

ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT ALBERT SHANKER BEFORE THE
SIXTY-FOURTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS MEETING IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN
ON MONDAY AUGUST 18, 1980.

PRESIDENT SHANKER: This is the time in our annual convention when I have the opportunity and the responsibility to share with you my thoughts, the thoughts of your elected leadership on the problems we face, the solutions that we propose and to comment on some of the events of the past year and some of the struggles that we face immediately.

Since we are meeting here in Detroit, I remember very well attending the last convention here in 1962. It was my first convention as a delegate. The AFT at that time had a membership of about 60,000 nationally. New York City had just ~~wne~~ a bargaining election six months before and had just completed negotiating its first contract, although the contract was not yet ratified or signed because a substantial number of members in that local doubted whether a contract which contains a no-strike clause which prevented you from striking any time you wanted should ever be signed. And we were a small, not very well-known union in a city of the giant UAW, which helped us, together with the AFL-CIO in our campaigns.

Since we are here in Detroit, I am also reminded of something else and that was in the deep financial crisis in New York City in 1975 as thousands of our employees were laid off, I frequently heard at meetings and I still have a large package of letters from our members saying what kind of union are we to permit this to happen? A strong union like the UAW would never allow it to happen.

Here, of course, we are in a city and state which are in deep trouble because there are circumstances that arise for each union at different times that are difficult and tragic and frequently, at least for a while, beyond their control.

We continue to face, as we knew that we would, problems of declining enrollment . We have a new problem arising in our country and that is an enormous shift of wealth moving from ^{some} states to other states based on the accident of whether a state is an oil-exporting state or an oil-importing state.

I don't know how many of you have followed the literature, but the state of Alaska has ^{voted to} ~~abolished~~ its income tax, ~~and~~ ^{and to} ~~actually taken some of the oil money and related it, so, perhaps, to the~~ ^{take} ~~citizens of the state.~~ ^{is contributing to take} ~~citizens of the state.~~ ^{some of the oil money and rebating} ~~citizens of the state.~~ ^{it to} ~~citizens of the state.~~ ^{citizens of the state.} So that while those states that must import oil

will have to have workers who work harder and longer to pay for that energy, those states which produce and export oil, will be able to lower their taxes, finance their schools and other public services and we will, within a short period of time in these United States, unless there is some basic change, we will have states within the United States that are an OPEC and then we will have the others.

This will also imply the flow of people. Why shouldn't people move from those states where they have to work hard and pay high taxes and not move to those states where public services can be financed without personal income taxes or, in some case, real estate taxes so we are in the midst as just on the international scene as there was a massive shift of wealth from some countries to others, we are now in the middle of that same process within our own country

We continue to face the problems of cities in trouble. We are meeting in one, but they are no longer limited to one or two or three or four. The list is very, very long and many of our cities, as we plan to open schools in September, are facing lay-offs and program cutbacks and I know that a number of local presidents here here have said we can stay until Wednesday or "We can stay until Tuesday" or "Some have not arrived yet because they are busy figuring out just what the extent of the damage will be."

Now on top of all this, we were faced this year with an additional problem --Yes, the cities find it hard to raise money. Wherever we have millage and other elections, it is very difficult to get the increases through. It is very difficult to get increases in state aid to education when you have a high unemployment rate and the state government has to take care of the problems of unemployment, but in addition to these reductions in education that come from our school districts and school governments, and if they weren't reductions in dollars, they were frequently reductions in effect because there were very few localities that provided increases to match inflation.

The federal government, this administration, decided that it would employ a strategy which usually has not been employed by democratic administrations. It is usually the republican philosophy, it is the philosophy that was exercised by Nixon and by Ford that was to try to control inflation by creating massive unemployment and balancing the budget so that hundreds of millions of dollars indeed--at one point the national proposal was to reduce Federal aid to Education by over a billion dollars. We fought hard and many of those cuts were not made, but many of them were.

And as we go back to our districts, one of the problems we will face is that some of the cutbacks, some of the lay-offs, some of the inability to negotiate will be not due to the votes of the Federal electorate and not to the failures of the legislature, but to the *Federal* Administration which now seeks our support and we will have more discussion of that during the course of this convention, but there is no doubt that is a very real problem for us.

We faced another one this year. We talked about it last year. We knew it was coming. We didn't know quite how bad it would be and that is a decision by the Supreme Court in the case of Yeshiva University. This is not a case which is limited in its effect to higher education alone. That would be bad enough. In this case the instructors at Yeshiva University wanted a union. It was their own local union. It wasn't NEA, AFT or AAUP. They got up a petition; there was an election.

The National Labor Relations Board certified them as the bargaining agent and Yeshiva University came up with a new/^{anti}labor strategy. It decided to go through all the steps in the National Labor Relations Board and all the steps in the courts all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States.

What was the position of Yeshiva University? It was very simple and that is the ~~instructors~~ instructors and the teachers and the professors who teach in our university are not really workers in the meaning of the law; they are really bosses. They are bosses because they help to select textbooks. They can pass or fail students. They are members of the committee which advise the administration on different things and therefore they really share the management.

Of course they don't set their own salaries. They don't negotiate their own contracts. They do not really decide effective hiring and firing, but nevertheless the Supreme Court decided that Yeshiva University is correct and therefore if the employees at Yeshiva University want a union, they can't do it by getting out a petition, signing it and voting because the National Labor Relations Board as a result of this decision no longer considers them as workers and that means that if they want bargaining rights, there is only one way to get them. They have to run an effective strike and compel management to sit down and recognize them because they are operating not under the law of the land, but the law of the jungle.

(Applause.)

Why do I say this is not college people alone? We now have people who run large supermarkets claiming that a lot of the workers there have to exercise judgment in the supermarket and therefore they are really partner-owners, and if you start getting an additional meeting with your principle at school and he asks your advise, be very careful. You may be in the process of becoming a boss whether you know it or not. (Laughter.)

There is no question that this decision is going to be used by State Public Employees Relations Boards to narrow the scope of the people who are eligible for bargaining. There is no doubt that in private industry and in public industry they are going to allow, they are going to ask us to say things so they can listen to us and get our advise so that they can go back and reopen the whole question of who is a worker. That is not a narrow attack on ~~whether~~ whether a college professor has a right to organize. This is really a way of changing the entire basis *of the law of the land by giving* all the way by giving people a tiny bit of

a tiny bit of what looks like the action, and there isn't any evidence that they had any real action at Yeshiva Univeristy.

You know, if at one end, you have the Harvards that are more like the medieval univeristy, where everyobody is sort of a partner, and on the other hand you have a diploma mill, where everyobyd who works, works at somebody's direction, I can ensure you Yeshiva was much closer to that spectrum than to the medieval university.

We are all going to be facing that. In addition to that, we have had by the Congress and administration, a broken promise when, because the education for all handicapped^{Act} was passed, we were told each year the federal government would increase the funding, not to a point of adequacy, but at least where the federal government would be a partner to this enterprise, but because of the budget constraints, all of our districts have found thousands and thousands of additional handicapped students, and in many cases, the courts have determined that the costs is twice or three or four times to educate a handicapped student as a non-handicapped student, and I am not arguing as to whether the handicapped students have a right to an education, what I am saying, at a time when our cities and states are in deep toruble and when tax payers because they are being wiped out by inflation, are unwilling to increase taxes, for the federal government at that time to insist that local school districts pick up enormous costs for education of new groups of students, really means what they are telling us to do is take ~~all~~ the money away from ~~those~~ ^{all the money} students and move it over to this group of students, and the result of that is to create massive disaffection on the part of parents who see ~~massive~~ ^{of} education ~~to~~ ^{now} their child ~~will be~~ deteriorating, and they start yelling, well give us our way to get out of these schools that are deteriorating, where you're taking money from my child and giving it to

some other child. Give us our own tax credits ~~our~~ or vouchers, so we can go out and buy the education of our choice, instead of remaining in a school which is deteriorating.

And, so these federal regulations -- and I'm not with the Republicans on this -- the demand that we educate and provide equality of educational opportunity and intergrate and provide education for the handicapped, these are proper roles for the federal government, but they are not proper roles for a federal government that is unwilling to pay for the programs that it mandates on our local districts.

(Applause.)

Now, we have another phenomenon and it's growing, and that is that the federal government is creating in these United States a school system with billions of dollars, and it's not a public school system, it's a private school system. And it's the systems that are created by some of the CETA Programs and the Youth Employment Programs, and they talk about taking youngsters who are 16 and 17 and 18 and 19 years old, the large numbers of unemployed youth who have not learned enough in the way of skills to be able to get a job. And essentially these are educational programs; they are programs designed to bring back drop-outs or to retain students who need basic skills.

And what do they do? They take a student from a high school where the student is in a class of 25 or 30 or 35 or in some cases 40 students or more, and where the local district can only afford to spend \$1700 or \$2,000 or \$2500 on them. And they say to the public schools, you are doing a lousy job; that child is not learning. And because the public schools are doing a rotten job, we are going to set up church funds and business groups and community based organizations, and we are going to give them money, and as a matter of fact, we are going to pay the 16-year-old youngster \$50 to \$75 a week to get out of your public school, because it's so bad, and to move out across the street to the little private school that we're giving a group money for.

Now, of course, over here, the federal government is paying from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per student to educate the child, frequently with classes of six students. And over here in this public school, if a child acts up, and is disruptive and violent, you've got to give him a trial and due process procedure before anything happens. Over here if a child opens up his

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mouth, they've got a right to kick him right out and they do.

And then they write glowing reports about how the public schools are failing, and about how wonderful these new set-ups that they have created are. Well, I'll tell you, one of the fights that we involved ourselves in this year on the Youth Employment Bill is if the federal government has from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per student to give, they ought to give it to the delivery system that has existed throughout the history of this country, so that we can do the job instead of putting it into private hands. That money belongs in public education.

(Applause.)

Now, there is another interesting part of this program. That is, we know what is wrong with the public schools. We know how many students are absent every day, because we're compelled by law to keep attendance records. We know how many windows are broken, because we're compelled to keep records on vandalism. We know how many kids were beaten up or mugged somewhere, because we have to keep crime records.

We also know how many students are below grade level and how many are above and how many are way below and how many are way above and how many drop-outs there are, because all of those items are aspects of accountability which we are compelled to maintain. So, everybody knows what our problems are. And I think that is the way it should be; I think you should have to keep records. You should know what your shortcomings are; the public should know.

But, when these private schools are financed by the government, there is no requirement for attendance records, there is no requirement for

3 grades, no requirements as to how many have dropped out, no requirements for anything -- no wonder they look good. There are no records. I think if we burned all of our records, we could hire a few public relations people and make a pretty good story, too.

(Applause.)

So, they have now got a piece of legislation in the Congress, and this piece of legislation, they kind of share the pie. They give a billion dollars to the public schools, and a billion dollars to continue the private operation, but they are two very different pieces of legislation all wrapped up in one, because the public schools in order to get the money have to comply with longest set of rules and reporting requirements and everything else, and the private sector doesn't have to comply with any of those things.

And we, together with other organizations, are saying to the Congress, if you don't set up the same set of rules and regulations for both sectors, we don't want that piece of legislation. We don't want a double standard which makes the public schools rotten and the private schools succeed before they even try, because of the way that you've rigged this things. That is one of the issues that we are dealing with now with the administration.

Now, a week ago, we got some more bad news. Are you ready? I don't think you have read about this yet. I know you are going to be happy that you get the bad news from me first. And that has to do with the new proposals from the new Department of Education on the Lau Regulations. Now, I would like to say in this particular issue, I have some personal history and

some empathy.

When I entered elementary school, when I was six years old, I did not speak any English. I was brought in a home where English was not spoken. I know how it felt being separated from parents and family for the first time, even if it was only for day. It is a very tough experience for a young child, and if it is tough for the average child, it is certainly tough for somebody who walks in a classroom and cannot communicate with any other child or the teacher or the principal and perhaps with no one in the school. That child could easily be in a state of shock .

The question is not whether we should make those children who do not speak English feel at home, whether we should provide a proper transition. Some years ago in San Francisco, a group of Chinese parents took a case. It went all the way to the Supreme Court and they had a very good case. They said, when you take our child who speaks Chinese and put that child in a class with only English instruction and English speaking children, you are not providing education for our child, because the other children can understand what is going on, but my child can't understand; you are educating others but you are not educating my child, and they are right.

And the Supreme Court eventually rules that this child was being deprived of the right to an education, and that therefore something had to be done. The Court didn't say what had to be done for a very good reason. Nobody knows exactly what is the best thing to do. What do you do?

Well, one thing is to teach the child in the child's language. The other way is to have a very rapid emersion program. Israel has faced waves of immigrants from other country, and they immediately put the children into an intensive program of six weeks and all these immigrant youngsters are able to function in Hebrew, in six weeks. That's another way of doing it.

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There are ways of using part of one approach and part of another. There is English as a Second Language. There are all kinds of approaches. The Courts didn't say this is good; this is bad. The Supreme Court is not made up of educators. They said, do something.

Well, now along comes the new Department of Education. And it says, that what you have to do, and this is the first time in the history of the United States of America, that the federal government is mandating a particular educational program and curriculum, the first time in our history. The only way to do it is with bilingual education. If you have another program going now, you have got to prove -- the burden of proof is not on bilingual education -- but it is with any other program, you've got to come before them and prove that the other program is worth while.

Now, not only is this the first time that the U. S. Government is mandating a given program. I might support a mandate. Suppose the federal government found some cure for educational cancer, they found a sure-fire way of reaching all those students who are behind, and out there you had some local school districts who said, well, we don't care if you've got the answer that will really save all those children, we want to do our own things anyway. If we were faced with that sort of thing, where we really had an answer, and we had reluctant and recalcitrant local school districts that were not interested in helping their children, I would think twice about the question of federal powers in local control.

But, in this case, you have bilingual education is, at best, unproven. There are vast amounts of evidence that it doesn't work very well. However, it hasn't been tried long enough. It was moved in before there were adequate numbers of bilingual teachers trained. The best you can

say at this point, is not that it always works, or that it's not the best -- the best you can say for it is that it ought to be given a try for those who want to try it.

Well, what else does this federal program do? It will bring about another vast expansion of costs. Costs of testing children, costs of testing students, costs of training teachers, testing teachers to see if they can be in the program, and all those costs will be borne by local school districts.

Then it will mean that huge numbers of bilingual teachers will be needed, and you and I know, that there are no surplus bilingual teachers waiting out there to teach these classes. There has been a shortage of bilingual teachers even when all of these children were not entitled to bilingual programs. Under these regulations, even if a child writes, speaks, and reads English, if the child is better at the original language than English, then the child must get bilingual education. Do you know anybody who started with an original language and is better in English?

(Laughter)

They may get better after a long time, but what they're really saying is that any child with another language background, that child must get bilingual education. So, what you're getting is a huge increase in the number of students who must get this program and no teachers are available. So, what does the government say? The government says, you will be in violation of the law, your school district. They can cut off federal monies from you, but if you can't find teachers, you have got to do the following: 1.) You have got to take some teachers that you have now, and

start teaching them the other language so that in five years they can be bilingual; that is one part of the program. That's not bad; the worst is yet to come.

(Laughter)

A second, you've got to go out and look for bilingual teachers, and the third one, you must do this or else you're in violation of the law. As a sign of good faith, if you cannot find enough bilingual teachers, you have to go out and hire any bilingual people whether they are teachers or not to come in and do the bilingual instruction. That's right.

Well, what does this mean? This is a formula for warfare in our schools. And I will tell you something. I do not believe that the overwhelming majority of parents whose children have another language want their children being taught by people who are not teachers, and I think that they want them to learn English as soon as they possibly can.

(Applause.)

Now, just imagine what we are going to have in major areas of this county as this is adopted, if thousands and thousands of experienced teachers who are now teaching students, have to be laid off in order to provide employment for those who never trained to be teachers, never wanted to become teachers, to satisfy the needs of this program.

Now, there is one other aspect of this, and we might as well get it all out. There is a little thing in the regulations, which doesn't sound like a regulation at all. It says, these programs shall be conducted in such a way as to show respect for the student's cultural and ethnic background. That sounds nice, but it certainly doesn't sound like a regulation.

And when I met with some members of the administration and other high spots, I said, what does that mean, and they wouldn't answer the question. I said, I'll tell you what I think it means. I think it means that if you have a group of Mexican American children, and if you are able to find Puerto Rican teachers and Cuban teachers and Dominican teachers, but are not able to find at that time Mexican American teachers, that that shows that you are not showing proper respect to the cultural background of the children.

In other words, one of the regulations in this program, the way it is going to be interpreted is that Cuban children must have Cuban teachers; they can't have Puerto Rican teachers, and Mexican children have to have Mexican teachers; they can't have Puerto Rican teachers; and so forth.

I don't like it. I don't know about you, but I don't like it. And we ought to fight this thing all the way.

(Applause.)

Well, as you get these budget cuts and as you get these programs you are forced to have, but are not given the money for, and as you dismiss teachers to hire non-teachers to provide these programs, and as you develop various ethnic conflicts because of the way these programs are promulgated, tuition tax credits and vouchers are going to look better and better to the average guy out there, who says, take me out of this thing where all these problems are, and let me go to some nice little place down the corner in some storefront or somewhere else where those of us who want to run our own thing, can run our own thing.

As Lane Kirkland said, the Republican Party platform has a very, very strong plank, saying that in the last administration we almost got tuition tax credit, but it was defeated because of the intervention of the administration; and the platform says, if Ronald Reagan is elected, he will personally go up to the Hill, twist arms and see to it that this legislation is passed. So, we have a more serious problem there than we ever had before.

Well, let me move into some of the things we have been involved in, and of course, our big involvement in the last couple of months, and I'm dealing with the issues that I have been talking about up to now, our biggest involvement while we have been negotiating contracts and trying to prevent layoffs and going to state legislature for state aid, and trying to get millage votes -- our biggest one -- was to involve ourselves in the politics of the nation so we could once again restore the cuts and bring a federal commitment to the various programs that we are involved in.

And this was a difficult thing for us to do. We have never before involved ourselves in a presidential primary. I can say for myself and for most of the members of your administration, we tend to go with the incumbent, somebody's in there; we try to develop relationships. We know that you can't get everything that we want; you never get everything that you want. We really wanted to we felt that we supported the administration four years ago, and we were sort of getting ready to support again. And then we saw something happen.

We saw that it looked like Ronald Reagan versus Jimmy Carter, and that Jimmy Carter, in order to win those votes, was beginning for a little while to look more and more like Ronald Reagan, because they were fighting over those same voters out there. And there was nobody out there who was speaking up for welfare recipients, for people who couldn't afford health care, people who needed decent education; there was nobody saying those things. It was who's going to balance the budget; who's going to cut more social programs.

And so, I'll tell you, a couple of days ago, someone came up to me

10 on the street, after Kennedy didn't make it, and someone asked me, aren't you sorry now you supported Ted Kennedy? Well, I want to tell you that we should not be sorry; we should be proud we supported Ted Kennedy.

(Applause and cheers.)

If it were not for his campaigning, there wouldn't be any presidential candidates talking about jobs and education and health programs and programs for the aged. And I know that the platform doesn't mean everything, and so people came up to me and said, what are you conducting such a big fight on the platform for? They never listen to them anyway. Well, I'll tell you, when you had one presidential candidate who had the votes, but the convention just rebelled and said we're not going to go with a conservative economic program. We may want you to be president for various reasons, we may prefer you to that other guy, but we like his programs and his ideas, and we still believe that this party ought to stand for something.

We sent a message to everyone of those candidates that with all this talk about how everybody is conservative, how people no longer care, we said said to all those candidates that there are tens of millions of people out there who still do care, and if you want their vote, you better move over and become more liberal on these issues.

(Applause.)

During the course of this convention, the Executive Counsel will make a recommendation, either for endorsement or for a procedure so that we can continue our consideration of an endorsement. I want to say that I agree with Lane Kirkland that there are great differences, but I also believe that for our union, the fact that one candidate is terrible,

11 should not lead the other one to take us for granted, and I, for one will not recommend an automatic endorsement.

(Applause and cheers.)

I think by the time that we are ready to endorse, and I hope it will be soon, it will not be for merely negative reasons; there will be positive reasons as well. We are engaged in discussions with the administration; we also had a committee meet with Anderson; and we also had a request to meet with Mr. Reagan, but so far he has not responded.

(Laughter.)

I think we have some good ideas to give him.

(Applause.)

Well, I suppose that all of you were watching the Democratic Convention, and you probably did not get to know, by what the announcer said delegates that the AFT had over 100 alternate and alternates there; that is was the second largest delegation in the United States of America.

(Applause.)

Of course, the NEA had the largest. It had over 300, and they had over 300 for a number of reasons; one is that they worked very hard at it, and we got started a little later, and some of our states felt a little uncomfortable with our endorsement. We are a very autonomous and decentralized union, and where these states didn't want to go along with the endorsement, and get involved, they did not. So that was different.

But, there are other reasons as well. One is that even where we were the main organization at the heart of the campaign, and we could have gone and mobbed all these caucuses, and we could have taken practically all the

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the delegate positions in some cities and some states and some localities. We didn't do it, and we didn't do it because in order for us to take all these delegates, means you would have to knock out the county executive or the mayor or knock off the fellow who's the head of the local Democratic Committee. These are the people we've got to live with every day: legislators, governors. Sure, there are a lot of places where we've got the membership; we could have gone in there and pushed everybody out; we could have had another 100, maybe 150. But at what price?

Well, it would have looked good on television, but for the next four years we would have to live with these active, party people and politicians, and so, we didn't do it that way. We sat down and worked out arrangements. We said, look, we'll take a certain share. And it still looks better on television the other way, but we had a reason for doing what we did.

I want to say that the fact that the combined two organizations had maybe 500 delegates, teachers, are something that we've known for a long time. Teachers and unions can do a great job, and if we had one merged organization with 3 million people, we might have had 6 or 700 delegates there; I don't know.

(Applause.)

But the important question to me, one important question is, do you have a lot of delegates? Well, they had a lot; we had quite few. Next time, I'm sure we'll have even more, but the important question, is, all right, you got some power, what do you use it for? In whose interest did you use it? And here I want to talk for a few minutes about the convention.

The NEA devoted its full energies for the election of a candidate because of one issue and one reason, the creation of a separate education department. The American Federation of Teachers threw its resources

support a presidential candidate because we want money for health, money for education and money for jobs. That is the basic difference between these two organizations.

(Applause.)

Now, there's something else that's happened. The NEA tried for that education department so much and so hard, that they got so locked into the administration on that one issue, that you should know what happened at the Democratic Convention.

In order to get that education department, they pretty much had to say to the President, get us that, and we will do whatever you want, because when the massive budget cuts came, which would mean thousands and thousands of jobs lost for teachers and class sizes increasing across the country, you didn't hear any big words of criticism from the National Education Association, because part of the deal -- as a matter of fact, the headline in their newspaper at the very time that the budget was being cut was to deny that the administration was taking any money away and to try to put their own members to sleep.

But at the Convention, NEA had whips and one of the things that they defeated on a roll call vote, ~~that-had-the-NEA-defeat~~ they had the convention defeat a plank that the United States of America should have national health insurance, because they were asked to go down and do it, and they did it, even though it's part of the NEA's program.

They got ready to try to defeat the jobs program, and then something wonderful happened; their own delegates rebelled against the leadership. And they said, we're not going to get in trouble with the other local people in our state, and finally they had to release their delegates, and they had the overwhelming vote on jobs. But if their leadership had had their say,

14 they would have voted -- I saw some of them; I said, how are you going to go back to your state, and talk to the people who are paying taxes to support you and the public schools that you voted against the provision to get them jobs? But that's what they were about to do. We will see what they will say about this new program about bilingual education in the next couple of weeks, whether they feel so married to the administration, that they can't criticize a program which is going to be devastatingly bad.

Now, what I am saying is this. The great thing about the AFL-CIO, the great thing about this union and other unions is that we know, we never want to be controlled by the government, and there are countries where the government controls you, because if you don't say what the government wants, off you go to jail or worse. But that is not the only way of being controlled.

You can be controlled if you become so dedicated to a narrow issue that you decide that the separate ed department is so important that no matter what the administration does, fires teachers, puts in a bad bilingual program, jobs, health and anything else, you will forever be silent and refuse to criticize the administration because this is the one goodie that you got.

In other words, what I am saying, ~~is that~~ we have now a major national union that is basically silent because it made a deal on one piddling, marrow issue, and now I want to talk about this issue of the separate education department, because the other day or maybe the education department is such a wonderful thing, maybe, I am sure that everyone here has noticed how much easier it is to teach, now that we have a Department of Education.

(Laughter.)

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I've certainly noticed.

(Laughter.)

Life has been very different. Now, let's see how important this is. The latest issue of the Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, the prestigious Washington report on lobbying and political activities, has an article on the NEA, and it talks about the goals of the NEA. How, listen to this; it's very hard to believe. The third goal of NEA leaders is to hold on to something they won in 1979, the Department of Education. As much as they like the Education Department, however, NEA leaders wonder whether it would be worth keeping if Republican Ronald Reagan were running it.

"A misdirected education department would cause more problems than it solved. An education department under a President Reagan is something we would have to think twice about. I would entertain the possibility that it would be easier to let the department go than to live with it under Reagan." Terry Herndon, NEA Executive Director.

(Applause.)

Well, this is going to be very interesting, because what we need clearly is legislation that says that the separate education department remains in existence only when you have an administration friendly to the NEA, and this is going to be the first yo-yo cabinet level department in American history.

(Applause and cheers.)

Well,

-But we're going to have to make a decision on the presidency, but I'll tell you, one of the big things that we all ought to worry about is the nature of the next Congress on the issues that I have been talking about, but particularly in the issue of tuition tax credits. Now, remember, last time we lost in the House of Representatives, and we made it, but we

didn't make it so big, in the Senate. And we did have the administration with us, and we don't know what's going to happen in the next administration, whether it will be with us or not. I urge all of you to look at the AFT policy that that we enacted of trying to defeat those who were wrong on the tuition tax credit issue, unless we can get commitments from them, that if it ever comes up again, they will go the other way. If you don't take this seriously, we are going to lose. The pressure for vouchers and tax credits is there.

The people who want them are out there, trying to defeat our friends who are with us in support of public education. If we don't play hardball on this issue -- and this is another one; the NEA continues to give a lot of money to legislators who support the Education Department, but who also would destroy public education by giving money to people to take their kids out of public school and dismantle our public schools.

Take a look at that policy; reaffirm it. Play hardball. Let the members of the Congress that this is a life or death -- this is not a little increase or a department or something like that. This is the entire existence and future of public education in this country, and of course, look at where they stand on labor issues.

Well, we can be very proud with what we did in political action this year. Our candidate didn't make it, but I'll tell you something. The other candidate won't make it, unless he starts sounding more like our candidate in the general election.

(Applause.)

Well, in addition to politics, it's clear that if we don't do a good job politically, we aren't going to be able to do very much at the

bargaining table, and all the things that we've won all these years, and the gains that we've made, can be completely wiped out, if there is not a proper economic atmosphere in this country, to sustain the public services, education among them.

We've had a good year; we've had growth, and this is with a lot of people having lay-offs. Now, we've had a growth of over 30 thousand in the organization, and I want at this point to specially recognize the new groups that have come in. I am going to apologize for this. I have got a lot to learn. I have to start getting away completely from education issues, and that's going to happen as new groups come in in greater and greater numbers because we share common problems in terms of labor laws, in terms of budget cuts, in terms of all kinds of programs.

I would like those who are here in the health care field and the civil service field to stand up; I would like the convention to welcome them here.

(Lengthy applause and cheers.)

Get to know them while they're here; they need our help and we need their help. We're going to reach that mark of over a million and we're going to be better off for it. We're going to be helping each other. We're going to do it with teachers, and health care people and civil service people. We're moving very fast.

Now, we're also doing something else. Because of the fiscal crises we are developing coalitions with groups that we never talked to before, and the AFT is providing service to locals, to states on this. Believe it or not, we're working with bankers --

(Laughter.)

-- and in New York, I have been meeting regularly with David Rockefeller and Walter Wriston and a number of others --

(Laughter.)

Don't you want me to ask them for money? Oh, all right.

(Laughter.)

San Francisco, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, every city that's having fiscal problems, we are developing partnerships. Look, these banks and business people, they may not like unions, and they may want a tax structure that gives them more money than they deserve, but they don't want the whole thing to fall apart, because they do business there. And if you just have that amount of recognition, at least you can bring them in and say, do you know what 's going to happen if the schools get cut this amount?

Where are you going to get your typists and your secretaries and your clekks, and who's going to move into these buildings? What's going to happen if you don't have people here who can deliver the services, and we're doing that, and it's working. We are developing materials, conferences across the country on the basis of developing expertise among our leaders.

You will find in this room, I think, over 40 visitors from foreign countries, most of them leaders of teacher unions. I hope that you will have time to spend with them, get to know them, their problems, and tell them some of ours. We have very much expanded our activity in this area. There are a lot of reasons for it. First of all, the whole reason for being a union is to try to help those who need help, and many of these are struggling unions in struggling nations.

We have a delegate here from a country that wouldn't let me in a few years ago, and I'm sure he is a survivor of some horrible experiences but a leader of the teachers in Uganda. It is ^{wonderful} beautiful to have him here, and that there is now a teachers's union there.

(Applause.)

We have reached out in terms of support for human rights, and we have also worked with developed countries. We are going to learn a lot; right across our borders in Canada, in a number of provinces, they are trying vouchers and tuition tax credits, and professors from American universities are going over there to write articles about how wonderful these private schools are so that it becomes part of the selling campaign in the United States.

We are involved in these exchanges, we can learn from each other, and we welcome these guests here.

Now, I have one final point, and that is that we cannot protect public education through collective bargaining and through political power alone. The American people are spending a lot of money for education, and they have a right to be concerned when they see that there is violence in schools and test scores are going down, and we have got to do something about that, too.

One of the things that we have to do is reach out to get more people to support the schools, because if the only people who are supporting the schools are public school teachers, we are going to be in deep trouble, even if we got all the teachers together. There are only 3 million of us in the country, and no matter how powerful, if everybody else is convinced

20 that the public schools are not doing an adequate job, it is only a matter of time until this very important institution will somehow be dismantled, probably never to be put back together again.

Now, a Gallop Poll taken several years ago, and repeated each year shows something very interesting. It shows that one little thing, if it happens makes all the difference in the world as to whether or not the person out there thinks the school is good or bad. It shows that all those people out there who have not been in a school building in the last year, the majority of them thinks that the schools are pretty bad. It shows that any member of the adult population who visited a public school, even once, even to go to a movie, to do anything, walks into that school; sees that there is children's work up; that something is happening there; that the place is not completely a battleground and so forth.

That just a visit to a school once a year means that the overwhelming majority of those who had that experience believe that public schools are doing a good job. Now, that is an amazing fact, and it tells us something that we've got to do.

Now, I know that it's a very difficult thing to go back to a teacher who has been teaching all day with an over-sized class, probably running to a job after school and maybe taking courses weekends and nights in order to get a few extra credits for a salary differential, and doing all these things, and the first thing that will happen when you or I go back there and say, now, in addition to all the other things you're doing, we want you to call the parents and invite them in the school. Many of us are afraid that we would have our heads handed to us.

But, you know, I don't think it will be more difficult to do that than it was to convince teachers to join a union, or to go out on strike. Those were very difficult things to do and they were worth while, and there are some difficult things that still need doing, and what mostly needs doing is that contact between teachers and parents so that they know what we're doing; so that they know what the effort is -- to enlist them to help their kids at home with homework and with other work.

Several of our locals now have programs where parents and students can call a certain number ^{after} at the school and get help with their homework over the telephone. ^{Not} ~~Now, it is~~ an expensive program, but what a feeling to a parent that after the kid is home and you are all finished with them, you are not finished with them. That picture of the teacher who is immediately running out at the end of school to go somewhere else is so completely changed, when you say call any time up to 8 p.m., and you get helped on the telephone, and not only in English, but in Spanish and in Chinese or whatever language you or your child speaks so you understand the homework and it works out well.

I had an experience that I shared with a few of you at another conference. I was sitting home one day, and I got a telephone call. It said, did your son, Adam, graduate our school last June? I said, yes, and she said, this is Marmaroneck High School, and most of our kids go to work or they go on to college, but some kids get lost and they don't know quite what's happening to them, so we make a policy of calling every home six months later to see if we can be of some help.

Now, you know something. That's about a 30 second call, but if all of my children had graduated and if I were now not a teacher leader or a

and if I was one of those people saying, who needs public schools now my kids are out, now I'm going down and vote against the tax increase, against the millage because I've gotten the benefit, that one call, that the public school, your teacher, your guidance counselor still cares about you, probably did more in that communicate to creat support for education.

Can we do these things. Well, we better, because if we don't create that connection, our political power and our union power, our bargaining power will not be enough to reverse the negative feelings that are created through the press, on the papers, and in some cases, through government itself.

So, one of the things that we have to be committed to, is to improve quality. We're doing it with teacher centers; we are doing it with the attitude that we have toward testing, unlike the NEA, no tests. Well, no tests to parents, means the kids are flunking and you don't want anybody to know. We favor tests. If the kids don't do well on tests, it means we've got to improve our public schools. We need more resources. And if the kids are doing well, we ought to brag about it and let everybody know.

Now, all these things that we've been involved in, and I think each of us could go on much longer in terms of legislation, in terms of organizing, in terms of strikes, in terms of new groups that are coming in.

Public relations, the periodicals, legislative programs, COPE and political research. All of us have a great staff working for us; they work hard; and they've built an organization from a very small one a good one, a principaled and dedicated one but strong to a big and powerful one. And then, of course, those who have really made it work, are the people sitting in this room,

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because we will never be able to handle most of the work in this organization with paid people; we will never have enough money. We will never have enough employees. The people who do it are largely volunteers, elected officials, delegates, the people who know the score, the people who go back and spend every extra minute of their lunch hours, their prep periods and after-school time building this great organization that we have.

So, all of us thank you for making this possible this year, and I know we are going to count on you for the years to come. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

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