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"STATE OF OUR UNION"

by

ALBERT SHANKER

President of American
Federation of Teachers
AFL-CIO

PRESIDENT SHANKER: Thank you very much, Joan-Marie. It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to review some of the things that we have done over the last two years, some of the things that have happened to our schools, to our country, to our union.

and Since we last met two years ago, just kind of looking back and thinking of some of the major things, some of the events that I was involved in, some that all of us were, some involving the whole country, I guess the first thing to see is that the education issue hasn't gone away. It's still a major concern to the American people and the American business community.

Over this two years a number of locals in the American Federation of Teachers, an increasing number of locals, have made major strides in terms of bringing about reforms and restructuring within their school system. And some of the

1 changes that these locals are involved in are so radical, so
2 different from what has gone on before, that almost all of us
3 have had the opportunity to read about them, not just in the
4 publications of the AFT, but in national news magazines, news-
5 papers, and we've seen reports on television and heard about
6 them on the radio.

7 And I must say that almost everyone of these major
8 efforts to transform our schools is an effort of a local of the
9 American Federation of Teachers, and locals that enjoy very
10 strong collective bargaining relationships.

11 (Applause)

12 PRESIDENT SHANKER: We've been involved over this
13 period of time in an interesting legal suit where in St. Louis
14 the Superintendent of Schools has decided to fire teachers and
15 evaluate them largely on one item, and that is, on the test
16 scores of students, a very important issue in terms of the
17 meaning of professionalism.

18 Many of you last year attended what was probably
19 the greatest educational conference in the United States, a
20 Quest conference that would have been as big as this convention
21 if we'd had enough hotel space. And during the last two years
22 tens of thousands of teachers across the country, including

1 many in districts represented by the National Education
2 Association, have brought in our programs on educational
3 research and dissemination, critical thinking, and other areas,
4 fields in which we've shown leadership.

5 During this period of time we also issued a very
6 important document, a statement on the need to have our schools
7 and our teachers involved in the teaching of the meaning of
8 democracy. And we obtained the signatures of support from about
9 200 citizens across the country. I'm happy to say that your
10 state superintendent Bill Honig was not only a signer, but
11 has actually--this state has contributed funds to the ongoing
12 development of textbooks, materials, the training of teachers,
13 and has had groups working in this state to see to it that the
14 curriculum of the state carries out the important mandate set
15 forth there; an extremely important issue, because after all,
16 why do the American people, even those without children, pay
17 for our schools and the education of our children, if not for at
18 least one thing, and that is, to maintain an understanding and
19 a belief and a faith in our system of government.

20 During this period of time there was an important
21 report by the committee on economic development. I had the
22 privilege of serving as an adviser to that committee. An

1 extremely important report, a major national business group,
2 that went beyond the report that it had previously issued in
3 support of educational reform, and started talking about issues
4 like the tens of thousands, indeed millions of children, who
5 will be coming into our schools with terrible handicaps and
6 brain damage and retardation unless we provide adequate medical
7 care and nourishment for pregnant mothers.

8 And for the first time in the history of American
9 business, major leaders of corporations testifying before
10 Congress for major increases in funds.

11 We also saw some important cases like the so-called
12 Scopes II case in Tennessee, and another case in Alabama,
13 dealing with the issues of textbooks and religious issues,
14 cases which showed up the shortcomings of many of our textbooks,
15 but which fortunately did not support the position of some of
16 the extreme groups that were involved in those cases.

17 Only a few months ago I had the great privilege of
18 representing Lane Kirkland in a march in Warsaw, Poland, the
19 first illegal march by Solidarity since the declaration of
20 marshal law. And we continue in our support of that great,
21 courageous and brave union.

22

(Applause)

1 PRESIDENT SHANKER: And some months before that,
2 last October, together with world leaders of other public
3 employee unions, I went to Chile and spent some time there.
4 And we have sent some of our leaders down there to work with
5 the teachers union. We'll be hearing more about that during
6 our convention.

7 But this union and the AFL-CIO, and the National
8 Endowment for Democracy, and the International Federation of
9 Free Teachers Unions, is playing a major role in the referendum
10 that's about to take place in Chile, where we are involved in
11 voter registration and campaigning in the hopes that we will
12 be able to oust the Pinochet regime and restore democracy in
13 that country.

14 (Applause)

15 PRESIDENT SHANKER: During this two-year period
16 of time, we have new tax legislation in Washington. And very
17 few of our members know it, but one of the most important things
18 that we did during that tax fight was to make sure that the
19 deductibility of state and local taxes remained; and that is
20 now a \$40 billion form of assistance to schools and to public
21 employees and to other public services at the state and local
22 level.

1 And we saw the creation of the national board
2 transformed from the Carnegie Board, something that started
3 with some ideas that we put out there. They were transformed
4 and modified, but as Bill Honig pointed out, we have great hope
5 for what that will do for teacher professionalism in the future.

6 And just a few weeks ago I was invited by Jimmy
7 Carter and Jerry Ford to go to Atlanta to meet with 100 business
8 leaders to deal with the future of education and the economy.

9 I've been over the past two years to dozens of
10 meetings of boards of directors of corporations to talk about
11 the needs of our schools; meeting with governors, state
12 legislatures. It has been a very exciting, very productive two
13 years, a period during which the American Federation of
14 Teachers, because of the policies that you adopted in convention
15 two years ago, has been in editorials, in articles, has been
16 recognized as being in the leadership, in the forefront, of
17 bringing about change in our schools.

18 Now, I would think that the first thing we should go
19 back to and look at is what Bob Porter pointed out to us just a
20 few minutes ago. When I joined the AFT in 1952, the American
21 Federation of Teachers, after 42 years of existence, had
22 50,000 members nationally. In the last two years we gained

1 55,000 members, more than we gained in the first 42 years of
2 our existence. And that's more than organizing 55,000 members.
3 Because you know, these are--this is growth. In addition to
4 growth we constantly have to sign up people to make up for
5 those who retire, those who leave, those who move out of
6 teaching, those who pass away. There are about 70,000 a year
7 who move out of the union. So in order to stand still we've
8 got to organize 70,000 people a year.

9 To show a growth of 55,000 means that all of you
10 and your building reps actually signed up 200,000 members over
11 the last two years: quite an accomplishment.

12 (Applause)

13 PRESIDENT SHANKER: We expect to continue to
14 recognize those involved in the great organizing effort. You
15 saw quite a large number stand with their golden apples.

16 Within your locals, many of you still have large
17 numbers of people who are not in the union. We're working for
18 them, we're negotiating their salaries, we're taking their
19 grievances, we're representing them in Washington and in the
20 state capitol, we're doing all sorts of things, but they have
21 not yet decided to join.

22 What these local leaders have found out is that if

1 you keep working at it, keep asking, keep trying, you can
2 get them. And we can make very great progress. And I want to
3 congratulate the winners.

4 The new growth is terrific, and we're going to
5 continue traditional organizing. But one of the very key issues
6 is growing in many different ways, and I'd like to address at
7 this time something which was adopted in convention two years
8 ago, and that is, we modified our constitution. We had
9 extensive debate. And we decided to put in our constitution a
10 new form of membership called associate member.

11 Now we understand that associate members are not
12 voting members. And they're not members in the same sense that
13 we are, or the members in our schools.

14 But we also discussed at that time the fact that
15 there are many people who would like to be associated with us.
16 And if we signed up 100, 200, 300, 500, 700,000 people like
17 that, so that in addition to our 670,000 members, let's say we
18 had another 670,000 associate members, the President of the
19 United States, governors and members of Congress, they won't
20 say, well, you've got all these different kinds of members.
21 They would know that we would have 1.2 or 1.3 or 1.4 million
22 members.

1 And while we're not ceasing our efforts at growing
2 in the regular ways, we ought to, at the same time, devote
3 efforts to bringing in associates.

4 Now in your kits are materials on associate
5 membership. There's a flyer. There's an envelope. There's a
6 sign-up card.

7 We hope that in addition to that one sample, back
8 out there somewhere there are tables with these, that you will
9 take them with you. Because if each and everyone of our members
10 would sign up one other person--now, these might be people who
11 use to be in our local but they're no longer teachers, but
12 they'd still like to get the American Educator and the American
13 Teacher and be eligible for our insurance and have travel
14 discounts and get our credit card and do all these things for
15 \$25 a year and still be counted as a member.

16 They might have moved to another district where
17 there's no AFT local. And until there is one, they could
18 maintain their relationship this way.

19 We're moving on the retiree membership, which is a
20 form of this. And then we just want to expand what we call the
21 friends of education. Friends, relatives, people that you know
22 in church or clubs or anywhere else, if each and everyone of our

1 members carries around one or two of these, and next year as
2 we come in with not only 30,000 or 40,000 regular members that
3 are in collective bargaining units or moving for collective
4 bargaining, but also bringing in tens and indeed hundreds of
5 thousands of associate members, our influence with the Congress,
6 our influence with the next and forthcoming administration,
7 will be multiplied and will move that much faster.

8 This is one of the very, very high priorities of the
9 union. We'll get to a million the regular way. We'll get to a
10 million and a half. We may get to two or more eventually. But
11 you see that organizing 33 or 25 or 30,000 members is very hard.
12 We're going to continue doing that.

13 But we can move up to that 1-1/2 or 2 million mark
14 much faster if we make this a priority, and we intend to do
15 that.

16 Now you see that our growth is in all areas. And
17 the backdrops that we have indicates that our union is made up
18 of a number of different constituencies. We started, and our
19 largest single group of course is still classroom teachers.

20 But over the last year we have recognized the
21 number of different groups in our union in different ways.
22 For example, we have a special committee of the executive council

1 that's considering types of restructuring for the organization
2 so that these other groups that are with us here today and that
3 have shown such tremendous growth, we're thinking of new
4 structures and new ways of providing for increased participa-
5 tion for each of these groups.

6 Now while we have a number of different groups,
7 there is a commonality of interest. And that can be seen in the
8 fact that we're all going to be working together at getting a
9 new administration in Washington, D.C., one that cares about
10 education and health care and public services, because all of
11 these things go together.

12 The \$40 billion that we manage to keep there as tax
13 deductible helped not only schools but state and local public
14 services and health care as well.

15 We will have a number of speakers at this convention.
16 And I am sure that we will find everyone of them making a great
17 contribution to our understanding.

18 Let these speakers come to us, and we've selected
19 them in such a way, that they touch upon the priorities of
20 each and everyone of our groups.

21 William Julius Wilson, a brilliant black scholar at
22 the University of Chicago who has written a great book called

1 The Truly Disadvantaged, which shows the problems that our
2 schools and other agencies are faced with as a result of poverty
3 and urban decay and the rise, the growth of the underclass.

4 Marian Wright Edelman at our civil rights luncheon,
5 really a person who single-handedly has raised the money and
6 has taken nationally the issues of teenage pregnancy and neglect
7 of children through the Children's Defense Fund.

8 Tom Donahue, who is Secretary-Treasurer of the
9 AFL-CIO, has led the committee on the future of work;
10 restructuring, improving the AFL-CIO so that it can grow and
11 be more effective than it has in the past.

12 Dr. Paul Starr, a Pulitzer Prize winning author on
13 how medicine became a profession, and the history of the medical
14 profession, will be here to talk to us on an issue that
15 affects teachers but affects all public employees, the issue of
16 privatization, the view that government workers are lazy, that
17 government can't get it done, all you've got to do is sell
18 everything that's now done by the government and have some
19 private contractor do it and it will be done better. This is
20 now his area of concentration, and while his address will
21 undoubtedly focus on many areas of local and state government,
22 its impact on vouchers and tuition tax credits is very clear as

1 well.

2 And then Admiral Watkins, who is head of the AIDS
3 Commission, will be here to talk on that issue, which of course
4 is not only an issue affecting our health care people, but all
5 of us.

6 Now I would like to touch on some of the accomplish-
7 ments of the other groups, the non-teacher groups, who are here
8 and who are such an important and strong part of our union.

9 FNHP, health care. This is the 10th birthday, happy
10 10th birthday for that group in terms of its affiliation with
11 the American Federation of Teachers.

12 (Applause)

13 Over that period of time, it has grown from 11 to
14 63 locals, representing over 40,000 employees, not only registered
15 nurses, who are important, but also, LPNs, medical technicians,
16 physical and occupational therapists, pharmacists, laboratory
17 and other technicians.

18 And recently we have begun taking in and are quite
19 successful in bringing in doctors and dentists. And we are
20 now talking to quite a number of doctors and dentists who
21 believe that this is the union for them.

22 So when we get back here two years from now, don't

1 be surprised. You may be able to turn to the person next to
2 you and get some free advice.

3 We've had a very good record in the health care
4 field. They are tough employers. They hire anti-union firms
5 to figure out how to keep the union out. In spite of that we
6 have won two-thirds of all the collective bargaining elections
7 that we have gone into; a terrific record. (APPLAUSE)

8 And this is another area in which each and every one
9 of you can help the union grow. If you know people who are in
10 this field, people in the hospital near you, or in your locality.
11 Think not only of organizing teachers, and not only of associate
12 members, but think of people in the health care field down the
13 road. Most of them are unorganized in this country, and it's a
14 great potential for growth for the American Federation of
15 Teachers.

16 We have also shown significant growth in our federation
17 of state employees, which includes state and local employees. We
18 have organized in that field an outreach program, and for the
19 most part we are bringing in entire state and local organizations,
20 organizations that have been there for some time, but have not
21 been within the AFL-CIO or any of its affiliated unions.

22 We bring these groups in and we have an annual

1 budget briefing to tie in the relationship between the Federal
2 budget and what's about to happen to them at the state and local
3 level.

4 We had a national conference on privatization. We
5 brought experts in from across the country to familiarize
6 our own members with the kinds of problems they'll be facing,
7 the kinds of arguments they'll be facing, and how to handle
8 these arguments.

9 We have research and training operations in this
10 area which are separated from our teacher research and training
11 operations; and we have widespread cooperation with a number of
12 organizations that are still independent in the hopes that by
13 working with them and they with us that they will follow many of
14 their colleagues and affiliate.

15 Two years ago we announced the affiliation of the
16 Illinois State Employees Association. And now we have with us
17 as new affiliates the Indiana State Employees Association; the
18 Kansas Association of Public Employees; the Kentucky State
19 Employees Association. And just the other day our executive
20 council approved the affiliation of the largest chapter of the
21 North Dakota Employees Association.

22 I want you to welcome them to our ranks. They are

1 all here.

2 (Applause)

3 Now, our fastest growing group are the paraprofession-
4 als and school-related personnel.

5 (Applause)

6 In the last two years we have organized more than
7 15,000 in this particular group, and their annual conferences are
8 beginning to look something like an AFT convention in both size
9 and enthusiasm.

10 Now, with our thrust towards reforming and restructur-
11 ing schools, paras and school-related personnel are included in
12 all of our plans for involvement of employees and in many cases,
13 we're developing career ladders so that those employees who
14 wish to move to other categories in the school system can do so.

15 But in talking about school, we've got to remember,
16 that school is, yes, it's teachers and it's students. But when
17 it comes to problems, well, discipline is just as much a problem
18 for the bus driver as for the teacher. A good school food pro-
19 gram in terms of nutrition for many of these kids is the only
20 decent meal they get during the day, and without that their
21 education would suffer.

22 And we know the importance of school secretaries,

1 custodians, and others. So to have them all in the same union
2 and working for the same goals is very, very important.

3 Now, it's very interesting that about five years ago
4 when we started organizing these groups, the NEA used to put out
5 fliers saying that the AFT is going to become an organization
6 that is not really professional, because it's taking all these
7 other groups in. They had posters; they had fliers; they were
8 pretty vicious, saying that somehow we will lower our standards
9 by taking other people in.

10 They put those fliers out for a number of years, but
11 it's interesting that the NEA is now growing as an organization,
12 and they're growing by starting to do what we started all those
13 years ago.

14 So once again, we welcome them to the club in terms
15 of following our leadership in this area. So we face stiff
16 competition, but both organizations are doing this.

17 I would like to, at this point, this growth is
18 something which all of you have been involved in. It obviously
19 can't be done by essential staff, essential headquarters. But
20 it does take coordination. It takes materials. It takes
21 judgment and targeting assistance and funds.

22 And I want to at this time thank all of you for

1 what you've done in this growth. I want to thank our staff. But
2 I especially want to thank the person who is the greatest
3 organizing director in the entire labor movement, our own
4 Phil Kugler, without whom this progress would not have
5 happened.

6 (Applause)

7 The main issue that our union has been involved in,
8 if you ask any reporter or any educator over the last couple
9 of years, has been the issue of changing schools. Two years
10 ago, as I indicated before, we adopted a very radical document
11 called "The Revolution That Is Overdue".

12 And if you read it today, you'll find that it still
13 is revolutionary. And while we adopted it, and in some places
14 we're carrying it out, it changes very slow, and it's very very
15 difficult to bring about.

16 And so I want to devote the remainder of my remarks
17 to the issue of bringing about change in our schools, and what
18 the union's role is, and what our next step ought to be.

19 Five years ago, when A Nation At Risk was pub-
20 lished, the American Federation of Teachers took a position
21 quite different from most other groups in the field of
22 education; not that we agreed with the critics, not that we

1 thought they were so accurate in their reports or in their
2 criticism or in their advice. But we did feel that there were
3 some real problems out there, and that if we did not show a
4 willingness to cooperate in change, that the American people
5 would get fed up with their public schools and would start
6 moving in the direction of private schools.

7 We saw the polls where each year the parents were
8 giving the schools worse and worse marks. And I would like to
9 say that the problems and dangers we saw then have not gone
10 away.

11 And as we talk about changing schools, this is not
12 an academic issue. It's not just a hobbyhorse that I have that's
13 nice to hear every year or once every two years. It remains
14 a life and death issue for American public education, for our
15 profession and for our union.

16 The polls on what the public thinks of us are still
17 down. The public does not think that there's very much
18 improvement in the schools.

19 There is still talk about tuition tax credit and
20 vouchers, and more than just talk about these things. Now of
21 course we face all kinds of outside problems. I found that there
22 was something rather obscene about Bill Bennett getting up every

1 couple of months and criticizing all of us for the poor
2 performance of the schools when he was part of an Administration
3 that threw millions of children into poverty; that resulted
4 in hundreds of thousands not getting enough health care before
5 they were born so that they come to us so damaged that there's
6 very little schools can do for them; they've thrown hundreds
7 of thousands into the streets so that they're homeless; part
8 of an Administration that has created such problems for so
9 many of these kids, policies that have shut down so many jobs
10 in this country that used to be good middle class fine blue
11 collar jobs that would enable a family to get along, and have
12 thrown these people into poverty jobs, or many of them into
13 extensive periods of unemployment. To have somebody like that
14 stand up and blame us for not having these kids read Shakespeare
15 or James Madison is something that's quite obscene--

16 (Applause)

17 --about being part of an Administration that creates
18 tremendous problems and then blames somebody else for not
19 handling them.

20 But in the long run we can't just stand up and
21 blame other people even if they deserve it. We can blame them.
22 But in the long run the public will only support public schools

1 if the schools do better.

2 We cannot overcome all the problems. But I think
3 that when we look at what's happening now and how we're doing,
4 I think we'll all agree that we can do a lot better.

5 Now the first thing we need to recognize is that
6 the threat has not gone away; it's still there. Now, it's hard
7 to convince our members, and it may even be hard to convince
8 ourselves in this room, about how big that threat is.

9 There are some threats that you can see, they're
10 right in front of you. In the Congress someone introduces a
11 tuition tax credit bill. Immediately we get the word out. The
12 newspapers have it; the television has it; there is a debate.
13 Everyone gets unified and gets into the fight because you can
14 see the threat; it's right there in front of you. It's big; it's
15 national; it's tangible. And we're very good at responding
16 to that sort of threat.

17 But there are other threats that are there but
18 they're not obvious. They're creeping. They're slow. It's
19 like the people in the auto industry who went to Japan and saw
20 in the 1960s that they were making better cars than we were;
21 cars that were cheaper. They saw it. But it didn't all happen
22 in one day. The American people didn't go out and, you know,

1 pour kerosene on their cars and burn them up and go out and
2 replace them with Japanese cars. It didn't happen that way.

3 If something like that had happened, maybe the
4 American auto industry would have been so shaken up that it
5 would have done something very quickly. But what happened was
6 that the first year people bought another 20-, 30-, 40,000
7 Japanese cars. The next year they bought another 50,000. The
8 next year another bunch. So that each year the American auto
9 industry lost a percentage, and they started laying off a
10 certain number of workers the first year, and some more the
11 second year, and some more the third.

12 Now that you look at it, and if you look at a
13 graph over the last 10 or 15 or 20 years, it's very clear what's
14 happening. It's an industry that may die. We may have none.
15 But the industry was unable in the early days to mobilize itself
16 because there wasn't enough of an instant, immediate threat of
17 death. It was death by stages, death by percentages, death a
18 little bit at a time, on the installment plan.

19 Well, that's sort of what's happening to us if you
20 look around. In the last two years, Iowa--the State of Iowa
21 passed a tuition tax credit bill. Now, of course, not all
22 people have rushed to take their children out. But it's there

1 and it's starting to be used.

2 By the way it was supported by the NEA in the state
3 because the tax credits were attached to their salary increase
4 in the same piece of legislation. So the teachers had to face
5 the problem that if they opposed the tuition tax credit bill,
6 they were also opposing the bill which contained their salary
7 increases. And they chose to support them because they were
8 interested in the salaries, and somehow weren't frightened
9 enough of the tax credits.

10 The State of Wisconsin this year introduced their
11 voucher bill which passed one house; was strongly supported by
12 the governor; may pass the next time that legislature meets.

13 The State of Minnesota has introduced an individual
14 statewide choice plan. It's in the public sector, but it could
15 be expanded to the private sector. And that choice plan, which
16 allows individual families to move their kids from school
17 district to school district may very well mean that some of the
18 kids who are learning will be moved out of schools that have
19 some problems, and it may result in some districts being
20 filled with kids who are concentrated in the underclass and
21 create huge problems, because in many of those schools the
22 learning models that help to keep the teachers in the school

1 and are role models for other students may very well just move
2 out, resulting in a horrible situation of increased segregation
3 and isolation. That's a threat.

4 New Jersey has passed an educational bankruptcy
5 law which says that if the state education department, in
6 accordance with certain standards, believes that your school
7 system is educationally bankrupt, the state has a right to come
8 in and put in trustees and take it over so that your school
9 board and superintendent are removed. Some of us might not mind
10 that. But the question is, what comes in its place? And what
11 comes in its place, who are they responsible to? What are they
12 going to do? Do they have to live up to any of the contractual
13 or legal or other agreements that are in place? What happens?

14 Well, there is the first move now to take over
15 an urban district in the state of New Jersey. And even though
16 at times we would like to remove superintendants of school
17 boards and at times they ought to be, there is no clear indication
18 that a state board of education knows how to run local school
19 districts any better than local people do. There is no magic
20 answer here.

21 But it does represent a great threat certainly to our
22 contractual relationship.

1 City of Chicago, Illinois legislature, has been
2 toying with the idea--fortunately, I think killed for this
3 year--of carving up the city school district into a large number
4 of districts; dismissing all the current staff--all the current
5 staff--and not giving them any guarantee of reemployment in the
6 new districts. They would have to be hired and be employed on
7 the basis of whether the new governing boards or school boards
8 in these districts want them.

9 Now it took a lot of effort to modify that and to
10 defeat the worst provisions of it. But that is not going away
11 forever.

12 There is one other threat that's out there, and
13 you'll be hearing more and more about it. And that's what's
14 happened in England over the last couple of years. The
15 parliament in England abolished collective bargaining for
16 teachers several years ago, something the teachers there have
17 had much longer than we've had in the United States.

18 Abolished it; the next thing they did--and that's
19 about to go into effect. This is legislation which has passed.
20 And that is this. They've passed legislation that says that
21 if 20 percent of the parents in any school, parents of children
22 in any school, vote, they sign a petition, they can call for an

1 election of the parents of the children in the school to
2 determine whether or not the majority of those parents wish
3 to remove that school from the jurisdiction of the board of
4 education and to run that school by a committee elected by the
5 parents.

6 Now, it's something like collective bargaining for
7 parents. They sign a petition; then they get a secret ballot
8 election. If a majority voting in the secret ballot election
9 decide they want their own school, they run the school. They
10 have a right to hire and fire.

11 In order to make sure that the parents run it
12 properly, they have instituted a system of national examinations
13 and a national curriculum which will tell all teachers in all
14 schools exactly what they have to teach so that their kids can
15 do well at the end of the year.

16 Now you may say, well, that's England, and it's
17 not going to happen here. Well, what happens here frequently
18 moves over there, and what happens there frequently moves here.
19 On television a number of months ago I was watching C-SPAN and
20 saw the Republican National Governors Conference. And there were
21 three or four governors who got up and made speeches about
22 Margaret Thatchers wonderful reforms, and about how those reforms

1 ought to become the' basis of the Republican Party's platform
2 for education in the United States.

3 Now it might not happen this presidential election,
4 but it's something to watch for, and it's something to worry
5 about. Great Britain is not known as a radical nation. There
6 is a very conservative prime minister doing something very
7 radical and something that turned out to be, at least
8 according to the polls, very popular over there.

9 I believe that we are in a situation that is
10 something like the auto people in the 1960s. They were
11 able to see what the Japanese were doing, and they knew it was
12 a threat. But somehow, they weren't able to mobilize the
13 industry or the union or the other people fast enough to be able
14 to make a better and a cheaper car.

15 Not until more recently, when it became obvious
16 that they were going to go out of business completely, did
17 they start working on things like the Saturn Project and other
18 things.

19 I think that's very much the position we are in. And
20 I hope that when you return to your locals and your colleagues
21 I hope that you will share these things with them. Because in
22 10 or 12 years, or maybe in even less time than that, we may not

1 just have Iowa with tuition tax credits. We may have five or
2 six states. And we may not just have one state considering
3 vouchers, but a few with them. We may have choice plans which
4 are destructive of many of our urban school districts in more
5 than one state. We may have these bankruptcy plans, and we may
6 have these what are called opt-out plans in England where
7 schools can opt out of the regular public school system and
8 become sort of government financed private schools.

9 It won't happen all across the country at once. It
10 won't happen in every state at once. Not all parents will
11 take their children out at once. It will all be slow and
12 easy.

13 And precisely because it's slow and easy, unless we
14 go back and warn and educate and inform our own members we
15 won't do very much about it. Nobody's going to be very
16 motivated to do very much about improving or changing schools
17 if we think nothing's about to happen. Everything's okay;
18 nothing's changing.

19 Well, things are changing. There are these terrible
20 indicators. We should not wait until it's too late. The
21 time to start doing something is now.

22 Now the reasons--so the danger is there and it's

1 very great. And it's more dangerous because it's slow and
2 creeping and incremental and not visible, and because you will,
3 when you start saying these things to teachers, they're going to
4 look at you the way people look at me a lot of these places:
5 What are you so worried about? Everything was okay this year.
6 We got a good state aid package, and we got a good contract.

7 I can assure you that we do have a representative
8 of our British affiliate of the IFFTU here, and I hope that
9 many of you will have an opportunity to talk with him and see
10 really how unexpected--I'm sure that there was no one in England
11 who five years ago, if you said five years from now the parents
12 will be able to vote to take their school out and fire anybody
13 they want and there'll be a national curriculum, they say, you
14 go off to the looney bin; you're crazy. It would have been
15 viewed as insanity.

16 It's there. So let's take it seriously, and let's
17 spread the word.

18 Now, is this feeling that schools aren't doing so
19 well, is this just a bunch of enemies of education who are
20 spreading the word? Or are there reasons?

21 Are there good reasons? What indeed are the schools
22 like?

1 Now, I've had some problem with this. Because I've
2 been going around the country talking about some of the results.
3 And I have been saying, and I'm saying here today, that any
4 reasonable person looking over the results would say that we
5 are only educating--the school system of this country, public
6 schools of this country--are only bringing to a level, fairly
7 modest level of education, I'm not talking about some high
8 intellectual standard, and we'll get to the standards in just
9 a minute, a very small proportion of the youngsters who go to
10 school. Very small; shockingly small.

11 I've been criticized for saying that. I've been
12 criticized by the NEA, for instance, who say, Al Shanker, he
13 should be saying good things about the schools, and instead,
14 look what he's saying. He's talking against teachers, and he's
15 giving us very bad public relations.

16 But it's not just the NEA. Some of you have written
17 me letters. And some of you have sort of button holed me
18 and said, Al, when you say that, it's bad PR; it doesn't look
19 good. And some have said, gee, that's not what my district is
20 like. We're doing really great in my district. I don't see
21 the kind of results that you're talking about there.

22 So I would like to talk about why I say this, and

1 then share with you, and for some of you, share for a second
2 or third time, what some of these indicators are.

3 People come up and say, gee, you used to be known
4 as Big Al the teachers' pal. What's happened to you? Why
5 are you saying all these things now?

6 Well, first, I think you all know that I am not
7 attacking teachers. Teachers are as much the victims of a
8 system where they are forced to do things they don't want to do
9 and that in many cases they know will not work, because that's
10 what they're told to do. And if they didn't do it that way,
11 they would be in deep trouble.

12 So it's not a criticism of teachers; it's a criti-
13 cism of the way schools are organized. No more than it's a
14 criticism of auto workers that were losing that race. The auto
15 worker came and did what he was told to do. He didn't design
16 the automobile. He didn't design the product. He wasn't
17 responsible for the quality control or for anything else. He
18 was just told, here, sit there and do that or stand and do
19 that, and he did it.

20 But ultimately, it's the auto worker who pays the
21 price. And even though we are not the ones who are designing
22 the schools. We're carrying out the orders; we're doing it as
well as we possibly can. When all is said and done, if the

1 public loses faith in the schools, we will be, students and
2 teachers and others employed in the schools, will be victims
3 once again.

4 Now, secondly, I think we ought to know that I have
5 no view in my mind, as Bill Bennett seems to, that somehow
6 the schools have gotten worse; that once upon a time there was
7 a golden age where everyone sat in school and read Shakespeare
8 or James Madison and worked on probability theory and calculus,
9 and all of a sudden, along came teachers' unions and tenure
10 and collective bargaining and a few other things. Then all of
11 a sudden kids' scores went down, and they stopped learning,
12 and standards went down, that sort of thing.

13 That's nonsense. There was no golden age. In 1940
14 about 80 percent of the kids dropped out and only 20 percent
15 stayed in school. We are doing better than we ever did before.
16 We are keeping more kids in school for much longer periods of
17 time, and they are learning much more.

18 But that isn't--unfortunately, sometimes you can be
19 doing much better than you ever did before, but you're still
20 in trouble. For example, the automobiles that American manu-
21 facturers are making this year are a hell of a lot better than
22 the automobiles that they used to make in 1950. I don't know

1 of anybody who would trade this year's or last year's model
2 for a 1950. But in 1950, everyone wanted an American car
3 because there weren't any Japanese cars around. There wasn't
4 any competition.

5 So it's not a question of are we better today.
6 When kids dropped out in 1945, they dropped into a world where
7 they could go out and make a lot of money in jobs that were
8 there, good union jobs.

9 When they drop out today, there is not a world.
10 It's not that we have gotten worse. We're doing better; a
11 heck of a lot better than we ever did before.

12 But that doesn't mean that it's good enough. It's
13 not our fault that it's not good enough, and it's not good
14 enough not because there's something wrong with us. It's
15 not good enough because the world around us has changed, and
16 the consequences of not getting an education--

17 (Applause)

18 --the consequences of not getting an education are
19 very different today than they were at that time.

20 Now, I think the third thing that's important here
21 is that it's not true that if you acknowledge problems that
22 you have that the public necessarily looks down on you and

1 criticizes you. And I think the best example to look at here
2 is medicine. This country has spent billions of dollars in an
3 effort to try to cure cancer over the last 20 years. And most
4 areas, we're no closer now than we were before.

5 There are a few cancers that have been cured and
6 solved. But some of them have actually increased.

7 I don't see any doctors walking around saying we
8 have found a cure. I don't even hear them saying a cure is just
9 around the corner, or we'll have a five-year report card on how
10 well we're doing on this.

11 Doctors are honest with us. They say, it's tough.
12 We don't know how to do it. We're working as hard as we can.
13 And here's a new disease that pops up that threatens all of
14 civilization, AIDS. We don't know very much. We're trying.

15 The idea that we should somehow turn this whole
16 thing into public relations. I must say that I was just
17 some months ago on a platform with leaders of various education
18 groups on the national scene.

19 And one of the top leaders of the NEA at the end
20 of that forum said, there's nothing wrong with American education
21 that couldn't be cured if each of the organizations here would
22 put up millions of dollars and we had a big television

1 commercial campaign telling everybody the schools are wonderful.

2 Well, that's what the auto manufacturers thought
3 in 1965. They thought that if you just do a good promotion
4 job, you don't have to worry about whether anybody else
5 has a better automobile.

6 It will not work. Now, I think there is another
7 reason for levelling with the public. They're going to know
8 anyway, but there's something else out there, and that is the
9 belief that if the schools aren't doing well, it's because
10 teachers aren't planning their lessons right; it's because
11 we're working too short a year; it's because we don't have high
12 expectations of our youngsters.

13 Notice the whole thing is blaming the people there
14 for what is happening. And somebody has to stand up and say,
15 look, the system isn't working very well. And there are lots
16 of kids who aren't making it. But it's not because of what
17 we're doing.

18 We're not paid very well. We work hard as anything.
19 And we are the first to be disappointed. We came into this
20 field because of what we want to do for kids.

21 And it isn't what we're doing, or that we aren't
22 trying hard, or that we're not good enough. Sure, we could

1 give a slightly better lesson, or slightly better this or
2 that. Everybody can improve a little bit.

3 But the problems we've got are not in what we are
4 doing. It's not in our efforts or in our intentions or our
5 expectations. The problem is in the way you have organized this
6 whole thing, just as it wasn't the auto worker who was laying
7 down on the job. It was a stupid assembly line, and a
8 rotten design of an automobile, and it wasn't the worker
9 who wasn't working. (APPLAUSE)

10 Look at what's happening in the automobile industry.
11 The Japanese have come over here and opened up some Japanese
12 auto firms, run by Japanese managers, and hired exactly the same
13 UAW people and put them into--exactly the same workers in a
14 number of plants, some of them right here in California, are
15 turning out excellent automobiles.

16 It wasn't the workers who weren't doing a good job.
17 It was management that didn't know how to organize the system
18 of production.

19 (Applause).

20 And so I would like to share with you what some of
21 these results are. They never cease to shock me, even though
22 I talk about them at least once a day. And I find them hard

1 to believe too.

2 But we do have one system of national assessment
3 that most people have great confidence in. It's not perfect,
4 but it's the best thing we have. It's called the National
5 Assessment for Educational Progress. It's financed by the
6 U.S. Government. This year we managed to get them a
7 substantial increase in funds and also philosophy and
8 direction, so we'll even have better assessments in the
9 future.

10 But here's the evidence. These are 17-year-old
11 kids who are being assessed nationally. Please don't just
12 think that these are urban areas with a lot of kids who have
13 got lots of problems. This is national.

14 These are 17-year-old kids who are still in school.
15 That means the dropouts are gone, so these are the good kids
16 who are going to graduate later this year. Positive selection.
17 These results should be good. Dropouts are gone.

18 In the most difficult writing examination, it asks
19 the youngster to write a letter to the manager of a supermarket
20 a couple of blocks away from the school applying for a job.
21 The letter is not market for perfect grammar or perfect
22 spelling. The idea is, can the kids give one or two arguments.

1 the dropouts have gone who can write that acceptable letter
2 just before graduating high school is 20 percent; 20 percent.
3 Eighty percent of those who are still in school write below
4 that level, and then I'd have to flash on what they consider
5 to be unacceptable. There's no difference as to what they
6 consider to be unacceptable. There might be a difference as to
7 whether the acceptable one is really acceptable. But there
8 wouldn't be one in the other direction.

9 Now, very important. Second one: mathematics.
10 Show the students six common fractions. The kinds that they
11 get in class almost every day from the time that they get
12 fractions. Nothing huge or fancy. And ask them to put these
13 fractions in size places, smallest one first, largest one last,
14 et cetera.

15 The percentage of graduating youngsters who can
16 do that is 12 percent.

17 Now let's take this one. You give a kid a picture of
18 a railroad or bus timetable. And you say to the kid, you are going
19 from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. What train do you have to
20 catch on a weekday in order to get into Washington just before
21 6:00 p.m.?

22 The percentage of kids who were able to figure

1 The kid is told in the instructions, there will
2 be a lot of applicants for the job, so be sure you make the
3 best argument you can. So what they're looking for is something
4 like, I used to work in my uncle's grocery store, and I know how
5 important it is to come on time because I know you'll be counting
6 on me. Or, I know you'll lose the whole day's profits if you
7 don't know how to count change, and I know how to do that. Or
8 I used to collect the dues, I was the treasurer of my Boy Scout
9 troop. Or something like that. One or two reasons

11 Critical thinking, persuasion, expression. Nothing
12 very intellectual. This is not Shakespeare or Dickens. It's
13 just writing a simple letter.

14 What I should have done is to flash some of the
15 sample letters up on the screen here. We'll do that in the
16 future. But something that the National Assessment considers to
17 be an acceptable letter.

18 If you saw an acceptable letter, you would not
19 think it was a very high standard. It is not high. It is so-so,
20 you know. You wouldn't think much, but all right, let's accept
21 that standard and say it's acceptable.

22 The percentage of kids who are still in school after

1 that out: 4.9. 4.9, 17-year-old kids, 4.9. By the way, if
2 all minorities are excluded, and you have whites only in the
3 sample, it's 5.9.

4 So I mean, look, we still have a lot of special
5 things that need to be done for the years of discrimination
6 and poverty and everything else for minorities to catch up,
7 but the educational problem in this country, minorities are
8 catching up, that's one of the results that the NAEP results
9 show.

10 And if we get an administration that puts more into
11 Chapter I and early childhood and these things, minorities
12 will catch up.

13 But the problem is with our entire system as well.

14 (Applause)

15 Now, if you look at history, you've seen the results,
16 the number of kids who know what half century Stalin lived in
17 or Lincoln lived in or World War II took place in is just
18 abysmally small. And there is no way you can have an intelli-
19 gent discussion about any current event unless you have a
20 placement of some things in history.

21 Is our helping contras in Nicaragua the equivalent
22 of Munich which will result in a further conflict in the area?

1 Is it the equivalent of Vietnam, where we're going to get
2 sucked into an unwanted war?

3 I mean, the thinking about history and current
4 events is always in terms of what was it like that went on
5 before? And you have to have pictures in your mind of who were
6 the actors. What happened when? What happened before and
7 after, and why?

8 And if you don't have that, you have no understand-
9 ing, you have no basis, for making political decisions now, to
10 say, I'm going to vote for this candidate rather than that one.

11 And if you look at the results, they don't have it.
12 And the mathematics results that came out a few weeks ago,
13 absolutely dismal.

14 Well, what percentage of the kids on the basis of
15 this and other evidence are we educating? If you really want
16 to talk about any sort of an intellectual standard, that is, a
17 kid who can do really two or three step problems in mathematics,
18 somebody who can read a really good book and understand it;
19 somebody who can write a good letter, not just a minimally
20 passable one and all that, it may be 9 percent, 10 percent,
21 maybe less; maybe slightly more.

22 If you take these figures--now remember, 25 percent

1 of the kids have dropped out already. Some of those are smart
2 kids who were angry, or got hooked on drugs or something else.
3 But most of those kids would probably not do as well. They
4 were having problems in school. Maybe we're educating 20
5 percent of the kids.

6 It depends on what standards you'd want to have.
7 Maybe you would say we're educating 25 percent. Maybe you
8 want to be real lenient and have really good public relations
9 and say we're educating 30 percent. Maybe you'd haggle and
10 you'd get me up to 35.

11 But I assure you that if you were sitting there
12 with these results in front of you, the actual papers of what
13 the kids are doing, I guarantee that there isn't a person in
14 this room who, if they had the materials in front of them,
15 who would say, we're educating 45 or 50 percent. There are
16 very few who would say 40 or 35 or even 30.

17 Now that means that small changes will not work.
18 I should add one other thing to these results. The results
19 show that 75 to 80 percent of the kids are learning very little.

20 Now there's further bad news unfortunately. The
21 kids who are learning, what you learn is that the way we learn
22 in school can't be applied to anything in the real world. That

1 is, unless you're going to be a teacher or a college professor.
2 where it does come in real handy, no one goes to work with the
3 notebooks that he had in high school or college and says,
4 now let's see what I learned in that course, and applies it.

5 Instead, they turn to the person next to them and
6 say, what are we doing here and how do we do it? That is,
7 most people learn through some sort of apprenticeship or
8 training program right on the job. And that's a whole new
9 area of research that people are going into, saying, look, on
10 the job you are expected to work with five or six other people.
11 In school, if a kid turns around to the one next to him and
12 says, how do you do this, it's called cheating. In work, it's
13 called collaboration.

14 If you got something wrong at work, and you didn't
15 lean over to ask the person next to you, you'd be fired for that.
16 Somebody would say, what's the matter with you? Are you crazy?
17 You've got all sorts of people right around you who can help you.
18 In school we'd say, you've got to learn the whole thing individ-
19 ually or by yourself.

20 At work, there are all sorts of instruments. I mean
21 nobody actually has to do all this division or anything else.
22 You know, there are calculators and computers, and there are

1 all sorts of little tools that people have, on all sorts of
2 jobs. Schools are placed where you almost never see these
3 tools. You've got to do it all in your head. So all the kids
4 who can do them, could do them if they had these gadgets, think
5 they're dumb and think they're no good.

6 So a lot of kids who are pretty smart but can't
7 manipulate abstract symbols outside of any context and do it
8 all by themselves, who could be very valuable workers out there
9 because they can work on a team and they can do it together and
10 they can get the answer right, if it's a practical problem and
11 if it's in context and they have tools to use, large numbers
12 of kids are being told they're stupid because they can't do
13 something which isn't going to do them very much good later on
14 anyway.

15 So that's--we need to do a good deal of rethinking.
16 And what we've got to do is ask ourselves why the schools are
17 getting these results.

18 I've indicated, it's not because teachers are not
19 committed or working hard. It is because of a system. And I
20 want to touch on a few of the things that we do know.

21 We know that schools as now organized don't work
22 for most kids. They don't work for most kids because 85

1 percent of what goes on in school is talk.

2 Now, if I were to ask you, what do you remember most,
3 if you listen to people talk for six hours, or if you watch a
4 movie, which one would you remember more?

5 If you listened to someone talk for six hours or
6 if you sit down with three people and really do something
7 together, what grabs you more?

8 I mean, there's no question about it that one of
9 the things that gets our attention the least, that grabs us the
10 least, is the thing that most school is made of.

11 So: a lot of talk. And by the way, it's the
12 way schools are. You've got to cover the materials. You've
13 got to talk because you've got to worry about what's going to
14 be on those exams later on.

15 You've got to cover it, and you've got to rehearse,
16 and you've got to practice. And essentially, most kids don't
17 learn that way, and most adults don't learn very much that way.
18 And we don't have another way of reaching most kids. We don't
19 have the time, and we're not encouraged to do it.

20 If medicine were organized the way education is,
21 then this would happen. You would go to a doctor. The doctor
22 would look at you and listen to you, and he'd say, here, try

1 this medicine.

2 Three days later, you would return. And you'd say,
3 doc, not only did that medicine not cure me but, look, I got
4 this terrible rash from your medicine.

5 The doctor, if he were in the field of public
6 education, would turn to you as the patient and say, you've
7 got a hell of a lot of nerve not responding to my medicine,
8 here, take more of it.

9 (Applause)

10 Now, seriously, what does the doctor do? The
11 doctor doesn't blame you for not responding to his--the doctor
12 says, I'm sorry. I gave you the right medicine. That works
13 on most people. I'm sorry, it didn't work on you. It doesn't
14 work on everybody.

15 And then he'd say, here, try this, and he'd give
16 you something else. It's not your fault if you don't respond
17 to a particular medicine.

18 And one of the things we need to do is to structure
19 schools so that you know that when you're not reaching a kid
20 through talk, you've got a second way. You've got the time.
21 You've got the materials. You've got the support system to
22 reach that kid a second way, a third way, a fourth way, a fifth

1 way, until the kid gets it.

2 (Applause)

3 Then we have the way schools are organized. As a
4 British business writer who did just a marvellous thing about
5 schools, and how secondary schools are organized. And he said,
6 a school is something like an office. It's not like a coal
7 mine and it's not like a paper mill. It's not like an auto
8 factory. It's not like working on a ship.

9 A school resembles an office where people are read-
10 ing things, and they're writing things, and they're listening
11 to people and they're passing paper. Now, suppose you had an
12 office. Let's say it's an insurance company or a bank or a
13 newspaper office or it's your union office or a school office.

14 And suppose you hired somebody and you said, Al,
15 here's your desk. Sit over here. And see that? You've got 25
16 other people working. They're doing the same work that you
17 are. But we don't want you ever to talk to them. Because
18 they do their work, and you do yours alone.

19 And you see that person over there? That's your
20 manager. And your manager is going to come over and tell you
21 exactly what to do, and then you do it.

22 And by the way, in 45 minutes, a bell will ring.

1 We want you to leave this desk and this room and the people
2 sitting around you and that manager, and we want you to walk
3 up to 412 where you will have another boss who will give you a
4 totally different job to do. You will have 25 other coworkers
5 sitting around you. We don't you to talk to them either. And
6 you will be 45 minutes in that room and then another bell will
7 ring.

8 And every 45 minutes we're going to give you a
9 different job to do and a different boss to relate to and 25
10 other coworkers that we don't want you to have any conversation
11 with.

12 If you organized a bank that way, or a newspaper
13 office, or your union office, you would be driven out. People
14 would say, you don't know what you're doing. It's hard enough
15 to work for one boss, you organize a union against him. But
16 imagine having seven different bosses in a day; seven different
17 personalities, different sets of expectations.

18 People can't just turn around a do a different job
19 and do it in 45 minutes. It takes them time to get adjusted.
20 What about the kid who doesn't get it until the 40th minute?
21 He's just starting to get the hang of it. The bell rings; off
22 we go.

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Now, this system makes sense if you think of the student as an inanimate object going through an assembly line, and the first teacher is putting this bolt on, and the second one is tightening this screw, and the third one is doing something else.

If you view the school as a factory, in which the teacher is the worker, and in which the student is an inanimate object being worked on externally, this makes perfect sense. You're going from one to another to another on the assembly line. You move from teacher to teacher during the day. And each year you move from teacher to teacher, and that's the whole thing.

But you know, nobody can educate anybody else. Education is something that a person does for himself or herself. The teacher can create--

(Applause)

--the student is the worker in the school. If the student doesn't do the work, the student will never learn, no matter how brilliantly the teacher does the job.

(Applause)

The teacher is the manager of the work. The

1 teacher can have ideas as to what kind of things to put before
2 the students that will get the students to be engaged and to be
3 motivated and to work. The teacher is really the manager and the
4 student is the worker. But we don't organize schools in that
5 way. Well, that's something we need to think about. That
6 was secondary schools.

7 What about elementary schools? Well, one education-
8 al writer has said that if children had to learn how to speak--
9 something that they all have to do; and it's very difficult
10 learning how to speak, because you can't look back at the
11 words as you can in reading.

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1 People have different pronunciations of words.
2 You have to be listening at the rate I'm speaking. You cannot
3 control that. Whereas when you're reading, you can go over
4 it and you can control your own rate. But all kids learn how
5 to speak.

6 But somebody said if kids had to learn how to speak
7 the way they are taught in schools, they would never learn how to
8 speak. And here's a description of how we would teach kids,
9 might teach kids how to speak in school.

10 And suppose we decided that we had to teach
11 children to speak, how would you go about it? Well, first,
12 some committee of experts would analyze speech and break it down
13 into a number of speech skills. And they'd say that speech is
14 made up of sounds, and a child must be taught to make all of the
15 sounds of his language before he can be taught to speak the
16 language.

17 Well, then, we would list the sounds, the easiest
18 ones first and the commonest ones first, and the hardest ones
19 and the rarest ones later. Then we would begin to teach
20 infants these sounds, working our way down the list.

21 When the child had learned to make all the sounds
22 on the sound list, we would begin to teach him to combine

1 sounds into syllables.

2 When he could say all the syllables on the syllables
3 list, we would begin to teach him the words on our word list.

4 At the same time, we would teach him the rules of
5 grammar, by means of which he could combine these newly learned
6 words into sentences.

7 Everything would be planned, and nothing would be
8 left to chance. There would be plenty of drill, review, and
9 standardized tests to make sure that he's not forgotten anything.

10 Now suppose we tried to do this? What would happen?
11 What would happen quite simply is that most children, before
12 they got very far, would become baffled, discouraged, humiliated
13 and fearful. And they would quit doing what we asked them.

14 Now the interesting thing when a kid first starts to
15 speak, and I know because I'm a grandfather whose grandchild is
16 just starting to speak, the first sounds that come out of a
17 baby's mouth, we don't say, that's not a word.

18 We say, look, he's speaking, and we grab him and we
19 hug him and we say how wonderful it is.

20 (Applause)

21 So one of the things that we know as parents, and
22 we know that--what do we say about principals and about school

1 superintendents, we say the one thing you must never do if you
2 want to get the faculty really to work and to pitch in, never
3 humiliate anybody.

4 You can criticize. You can show people how they
5 might do better. But never humiliate anybody. What do we
6 do in school? Not because we intend to. But if we constantly
7 call on a kid who doesn't know the answers to recite in front
8 of all the other kids in the class, that kid is being humiliated
9 in front of all his colleagues. That's the way the class is
10 organized.

11 We don't intend to do it. But a lot of kids stop
12 trying because of that humiliation.

13 Well, these are the problems we have. Another
14 problem is the way we group kids. You can make a kid feel
15 terrific by grouping him in such a way that he's the best kid
16 in the group. He'll feel great.

17 You can knock the stuffings out of another kid if
18 he's always in a group where he's the lowest. I'd like to
19 share with you the kind of thinking that needs to go on in our
20 schools, and that we as teachers need to be involved in, because
21 nobody else can really do this, or will do it.

22 After our last conference, last October, I had the

1 privilege of visiting our colleagues in the German teachers'
2 union. And I visited a school in Cologne. And I'm not offering
3 this to you as the answer, so that everybody goes out and has a
4 Cologne school in their district. It is a way of thinking about
5 how by changing a few things and thinking about a few things,
6 you can make a very big difference.

7 It's a challenge to build your own, and to do your
8 own, to think about your own. It is not a challenge to ask
9 you to copy somebody else's, although there are some good
10 elements in it that deserve some copying.

11 But here's a school. It's an urban school. It's
12 got 2,200 kids. There are a lot of Turkish kids and Moroccan
13 kids and Greek kids. So there's multiculturalism and multi-
14 lingualism. It's not a nice neat school with a lot of obedient
15 middle class German children.

16 This is a school, a secondary school in Germany.
17 All of the kids are tested in the fourth grade. And let me
18 tell you, if you're real smart, they send you to Gymnasium.
19 And if you're not so smart, they send you to Realschule. And
20 if you're at the bottom of the pack, they send you to something
21 called Hauptschule.

22 This is a comprehensive school. And that means

5

1 most of the kids who were told they were smart on the basis of
2 the test have gone off to Gymnasium, and this school takes the
3 bottom two groups, the two that were told they're not smart
4 enough to go to college.

5 And the results in this school are amazing. Because
6 it takes lots of kids who were told they can't go to college.
7 And it has them pass a national examination which actually
8 does send them on to college. Now what does the school do?

9 The first thing that happens is, you are not
10 assigned to a class. When you come to the school, you are
11 told, Mr. Shanker, here are seven other teachers who are part
12 of your team. There are eight teachers on your team. And here
13 are the record cards for, say, 120 kids. These are going to be
14 your kids. They'll be here in a few days.

15 It is the job of your team to make the following
16 decisions. They will not be made by the principal or by the
17 superintendent or by a computer or by a programmer or by anybody
18 else. Your team of teachers will decide the following.

19 How do you break these kids up into groups of
20 classes? Which teachers teach what subjects? And teachers who
21 are good at teaching reading may not be that good at teaching
22 writing, et cetera. So everyone plays to their strengths.

1 The next thing that happens is, you have no bells
2 here. And therefore, you don't have to move every 40 minutes.
3 You make the decision. You want to keep the kids a whole
4 morning for math? Fine. A whole afternoon for German? Okay.

5 After the first week you find that all morning for
6 math is too much, the kids are getting restless, you can change
7 it. You can change it anytime your team wants to. It's your
8 business. It's not the business of the rest of the school.

9 The only thing we're concerned about is the kids
10 are learning.

11 The next thing we want to tell you, you see these
12 kids you're getting? You're getting them in the fifth grade,
13 and they're not graduating until age 19. They're going to be
14 in this school.

15 Your team of teachers will have these same kids
16 from the fifth grade through age 19. That means you're not
17 going to spend until Thanksgiving each year learning the
18 names of 150 new kids, and it means you're not going to pack up
19 the first week in June because you're got to get ready to pass
20 them on to the next teacher. You are the next teacher.

21 And you're not going to be able to say you got a
22 bunch of kids from the teacher who ruined them last year.

1 And you can't wait to pass them on to the next one because
2 there's not much you can do with them. You will be with them
3 long enough so that you will live to look at yourself in the
4 mirror and say to yourself, whatever good has happened to
5 them, I take the credit. And a lot of the bad things, I am
6 responsible.

7 It takes a bureaucratic factory situation and
8 turns it into a moral community.

9 Finally, there's very little lecturing or talking
10 in the classrooms. The kids are tables of five doing what
11 we call cooperative learning. That is, they get problems
12 and questions where the kids help each other. No child is
13 ever asked a question to perform in front of the whole group
14 unless you know in advance that he's going to look good.

15 The embarrassment if any is in that small group
16 where he's shielded by friends.

17 Now, is this a perfect system? No. Should
18 teachers stay with kids for that many years? Maybe not.
19 Maybe it should be two years; maybe three, instead of that
20 many.

21 Do you give up something? Sure. Maybe not all
22 teachers can teach the fifth grade and teach the last grade

1 of high school. That's quite a span. Maybe it's not true that
2 all teachers will relate to kids of all those different age
3 groups.

4 Maybe they should be two-year blocks, or three-year
5 blocks, or different ways of organizing. But the only question
6 I'm raising is that everything we take for granted, which is
7 that you're assigned the kids. The bell rings every 45 minutes.
8 You teach this. This is how you group them. This is what you
9 do. That what this school has done is to question everything
10 that's done, and to say you can do it differently.

11 They are successful. That isn't the only way of
12 doing it. Dade County schools are involved in a remarkable
13 experiment where over 40 schools are managing themselves.
14 They submitted proposals, and they are managing themselves.

15 It is probably the largest experiment going on in
16 the United States of teachers, and actually, not just teachers,
17 but all the members of the faculty cooperating and building a
18 school.

19 Now the question I want to raise is, how do we make
20 this happen? If we are going to improve schools, it's going
21 to be because things like these are tried in different places.
22 And when they're first tried, they're not going to look so good.

1 When you try something new, it's messy.

2 And the first things that are tried, you may have to
3 abandon half of what you tried, and keep half; and keep trying
4 and trying and trying until you get it right.

5 As a matter of fact, a school is a type of
6 organization where it's never going to be perfect. And as a
7 matter of fact, that's what the automobile manufacturers are
8 finding out, that even when you manufacture inanimate objects,
9 you're got to give the workers who are working with these
10 inanimate objects enough decision-making power so that when
11 they see that the light has changed or the metal has changed or
12 something else, you've got to give them the power to constantly
13 make adjustments and to use their intelligence or initiative,
14 or otherwise, you're not going to make good automobiles.

15 Now, how do we do this? I suggest that we continue
16 to try to do the kinds of things that Dade and a few others
17 are doing, and that is to try to do some things on a school
18 wide basis or even on a systemwide basis. That's fine, where
19 it can be done.

20 But in many places, you can't do it on a school
21 wide basis. And therefore I suggest that wherever we have a
22 team of teachers--notice that in this German school, that team

1 of eight teachers, that's really a whole school. Because
2 those eight teachers, it's almost as if nobody else were in
3 the school. They stay with the same kids, the same teachers.
4 They could have their own building; they don't.

5 In that school they do have a faculty senate, and
6 the teachers on each team elect a person to the faculty
7 senate--by the way, the principal of each school in Germany
8 must be in the classroom with kids for at least six hours a
9 week; that's German law.

10 (Applause)

11 By the way, that's the way the German principals
12 feel about it, too. They don't feel it's punishment. They
13 feel that cements their relationship with the faculty.

14 And in Germany, you'd probably have a strike of
15 principals if they were told they were going to be full time
16 administrators outside the classroom and change that
17 relationship.

18 But in that school, the principal cannot do anything
19 without a majority vote of the faculty senate. It's a
20 democratic school for the faculty.

21 But what we need, in the next year or two, and
22 it won't happen unless each and every one of you returns to a

1 local and tries to make this happen, wherever you have six,
2 seven, eight, nine, 12, 20 teachers, we have to find a way of
3 allowing those people, provided that they have a good idea and
4 are willing to work on it, and provided there are parents who
5 are voluntarily willing to have their children in such a
6 school, which will be a different type of institution, we have
7 to permit those teachers to have a school of their own.

8 Now, a few months ago, I suggested this at a
9 national press club conference, and I called these opt-for
10 schools, and some people called them schools within schools.
11 Since then somebody has sent me a book on this issue. And
12 this person has a very good notion. He calls them charter schools.
13 Charter.

14 Think of the fact that every local in the AFT has
15 received a charter from the AFT. You received the charter
16 because we have confidence in you. We're not telling you what
17 to do. We're not directing you. We're chartering you to
18 accomplish the purposes and missions that you set out to do.

19 And we've got thousands of locals across the
20 country that are totally autonomous. They're not under our
21 control. And yet look at all of us and how well we work
22 together throughout the year on legislative, political,

1 collective bargaining.

2 If you will get good people out there, and you give
3 them a charter, give them the opportunity to work independently,
4 they can do a good job. And it is very much like sending Henry
5 Hudson off with his charter from the East India Company.

6 A charter is usually granted by someone. It ought
7 to be granted jointly by the union and by the board of
8 education in any district. They say, we jointly give these
9 teachers the right to set up their own sub-school in accordance
10 with the following principles.

11 They usually issue a charter because the people
12 out there are going to be working in territory that is sort of
13 dangerous and unexplored. That's what all of you are doing
14 in your districts all the time. That's what Henry Hudson
15 did.

16 We can't centrally know all the problems that you
17 are going to be facing locally. We as a national organization
18 and the school district ought to provide support. And we
19 ought to say to these people that the charter goes for five
20 years or for seven years so that you've got enough time to put
21 the thing into shape, and know that you're not going to get a
22 new principal or a new superintendent who's going to come in

1 after you've invested all that work and effort, that somebody's
2 going to say, stop, we don't like what you're doing anymore,
3 and pull that out from under you, which is true of so many
4 educational experiments.

5 Now, this isn't the 1960s. This idea does not
6 mean that anybody can go off and do his own thing. Proposals
7 would have to be submitted that deals with cooperative learning,
8 how to individualize instructions, the use of technology,
9 kids working in groups and adults working in groups. How to
10 get away from talking and use other ways of reaching kids.

11 So there would be proposals that would be submitted
12 and would have to be a scheme of evaluation, although hopefully
13 we would get away from the crazy standardized tests that are
14 driving us all to narrow the curriculum as we get people to
15 fill in forms with little answers that don't mean very much.

16 Now, we will need--I want to conclude by talking about
17 the problems that this will raise. Many union members feel
18 uncomfortable about getting into the area of trying to change
19 the schools. They say that's not what a union was there to
20 do. We're good at negotiating. We're good at political
21 action. We're good at bargaining contracts. But we don't
22 really know about this. I wasn't elected as a union leader,

1 they say, because I knew how to do this.

2 Of course, when we all started, we didn't know
3 how to negotiate either, because there was no collective
4 bargaining. And we learned, with some help from the AFT and
5 some training programs. But mostly we learned through our
6 own trying it.

7 Teachers felt the same way not too many years ago.
8 Twenty years ago teachers felt the same way about being
9 involved in politics. I remember standing in front of a
10 delegate assembly as president of the New York local in 1968
11 just weeks before the election between Hubert Humphrey and
12 Richard Nixon.

13 And I suggested that the union endorse Hubert
14 Humphrey. And I was booed down. I mean, I was popular with
15 the troops, but on that issue, I was booed and voted down.

16 It wasn't that our teachers were for Richard Nixon
17 or against Hubert Humphrey. In those days they thought it was
18 the wrong thing for a union to be involved in politics. They
19 said if you get involved in politics, you're going to get away
20 from the main thing which is collective bargaining, and the
21 negotiation of contracts.

22 Al, you're going to get too friendly with these

1 politicians. And before you know it you'll start wondering
2 whether you want to be nice to the guy you helped elect, or
3 whether you want to punch him in the nose to get a good
4 contract. And they certainly had a point; there's no question
5 about it.

6 But it was a year later that New York City teachers
7 found out that their whole contract and job security and
8 everything else depended on the governor and the state
9 legislature.

10 And none of us any longer have to make the argument
11 as to whether we should be involved in politics. We know that
12 that is money. It's Prop. 13. It's tuition tax credits. It's
13 privatization. We know now that politics is as essential to
14 our being as any contract we ever negotiated, or any grievance
15 we ever handled.

16 And I submit to you that the improvement of our
17 schools is just as essential. It will not make much difference
18 if the UAW negotiates great contracts and handles terrific
19 grievances if we produce automobiles that can't compete with
20 the Japanese. There won't be an auto industry or an auto
21 union or grievances or anything else there.

22 And there won't be an AFT or a public education

1 system in this country unless we do it. No one else can do it.

2 And I hope that as a result of this convention and
3 the support that we offer to you after the convention, that we
4 in the American Federation of Teachers go on to make more
5 history than we have.

6 We've already made it. We brought collective
7 bargaining to America's teachers. But when the history books
8 are written ten or twenty years from now, I would like a
9 chapter that would show the kind of danger that public education
10 was in, and would show that the only group of people who were
11 there in the classrooms, who were there with the kids, that the
12 only group of people who know and can figure out over a period
13 of time what's wrong, that they would be involved in turning
14 schools around.

15 Now the greatest problem that we have is that
16 most people in education who engage in educational experiments
17 are not very much liked. They're not liked very much because
18 most educational experimenters in the past have been very
19 arrogant. They have kind of said, we know the answer. The
20 rest of you who were not involved in our experiment, you're
21 lazy or you're not really committed.

22 And if you weren't lazy and if you were committed,

1 you would be doing what we're doing.

2 In other words, many people who have gone off to
3 try these things kind of say, the rest of you are terrible.
4 You're bad teachers. You're really hurting the kids. We are
5 the only moral and truly good people.

6 And of course, first of all, they're wrong. They
7 don't know what they're doing. Most of them fall on their
8 face. But frequently, we help them fall on their faces,
9 because nobody likes to be put in that position, a position of
10 inferiority.

11 We are not saying that these chartered schools are
12 superior or that the people are superior. Think of it this
13 way: the fact that there are people engaged in medical research
14 does not mean that they are superior people and that the
15 practicing doctor is inferior. Nor does it mean that the
16 practicing doctor is doing the wrong things.

17 The people who are doing the things they're doing
18 on a day-by-day basis are doing what they know how to do and
19 what they're expected to do. The researcher is trying to figure
20 out new and better ways of doing things next year and five years
21 from now and ten years from now.

22 And the role of these charter schools is not to set

1 an example of what a perfect model is. The role of these is to
2 find new ways for other people.

3 And the fact that you have doctors engaged in
4 medical research does not demean the role of the practitioner;
5 it elevates the role of the entire profession.

6 Wouldn't it be great if in thousands of our
7 communities we could turn the parents, who see what some of the
8 bad results are, and say, look, we know, but nobody knows
9 how to solve that problem. It's true here. It's true in
10 other countries. The kids are not learning these things.

11 We're doing the best job we can. And in addition
12 to doing the best job we can, we have the following group out
13 there that is seeking new answers, and we support them and we
14 help them, because we too are concerned.

15 We came into this profession not for the money.
16 We knew that it didn't pay well. We came in because we wanted
17 to do something for these kids. We want all of them to learn.
18 We want more of them to learn. And we're doing the best job we
19 can, and we are supporting those people who are going to find
20 better ways yet.

21 And each year things will get better, because people
22 will find new and better ways of doing it.

1 It's a tall order, but so is collective bargaining.
2 And I hope that throughout this convention, and I hope that when
3 we leave it, I hope that when we come back two years from now,
4 that in addition to the relatively small number of districts that
5 are now engaged in pioneering efforts, I hope that each and
6 everyone of you will enable me to stand here a few years from
7 now and say that we've got 300, 500, 700, 1,000 places where
8 there are six or eight or 12 or 15 or 20 teachers who, with the
9 support of their union and the support of their faculty, and
10 the support of their school system, are trying to make a system
11 that will work better than the one we have today.

12 I know that we can do it.

13 (Standing ovation)

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