twice a year. Yes, they are supportive. But many of them supported Blackwell in the campaign. Naturally, I am in closer touch with some than others. But I meet all of them twice a years." It's a little bit like the black church was more important in civil rights than now. Schools are CF's key institution!
- Well I went to one of those meetings and it was poorly attended. His comment re who was with him reminded me of my conversation at the fund-raiser with a guy who said of CF, "he has a good memory. He remembers his friends and he remembers his enemies. And he treats them accordingly."
- I probed on CBC and got nothing but boiler plate and may be that's significant. Nothing about anything he did, just general comments on the sophistication of the group--as evidenced, for example, by fact that so many delegations pushed for an African American for Appropriations. But when I Asked point blank whether they could, as a group, have done anything for him, he said "no." He said they were split on African trade bill and split on China bill
- He said re committee assignments that they were "focusing on entrenched power" re committee seats. At one point he said "they... I mean we." Which may have been an indicative slip. He does seem pretty detached. Talked about their diversity and their good work for black farmers. Also, the intra-governmental linkages they fostered with countries in Africa.
- Rebecca told me off-the-record that she thought the one thing CF had not done to line up his Appropriation's slot was to work to help black turnout--a big thing in 1998. She gave me the name of a Roll Call reporter who follows House Democrats

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and who gave her a lot of info off-the-record. Rebecca thinks Clyburn got the seat Chaka would have had and that Clyburn was head of CBC and that Clyburn gave up his seat for Kennedy. CF wouldn't have done that--if that is, in fact, true. PA may have lacked a spokesman. Murtha an old guard guy.

- The Gear Up program was impressive. The various adult participants seemed to appreciate what they got in CF. I'd guess about 300 people--adults and kids.
- "Meetings like this, celebrating the first year of Gear Up, are going on all over the country. But the only celebration that has the author of the legislation present at their meeting is the Overbrook <sup>cluster</sup> Chaka Fattah. He's ours! We are privileged to have him here." Big applause.
- "This is living history. No one has ever done what this man has done. He has helped millions of Americans. It's a privilege to have him here. I hope all of you will take this chance to shake hands with him afterward."
- Re meeting at University of Pennsylvania auditorium: "There are votes going on right now in Washington and one of them is on my college completion provision. It's my second significant piece of legislation. But my local people have told me that it's much more important for me to be here for this ceremony than anywhere. We will hand out the certificates to the first group of seventh grades in the Gear Up program. These students are from the heart of my district and some are from my old middle school, from the neighborhood where I grew up. This is a major event and its where I should be. Besides, my bill will go through unopposed, on suspension (of the rules) and without a roll call votes."
- Interesting that he was not listed on the program, but was the subject of an insert. A late decision by him. The reason he may have needed a little persuasion is because President Clinton came earlier and really kicked off the program by giving the first certificates at a ceremony at Sulzberger Middle School. He praised CF profusely on that occasion. And may be CF thought that was it and he'd been in on the real kickoff. The locals may be had to make sure that he also participated in the neighborhood kick off. His son graduated from HS the next day. Another incentive.

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- "One of my predecessors, Congressman Nix, was the first black congressman to be chairman of a House committee--the Post Office Committee. That was a great accomplishment at the time--first black chairman. It was his claim to fame. Now I'm chairman of the post office subcommittee and no one mentions it. I certainly don't. It's not something I'm interested in or want people to know about."
- Re the Philadelphia Tribune, he said his mother was editor once "before she got out of journalism." He noted it was the oldest, that it was a weekly and that it was mostly "an advocacy paper," which I took to mean that it didn't cover his activities in DC or write interpretive process. He said that he was usually in the paper and that if they make an effort, they might get something in. (Rebecca asked them to come to the celebration--they didn't. He notes that they supported Blackwell. He also noted that when he first ran for the State Senate, they thought he was "pushy." In general, he did not credit them with helping him at all. Very different from Call and Post's relation to Lou Stokes.
- "I decided to run for the State Senate against a man who had been in for a long time. When I announced, he had not said whether or not he was going to run again--that he would let people know when the time came. But I said I was running regardless, and we had a big kick off rally. The Tribune thought I was too pushy, that I should wait my turn." How did it turn out? I'll have to find out.
- \*He has a long history of running and the history has to be a part of my analysis. He "grew" his district. He was aggressive. And he is in Washington, too.
- Re the Philadelphia Daily News: "I don't think they have written one decent, substantive article about me in five years. I know what they are about. They are a tabloid. They are in the business of hunting headlines. That's just the way they are."
- He's beginning to get his people into city politics. In the last election, his former legal assistant, Blondell, was elected to city council. She called him on his car phone to tell him about some trouble she was in because of a vote. They got disconnected, but he was in the process of finding out who she voted with, on what side, have to do with face

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masks(?).

- And his chief political advisor Sondra (McArthur) Glen had just been appointed to the school board. "She is my first direct connection with the school board. They will be choosing a new superintendent of schools and she will be knowledgeable about that. We've had a great superintendent and we're going to get another good one."
- \*I have to think of him, now as Mr. Education. It is his passion for now and his accomplishment. If I can fit community politician and education within a single rubric, I think I've got him.
- On ride to cocktail party, he talked about this councilman-- Nutter and his feud with Mayor Street. He accused mayor of hanky panky during campaign and CF talks about how foolish he was. But Nutter, I think, is his councilman.
- I asked him whether he regularly went to fund-raisers for city councilmen. He listed two others for whom he had been more than once. (Blondell many times. Nutter 2 or 3, and someone else 2 or 3.) Not a general pattern for him.
- "I was playing golf with the President about that time (HH) and he said 'Chaka, I don't think Congress is going to give us the money for that program of yours.' I told him, 'I think they will, Mr. President. We're working it out.'"
- He talked about the legal suit city is bringing re equalization. It's on hold now since Ridge offered to give em extra money if they kept suit on hold for a year (he wants to be VP). A win/win solution, says CF, helps everyone "now" and puts no constraints on "later."
- He said that the \$28 million that Philly got for Gear Up was the second largest amount of money Philly had gotten from federal government this year(?). He said that early on, they (we) decided to organize into clusters of schools instead of one-on-one. They have six clusters (Overbrook, 700 kids) in the city. Only certificate ceremony he went to was one in his neighborhood. [Where his kids went to school, son and daughter. Son to Drexel, daughter to Penn and Fordham LS (1st year). He has no interest in politics--only business. Wants to make money, says CF "should be a Republican." She leans

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more toward politics--worked in soup kitchens in summer. "I have hopes for her. She will work in White House counsel's office for five weeks this summer, then go to a law firm. He likes WH job. But his friends tell him law firm is only thing that matters. Laughs about his political take on everything. I agree with him.]

- Any how, he stresses that he worked with the school superintendent (whom he likes, but who is leaving) and teachers and universities to make sure that Philly had a good proposal to present to the panel of outside referees. "We had the advantage of knowing the history and the content of the legislation. And the author of the legislation; but it would have been embarrassing if Philadelphia's proposal had not been a very good one. So everyone worked very hard to make sure it was a good proposal. We got the second largest sum of money, after Chicago."
- At beginning, he wanted to know who I was writing on--I explained--he called it "the changing of the guard."
- A staffer brought a summer intern in to introduce her to CF. He asked her where she went to school and a couple of questions. Didn't show any warmth. Very perfunctory. Of course, they were interrupting an interview. But if I had been this young woman, I would not have felt any good vibes. It's part of his very business-like approach--no wasted motion.
- **Gear Up Talk:** <sup>He has</sup> ~~We have~~ spent a life time focused on young people, whether in his career in the General Assembly of the state of Pennsylvania or now, in his term as congressman. He has put before the Congress, a number of things, but nothing is more important to Congressman Fattah than education, and one of his greatest successes in getting through the Congress, particularly because it was sponsored by a Democrat was Gear Up. The person who put it together for the whole nation was Chaka Fattah. And we owe him a great debt of gratitude. Asks for "great round of applause" and gets it. Chaka Fattah "living proof of what any student can accomplish with the proper foundation and preparation and what opportunity one individual can provide for others when he or she is committed to excellence and a fair chance for everyone." Mentions that he went to Shoemaker Middle School and Overbrook HS and family lives in the community.

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- Philadelphia proposal was "the most scrutinized of all the programs across the country because it was in my home district."
- First year of six year program, will follow them for next five years. "A turning point in their lives."
- "If they know for a certainty that something will be there for them, they will take advantage of it and prepare themselves for it."
- The question "are we going to challenge the young people to do their best, to work hard and stay in school, Gear Up the most important direction toward success... The only way to success is through hard work. You may look in the dictionary and find "success" before "work", but in real life, young people have to work at it. They have to spend time and stay focused and learn the subjects you have to learn, to go to college."
- Story of paralyzed geometry student who makes summa cum laude at Harvard.
- "If they can remember the words of every rap song (right), if they can, like clock work, know the intricate details of the television schedule (yes), they can learn the subject matter that will prepare them to go to college." Loud applause First of the speech! Finally, he <sup>hit</sup> home.
- Juvenile ? act on the floor when he first talked about his bill.
- Billions and billions of dollars to provide for people who are going to do the wrong thing. His point was that it's about time in the country that we started to provide some guarantees for young people who are going to do the right thing." Applause.
- "We can't spend all our time focusing on the planes that crash. We have to focus on the planes that land."
- Talk about son and daughter went to school in Overbrook cluster.
- "Aptitude is very, very important, but it is not the

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controlling factor. Your attitude is the most important controlling factor to determine where you end up in this life."

- "If you believe it, you can achieve it." Work hard is message.

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