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AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

PRESS CONFERENCE

National Press Club
529 Fourteenth Street, N.W.
First Amendment Room
Washington, D. C.

Wednesday, September 9, 1987

9:00 a.m.

Albert Shanker
President
American Federation of Teachers

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(9:02 A.M.)

MS. SHEKETOFF: Good morning. Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Emily Sheketoff, with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. This morning our morning newsmaker is Albert Shanker, president of the American Teachers Federation and also on the executive council of the AFL-CIO. Mr. Shanker serves on committees concerned with education, labor, and international human rights. He will speak for about 15 minutes and then take questions.

I would like to remind those who may not be familiar with our format to please state your name and organization before asking your question.

We will turn now to the man Woody Allen said started World War III, Mr. Albert Shanker.

MR. SHANKER: Good morning. Thank you for being here this morning. It's a pleasure to be have this opportunity and make some remarks on the occasion of the opening of this school year.

It's very important to note that this school year is marked by what is probably the smallest number of teachers strikes that we have seen in many, many years. I think that is evidence of a cooperative relationship brought about largely in the interest in the educational forum and by the involvement of the business community and Governors

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1 across the country.

2 The other thing that we see all across the
3 country is that while in 15,000 school districts most of
4 them are making changes that are legislated, that we see
5 this year a larger number of school districts across the
6 country that are trying some basic and fundamental changes.
7 The analysis that we have gotten in recent years from the
8 national assessment of educational progress is one that
9 leads to the conclusion that we need more than reform if
10 reform implies that some relatively minor tinkering or
11 shaping up of school systems, and that what we need is a
12 fairly major overhaul.

13 Some of those results I will just spend a minute
14 to cite and show how much change, fundamental change, is
15 needed on the national assessment of progress, examinations,
16 and assessments. In reading and literacy, we find that
17 while practically everyone in our country can read a stop
18 sign or an exit sign and can open up a box and follow simple
19 instructions, that when you get to the ability to read a
20 newspaper on the reading level, say, of the Washington Post
21 or the New York Times, you are down to about 36 or 37
22 percent of those still in high school at the age of 17-1/2,
23 so that we are measuring the successful students, those who
24 are still there, not those who drop out.

25 When you move to a slightly more difficult level

Vpv 1 -- that is, how many can read an airline timetable or a
2 railroad timetable, not so important in and of themselves
3 but very important if somebody is to read the material in
4 the World Almanac, a spreadsheet or anything else -- then
5 you are down to 4.7 percent of those students who are still
6 in school, the successful ones, not the dropouts, only 4.7
7 who can look at a chart and sort of combine the headings at
8 the top of the chart, look at the numbers and get the
9 information from it. Extremely low.

10 If we move over to the analysis of writing, the
11 writing report card, and once again we assign a very simple
12 task to 17-1/2-year-olds -- these are again the successful
13 ones, those who are still in school, not the dropouts -- and
14 ask them to write a letter to a prospective employer
15 applying for a job, and how many of them can write the
16 letter using some evidence indicating to the employer that
17 he or she knows what the two or three major qualifications
18 for the job are, and then offering evidence that I should be
19 hired for this job because, "Yes, I can take care of money,
20 I worked in my father's store until two years ago, and that
21 was fine. And I know you need somebody who his reliable,
22 and I had the following job at church and Boy Scouts, and I
23 always did this." That is someone who can muster evidence
24 and write a persuasive letter of that sort.

25 Of those who are still in high school at 17-1/2,

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1 only 20 percent of them can write such a letter.

2 When you move to mathematics, only about 27
3 percent of those still in school at 17-1/2 can do a simple
4 problem which involves more than one step. That is, the
5 numbers aren't very difficult, but you have to know that
6 first you subtract, then you multiply or do some other
7 sequence of basic numerical manipulations.

8 Well, if we had a system in which 65 or 70 or 75
9 percent of the students were doing well, then reform would
10 be the right thing to do. It would just mean shaping up
11 what we are doing, the system that we have, and doing things
12 a little better. But when we get results that show that
13 only 4.7 percent can read a simple chart and only 20
14 percent can write a letter, not at a level of brilliance but
15 at a level of moderate acceptability, and that only 27
16 percent can do fairly simple mathematical problems, we have
17 to reach the conclusion that reform is not enough and that
18 what we need is a very major change in our schools.

19 We are not trying to get five or ten percentage
20 points of improvement, we are trying to get a percentage of
21 students who succeed in these various things to move from
22 the 4.7 or 20 or 27 percent mark up to the 75 or 80 percent
23 mark.

24 That is not going to be done by teaching a little
25 better, getting a slightly better textbook, adding a little

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1 more time onto the day. It is going to be done only with
2 some fundamental rethinking.

3 So I am very happy that this year a number of
4 school districts have moved toward making some basic
5 changes. I am going to leave some out, but I am going to
6 mention a few.

7 Dade County has embarked on a very interesting
8 program of school-based management. They invited their
9 faculties to meet last year and to discuss how they would
10 change the school if they had no rules and regulations
11 imposed upon them, how they would govern the school and what
12 substantive changes they would make, and the schools that
13 came through with the best proposals have been granted their
14 wish.

15 That is, they are not beginning a program in
16 which they will be relatively free from regulation and in
17 which the teachers and supervisors on the spot within those
18 schools can manage themselves. We are looking forward to
19 some very interesting, different schools as a result of
20 that.

21 Hammond, Indiana, has a school-based management
22 program which is very interesting and very exciting, in
23 which the entire faculty plays an important part.

24 Some of the new contractual provisions in the New
25 York City contract are outstanding. That is a provision

.Vpv 1 which says that the faculty of a school can vote to suspend
2 a particular point in the union contract if it believes that
3 suspending that particular point in the union contract is in
4 the best interests of good education within that school.

5 That is a very important movement away from
6 bureaucratically run schools, and I am sure that the
7 teachers who go to those schools are probably going to say,
8 "We are willing to suspend this item of the contract if the
9 board of education is willing to suspend some of its own
10 bureaucratic rules which prevent us from doing things," and
11 will result in a lot more school-based decision making.

12 The movement in Rochester, New York, which is a
13 very extensive involvement of the entire faculty in running
14 schools, in training new teachers, in deciding who remains
15 as a teacher, and assisting experienced teachers who are not
16 doing such a good job, involving teachers as adjunct
17 professors at the University of Rochester. So that
18 experienced teachers within the system become the professors
19 who are training new teachers who come in. All of these are
20 very new and very exciting approaches.

21 The rationale for this is very clear. The first
22 wave of reform consisted of having states like California,
23 Texas, and Florida impose a big, fat pack of rules and
24 regulations either by the state commission, or usually
25 through the state legislature and signed by the Governor.

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1 We favored most of those reforms, and we favored them
2 because we believed that local districts were not doing a
3 good job themselves.

4 But that is not a good way to run a school
5 system. That is, somebody in the state capital should not
6 be telling local people. You wouldn't run your medical system
7 to run that way. You wouldn't want a law passed somewhere
8 in the state capital telling every hospital and every doctor
9 exactly what to do.

10 You want well-trained, intelligent people on
11 hospital staffs looking at you, asking you questions, and
12 making judgments on the basis of what is right and what is
13 wrong for you. That's what we need in education.

14 What is good about the schools I was just talking
15 about -- the Dade Counties and the Rochesters and the
16 Hammonds and the Toledos and the New York Cities -- is that
17 there is the beginning of a recognition that schools are not
18 going to improve substantially by being kicked from above
19 and being told what to do by some remote group of people.
20 They are only going to improve substantially if there is
21 total involvement of the people who are on a school site who
22 keep asking questions, "What is right for this place? What
23 is wrong with it? What changes need to be made?"

24 That implies that the people at those sites have
25 to have the power to make the changes. Up to now we have

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1 had many complaints that OES, "We could run the place
2 better," they say, "We would run it differently, but they
3 won't let us." And "they" was always the board of ed, the
4 union contract, the state education department, the
5 legislative rules.

6 We are beginning now to move into a system which
7 is away from regulation and toward creativity and
8 involvement of individual schools, and I applaud that.

9 I would like to spend a few minutes on the
10 upcoming presidential debate, on presidential candidates'
11 debate on education, and say, first of all, that I think it
12 is very significant that the presidential candidates, that
13 there will be a national focus.

14 This, of course, stems from the continuing
15 interest on the part of the business community, and indeed
16 the Governors and the whole country, on the problem of
17 competitiveness. That has not gone away. It won't go away
18 for quite some time. Our schools are not going to be turned
19 around in one or two years. This is a project for at last a
20 decade, and it's really a continuing project after that.

21 Therefore, that continuing interest is very
22 welcome and very important. The things that I would hope
23 presidential candidates would commit themselves to are the
24 following:

25 First, we expect that there will be on the part

Vpv 1 of the majority of candidates some financial commitments and
2 essentially the financial -- I don't have a number that I
3 want to pull out of my head because I think one of the
4 important contributions of the school reform movement is to
5 say that the schools themselves ought to be market-
6 competitive, and I think that what we should do in schools
7 is exactly what is done in other areas, whether it's law
8 firms or hospitals or accounting firms or engineering firms.
9 We ought to set standards, reasonable standards, and say we
10 want teachers who meet the following qualifications.

11 We shouldn't be unrealistic in thinking that we
12 can have all the talents in the country working in our
13 elementary and secondary schools. We wouldn't want a
14 country where there weren't talented people working in many
15 other fields. But we ought to get our fair share of
16 people, and we should certainly not bring into our field any
17 people who are incompetent or who are below a certain line.

18 What their salaries should be, once we set those
19 standards, ought to be set by the market. That is, you
20 offer a certain salary, and if you get it, you get enough
21 people who meet the standards that you set, then that is
22 what you ought to pay them.

23 If you've got too many lined up, salaries will
24 probably move up slowly because there are lots of good
25 people lined up for those jobs. Salaries are not going to

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1 move up.

2 On the other hand, if what we are offering people
3 does not bring in good people to the standards that we have
4 set and if the standards are reasonable, then we ought to
5 move them up.

6 I believe that when we are finished viewing all
7 of this from a market point of view, that we will need some
8 additional financial support. Exactly how much I do not
9 know.

10 Secondly, I would hope that all the presidential
11 candidates would strongly commit themselves to the National
12 Board for Professional Teaching Standards. There are a
13 whole range of issues involved with this. There is the
14 whole question of paying some teachers more than others.
15 There is the whole question of having a school in which some
16 teachers can have more responsibility than others.

17 That whole set of issues has always ended up with
18 no change because there was no faith in the local principal
19 or the local school board or whoever was going to make the
20 decision. How do you know that person is really going to
21 pick the people who are really outstanding? How do you know
22 you're not going to have local politics and favoritism?

23 The creation of a national board gets away from
24 that. It means that a national board not subject to local
25 politics and patronage and, hopefully, not subject to

Wpv 1 national politics and patronage either -- that is, a really
2 independent board -- will be able to certify that some
3 people are outstanding and schools, therefore, will be able
4 to use those people both in terms of compensation and in
5 terms of different rules in the schools without the negative
6 political consequences that we have faced up to now.

7 The second important part of that board is that
8 it will contain an ongoing research arm which will keep
9 asking the question, "How do we identify people who are
10 outstanding? What do we mean by outstanding? And how can we
11 train and educate people in the future to be outstanding so
12 there will be an ongoing focus on how to do a better job in
13 terms of teacher education?"

14 I also think that a good set of assessments of
15 teaching will bring about major changes in teacher education
16 which are long overdue, and I think it's very hard to get
17 these changes in colleges and universities. But if some
18 colleges and universities find that none of their graduates
19 are becoming board-certified teachers, this is indeed
20 something that those colleges and universities will
21 undoubtedly feel pressure to change, either their selection
22 processes or the processes of selecting and training that
23 they have.

24 Closely related to that is the idea of support
25 for education as a profession. We want to move more and

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1 more toward involving teachers as a group in making
2 decisions.

3 The reason for that I gave a minute ago, and that
4 is that children are not mechanical objects being moved
5 through an assembly line. They are very complicated. They
6 are all different. And the only way to provide for a proper
7 education is to make individual judgments.

8 And the only way to get individual judgments is
9 to have people right there at the front line who are
10 sophisticated, who can make them. And the reason for
11 professionalism is exactly that.

12 It means you get highly educated people who have
13 been very well trained, and then you allow them, give them
14 the flexibility to make decisions and judgments which are
15 appropriate in each case.

16 Without that, I don't think we are going to go
17 along a track that is going to put many good people into the
18 field. You cannot get good people who feel that they are
19 coming into a system where they are being treated as though
20 they know nothing and someone else is telling them
21 everything that they ought to do.

22 The next important thing that I will look for in
23 what the candidates say is the commitment to research. As
24 Secretary Bennett pointed out yesterday, we are about to go
25 over the \$300 billion mark in our expenditures for

Vpv 1 education, and the moneys are assigned at the federal level
2 for research and for the national assessment are somewhere
3 around the \$15 million mark.

4 That is an outrage to spend \$300 billion and not
5 constantly measure what is it that is going right, what is
6 going wrong, how might we change things, not to have a
7 measure which compares state by state how well we're doing,
8 how well is this state doing now compared to what it did
9 five years ago and ten years ago.

10 Why do we have to wait every ten years to find
11 out how many of our kids can write a letter or read it or
12 what that improvement is, instead of getting it every three
13 years or four years so that we can make changes more
14 quickly.

15 A commitment to research, that is not one of
16 these sexy things which is going to find millions of people
17 out there saying, "I won't vote for you unless you support
18 educational research." But we really cannot support
19 improvement in the world of education without finding out
20 what's happening, are we doing better, are we doing worse,
21 what kinds of programs are working and which programs are
22 not working.

23 In addition to that, we are going to be looking
24 for candidates to make commitments to adding resources with
25 respect to targeted groups, the minorities and the poor.

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1 These groups have made the most progress in the last 15
2 years. They have had funds targeted in their direction

3 Yesterday the Committee on Economic Development
4 came out with an outstanding report -- I was privileged to
5 serve as an adviser to that committee -- in which they
6 pointed out that unless we reach a lot of these youngsters
7 very early with an array of community and educational
8 services, that we are going to continue to have this problem
9 of large numbers of essentially handicapped youngsters
10 because their pregnant teenage mothers didn't get the right
11 nutrition and then we get brain-damaged kids in schools and
12 can do nothing about them; that we have to take these
13 problems seriously, and that is a range of problems that is
14 an appropriate federal concern.

15 It comes out of previous discrimination, and it
16 also ends up with a federal burden in terms of welfare and a
17 whole bunch of other things. There is no question that
18 there needs to be federal commitment there.

19 We are also going to be looking not just for
20 money, but for values. I think all of you have seen a
21 project that we have been working on recently dealing with
22 the teaching of democracy.

23 A recent report by the National Endowment for the
24 Humanities indicates similar problems in terms of what it is
25 that our students know or do not know about our own country,

1 our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, what other forms of
2 government there are, what are the alternatives, and that
3 democracy is not something that you keep and hold onto in
4 ignorance, it frequently has to be fought for and no one is
5 going to fight for it if they don't understand it.

6 That is a job the schools have to do, of charter
7 development, values and understanding of that by candidates
8 is extremely important.

9 I will just wind up by saying that I think this
10 is going to be a very crucial year for education in a number
11 of ways. The national commission, the Carnegie Commission,
12 will start as a regular commission for the first time on
13 some very basic decisions will be made there. Depending on
14 which way they go, we will either move toward
15 professionalism and toward a restructured school, or, if
16 things don't go right there, we will end up with what we
17 have had all along -- namely, a school system that is not
18 working very well.

19 The presidential candidates and the presidential
20 debate will provide an opportunity for a national focus on
21 education, which we have not had for some time.

22 Third, of course, is the fact that across the
23 county there are more and more places where very different
24 things are being done, and it is going to provide an
25 opportunity for a national discussion of what are the

Vpv 1 appropriate changes in our schools -- to what extent are the
2 things that Dade County has started to do and Rochester and
3 New York City and Hammond, Toledo, Cincinnati, and New
4 Haven, Hartford, and a number of other places -- to what
5 extent will these programs work, to what extent will they
6 improve education? We believe they will. That will start a
7 very widespread movement towards similar programs in other
8 school districts in the country.

9 Thank you.

10 MS. SHEKETOFF: I would like to remind everyone
11 to please identify themselves and their organizations before
12 they ask any questions.

13 Are there any questions?

14 QUESTION: My name is Bob Shoga, with the L.A.
15 Times. Mr. Shanker, I wonder if you could be a little bit
16 more specific about the first point. You said some
17 financial commitment. I understand your reluctance to put
18 an exact price tag on it. Could you give me some figure?
19 As you know, the people argue most about in politics is
20 money and where it comes from. What is the magnitude of it?
21 How essential is it for there to be an increase in federal
22 aid? I guess that's what you mean. Could you speak to
23 that, please?

24 MR. SHANKER: I think federal aid is only
25 appropriate for some things. That is, I do not believe that

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1 it is the Federal Government's job to basically support he
2 school districts of our country. That is the state and
3 local responsibility.

4 I think that there are several federal
5 responsibilities. One is in the area of civil rights. That
6 is that where there are deficiencies in the education of
7 youngsters due to discrimination which came out of -- well,
8 it's within our lifetime that we had legal segregation in
9 this country. There is no question that a lot of the
10 educational deficiency goes right back to that.

11 We now have about \$3 billion invested in Chapter
12 1. That reaches only a small proportion of the youngsters
13 who are eligible. So that you've got to pick and choose.

14 I would say that all the youngsters who are
15 eligible for the program ought to get it, and therefore that
16 program probably ought to move from \$3 billion to cover all
17 kids. It ought to be an entitlement program. That would
18 probably bring it up to about \$12 billion.

19 I may be a little off on that, but I don't think
20 I am very far off. That obviously cannot be done in one
21 shot. You couldn't find the teachers, space, and everything
22 else. But if you have a program, a budget target where you
23 say within a certain number of years you are going to do
24 things, there is no reason why you can't have educational
25 targets to say that this will be done over a period of time.

Vpv 1 Second, the responsibility of the Federal
2 Government is research. We have done it in agriculture. We
3 have done it in a lot of other fields, where we know that
4 you are not going to get 15,000 separate local agencies
5 doing it. And that is not expensive, but it probably means
6 moving the \$15 million that we now spend to \$30 million or
7 \$40 million or \$50 million -- we are talking about millions
8 here, not billions of dollars.

9 QUESTION: How much do we now spend? I am sorry.

10 MR. SHANKER: \$15 million. A doubling or a
11 tripling. It's very little. It's ridiculous. We talk
12 about \$300 billion expenditures and \$15 million to figure
13 out whether you're spending the money wisely. That wouldn't
14 take a huge increase, certainly not in terms of -- well,
15 that's dollars. That's second.

16 This is that the Federal Government needs to
17 intervene in terms of special problems that are, in a sense,
18 one-shot interventions designed to meet certain types of
19 emergencies.

20 Now, I would say that probably in the next five
21 or ten years one such emergency will be the number of, let's
22 say, math and science teachers who are qualified that we
23 have in the country. Most of our kids who are in high
24 school now went to elementary school before the wave of
25 reform. Many of them weren't required to take much math or

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1 science. Many of them don't feel very good at it. It's
2 going to take quite a while before the country to produce
3 enough people in math and science for industry and the
4 military and education.

5 Therefore, I think you need something like what
6 you had in the Talented Teacher Act, which says to future
7 mathematicians and scientists, "We will pay for your college
8 education or we will wipe out your college loans if you will
9 teach for three years or five years before going to work for
10 some company." In other words, some sharing of resources
11 with incentives created by the Federal Government.

12 States can pick up on programs like this also.
13 Some of them do. Some provide a medical education for
14 people who will provide medical care in rural areas for
15 three, four, five, six years.

16 There are programs similar to this in a number of
17 field. And I would include in with this last batch, since I
18 think the most important development we have now is moving
19 toward the professionalization of teaching, support for the
20 Carnegie Board. Eventually, the Carnegie Board will be
21 supported by teachers who take the assessments. But for the
22 first three, four, or five years it will need some outside
23 support. These are some of them.

24 But the biggest one would be the poor and
25 minority youngsters. It would include Chapter 1, early

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1 childhood education, and a battery of services in terms of
2 preventing low-birthweight babies and things like that.
3 That would be the most expensive part of it.

4 Anyone else? Yes?

5 QUESTION: Ken Askey, from Scripps-Howard. I
6 don't understand how a national board of standards would
7 solve the merit pay problem. This is a local decision that
8 people have to make at a local level. Your staff is paid on
9 a merit basis. So is mine. Somebody has to make that
10 subjective decision.

11 MR. SHANKER: The subjective decisions are made
12 on the basis of who is hired and what function they are
13 given in the institution, and there will always be some
14 subjective decisions.

15 In our proposals, we favor moving away from the
16 classroom as we know it right now. We think that almost
17 every other industry in this country has changed very
18 radically over the last 200 years. Schools have not. The
19 notion of a teacher standing in front of a bunch of
20 youngsters and the youngsters sitting still for five or six
21 hours a day listening to someone talk, with very little use
22 of technology and very little differentiation in staffing is
23 not a very good structure.

24 However, we feel that a national board can do in
25 this field what it has done in other professional fields.

1 Look, there are a lot of people who work in accounting, but
2 there is a difference. Most companies of accountants will
3 treat a certified public accountant differently from
4 somebody who can fool around with the numbers but isn't
5 certified.

6 When you are serious about some medical problem
7 you have, any doctor can treat you, but the chances are you
8 are going to look for a board-certified surgeon or a board-
9 certified allergist or somebody else to do that.

10 There is no reason why the profession itself
11 shouldn't have a way through a bunch of nationally
12 comprehensive assessments of saying to the public, "Look,
13 the states make the decision as to who gets licensed, the
14 local boards make the decisions as to how much they are
15 going to pay people that we are going to hire, but the
16 profession itself is going to certify to you that the
17 following people are outstanding in the following ways. And
18 then locally you can take that into account in how you
19 structure your schools.

20 QUESTION: But that is pay by credentials, not by
21 performance.

22 MR. SHANKER: Well, I think we have that in our
23 society, too. That is why surgeons generally make more than
24 general practitioners and certified public accountants. If
25 you've got a good system of certification, then there is a

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1 relationship between certification and performance.

2 I think in most other professions the argument
3 would be that a person who is certified is going to be a
4 better performer in that field on average, which is why you
5 look for a certified surgeon, a board-certified surgeon, you
6 don't just go out and say, well, I can do just as well with
7 anybody else in surgery.

8 Yes?

9 QUESTION: Emily Feistner, of the National Center
10 for Education Information. You mentioned that the Carnegie
11 Forum about ready to either make or not make some very
12 crucial decisions, and if they do things will be better, if
13 not they will go on as in the past.

14 Could you be specific about what those are?

15 MR. SHANKER: Well, it has to determine whether
16 the standards for board certification are going to be set
17 high or low, because there are obviously differences of
18 opinion among the people on there. Some feel that a board-
19 certified person ought to be fairly rare, not too common,
20 ought to meet very high standards. Others feel, gee, that
21 is going to make a lot of people feel bad, so let's have
22 standards so that almost everybody can make it.

23 There are questions as to whether one has to go
24 through the current system of teacher education to even sit
25 for such a certification or whether anybody can go through

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1 it whether or not they have. The answer to that question
2 will be very important.

3 I think the question of whether the national
4 board becomes just a coordinating device for 50 different
5 state boards or whether it actually does certification on
6 its own will be very important. I think if you have 50
7 totally different standards in the 50 states, you are going
8 to not end up accomplishing very much.

9 So I think those are some of the key questions.
10 There are others. But if you end up with 50 different
11 states and you end up with relatively low standards and if
12 you also end up with -- well, in other words, if we end up
13 with almost everybody being certified as being outstanding,
14 the whole thing is going to look silly. And indeed, it will
15 be.

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Vbw 1 I think there are several other problems in the
2 process. One is the Board is going to have to very
3 delicately balance several things. There is a desire on the
4 part of some not to have anyone certified until you have
5 developed a perfect certifying instrument. That could take
6 ages. You would have another generation of people or maybe
7 two generations sitting here at a press conference waiting
8 for the assessments.

9 On the other hand, there could be a rush to put
10 things out quickly, which don't have very much credibility.

11 So I think to a large extent, the credibility of
12 the enterprise will rest on being able to reduce assessments
13 fairly quickly within a couple of years that are better than
14 anything that now exists, but that aren't perfect.

15 We are not waiting for perfection, but to be able
16 to produce something that's, let's say, far better than
17 anything like the NTE or any of the other exams that are
18 available now.

19 MR. BARRETT: Larry Barrett of "Time" magazine.
20 You have doubtless been paying attention to what several
21 presidential candidates have been paying already. They are
22 all talking about education in one way or another.

23 Which of them strike you as making a lot of sense
24 and which of them strike you as making nonsense?

25 MR. SHANKER: I wouldn't put any of them in

1 either of those categories right now. I don't think that
2 any of them as yet have taken very specific positions. They
3 kind of all think education is important and that teachers
4 are good people and they ought to be helped and supported.
5 All that is very nice, but it is not a program, and I have
6 not yet seen any programs.

7 I think it is very important that presidential
8 candidates, as soon as possible, take on some of the tough
9 issues and some of the tough issues are issues of saying
10 that we need a national board, we need to move toward
11 professionalism, we need staff differentiation, we have to
12 find ways of using technology in schools which are not being
13 used.

14 Who says the only way a person can learn is by
15 listening to somebody talk all day long? I mean, can't kids
16 learn by watching a VCR, listening to an audiotape? They
17 can learn from other kids. They can learn by reading. They
18 can learn from simulations. They can use computer
19 instruction.

20 You know, there are all sorts of ways of
21 learning.

22 And to say that the way we are going to do it is
23 the way we always did it before there was any other
24 technology, and that is to have the student sit there and
25 listen to somebody talk when we know that the rate of

1 failure is very great in this, that lots of kids just cannot
2 sit still, keep quiet and learn by listening to someone
3 talk. Many of them could learn in other ways. It is just
4 wrong.

5 So I think it is very important for presidential
6 candidates to indicate that they will support and do
7 something to help to bring about a school which is a school
8 for the next century and not just assume that the school
9 that was okay for the 19th century and continues through the
10 20th is all right.

11 We have also learned a lot in our industry about
12 different styles of management. If you look at what is
13 happening in corporations today in this country, in terms of
14 the relationship of management, the workers, what is
15 expected of employees, in terms of participation, in terms
16 of contributing to the quality of the product, I don't see
17 any reason why that same philosophy shouldn't be brought
18 over to the schools. I don't see any of that yet.

19 MR. BARRETT: Well, several of them have been
20 talking of lengthening the school year, making the
21 comparisons between the U.S. and Japan and the U.S. and
22 certain other countries. Several of them are stressing
23 accountability, I guess somewhat in the vein of Bennett here
24 yesterday.

25 Do you think lengthening the school year is a

Vbw 1 good and feasible thing?

2 MR. SHANKER: It might be, but if you keep --
3 well, look, if we're not doing very well in the way we are
4 doing it, doing more of not doing very well isn't very good.

5 The big problem is not the length of the school
6 year. It is how much time the kid pays attention, and if a
7 kid is tuned out all year long now, which a lot of them are,
8 and that is what the National Assessment figures show, it
9 shows that maybe the majority of students are not listening,
10 are not engaged. They are attending, but they are not
11 getting anything out of it.

12 Lengthening of the school year will give you
13 another week or two weeks or three weeks a month of not
14 listening and not doing anything.

15 Now it is true that the minority of kids who are
16 listening and paying attention, I believe will learn more,
17 assuming that a kid who is not doing that, if you lengthen
18 the year for that kid, that kid is going to continue to be
19 engaged. He may decide not to be. He may decide that's
20 when he goes to Boy Scout camp or does something else and
21 may tune out for part of it. But that is very mechanical.
22 That is something like saying, hey, the way we make a better
23 automobile than the Japanese make is to get all the auto
24 workers to work an extra half hour a day.

25 I haven't heard anybody say that. I have heard

Vbw 1 them say that you got to put quality in there. You've got
2 to have a different mode of production. You have to have
3 leaner management. You have to have employees who care
4 about quality. You maybe have to have some of what an
5 employee is paid, based on the profits that the company
6 makes. You have to provide incentives within the system,
7 which is accountability systems.

8 And also, I hear a lot of talk in business about
9 how we are not doing so well, because we worry about the
10 quarterly bottom line.

11 I think we've got to worry about that in
12 education too. That is, the Japanese worker and manager
13 knows he is going to be in the same company ten to twenty
14 years from now, and if that company goes down, he is
15 unlikely to get employed anywhere else. That is a very
16 strong incentive for making that company work, and if the
17 company looks like it is going down or he is spending
18 weekends, nights, summers, every extra minute figuring out
19 how to make the company succeed, if he is just worried about
20 a move to the next corporation in the next quarter, if they
21 show a great bottom line, you don't care about what your
22 company is going to be doing, one, three to five years from
23 now.

24 So I think we need accountability measures, which
25 is why I favor more money for national research. A large

1 part of the research would be gathering information as to
2 what works and what doesn't. Are we doing better? Are we
3 doing worse? Once you have that information, we have to
4 start asking what kind of incentives do you build in to get
5 the better models adopted by those who don't have those
6 better models.

7 But I don't have very much faith in the notion
8 that all you have to do is add a little time, you know, some
9 mechanical fix-it is going to work it.

10 If 80 percent of your kids who are in high school
11 are not learning to write a decent letter, I'll tell you one
12 of the reasons for that. One of the reasons is that, if
13 you've got 30 kids in a class, five periods a day, you've
14 got 150 papers to mark, if you give the kids an assignment,
15 and it takes you five minutes to mark it, five minutes to
16 sit with each kid and suggest how he might rewrite, that is
17 30 hours.

18 If you can't figure out some way of reorganizing
19 the school to make it possible for kids to write two, three,
20 four or five times a week some substantial paper and have an
21 adult read it and talk to the kid about it without creating
22 an absolutely impossible burden, you can add another four
23 weeks onto the school year, where kids won't write and
24 nobody is going to read their papers, and they still won't
25 learn how to write.

.Vbw 1 So I think that sort of proposal -- add a little
2 more onto the day, add a little more onto the year, require
3 the student to do this. Now in Japan, you have a very
4 different set of factors, as you know. You have mothers who
5 spend their entire lives bringing up their kids. You have
6 mothers who get the same books and the same homework that
7 the kids do, and they do it together. If a child is ill,
8 the mother goes to school and takes the notes and comes home
9 and teaches the youngster.

10 There is competition to get into the schools at
11 the age of 3 and into schools that prepare you for the
12 schools that are there at 3 before that.

13 I don't think we are about to change the American
14 culture to do that. That doesn't meant that we have to be
15 losers, but it means that we have to make our improvements,
16 in accordance with the American character, not in accordance
17 with the characteristics of another people.

18 QUESTION: The kids in Chicago are having a
19 shorter school year. The teachers are out.

20 What are the issues there? Are you playing an
21 role?

22 MR. SHANKER: The issue there is a shorter school
23 year, isn't it, that the board is trying to impose in order
24 to save money. That's a money issue, mostly. As you know,
25 the governor had asked for a tax increase in order to

1 provide increased aid to education. Illinois school
2 districts are very heavily dependent on state aid for school
3 support. The legislature did not support that increase. I
4 don't know what the economics of the district are, but
5 Chicago is claiming they don't have money and that,
6 therefore, they want to close schools a few days and cut
7 teachers' salaries back to reflect the reduction in the
8 number of days worked. And the teachers are on strike for a
9 salary increase.

10 QUESTION: Are you planning to go there or
11 playing any role in this?

12 MR. SHANKER: I will go there if they ask me to.
13 I mean, basically, the national organization doesn't conduct
14 strikes. If they need research, advice as to tax base and
15 things like that, we have people -- for instance, we do have
16 people in Detroit right now. There are some differences as
17 to what's available in the budget. We do that, but our
18 locals are perfectly capable of conducting it.

19 QUESTION: But as you are here this morning,
20 around the country, constantly talking about teacher
21 professionalism, and you talk about the profession, does it
22 worry you to see the big headlines that the teachers are out
23 in Chicago, as they were out in L.A.?

24 MR. SHANKER: Well, sometimes you have no choice.
25 I mean, suppose -- I can tell you, if the teachers in

Vbw 1 Chicago, just remember, this is not the first time they've
2 been out, and each time they've been out, the school board
3 said they had no money, and after the teachers went out, the
4 school board miraculously found some money. Both teachers'
5 salaries and conditions today would be much worse in
6 Chicago, if the teachers had merely accepted what the board
7 tried to impose on them each of those times.

8 I don't like it. I think kids do lose when they
9 are not in school. I think teachers lose, in terms of what
10 the public thinks of them when they go out on strike, and
11 that is a price which, in a democratic society, is a touch
12 price, when you are trying to get the public to support
13 public education and negative feelings are created by this,
14 but I think that the alternative, which is to accept
15 constant deterioration, is also not an acceptable one.

16 So I wish that they were able to solve it without
17 striking, but they clearly were not able to.

18 QUESTION: What is the general trend on strikes
19 this fall around the country, Mr. Shanker? Do you have any
20 feel for it?

21 QUESTION: This is the smallest number that we
22 have had in years. It has been going down every year. The
23 high point was the late '60s and early '70s. And those were
24 essentially strikes for collective bargaining recognition
25 and first contracts, salaries and working conditions, kind

.Vbw 1 of labor and management figuring out who was stronger.

2 It was first experienced. Then there was a
3 settling down. Then in the mid-'70s, where all these
4 financial crises, the bankruptcy in New York City and
5 Chicago nearly came to the edge of that and other cities,
6 and you had a bunch of defensive strikes where management
7 was cutting back because of their bankruptcy and other
8 fiscal problems, and the unions went out to try to hold onto
9 what they had.

10 But since the reform movement, I would say, since
11 about 1980, the number of strikes has dwindled. When you
12 consider the fact that there are 15,000 school districts in
13 the country and there are probably about 50 on strike, most
14 of them are very small districts. So it is a very, very
15 small percentage of the total workforce, and of course, if
16 the strikes don't last very long, it is possible to make up
17 the time.

18 By the way, the Chicago School System chose in
19 these previous strikes not to have the kids make up the
20 time, because many of these school boards use the strike as
21 a way of balancing their budget. Obviously, teachers don't
22 get paid when they are out on strike.

23 You know, a strike is not the same kind of a
24 weapon in the public sector as it is in the private company.
25 If the employees shut the company down, both sides lose.

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1 The workers lose their salaries and the manufacturer loses
2 the value of the product, but when you strike a school
3 system, the teachers are losing pay and the board of
4 education is saving money. So that may be the reason for
5 the strike there, maybe that the board of education has
6 figured that that is the way to balance its budget.

7 That is kind of a way of closing the schools down
8 and not providing education for the kids and blaming it on
9 the teachers and their union.

10 QUESTION: Al, do you think that the increase in
11 teacher pay that has taken a phenomenal increase in the last
12 couple of years is going to take care of the teacher
13 shortage that the unions have been so concerned about?

14 MR. SHANKER: It takes care of some of it. We
15 find there are quite a few people coming into teaching now
16 who started in other fields and who now want to teach, and
17 we find that in most of our cities, that's a very
18 interesting phenomenon of people who are 30 or 40 or 45
19 years old, second careers. It is partly the money and
20 partly the feeling that things are going to get better, that
21 governors are talking about it, and business people are
22 talking about it. And for four or five years, salaries have
23 improved, but we need to remember that we've just reached
24 the point this year where we have now, in terms of
25 purchasing power, we've just surpassed the previous high

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1 point of 1973.

2 So we've had these ups and downs, you know.

3 I noticed that Secretary Bennett talked about the
4 big increase in teachers' salaries since 1960. What he
5 didn't talk about is what happened to teachers in the 1940s
6 and '50s. When everybody else was getting raises, teachers
7 pretty much stood still.

8 I don't want to pick a year that is favorable to
9 us or unfavorable, but unfortunately, we have periods when
10 you kind of stand still, and then there are big periods of
11 catch up.

12 But I think it has been helpful. I do not
13 believe that these increases and improvements will end the
14 shortage in certain areas, where there is an overall
15 national shortage.

16 So there has to be sharing in those areas.

17 Secondly, I think that, basically our standards
18 for admitting people into teaching in most states, is far
19 too low. As far as I know, it has not changed in most
20 places. To be an elementary school teacher, all you need to
21 do is get a 65 percent on the same examination that you are
22 going to be giving your students when you start teaching
23 there.

24 I think a 65 percent on an elementary school
25 examination for a teacher is an indefensibly low standard.

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1 The teachers have to be far ahead of the students, if they
2 are to be good teachers.

3 QUESTION: Did you write Bennett's speech
4 yesterday, of the NEA passages?

5 MR. SHANKER: No, I did not write the NEA
6 passages. I both agree and disagree with him on the NEA
7 passages. That is, I do think that the NEA has been an
8 obstacle to many reforms, but not everything that Bill
9 Bennett thinks is a good reform is, indeed, a good reform.

10 Bill Bennett tends to be of the push-button
11 school of reform, that mechanical things, in his view, will
12 make a big difference. I agree with some of the reforms and
13 not with others. For instance, we accepted the idea of
14 retesting teachers in Texas, not because we like the idea of
15 retesting somebody who has been teaching for 20 years, but
16 it was part of an overall reform package, and sometimes you
17 have to make a deal on a package or you lose the whole
18 thing. But I also do not believe -- I think the Secretary
19 doesn't come with clean hands on this whole thing.

20 I think if you want to bring about -- there is no
21 way you are going to bring about basic and important reforms
22 in schools without getting the acceptance of the people who
23 are part of the process. The SATURN project in General
24 Motors, about the acceptance of the United Auto Workers,
25 they have a pay schedule which was lower than that of the

.Vbw 1 average auto worker. They had the employees work in teams
2 and share the profits, so they had the chance of making more
3 money than any other auto worker, but their base pay was
4 low.

5 That was worked out, it was voted on, and it was
6 accepted by the employees, and I hope it turns out to be a
7 great success. It would not be a great success, if it were
8 imposed from above on a bunch of reluctant employees, who
9 felt that they were being done in.

10 Unfortunately, Bill Bennett doesn't seem to
11 understand that if you have a good idea, you don't just pass
12 a law and shove it down the throats of the people who are
13 going to have to carry it out. If you've got a good idea,
14 it ought to be good enough, so you can sit with the people
15 involved and convince them that it is in their interest and
16 it is in the public interest and they ought to do it and
17 make them feel good about it, so that they will help make it
18 work.

19 I am kind of surprised that somebody would have
20 discovered a philosophy like Bill Bennett, thinking you can
21 get improvements by legislating them through regulations
22 from above.

23 MS. SHEKETOFF: That seems to be all the
24 questions.

25 Thank you very much.

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(Whereupon, at 9:50 a.m., the press conference
was concluded.)