



At a 'Five Little Monkeys' reading, Charlie Rangel discusses Bloomberg, Soros and the sad fate of dropouts

By [Dan Rosenblum](#)

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Charlie Rangel's stop at the North General Hospital branch of the Institute for Family Health was part of a daylong series of events designed to promote the Reach Out and Read program in pediatric clinics and family health care facilities around America. The program is designed to encourage parents to read to their children by providing books and a demonstration of how to engage through reading.



Neil Calman, Charlie Rangel, and Reach Out and Read of Greater New York Medical Director, Sabrina Martin, MD

Yesterday, Rangel was doing the demonstrating.

The waiting room was filled with 21 children from Pequeño Souls, a nearby day care center. Ringed with children, teachers and program directors who took photos and video with their cell phones, the congressman performed an animated reading of "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed."

Murals and slogans from street artist James De La Vega colored the room with uplifting and defiant messages: "In the theater of life, you will have your moment," one message said. "Don't believe everything you see," said a figure with a waiting-room television for a head.

Dressed in a grey suit and tie, Rangel, who represents Harlem and much of northern Manhattan, arrived at 10:45 in the morning. (The reading was scheduled for 10, but the congressman showed up late after a scheduling mishap sent him to the Institute for Family Health location near Union Square.) He immediately took command of the room.

As his youngest constituents drew with markers and talked to each other, Rangel walked up to the front of the room and loudly whistled for their attention.

"I'm about to be introduced," Rangel told the children.

Neil Calman, the head of the Institute for Family Health, duly introduced him.

"All through this entire neighborhood and all through New York and all through the country, there are great places like this that Congressman Rangel has supported and has been responsible for making happen," Calman said. "And right now the reason we're here is because of Congressman Rangel, who has helped to build this hospital and is now helping to rebuild it into what it's going to be next."

(The Institute for Family Health is leasing some of the first floor of Harlem's North General Hospital, which declared bankruptcy and closed last summer. The upper floors are empty, according to staff.)

He praised Rangel for finding money for literacy programs and health clinics. One of the children yelled about how vegetables make people strong, and Calman agreed.

"And I'm sure Congressman Rangel eats all of his broccoli and carrots," Calman said as Rangel, smiling, placed his arm on Calman and raised his other hand, in a show of modesty.

Rangel greeted the children, who ranged from three to five years old, and called them future presidents, congresspeople, doctors, lawyers and teachers. He told them about the importance of learning.

"It's really God's gift of survival," Rangel said. "With every species they learn and protect themselves, protect their families and communities. Except we learn and we kill each other. And there's no question in my mind that this is morally wrong. But the key to civilization has to be reading. And I was raised on Lenox Avenue and it amazes me about how little I knew about the world until I read.

"And the only time you can dream is when somebody is putting thought in your mind and that's what you're doing now. It's like a great oak tree and you're dealing with the seeds, but you can't have that oak tree if the ground has no clue about what to do with its enrichments."

He spoke more on the importance of dreams: "When kids have nothing to dream about and they drop out of school, the easiest thing for them to do is to get into trouble with policemen who are not social workers and once you get into that system, the record is also clear that three out of four go back to the system. The system's not fair but that doesn't help us, what's fair and what isn't fair."

Addressing himself to the staff, he cautiously expressed support for new plans for Michael Bloomberg and George Soros to fund half of a recently created program for minority youth.

"What the mayor and Soros are doing—grabbing youngsters between 18 and 25—is a very, very expensive investment they've made, but it is far less than what it would cost if they didn't do it," Rangel said. "But if we started this way, we wouldn't have to do what the mayor and Soros are doing and so this is the least expensive with the highest possible return."

Rangel, who is 81 and has three grandchildren, asked the children questions. They quickly warmed to him.

"Why would monkeys be in someone's house, jumping on the bed?" Rangel asked the kids. "If I saw a monkey, I'd call the police and tell them to put the monkey in the zoo."

One child said she had a monkey at her home.

"You call Rangel and you say there's a monkey bouncing on my bed," he said to her. "You give me your telephone number, I'll go there and get rid of them."

Finishing up the book, Rangel had more jokes for the room.

"So the little five monkeys fell asleep at last," Rangel said, reading from the book. "Finally they go to sleep. And they stop jumping on the bed. And the mother says 'thank goodness.' And they turned her into 311 for being an abusive mother."

On his way out, Rangel shook hands with institute staff and a couple of parents and posed for photos.

"No more monkeys doing what?" Rangel asked a woman working on a computer behind the reception desk.

"Jumping on the bed," she said.

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