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ADDRESS BY AFT PRESIDENT ALBERT SHANKER
TO REGIONAL CONFERENCES

When we met last summer in Los Angeles, it was during an earlier period of development in the reform movement. We therefore knew that during the remainder of 1983, it would be very important for our leadership throughout the country to have an opportunity to develop more specific positions on the issues which we considered last summer. When we talked about these issues, we adopted an important policy resolution; however, there were many areas where we indicated we would be open to discussion.

It may well be that when we come out of these regional education reform conferences, we still won't have final positions on some issues. But the purpose is to bring the process along and bring us closer to the point of having specifics in these areas. These meetings are very much like the collective bargaining meetings we engaged in when the concept was very new for teachers and public employees. Many of us talked in those days about the idea of collective bargaining, and over the years, we had many sessions to help learn the best ways of working at the bargaining table. These are things that are very much part of us right now. Fifteen or twenty years ago, we were looking through textbooks or asking other unions how they did it because we didn't have that experience.

In a way, we are in a new type of bargaining now, bargaining not strictly over questions of salary and bargainable issues, but on a whole series of educational changes. We're here to become more acquainted with the issues.

Many people here, including many AFT members, were surprised that when proposals came out from commissions, governors and legislators this year, we did not pull out our old position papers on merit pay, longer school days, a longer school year, raising minimum salaries or providing higher pay for teachers in areas of shortage. We did not pull out old articles, booklets and arguments and just hurl them back or throw them at those who were coming forth with these proposals.

Of course, in a number of these areas, we have had rather longstanding positions. The reason that we didn't just dust off the old arguments and the old flyers is that things have changed. There is no greater mistake than not recognizing that the game we're playing now is a totally different one. We cannot keep playing by the old rules.

The game <u>has</u> changed.

The first of these major changes is that tuition tax credits are not a thing of the future; they are here. It's no longer a question of whether they will come. They have come. We are now operating in an entirely different world.

Historians will tell you that World War II didn't really start in September 1939. You can take a date earlier, when France or Britain or the United States or some other nation made a certain mistake. They did something -- they responded or didn't respond in a certain way, and once that response was made, it determined what was going to happen in the future. The day the auto industry went down is not the day Chrysler threw up its arms and said, "Unless the Congress gives us loan guarantees, it's all over." The day Chrysler went down was probably 10 years before that or

nine years before that, when both union and management at Chrysler knew exactly what the Japanese were coming up with. In order for Chrysler to compete, they had to turn their industry upside down and make a tremendous number of changes. Instead, they just closed their eyes and said, "Well, we hope that it goes away." They decided for a period of years to act as though the threat would not materialize.

Well, the same applies to tuition tax credits. Many of our members relied on the Supreme Court to declare tuition tax credits unconstitutional. There's no doubt that had there not been Ronald Reagan's appointment to the Supreme Court, the decision would have gone the other way. But the Supreme Court has now opened the door. So far, it's only open a little bit, but because of the case in Minnesota, the door was thrown open wider.

Minnesota had legislation stating that every taxpayer can deduct up to $700 in educational expenses for each child enrolled in any school, public or private. Of course, including public schools puts a good face on it. But in fact, a child going to a private or parochial school will inevitably have $700 worth of expenses, while a child going to a public school -- where the school may not charge tuition -- will only be able to deduct for a couple of pencils, a notebook, a gymsuit, maybe a pair of sneakers. So, one parent gets a $700 deduction per child and another one may get $30 or $35. Furthermore, if that $700 were changed to $1,700, the private school child would get $1,700, and the public school child still gets $35. So it's a unique way of opening the door to pay, ultimately, for the full cost, in some cases, of private education and to throw a few dollars to the parents of the child in public school. Then the court can close its eyes and say, "This is not 'aid' to private schools, it's not 'aid' to religious schools. This is to help the children. This is to help families meet their educational expenses."

Now, since the Supreme Court has said this is constitutional, we can expect that in the next few years, many other northeastern states -- where there is a very heavy concentration of students in private and parochial schools -- will try to adopt legislation of this form. It could be done by cities or it could be done by local school boards. So this is a dangerous period for public schools.

Now the polls show us something else. For the first time public opinion polls in this country show there is a plurality in favor of vouchers and tuition tax credits. A poll of top business executives in this country also shows this group to be in favor of vouchers and tuition tax credits -- something they had not favored before. So we can no longer reassure ourselves about tax credits or vouchers with the old, "Oh, don't worry about it, it's not going to come, because the Supreme Court will knock it down." Well, the Court hasn't.

There was another poll taken in conjunction with the National Institute of Education. This poll asks parents, "If you were given (a) $125, (b) $250, or (c) $500 to help pay tuition and other costs of your child's education in a non-public school, would you: (a) take advantage of it, (b) very likely take advantage of it, (c) probably take advantage of it, or (d) absolutely would not take advantage of it?" Even at the low level of a $125 tax credit, the population of private schools, which is now one out of every ten students in elementary and secondary schools, would more than double. They would go from 10 percent of the students in this country to about 22 percent of the students, with $125. With a $500 tax credit, it would go from 10 percent to over 34 percent. A very substantial increase.

Now if you break down those figures by ethnic group, you will find something of

very great interest. Forty-four percent of all the Hispanic parents and 36 percent of black parents in this sample said that if given a tuition tax credit, they would take their child from public school and put the child in a private school. The group most loyal to the public schools are generally white upper-middle-class people living in fairly affluent suburbs where the public schools resemble private schools. They are people who are very steady. Why pay anything if what you would create in a private school is exactly what you've got in the community at the public school?

These polls indicate more than the expression of blacks and Hispanics, and these polls should not be surprising. I think back to my own experience. My parents were immigrants and worked at rather hard, menial and low-paying jobs when they came here. We lived in a slum and my parents looked at education and public schools as the way of rescuing their children from a life which they considered to be close to slavery. Every day they pushed: What are you doing in school? -- Are you doing your homework? -- You aren't going to grow up and live in a place like this! You aren't going to live this sort of life. . . Parents living in poverty feel that education is the only way to pull their children out of that type of life cycle. Whereas middle-class parents are likely to feel. . ."Well, even if my kid doesn't learn very much, he's never going to end up in that impoverished situation. So he'll be a little better off, or a little worse off." The commitment to use education as a means of mobility is much greater when you're really down and out because that's one of the few ways up.

These poll results tell us more than what is on the minds of blacks and Hispanics in the United States. They tell us that groups like the NAACP and the Urban League, which have been with us -- strongly with us -- in opposition to tuition tax credits, may, in the next few years, face very great internal pressures from their constituents to change their position. On some of these midnight talk shows, such as the Larry King show, almost invariably a black mother will call and say, "I'm committed to public schools and I hated to do this, but we had a very bright child: he did his homework and he always answered the questions right. But there was a bunch of kids sitting right next to him in school who, if you answered the questions and did your homework and cooperated with the teachers, would beat you up. My son was beaten up several times. We want him to go to college, we want him to go on, and so we took him out and went to work. I worked two jobs. . ." She describes the sacrifices that they're making to save this child. How long will civil rights organizations be able to withstand pressures in their own communities? Parents will say, "Sure, we're philosophically committed to public education, but right now there is no other way that I can save my child. I can't let my child go on his own to this school down the block. This school is loaded with violence and with gangs and the teachers can't keep control. I'm going to save my child and put him into a school where he can learn."

That pressure is there. We must accept that as a danger to face in our legislatures, our local districts and in the U.S. Congress. In a number of states, I'm sure that the legislative sessions will open with tuition tax credits and vouchers, and of course it is being pressed in the Congress. We most likely can win. But, a key reason we will win is because there's such a huge budget deficit.

At the same time that we face this danger, something very positive has happened for education. Education is now on the national agenda. It's at the top in all the polls, and it's number one or two or three at a time when fewer people have their own kids in public school than at any time in recent years. It is not on the hit parade because the customers or direct users of education are particularly eager.

There's a general feeling among the public that education has something to do with our ability to compete with other countries and with our economic well being. For the first time, we have the business community all across the country on a national, local and state basis recognizing that education is one of three things that has to be done if we're going to get this country moving again.

Economically, the first is rebuilding our industrial base. Second is taking care of the infrastructure, and third is human development. In the state of California, the Business Round Table -- a group representing the 82 largest corporations in California -- pushed through a $2.7 billion two-year increase in education. This represents more than a 25 percent increase in the total operating budget in elementary and secondary education in the state. Just think of that! In New York State, the equivalent would be about a $2.8 or $3 billion increase over a two-year period.

The demands of the business community and the demands of governors and political leaders across the country essentially have a very simple formula: they are willing to come up with substantial increases in money to fund public education, provided that educators are willing to make substantial changes in the way we have been doing business up to now. They are saying, in effect, "We're not going to give you more money to do what you've been doing. We think you haven't been working. If you're willing to make major changes, we're willing to put up the money." What those major changes are differ state by state.

One of the very interesting things is that so far not one of these business groups has come out in favor of tuition tax credits. You would think that with the general business philosophy, these groups would now be saying that the public sector has failed -- that they agree with Ronald Reagan that test scores started going down as federal money started coming in. "Why not break up this system? Why not provide for vouchers and tuition tax credits?" But they haven't done it. Even the National Commission on Excellence, appointed by the Secretary of Education -- undoubtedly with consultation from the White House -- did not come out in favor of tax credits or vouchers. I would say that when a group appointed by the administration does not endorse the major educational initiative of the administration, it's fair to say that the National Commission on Excellence repudiated the proposal. There was pressure inside to go for the President's program. It's not as though they hadn't thought about it, or that it wasn't on the agenda. It was on the agenda. It was very hotly fought and their failure to adopt it was actually a rejection.

Now at the same time that we have the pressure for tuition tax credits and vouchers, we've got an extremely powerful force in the business and political community moving for financial support and change in education. Given that, I would say that if teachers' unions, school superintendents, and school boards do what the NEA did -- which is essentially to dust off the old arguments and bring out all the old guns and say merit pay, absolutely not; testing teachers, absolutely not; testing students, no; removing disruptive students, no -- things are going to be the way they were before. We're going to do business as usual and create a view that we don't care what anyone else thinks or what anyone else wants. We're going to continue talking in the same terms. Our schools are doing fine. You can't measure things. Tests are inaccurate, etc. If everyone in the education community took these positions, it would not take long for representatives of the business community, who are now planning and pressing for support of public education, to say that public schools are hopeless.

They'll say that public schools are just tied up with bureaucrats and shackled with union contracts and union regulations, and that the only way to get a decent education in this country is to smash this whole power structure. The public will say that we don't care about the kids, that we are only interested in ourselves and our own comfort. They say why not break that up and give public schools a lot of competition? Let the private schools flourish and let's see what the public schools do if faced with this sort of competition.

In light of that analysis, we have to take a look at various proposed changes. I frequently think back to about 20 years ago when a number of us started to demand collective bargaining. Many of our locals had been around since the end of World War I. As we sought collective bargaining, most of our locals were rather small and were made up of people who had lots of agendas and ideas. The reason they joined the union was not because they wanted another salary increase, but because they wanted to change the world. They wanted to change it for the bet**ter,** and they had all sorts of ideas, not only in education.

When we entered the era of collective bargaining, we knew that on a certain day all the teachers, not just the nice people in the union (and most were not in the union) were going to vote as to whether we would be the collective bargaining agent. We had to ask ourselves one question at every executive board meeting -- do we really want to win? Just as any smart political candidate would do, if you really want to win, you sometimes have to discard and push aside -- at least until you're elected -- a lot of things that you strongly believe in because they wouldn't go over very well with the people who are about to vote for you.

Well, we are in very much that situation now in terms of education. Do we really want to win in terms of the future of public education, in terms of tax credits, in terms of vouchers? The consequences are what I have suggested. We can't afford just to take out the old arguments. We've got to enter into a set of negotiations with the business community, with the public, with public fugures. . . and say yes, we want all this official money. We need it. Public education needs it. In exchange for that we're willing to enter into a kind of negotiations -- a dialogue to change things. And in discussions we're going to try to convince you that some of these things you want don't make very much sense. We're not going to give up our right to express our views, but we're going in with the view that if we can't convince you, we'll have to try another approach. It's like any other contract. Whenever I negotiate a contract and take it to the members, there are always people who stand up and say "We don't like this, we don't like that, how come that's in there?" In a sense, I always say that I could have written a better contract myself, but they wouldn't let me. . . there's always another side. (Laughter)

There are two sides in this discussion on educational policy. The NEA acts like they can write the contract themselves and there's nobody else to consider. So let's focus the issue.

The biggest issue that's facing public education in this country is the fact that for the first time in our recent history -- probably the first time in the history of American education -- public schools will not be able to get a sufficient number of competent teachers unless salaries are more competitive. In the past, we had a lot of good people because there was the Great Depression in the 1930s, and we could pick and choose from all those people looking for secure employment. After World War II, there were people who were afraid there was going to be another depression. Then there was the draft, and people would rather fight in some school

than in Vietnam or Korea. (Laughter) Then of course we had a huge supply of talented women who were shut out of most other fields. Nursing and teaching were the two most professional and best compensated areas for educated women. Now, of course, women are entering all other fields, and even if teacher salaries and conditions improved, you get a feeling that for the next number of years most women are not going into an occupation that's stereotyped as women's work. They are going to make it in all these other fields where women have been shut out before. So who will we have, except for the talented middle who have the "calling" and are going to make the "sacrifice" no matter what the conditions? There are not many of those people.

The overwhelming and large number of people who are now preparing to come into teaching are at the very bottom of all those now going to college. In earlier periods, they were people who probably could not have gotten into college and probably would not have graduated. That's who is coming. So the great news is that all the teachers who are now teaching are among the best and the brightest to teach for a long time. The reports essentially say, "be kind to the teachers you have now, worse could be coming!" (Laughter)

What program have we been proposing to attract and retain teachers? First, we have for a long time taken the position that teachers ought to be tested in their subject field. We know that testing well in mathematics and English or social studies does not mean that you're going to be a great teacher or even a good teacher. You might be incompetent as a teacher even though you can pass a subject adequacy test. However, we know that if you flunk the mathematics or social studies or English test, you will be an incompetent teacher no matter how lovely your personality or how much you love children or how much you want to be in this field. That is a position which we have taken and it is the single thing that we can do to indicate to the public -- and to each other -- that we mean business in terms of upgrading the school system.

I'm not talking about the kind of test that Florida gives. Florida gives a test to prospective elementary school teachers where the passing score is sixth-grade-level arithmetic. And 13-20 percent of the prospective teachers fail that test. Sixth grade arithmetic! The very least we ought to ask is that teachers be several grades ahead of the students that they are supposed to teach. (Laughter) A modest proposal. After all, sometimes a kid might not understand the one way that you explain it. You might have to try it a second way, and a third way, and a fourth and a fifth way. If you aren't able to explain it four or five different ways, then the only alternative is to move over to a school system where the teachers and the children are learning a subject together. (Laughter) If we're going to avoid that, we ought to have tests.

We ought to have more competitive salaries, starting in the area of eighteen to twenty thousand dollars for an entry-level teacher, because that is what a C+ liberal-arts graduate can expect to get as a trainee in private industry. Now, I'm not talking about pre-med students; I'm talking about liberal-arts graduates who graduated in the mid-grade level. If school boards can't go out and select from or compete for the average college graduate, we're not going to get anywhere.

Along with this test, and along with that salary, we ought to enact in every state in the country a provision which puts teaching on par with other occuaptions. When you have a shortage of doctors, you don't decide that anybody who's taken two years of biology can practice medicine as a substitute emergency doctor. You can't

practice as a lawyer if there's a shortage of lawyers. One of the things that we must do in this area of reform is to make it illegal to practice teaching, just as it's illegal to practice any other profession, unless you meet the minimum standards of our profession. (Applause)

There is another item that you need to attract and retain teachers, and it is just as important as the other elements I mentioned. You're not going to get a person who loves Dickens or Shakespeare or mathematics to come into a class and spend a large percentage of his or her time -- perhaps 50 to 60 percent -- taking care of a disturbed child who is always acting out, a child who is very disruptive and constantly violent. If we cannot solve the problem of placing disruptive students in special facilities for their own good and for everybody else's good, if we prevent the entire class from learning, then we are lost in public education. (Applause) If you took a poll of parents who pulled their children out of public school and put them into private school (not parochial or religious curricula), you would find that the overwhelming majority of those children were pulled out not because parents thought that the public school curriculum was bad, not because they thought that the teacher was no good, but because their child came home and said, "I'm not learning anything because this kid yells, screams, jumps. . ." There is no learning atmosphere. If we can't take the one or two children with a special disorder out of the regular classroom environment, the other twenty-eight children's parents are going to say, "We're going to get out." The public schools will be left with the handful of kids that no private school would take or keep for very long.

The next thing that you need is sort of a map between what the teacher is supposed to do, thinks he or she is supposed to do, and actually does. You're not going to get a math teacher in a high school if that math teacher has to face three, four or five major crises a day, or children who are still on third or fourth grade arithmetic. A person who becomes a math teacher makes a sacrifice to take that job and in his or her mind says, "I want to do algebra, geometry, maybe a beginning calculus course with some of the better students. I think this is important. I learned, I loved my teachers, I saw an entire world and this is what I want to share with students."

There's one more item here that we're going for. You're not going to get talented teachers as long as schools are using an antiquated management system. (Applause) I'm talking about an authority structure which rarely exists in any successful industry. It comes out of the old days when teachers were just high school graduates, when teachers went to something called a normal school for one or two years after high school. The principal was the only one who had gone to college. The principal was the educated professional, and the teachers were hired hands just slightly ahead of the high school kids. It was accepted. After all, the principal was the professional, and teachers really were not.

Today most teachers have masters degrees and can run rings around their principals, unless the principals happen to be in their own fields. Many principals today moved up to their jobs because they were the coaches of unsuccessful teams. (Applause) I don't think that the coach of a team has any right to walk into my classroom and teach mathematics any more than I would have a right, if I became a principal, to become a coach or to run the athletics program. I'm not talking snobbery here about physical education versus mathematics. I'm talking about professionalism: whether a teacher is respected for the expertise that person has in his or her own field.

A clear example of this antiquated, factory-type authority is taking place, today, in the New York City high schools. The principal will evaluate a teacher and say, "You are the finest math teacher we have ever had in this school. But I've graded you 'unsatisfactory' because you failed to have a step-by-step lesson plan made up in accordance with our new management system. You were great, the kids are learning, you're doing a great job teaching, but you haven't handed in the paperwork in the way that I want you to hand it in."

Given these conditions, the old boss-worker factory-style management system turns talented teachers and potentially talented teachers away. We have to examine the way we run our schools, and find a more adaptable means of managing them.

In many of our states, that opportunity currently exists. A great deal of attention was focused on education as a result of the many national reports that started coming out this summer on the state of public schooling. We've had fads in education before. But this time the emphasis grew out of an economic realization that the nation was suffering, that the nation was at risk, because we failed in the quality preparation of people as our greatest national resource. Politicians, business leaders and community groups have recognized the economic importance of education. Now we simply need to ally with these groups, work together, and trust the knowledge, expertise and expectations of all of the participants. Many of our locals have pioneered these initiatives and have made good, solid changes in their contracts, their communities and in the quality of their public school systems.

But it takes that first step. It takes understanding that four more years of Ronald Reagan will give us four more chances to fight tuition tax credits. Re-electing him could also lead to more Reagan appointees on the Supreme Court, which would lead to even longer lasting consequences.

The AFT must do all it can politically to see that that doesn't happen. Our members will be out backing the endorsement of Walter Mondale, attempting to restore Democrats to the leadership of the U.S. Senate and encouraging a coalition toward professional teaching standards in American public schools.