

Pittsburgh Convention 8/92

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### PRESIDENT ALBERT SHANKER

Thank you, Al Fondy. Just as you were giving that introduction I was handed a note that says, "Dear Al, please limit your speech to 57 minutes" (Laughter)

"because as a single mother I need the pool money to pay for two college tuitions."

(Laughter with applause)

Well, I'll try, but I do it from rough notes. So I can't be sure.

A few months ago, the AFT executive council met and, as we were discussing some of the proposed constitutional amendments and some of the resolutions, there was a feeling that most of us had about the mood of our members across the country and a fear of what the mood at this convention might be. People talked about sadness. Indeed, some talked about a state of depression, not economic, but psychological because of the problems that we face. Many talked about a mood of great anger.

Of course, the reasons were many and clear. There is the terrible state of our economy, which affects all of us. State budgets: just this morning *USA Today* talked not only about the \$11 billion deficit in California, but had a listing and a graph of a number of states that have made budget cuts in the hundreds of millions of dollars, including Michigan, Florida, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Illinois, Missouri and Washington.

Then, of course, the racial violence in Los Angeles really raised a question not only for Los Angeles. There is no successful multiracial society anywhere in the world. For many years in the United States we hoped and we worked for the idea that there can be one. Los Angeles was more than a one-city one-time incident. It raised questions in our minds about the ultimate success of our country.

Throughout the country we are in a state of gridlock when it comes to dealing with our health care problems. On the one hand, there are millions of people without any care at all, and on the other, those who have it are in constant fear that they won't have it three or five or seven or eight years from now as they look at the escalating costs and as they return to contract negotiations each year with demands for reductions in the benefits they already have. Then, of course, there's the strong national movement for vouchers and privatization in education and in other fields as well.

Well, fortunately, now that we're at the convention and have started talking to each other, something is happening. Yes, there's still some anger, and many are still going back to face very tough situations at home, but I have a feeling, and I think it's a feeling that many of you sense, too, that we're beginning to see some other possibilities. It's not just one thing, it's many things that we can look at. One is the work that we've done in this union over the last couple of years with our Futures Report.

We spent two years looking at what this union is about and asking: "Are we doing a good job? Where are we strong? Where are we weak? What do we need to change?" While the report is long and there are all sorts of recommendations, it comes down to developing a vision for the organization—one that sees that we have to value equally what we do for our members on the one hand, and the services that we provide to our public constituents on the other. In every area that we represent, we need to empower our members to be able to make more decisions, because we know more about improving and running those institutions than those who are now doing it in most cases. We've got to make a priority of making each of our institutions better and more effective, because even if poor quality is a result of someone else's management, ultimately, if we fail to improve these institutions, it is we and those who are served by the institutions who will be hurt.

Just two days ago the *Wall Street Journal* published a memorandum by a number of very prominent Republicans. This was a memorandum to the president of the United States saying: "If you want to win, you better come out for these things." It was a good part of the editorial page. There's every sign from the platform-making process at the GOP convention that they're taking this advice. Let me just read a few lines of that advice.

It urges the president and the Republican Party to join ranks with Britain, Germany, Italy, Russia, Mexico, Argentina, as well as numerous states and cities, to privatize state-run businesses, and sell assets and contract out services. Furthermore, educational reform must mean guaranteeing educational choice for all parents and not just wealthy families. So, that's the agenda on one side and it's pretty clear.

I'm going to spend time dealing with all of our issues, but I'm going to spend a little more specifically on the public school example. I hope that those who are not in elementary and secondary schools will ask these questions: If the American people allow the public schools to go private, what hope is there for public higher education? If the American people allow public schools to go private, what hope is there that we will ever have the courage and determination to develop a national health care system? If the Ameri-

can public schools go private, what hope is there that there will be any commitment to maintaining any other public services?

So, in dealing with one issue, I'm dealing with more than one. I'm dealing with those that face all of us. Now, we've had nine years of educational reform and lots of proposals. Many of them are not particularly good. All of us could sit there and take a look at quite a few of these proposals and we could point out what's wrong with them and we could intellectually win the debate. But it's not enough to shoot down bad proposals that other people have. If the public is angry, if they are frustrated, if they are depressed, if they feel that the services that they want and need are not coming from public agencies, intellectually shooting down privatization arguments will not be enough.

We've got to show the public that we are not defending what is there now that is inadequate. We've got to show them that it is we who are for change, real change, real improvement in these services; the change will not come from the proposals that are being made that would dismantle these services.

I'd like to mention some of the elements that we need if we are to succeed in the school battle, because I think that when we come together here each couple of years and when we meet in our QuEST conferences, we need to renew and develop our own vision. We need to develop a message, a message for our own members and a message for the business communities and general public throughout the country. So, I would like to mention a number of things that I think are extremely important.

First, I think it's very important that we tell the truth. What do I mean by that? Well, there are a lot of reports out saying that nothing is wrong, that everything is wonderful, and that the people who say that our youngsters are doing poorly are just sort of making up the figures. I don't think that helps anybody. Yes, we're doing better than we used to in 1950 or 1960, but the facts are that we're not doing as well as other countries are doing with kids today. That's what we have to be concerned about.

I think we also need to tell the truth, but not just about youngsters who are in poverty. Sure they're behind, and minorities are behind, as are those who have no health care and those who are discriminated against. But it's also true in our country that kids who have or should have no complaints, because they're among the most affluent and well-to-do and have all the benefits that any society has ever bestowed on anyone, aren't learning much either. So, we are in trouble.

But I think the other side of the story that needs to be told, which I started telling last year at the QuEST conference and that we need to continue telling, is about the dirty little secret regarding private and parochial schools in this country. That is, in spite of the fact that they have selected students and parents who are willing and able to pay, and have the ability to reject students and to expel them, they are doing no better in terms of student achievement than the public schools are. Therefore, allowing students to move over to those schools is no answer to America's educational problems.

(Applause)

Now, one of the things that I hear often—and I'm sure you do too—as I go to many meetings across the country, is a kind of defensiveness, saying, "Well, you can't really compare the United States to other countries, it's unfair because of our diversity." I'd like all of us to think about that argument for a few minutes. I think the best response to that was a paragraph in a speech that was recently given by John Jacob at the national convention of the Urban League in San Diego just a few weeks ago—a convention that I had the privilege of addressing.

John Jacob said the following: "Our children" — and he was referring in this part of his speech specifically to African-American children — "Our children are as capable of learning and of developing their talents as any in the world. If America could take immigrant peasants from the backwaters of Europe and mold them into a people that led the world, if Japan, Korea and Taiwan could take people wracked by poverty and devastated by war and mold them into a global economic powerhouse in one generation, then a committed, dedicated African-American community can help its children develop into the most intelligent and skilled people on the face of the earth."

(Applause)

When we use diversity as an argument, are we saying that African-American children and Hispanic children and new immigrants are incapable of learning as well as immigrants who came here in earlier generations? Is that what we're saying? I don't think so.

It's not an argument. Sure, we need special help because they start with many disadvantages. But I hope that we don't use diversity as an argument against putting in the effort that's needed to do the job.

I think another issue that's central, and we've got to talk about this with our fellow teachers and with parents and with citizens in our communities, is a national issue and one of great importance. (We're going to have a session on that in one of the workshops in this convention; Superintendent Bill Honig of California is flying out here especially for that; and I hope that you will try to attend that session—it's a very important one.) It's the

importance of developing national curriculum frameworks and standards. We are never going to move our youngsters to the same achievement levels as that of other nations, because in those other countries they have a picture of what an 18-year-old youngster is supposed to know and be able to do when that youngster graduates.

They say, "Well, if that's what he has to know at 18, then what does he or she know at 17, 16, 15," and so forth, and then there is an assignment for each grade level to get a part of that job done.

This is a vision; I'm not talking about standardized test scores. Once again, let me quote John Jacob, who continued by saying, "What will it take for our children to develop into outstanding 21st century citizens? Let me suggest four basic criteria based on what we know about the challenging demands of the future.

"One, every African-American child should graduate from high school with the ability to do calculus.

"Two, every African-American child should be fluent in a foreign language.

"Three, every African-American child should be able to research, organize and write a 25-page essay on a challenging topic.

"Four, every African-American child should live by strict, high, ethical standards."

And then he concluded, saying, "That's what it will take to make it in the 21st century, not just for African Americans, but for all of America's people."

**(Applause)**

I know the idea of national curriculum frameworks is radical, is different, and we're somewhat uncomfortable with it. I'm not talking about the Congress or the president making up a curriculum. We're talking about math teachers making up the math curriculum and social studies teachers making up the social studies curriculum and English teachers, the English and language arts curriculum. And we're not talking about passing a law to shove it down people's throats. We're talking about developing curriculum materials that are so terrific that they will be voluntarily adopted by states and localities.

**(Applause)**

A few weeks ago I did what I often do, which is get up at about 4:30 in the morning to start heading toward an airport. While I was having a cup of coffee, I turned on the television set and there I saw the interviewer interviewing six or seven students from Russia who had spent one, two or three years in the United States. It was probably a taped interview, I don't believe they were up at 4:30 in the morning being interviewed.

There were a number of questions about how the United States differed from Russia, and whether they're thinking of going back, and whether they're maintaining some contacts and relationships.

Then the interviewer asked them about school and to compare their school experiences in the United States with their experiences in Russia. Here were seventh- and eighth-grade students, and every single one of them had the same response, and that was, what they were learning in the seventh and eighth grade [in the U.S.], they had already learned in the third and fourth grade in Russia.

The reason for that is, if you tried to get your kids to do more work, really do a lot of work, parents are going to complain about it, saying, "Why are you piling it on when the others aren't?" If you turn to your students and give them a lot of hard work, they're going to turn to you and say, "This is too hard," and they're going to start negotiating with you.

One of the things you have when you know that everybody in the country in the third grade is covering certain topics is parents and children who cannot use the excuse that it's too hard, because everybody is doing it. That gives authority to teachers as professionals to do what they're supposed to do. Of course, they have the right to teach each of these things in their own way. That's what professionalism is about—how you do it, not what we ultimately want to achieve with these youngsters.

In the United States there's a further reason for making sure that we have a certain amount of standardization. That is, we have youngsters moving from school to school constantly; we're the most mobile society in the history of the world. We have schools in which 60 percent of the kids are different next year than they are this year. Well, what happens when you have a different curriculum in each place as these youngsters move around? As they move from one place to another, each teacher has a right to know that these youngsters have already dealt with this, because that's what's happening all over.

This is a very important issue and something we need to talk to parents about, because they will understand the notion that if we don't know where we're going, we're not going to get there. The idea of having a vision of what we want youngsters to know and be able to do is something that we don't have now and we need to move toward.

The next important point has to do with assessment. John Jacob said it: Just think of how wonderful those four standards are compared to the idea that we want to improve our standardized test scores next year—what

a world of difference! These are the kinds of tests that are worthy of being taught to. To spend years trying to get a youngster to be able to understand calculus or to be able to write a 25-page essay on an important issue, that's worth teaching to, it's worth preparing students for.

We also need results that are public and that are measurable, because our not having that is one of the things that undermines why we need an assessment system, and a good one. Because one of the things that undermines public confidence in education is this constant business of taking these crazy numbers of who's a few points higher or a few points lower and then raising questions about whether they mean anything or don't mean anything, or whether people are pushing or cheating or preparing when they're not supposed to. That whole complex of things tends to undermine everything that we do. We need to get an assessment system that we like, that is challenging to the youngsters, and that we believe in. Without that, we're going to continue to have a good deal of public doubt about education. We ought to throw our weight and our support behind creating such a system.

What about reform and restructuring? I guess at almost every previous convention for a number of years I've spent a good deal of time talking about creating new types of schools. At one convention I talked about the Saturn automobile and how General Motors and UAW sent a team of union members and workers and managers to Japan and Korea and to Sweden and to look at various outstanding companies in the United States, and they came back. At that time they were not yet manufacturing the car, so we didn't know if it would be a great one or not, but the idea was: Forget about everything you learned before and see if you can start from scratch and develop some new way of manufacturing a new kind of car with higher standards of quality.

Using that analogy, I must say that I was guilty of standing here before you and saying we ought to do the same with our schools—we ought to throw out the old model and start from scratch and build a new one.

Well, I started to notice something a little while ago, and that is, while GM and UAW are building Saturn—and from what I hear it's an excellent car—they have not thrown out the traditional models nor have they stopped trying to improve them. Lots of people will love the Saturn and buy it, but lots of them will still want the other models. I think there's a lesson in that for us.

And that is, there are really two jobs that we have. One is, that for those teachers and for those students and for those parents who want to begin on this great adventure of doing something that's very different and new, we should provide all the support they need and give them our blessings and give them enough time so they can succeed.

After all, most of the schools around the world are not new types of schools, they look like old-fashioned schools. Most of the schools around the world that are old-fashioned are doing better than we are. Therefore, we need to change not only to create new schools, but we need to engage in a rigorous and tough process of change within traditional schools and ask how we can substantially improve. How can we get the same kind of results out of our traditional and regular schools that are obtained in other countries and, indeed, are obtained in some of our schools within this country?

So, we need two types of change: Create types of schools like the Koln-Holweide school in Germany—create schools that work on cooperative learning and on seminars and that use technology and that use teams of professionals and paraprofessionals and others. Create new types of schools, but at the same time, improve substantially the schools that we have.

By the way, there would be nothing wrong in the public sector with giving parents a choice. Some parents don't like experimentation. You try to do something different and they immediately start yelling, "I don't want you to try that on my youngster, you haven't done it before!" A good deal of our inability to bring about change is not resistance among teachers, it's resistance among parents. So, if we want to change, we really need to give those parents who want the change for their youngsters the opportunity to choose such schools. Then we'll have parents who support what we're doing instead of parents who are constantly fighting what we're doing. And similarly for those who prefer a traditional model school.

I think there's another point we need to deal with. There's a big eternal fight that has gone on in the United States that really needs to end, and that is, whether we should group students heterogeneously or homogeneously. Why don't we look at what other countries do. No other country groups youngsters in elementary schools. All elementary school youngsters are expected to achieve the same and they're pushed hard and they're given assistance. The assumption is that everybody needs to have the same chance; we should not make assumptions that little children can't do it.

**(Applause)**

It's also true that by the time youngsters get to secondary school they are grouped on the basis of achievement. There are, of course, some examples of heterogeneous grouping. But the important thing is that in the

United States, when we group youngsters, we fail with the youngsters who are put in the low groups or slow groups. The reason is not that we're grouping them. The reason is that once we put them in a low group, we say, "Well, they're dumb so we're not going to give them any hard work to do." Of course, if you don't give them hard work to do, they won't learn very much. The issue is not whether we should group students, but whether, as in other countries, every single group of students will be expected to meet high standards and given hard work to do.

**(Applause)**

The issue is to make sure that we don't give up on any of our students.

I think there's one other issue here, and that is, you can't teach a homogeneous group the same way you would a heterogeneous group. There are different ways of reaching the students. We have another workshop at this convention with Harold Stevenson, who has done some outstanding research, and I hope you will attend it.

Why am I dealing with this issue? I'm dealing with it because that fight undermines confidence by the public. When you have sets of educators, one of them saying the greatest thing for your kid is to put him in a heterogeneous class. Then there's another educator next door saying that's going to ruin your kid and your kid is never going to learn there because the other kids are going to hold him back. Within each of our communities we have that battle. What do parents say? They say, these educators are supposed to be professionals—we're going to them for advice. Here you've got every other professional disagreeing with each other; they don't know what they're doing.

We ought to be telling the public both methods work, but if you group kids in this way, if you have a homogeneous group, you can stand and talk to them. If you have a heterogeneous group, you have to use different kinds of materials, you have to conduct lessons in a different way. That is, I think, part of what Harold Stevenson's talk will be about. What I'm dealing with are things that undermine our institution.

I want to deal with one other important element of success and that is, stakes. By stakes I mean that in every other country kids work hard and parents make the kids work hard because they know that there are consequences for failure. What is it that high school students want? They want one of two things: they either want to get a job when they get out of school or they want to make sure they get into college, or they want to make sure they get into some sort of a technical school or training program or apprenticeship program or something else.

In other words, if you work hard and do well, there's something at the end, something that you want and something that you won't get if you don't work hard and something that you won't get if you don't reach those standards. In the United States we don't do that.

We basically say we'll let anybody into colleges. Later on they flunk out. There aren't any major corporations that hire any youngsters. They wait until they're older. We need to develop a system.

I want to underline the fact that the purpose of having these stakes is not to reduce enrollments in college or to limit the opportunities for students to continue learning. We want them to have opportunities for learning throughout their lifetimes, not just when they're 18 years of age. But we also need to say that those who can do college work can go to college, and if you haven't made it now, we're going to make it possible for you to make it later—there's not just one last final chance. Plenty of second chances, plenty of opportunities. If you succeed, here's what you're able to do. You can go to a technical school. If you succeed at this level, you can go to a two-year institution, which leads into some sort of apprenticeship program.

Without being able to tell students that work and success mean something, they're not going to work as hard. That's why private school students don't work very hard in the United States, because they too know that it doesn't seem to make very much of a difference.

In addition to that, we've got to give students intrinsic incentives as well. What does that mean? Small schools where youngsters and teachers know each other. That's an incentive to do well. If you're in a huge place, where nobody knows your name and you're just being pushed around and you feel that hostility, the teachers don't know the youngsters, the youngsters don't know the teachers, the youngsters don't know each other because there are so many of them. It creates a kind of condition where the youngsters are not motivated because nobody can really recognize them and know them. So, smaller schools, keeping the same youngsters and the same teachers together for more than one year, creating more of a small community and a small society that means something: that's something we can do on our own. We don't have to wait for legislation to do this kind of thing, and it could have tremendous impact.

We ought to explain that to parents and we ought to explain what we're doing. Each of these things—if we explain to parents in our communities what we're thinking about and what we're doing—will help to restore confidence in public schools. These people know that something is wrong.

They're good, they've thought about it, they have ideas. There are changes. Change: you can see it.

George Bush is trying to run as the agent of change. It will be kind of difficult to explain why he didn't do it in the last 12 years. But everybody wants change. Bill Clinton is successful because he is viewed as a person who's going to bring about change.

We, as teachers, have to go back to our communities and talk about the ideas that we have and the changes that we intend to bring to our institutions. Just as Bill Clinton gives all of us hope by talking about the changes, we can give parents and business people and other members of our community hope that the public schools can do what they want them to do by talking about these changes.

**(Applause)**

Now, we've got to wage an all-out campaign against vouchers in private schools. What we need to do is, first, educate the public about the dangers of greater separateness within our society if we go for private schools.

Second, take the figures back on private school test scores and show everybody in your community that there's hardly a difference between the two.

Third, do what I just suggested, which is to share the plans for improving and changing schools and talk to people about what works and talk to people about the things that didn't work. They know that in trying new things not everything works.

Next, use some of the things that you would do if you were in a private business. If youngsters leave the school, call them up, find out why they left. It wouldn't be a bad idea in some schools if some survey were made. "What do you like about the school? What do you like about what's happening to your youngster? What do you think are some of the problems? Are you thinking of taking your youngster out? Why? What could we change that would change your mind?"

We've got to start thinking of youngsters and parents as customers, not just as people who are required or forced to come to public schools. We can do that, we should do it, it's the right thing to do. By the way, it will help us—seeing things through other people's eyes—just as having a voice in collective bargaining helps an intelligent management to understand teachers and what their needs are and the kinds of conditions that we need in order to be successful. Asking students and their parents should help teachers to understand the students and the parents we're working with.

We need to increase public school choice, because if we don't want to say the only way you can escape from a school that you don't like is to go to a private school, we've got to say there's another public school where you may find things that you like. There's nothing wrong with that, and we ought to be supporting that. We ought to fight very hard to make sure that if private schools get any money they are under the same regulations that public schools are under.

**(Applause)**

It's great to talk about how it's going to be wonderful if you have competition between public schools and private schools. But, if you have public schools that have to obey all sorts of rules and regulations, and private schools that don't have to obey any of them, there's no question as to who's going to win the competition. That's no competition at all.

If private schools were ever to get money, they should take all children and should not be permitted to reject or keep anyone out or kick anyone out; they should be required to live under the laws of the land. It's public money and they ought to be living under public laws.

**(Applause)**

Another issue that is very important—and the reason that lots of people are thinking of private schools—has to do with the issue of violent and disruptive youngsters. Teachers, of course, have always known this. We know that some youngsters are just disruptive for a short time: there's a problem at home, some of them are just disruptive with one teacher, they don't hit it off. But some of them have serious problems and they really destroy the education of all the other youngsters. That's what a private school offers parents. "Mother, if we ever have kids like that—one, if we know about them, we won't take them in. And, two, if we ever get them accidentally, we'll kick them out so your child will not have the problem of having a huge number of hours of classroom time wasted on discipline." We certainly should not throw kids out in the street, these youngsters need help.

One of the things I like about Bill Clinton's programs is that he does talk about special educational facilities to help these youngsters separately and help them ultimately to come back to our schools. We need to turn this into a national campaign, because it's one of the key reasons that parents want to escape. They don't want their youngsters to have these problems.

We need to work on school finance and do away with the ugly pictures that Jonathan Kozol accurately portrays in *Savage Inequalities*. There is no excuse in a democracy, where we say that we believe in equality.

Now, we know that not everybody is equal in all respects and we know that after people get an education they're not all going to be equal at the

end of it. But there is certainly no justification for spending one-half of the money on the child's education—the child who has the most problems gets half the amount of money to solve them within our society. That runs totally counter to any notion of democracy. There are no other democratic societies in the world that finance education that way. They either give all kids the same amount of money because they're all citizens of the same country, or they give kids who have special problems more money. But there is no other society where economically poor children are given a heck of a lot less than everybody else. That's something that we have to keep working on and keep bringing to the attention of the American people.

**(Applause)**

Finally, on this campaign issue of vouchers, I think we have to keep talking to people about what schools in the United States are about. Schools are not just about learning reading, writing and arithmetic. Yes, they're about that, but they're also about taking peoples of all colors, all religions and all ethnic backgrounds and having them work with each other as children, get to like each other, get to respect each other, get to understand the history of this country; yes, its faults and its sins. But most Americans feel that there is always a danger, because we come from so many different places and because of the diversity, that the United States could become a Yugoslavia if we didn't keep people together.

We need to emphasize history that shows all of the different peoples of this country and what they contributed, but we need to reject those types of curriculum that pit one group against another, because the public is never going to pay for that kind of education.

**(Applause)**

We need to engage in political action. That means we need to pursue relentlessly all of those who vote for privatization or vouchers. We need to follow them. And we need to give strong support to those who are for us on this. There is a reason why we did so well in the congressional vote yesterday, because in the late 1970s when the tuition tax credit fight took place, there were an awful lot of people who voted to give money for private schools. We made a very tough decision at that time. We decided that we would not support for election any candidate who voted on that life or death issue the wrong way.

By the way, we went out there, we supported opponents and we conducted campaigns and we showed them that this is an issue that we were serious about. I think we have to do that and we have to continue doing that. That has to be a key issue for all of us, one that each person who votes has to know, because the people on the other side are extremely tenacious on this. They want their private school paid for. And they tell members of Congress, "We don't care where you are on everything else, that's the issue that we're interested in."

If we're going to go to members of Congress or legislators and say, "We're interested in 50 different issues. This is only one of our issues, so even if you destroy public education and public services, we're still going to be with you." If they're reasonable people, they say, "Well, those other people are really angry and these folks are nice so we don't have to do very much."

We've had a tough couple of years, there are plenty of horror stories to tell: Florida, California, the Northeast. In spite of that, the AFT grew by 55,000 during this period of time. If you don't think that's an achievement, at the time that Bob Porter and I started working for the organization, the whole organization had 50,000 members. So, we've grown more in this period than what the size of the organization was at the time that we started working for it.

We've grown to 800,000 members. We've made that growth in all of the sectors. We've engaged in 200 bargaining elections. We have a terrific record for winning. More than three-fourths of the elections are winners and we have added 35,000 new people to our bargaining units. There have been some exciting wins. One of them was Saint Tammany in Louisiana: An effort of 13 years of trying to press for a bargaining election in a place where there is no right to one. By the way, we organized and won during a period of time when our state federation did a great job in the campaign to defeat David Duke in that state.

**(Applause)**

As a result of our commitment at our last convention to establish a zero-dues structure, we've added 32,000 retirees and intend to improve our programs for them. Ten thousand members also were added to the Federation of Public Employees, with progress especially in Kansas and Maryland and great prospects in Kentucky. So, we are moving.

We also have vastly improved relations with the National Education Association. You've undoubtedly read newspaper headlines, which are over-optimistic, saying both unions are about to merge. That's not true. What is true is that Keith Geiger, NEA president, and I have a very good relationship, personal and organizational. We talk to each other before meetings in order to try to establish a position in common where we can. When there are some disagreements — because our organizations differ on a

few things — we do it in a way so as not to exaggerate or overemphasize those differences.

The NEA is in the process of reconsidering its long-standing policy on its relations with the AFT and the AFL-CIO. We don't know where that will come out yet, but the very fact that there was an overwhelming vote at their convention on reconsideration is very good. I would urge all of you, wherever you can, to establish positive relations. We hope that over a period of time — we don't know whether this will lead to organizational unity or not — it certainly should at the very least lead to a good deal of cooperation, common undertakings and a substantial, if not total, reduction of the conflict that we've had over the years. We don't need to waste resources fighting each other at a time when we face so many external dangers.

**(Applause)**

Now, what I see here, as I said at the beginning, is a growing hope. Hope — that's a word that Bill Clinton used quite a few times. It's a wonderful word and it wasn't just a word, because we saw it reflected in the responses of everyone at this convention.

I just hope that nobody here will take the election for granted. Our members all watch television, listen to the radio, read something, and in the course of this campaign I'm afraid there will be some new Willie Hortons. There will be charges, there will be all sorts of exposures and there will be an effort to make people forget real issues and to deal with symbolic ones. Also, don't take for granted the notion that all of our members are registered to vote. Huge numbers are not. And if you look at election day figures on the percentage of people who turn out to vote, it's small. We do better than other groups, but we still have plenty of room, plenty of room for improvement.

The decision of this election, the decisions that will be made are really, well, it's mind-shattering to think about the consequences that hang in the balance. There is the whole falling apart of the country, which is what people sense. There's the growing anger and frustration. There's the question of whether we will have the will to have a health care system in this country.

Just think of the kind of issues that hang in the balance. We're talking about family values, but when it comes to giving parents the right to take time off without pay, to take care of sick children, we have a veto. Yesterday the North American Free Trade Agreement was announced. That represents a tremendous danger in its current form.

Think of what happened in Europe. There's a European common market. The Europeans waited for 20 years or more, while workers in Germany were making five times the money that workers in Greece and Portugal were. So, workers in Germany, France and Italy were concerned that if they did have a total free-trade situation, that employers would move out of the countries that paid five times as much and move their jobs and their factories to get cheap labor in those other countries.

What the common market countries did was to give \$68 billion to Portugal and Greece to get them to improve their standard of living. Now they are able to move ahead because the standards have moved up.

The difference in salaries between Mexico and the United States is not five times, it's ten times. The impact of this can be seen in a story that appeared recently on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. It's a story that says, "Threat of cheap labor abroad complicates decisions to unionize." This is a story about a factory in Monroe, Louisiana. It's a place that makes things like T-shirts and aprons and things like that. There are almost a thousand workers there. This is a story that would make you cry and fill you with anger at the same time.

It talks about a place with mostly women workers doing the sewing and making the minimum wage of \$4.25 an hour. There is no health plan, there is no sick leave and the clothing workers' union goes in there to organize these workers. Now, if you can't organize workers who are making this amount of money — by the way, no air conditioning in the plant, horrible conditions — if you can't organize these workers, who can be organized?

This describes what the employer told the workers. He said, "Look. I know this is a minimum wage job and I know that this is like a Third World factory. But if you don't want to live under Third World conditions here, I'm going to move this factory to the Third World." He told them that.

What you have here is a description of these workers talking to each other saying, "We really need a union, but does he mean it? If we vote for the union will we be absolutely out of a job? Then what will we do?"

Well, that's what hangs in the balance. That's what hangs in the balance in this election. Not hundreds of thousands, but millions, millions of jobs that will move. This is not an argument for not increasing trade. Certainly we ought to help Mexico and other countries in Latin America the same way as the more developed European countries helped Greece and Portugal. We ought to help them raise their standard of living so that eventually they've got the same standard that we do and then we can engage in free trade with them. But not the way it's being proposed. That's one of the things that hangs in the balance.

Striker replacement. The laws in the United States are uncivilized. There's nothing else like it in the industrial world. In the private sector, if you go out on strike, the law is that they cannot fire you. But they can permanently replace you.

*(Laughter)*

Now, what that means is that if you go out on strike, they can offer jobs to others and they can write individual contracts with those scabs and say they are going to hire them permanently. That means that even if you and the union decide that you want to go back on the same terms and conditions or even worse terms or conditions, the employer now says, "I can't take you back, I now have individual contracts with these people. All we can negotiate is what your place is on the waiting list to come back if these workers ever want to leave."

George Bush has said that if there is a change in the law, he will veto it. Bill Clinton has said that he would sign such a law. Not only sign such a law, but at the time when it was before the Congress a few months ago, Bill Clinton publicly campaigned for a change in the law so if you go out on strike you have a right to go back to your job.

*(Applause)*

Then we've got the difference on education between them. You know, I saw an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* just the other day. I'm still trying to understand this and maybe somebody here can help me understand this. But what it said was that Bill Clinton, because he supports public education, proves that he is controlled by private special interests.

*(Laughter)*

George Bush, because he wants to give a thousand dollars to send some kids to some private schools, is acting in the public interest, not for special interests. So, here we are — that's one of the most amazing public relations con jobs I've ever heard. When someone supports public institutions, which have helped make this country great for over 200 years, that's a special interest, but when somebody is trying to give a thousand dollars to people who can already afford to send their kids to private schools, that somehow shows freedom and something wonderful. Well, we've got to get that message to the public.

You heard Bill Clinton's commitment on health care and on higher education. I think what we had in Bill Clinton's speech here yesterday was really an amazing expression of something that is growing within the country.

I think many of us came here, as I indicated at the beginning, with some sadness, fear, anger. But, you know, if we think back two years ago, think of what has changed. Two years ago we had delegates here from many foreign countries that were recently freed, but the Soviet Union was still

there. Who would have predicted that in these two years the Soviet Union would fall apart? Who would have predicted that in a military attempt to take over the government, people in Moscow would come out to protect an elected leader? Who would have predicted that a dictator in one country in the Middle East would decide to take on the whole world? Who would have predicted that George Bush, just as he got within a few miles of being able to take care of this dictator who was called Hitler, would chicken out?

*(Laughter with applause)*

Who would have predicted that a president of the United States, who had reached the heights of popularity of no other president in our history, would reach the current low point? Well, that ought to teach us something, and that is that what goes up can come down, and the other way around. That's true with Bill Clinton, it's true with George Bush. It means that we should not take for granted the lead that is in the polls right now. It also means that we shouldn't just sit around hoping that it will happen and that other people will do it.

You know, years ago I sat around and had sort of a bull session where people raised the question, "What makes the union successful?" Somebody said, "Well, I know what makes the union successful. Look at those," and he named a few unions. He said, "You know what makes a union successful? It's a union that can really deliver lots of stuff for its members." Then he mentioned some union that had just gotten a big salary raise and pension benefits and all sorts of other things.

Somebody else who was sitting there said, "You know, I think you're wrong." It's really good if the union can deliver all sorts of things but that's not what makes a successful union. A successful union is an organization that figures out what people's hopes are, what their dreams are, what they want. A successful union is a union that gets people to believe that these need not be mere dreams. Furthermore, it gets to show them that the difference between whether these remain dreams or whether they become reality is whether these dreams remain within the individual or whether they become shared, because individually we can't realize any of these and they remain mere dreams.

Together we can achieve all of them. A union is an organization that takes people's dreams and gets people to understand that together their dreams can be realized.

I think we can leave this convention with a new sense of hope, because our union understands these dreams and how to make them come true. Bill Clinton understands these dreams and how to make them come true. Now we have to make sure that he's in the White House so that they can indeed come true.

Thank you.