

## Vice President Harris Energizes Students During College Tour

Written by Biden for President 2024 Press

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**Key Point:** *“Alexander Hitchens, 19, attended Harris’s event feeling unsure about which presidential candidates he likes — and if he’ll even vote. He acknowledged entering the event that he didn’t feel educated on the issues and was skeptical of politicians. ... But he left the event saying: ‘I think I’m gonna vote.’ He felt that Harris was ‘very to the people, just gets straight to the point.’ Her messaging on the need to combat climate change and address gun violence while keeping people’s right to bear arms, in particular, resonated with him. ‘I probably would vote for Biden and Harris. My family probably won’t like it,’ he said, laughing and adding that his family supports former president Donald Trump.”*

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### [The Washington Post](#) : Harris makes political, personal connection with students during college tour

[Sabrina Rodriguez, 9/21/23]

[...]

Harris is in the midst of a month-long “Fight for Our Freedoms” tour to several colleges across the country. The tour, which kicked off last week with her visits to two historically Black schools, is an opportunity for Harris to talk about issues the Biden administration sees as most pressing for young voters as an election year approaches.

[...]

The vice president was well-received during Tuesday’s upbeat event, similar to her reception last week at Hampton University in Virginia and North Carolina A&T University. Upcoming visits over the next few weeks are scheduled for schools in Georgia, Wisconsin, Arizona and Nevada, most of which have sizable Black and Latino student populations.

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Hours before Harris's arrival, long lines formed outside of the college's Miller Center for the Arts, while inside the auditorium a DJ played top hits from artists like Bad Bunny, Latto and Beyoncé and Reading High School band and cheerleaders energized the crowd. The cheerleaders closed out with a cheer for Harris: "She got that fever. She got that heat. She's our VP. You cannot compete," they chanted.

Before she took the stage, Harris made brief remarks to students in the overflow area outside the auditorium and to a group of student leaders in the center's lobby. She then talked about a range of issues with actress Annie Gonzalez, who appeared in the Netflix show "Gentefied" and the Hulu film "Flamin' Hot," and took questions from students about such concerns as climate change, reproductive rights and gun safety.

Gabriella Soto, 19, who attended the event, said Harris's question about active shooter drills particularly resonated with her. She has lost count of the number of drills she did at school while growing up. Now, as a daycare teacher, she has taught young kids to stay quiet in their hiding spots. And as an education major, she expects those drills — and the fear of school shootings — will be part of her future in the classroom.

**Soto said it was meaningful for her to hear the vice president acknowledge how present the issue is in young people's lives, as guns are the number one cause of death among children and teens.** It also reminded her of her own conversations with her family about living through school shooting drills.

[...]

Several students, including Soto, marveled over Harris's decision to come to their community college, calling it a sign of her dedication to them.

"It's definitely like a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a lot of RACC students," Soto said as she stood outside the auditorium on the sunny afternoon hoping to get a glimpse of Harris leaving.

Colin Pinkerton, 21, said he felt Harris's visit sent a positive message to Reading, a city of about 95,000 that is the county seat of Republican-leaning Berks County. Reading's median household income is \$38,738, compared to the county median household income of \$69,272. It has a poverty rate of nearly 30 percent and was named by U.S. News and World Report as one of the nation's 10 poorest cities.

"It could just be her trying to get us to vote for her but it kind of shows that she cares about our small community here," Pinkerton said. "It's a pretty nice gesture to say the least."

**Harris's visit comes as Democrats work to energize young voters and shore up support among Hispanic voters ahead of the 2024 election.** Youth voter participation has reached historic levels in recent election cycles, with a majority backing Democratic candidates. **It also comes at the start of Hispanic Heritage Month, a point Reading Mayor Eddie Moran said had a "profound significance" for the community where more than**

### two-thirds of the population is Latino.

[...]

Alexander Hitchens, 19, attended Harris's event feeling unsure about which presidential candidates he likes — and if he'll even vote. He acknowledged entering the event that he didn't feel educated on the issues and was skeptical of politicians.

"I'm not on anybody's side," Hitchens said, who's studying criminal justice and called himself an independent.

But he left the event saying: "I think I'm gonna vote."

He felt that Harris was "very to the people, just gets straight to the point." Her messaging on the need to combat climate change and address gun violence while keeping people's right to bear arms, in particular, resonated with him.

**"I probably would vote for Biden and Harris. My family probably won't like it,"** he said, laughing and adding that his family supports former president Donald Trump.

Nangelie Zapata, 19, said she hoped Harris's visit would bring about some momentum for change among youth in Reading and show them they and their city matters.

Zapata, who is studying art, added that she's eager to vote in 2024 and is trying to sway friends and other students who are less sold on the importance of voting.

"It's hard to bring an understanding just because there's such a strange stigma against it. But I think we can always change that," she said. "It's just hard for some people to understand why their vote matters but I'm trying to explain it and change their minds."

[...]

For Justin Perez, 19, who was inside the event, Harris's remarks on gun violence stood out the most.

"This is just an issue that hits really close to home," Perez said, sporting a red student ID lanyard that said #RACCProud. "Changing that for us is what really would make a difference in our lives because I feel like our whole community feels it."

[...]

Ahnya O'Riordan, 19, teared up listening to Harris speak. It wasn't about any one issue the vice president addressed but hearing her offer them advice about being proud of who they are. She recited almost verbatim a closing portion of Harris's remarks in which she told the students that they're often going to walk in rooms where they're the only one that looks like them.

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“When you walk in those rooms, you walk in those rooms chin up, shoulders back, knowing that we are all in that room with you and that your voice is the voice of all the people you carry into that room and you make sure your voice is heard,” Harris said.

**“I felt like she actually gave us a voice and wants us to be heard and even gave us some strength,” O’Riordan, who is majoring in forensic psychology, said. “I just love her.”**