

**Sandra Feldman  
President, American Federation of Teachers  
Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO  
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**Thank you, Ed, for that kind introduction, and for the opportunity to address the 66<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Building and Construction Trades Department.**

**I enjoyed working with your former president, Bob Georgine; I congratulate Ed Sullivan on his election as your new president; and I look forward to working with Joe Moloney, Ed and with all of you. I see so many old friends here.**

**You know, the partnership between the Building Trades and the American Federation of Teachers is a natural alliance. (Aside from all the families with teachers in them,) As educators, we admire the outstanding job you do**

**preparing 180,000 apprentices each year and helping tens of thousands of journey workers sharpen their skills at your training centers all across North America.**

**And, as trade unionists, we respect your willingness to take on the tough fights, not only for yourselves but for all of America's working families. I couldn't count how many picket lines and demonstrations I've been in – happy to be surrounded by you all.**

**Today, together, the Building Trades and the AFT are taking on one of the toughest. As Senator Kennedy mentioned, we're working to make sure that America rebuilds and repairs our children's schools – and that the work is done by skilled union members earning the wages they deserve.**

**It shouldn't be a hard fight – but it is. Like you, I've been fighting that battle for as long as I can remember. When I was getting my start in the teacher union movement in New York City, the AFT under Al Shanker and the Building Trades under Peter Brennan worked together to make sure school construction and repair would always be union work.**

**The great Harry Van Arsdale of the IBEW and longtime president of the New York City Central Labor Council was a mentor to me.... a man way ahead of his time on issues of civil rights and human rights. In fact, by his doing, I was the first woman grand marshal of the New York City Labor Day parade — one of the proudest days of my life.**

**I've always believed in the labor movement, and I've always been impressed -- first hand -- by the huge difference in quality and safety that skilled union labor makes -- on many things -- but particularly in building and maintaining**

**our schools. And all our children deserve the best learning environment we can give them.**

**We're still fighting for this issue in New York, where Ed Malloy is doing an outstanding job as president of the Building Trades Council – and throughout the nation, where the Building Trades and the AFT are bringing this issue to America's attention.**

**Make no mistake about it: When it comes to repairing old schools and building the new ones we need, America has a huge job to do – and skilled building trades workers are the only people who can do the job – and do it right.**

**All across America, there are too many schools where the heat doesn't work, the windows are cracked, the ceilings are falling, the plumbing is broken, the wiring is outdated, and the buildings are so overcrowded that the teachers have**

**to hold classes in trailers, in hallways, and even in closets. These problems affect not just our urban schools but nearly a third of our suburban and rural schools.**

**Building and fixing schools is a big job. It involves the health and safety and well being of teachers and students. And it takes workers who are well-trained, highly-skilled, and paid what they're worth. Just as good education takes teachers who are well trained, highly skilled, and paid what they're worth.**

**That is why – whenever anyone has come to the AFT and asked us to support a plan to do this work without skilled union labor earning the prevailing wage – we have told them, loud and clear: No deal; no how; no way!**

**And that is also why we are working with the Building Trades to make sure the work goes to the folks who know how to do it.**

**Last Labor Day, the AFL-CIO, the Building Trades, and the AFT held “fix-up” events at schools in urgent need of repair, all around the country. Together with President Bill Clinton and AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, Bob Georgine and I attended an event at an elementary school in Norfolk, Virginia. And many of you participated in “fix-ups” at schools in Los Angeles, St. Louis, Providence, and other communities.**

**Because we spoke out and stood fast, there are positive plans to repair and rebuild America’s schools.**

**Congressman Charles Rangel of New York and Congresswoman Nancy Johnson of Connecticut have**

**offered a bipartisan plan to help local governments issue 25 billion dollars in school construction bonds and help modernize 6,000 schools nationwide.**

**The federal government will pay the interest on the bonds. And the workers will be covered by Davis-Bacon prevailing wage protections – and that’s an important first for a program involving tax subsidies. Without your leadership, it wouldn’t have happened, believe me.**

**The Rangel-Johnson Bill has 221 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives. That includes members of both parties, and I thank the Building Trades for helping to bring some Republicans along. And, in the Senate, Charles Robb of Virginia has introduced a similar bill.**

**On top of that, President Clinton has proposed another \$1.3 billion for emergency repairs at 5,000 schools. This work will also be covered under Davis-Bacon.**

**My friends -- we've got to keep fighting for the Rangel-Johnson Bill. Even though it is co-sponsored by more than half the members of the House, supported by President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, the Republican leadership still won't bring it to the floor for a vote. We've got to take the message to every member of the House and Senate -- from both parties -- that we're watching what they do, and we'll remember in November.**

**And one thing to especially remember -- Al Gore is leading this fight at the Federal level...and George Bush is opposed -- wants to leave it to the "local communities" that aren't doing it now.**

**I know the Building Trades understand that the fight for our public schools is a fight for America's future. Our public schools educate 90% of America's kids – including the overwhelming majority of the children of our working families.**

**These schools are where the children of immigrants are assimilated into America; where working class kids get the opportunity to move up in the world; where kids from every background find out how to live and learn together; and for the children of the poor – often the only way into the American dream.**

**And today our schools have an even more challenging job than ever – preparing all our kids for the new economy and for the huge technological changes.**

**Yes, we have a way to go. But we're getting there. America's teachers are working harder and smarter than ever. We're pushing for improvement and higher standards. And we're getting real results.**

**Here in Chicago, and in major cities across this country, kids are doing better – in reading and math and science. More youngsters are going on to 2 or 4 year colleges. And at the AFT we've been doing our part – with programs that have been proven to work – for turning around low-performing schools, for new and better ways to teach reading, for smaller class sizes. And of course, we're still fighting to bring teacher salaries, especially in poorer districts, to where they need to be to attract the best and brightest and get all our kids the good teachers they deserve.**

**At the AFT, we have a slogan: "Building better schools – it's union work." We mean that union teachers need to help**

**all our students reach the highest standards of achievement and behavior. And we also mean that all our school buildings should meet the highest standards of safety and quality – because they’ve been built and maintained by skilled union labor.**

**The AFT has always been a labor union committed to the trade union movement. And, like our sisters and brothers in the building trades, we’ve always believed that the highest standards of professionalism are fully compatible with unionism.**

**Let’s keep working together to rebuild and repair – and to preserve and improve – all our public schools. It’s union work – and, together, we’re going to get the job done.**

**Thank you for everything you’re doing, and for inviting me to this inspiring event.**

**[And now, Ed, I'd like to present you with an AFT tee-shirt with the slogan, "Building better schools – it's union work."]**