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AL SHANKER
PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
ADDRESSING THE AFT'S 18TH ANNUAL
PARAPROFESSIONAL AND SCHOOL RELATED PERSONNEL CONFERENCE
APRIL 7, 1995

Thank you very much. Well, Lorretta, you've done a great job again. We're not surprised. I've been away for two years but we have a larger group here this year than we had last year or two years ago. We have about 8,000 more PSRP members than we had then. We've won 59 collective bargaining elections and represent about 9,000 more in these units. The states that have produced the most are Illinois, New Mexico, Missouri and Minnesota. (Applause) Our biggest single victory was in Corpus Christi, Texas where we achieved voluntary recognition for 1,900 blue collar employees who have joined us. (Applause)

This is a time when those who are with us will appreciate the fact that, in hard times, if you don't have a union, you're in great danger. And if you have one you're still in great danger. (Laughter) But not quite the same. I think many of those who don't have one are going to wish they did. While we're going to face some very tough times in terms of funding and with the congress, and I'll talk about that in a minute, this also represents an opportunity. A lot of people who thought they didn't need a union are going to realize that while maybe they can do a good job in their own local district; when a lot of those cuts start coming from Washington and elsewhere, they're going to realize that if they don't have somebody working for them in the state and at the national level, they can't really do a good job for their members locally. Most of us think locally. That's where we're employed. We've got our little organization here and we meet with the superintendent. That's fine. That's all we need. Very few members realize what the connections are in terms of money, in terms of rules and regulations and things that extend elsewhere.

Unfortunately, this will be a period when those relationships become pretty obvious even to those who are a little slow in learning and we ought to capitalize on those opportunities and get out there and explain to people who are going to be hurting what's happening, why it's happening to them and how they can turn it around.

Let me start for just a few minutes with the problems that we face in Congress. Obviously there was a tremendous change in November after the elections. A change which has resulted in a totally different Congressional agenda. Instead of going to Congress and trying to figure out what improvements we can get this year, next year and the year after that, we are in a defensive position. The Congress is proposing very substantial reductions in a whole host of programs which affect us. I need to make a distinction here. The first thing Congress is talking about are recissions. Recissions deal with a budget and programs and money that were already adopted by the Congress. What you have now is the Congress coming in and saying, "Well, we know that they were passed but now we want to take some of that away. We can start balancing the budget and cutting things now. We don't have to wait until next year." What you have is a lot of recissions - that is, reductions in this year's budget, in moneys that are already flowing and which have already been approved. They are very substantial reductions and we are in the middle of that fight now. The House passed pretty large reductions. We met with a number of Senators and were able to sponsor an amendment in the Senate, which passed yesterday, which gets rid of almost all the education cuts, not all of them but almost all and that passed in the Senate. (Applause) So now there is going to be a conference between the House and Senate and we'll see how hard the Senators fight for that position. But at least we're in there with a position which preserves most of what we have for this year. If it turns out not to be good, the President can still veto it. Remember these are programs that have already been passed, this is a bill that says take away a piece of what you already have. The president can veto that. If he vetoes that, you keep what you have now. He has promised he will veto legislation which has a negative effect on education. So we

have got a big fight ahead of us, but we have a pretty good chance of coming out of this in pretty good shape for this year.

The Congress will soon start talking about next year's budget -- probably in May. That's a different story. That's a budget which has not been adopted and has not been enacted and it will come out of the House and then go to the Senate. It will probably have very big cuts compared to what's been proposed this year. What they are really proposing is that over a period of years, not many years, the budget be balanced. What they have done are the first shots -- the really easy stuff. It's very small compared to what balancing the budget will be. In other words, if we are out of balance by this much, that first cut is very, very small. So, bad as the proposals that they have made up to now are, and they are and will be harmful, we haven't seen anything yet. The real cuts and the real numbers and the real attacks on these programs are going to come the year after and the next four, five or six years. Especially starting this May and going over into next year because they will be coming up with proposals which will be multi-year plans.

There we will be in much tougher shape. Suppose the Congress passes a budget which really rips the hell out of all kinds of programs. The President can veto that and then there's no budget. If there's no agreement as to what you do until there is a budget, they could stop the government. That is they could stop checks and do all sorts -- We don't know what's going to happen. In the past, they came close to it. They got to that day and maybe did it for a half a day and they would usually adopt a resolution that says "Okay, until we work this out just keep going the way we were going before." But I doubt that this Congress will do that because to keep going as we were before means to keep giving out the money that you have now when what they want to do is to take away that money. So we will be in a very new period.

It's very hard to predict. Of course what the Congress does and what the President does will, to some extent, depend on what public opinion is out there. The Congress

may want to enact all these cuts today. But if lots of people write to them and if a lot of people make telephone calls and if when they go home on weekends and holidays, a lot of people are making a noise about this is too much or it's bad or it's hurting a lot of people or a lot of programs that are worthwhile -- they want to get reelected and most of them will listen. So, even though right now if one had to write a scenario and say what's going to happen, it would probably be a pretty sad scenario. The worst thing in the world would be to leave here and say, "Well, therefore nothing can be done about it." But something can be done about it and what can be done is to talk to lots of people in our schools, in our churches, in our neighborhoods and communities, our friends and relatives and get people to make noise about these things and say "we don't like what you are doing." If there's enough of that there will be changes. It will make a difference. First of all, it will give strength and energy to the Democrats to fight it rather than just roll over. There's the question as to whether they will fight it or just roll over and that's going to depend on where they think the voters are. The same is true with the Republicans.

If there's anything that comes out of this, and other meetings in terms of what you are going to hear, it's all going to be pretty sad stuff. It's very easy when you get a lot of sad stuff to kind of lean back and say "Well, I can't help it and there's nothing I can do about it and this is just very bad." If you do that, you are going to be helping that happen. The purpose of my talking about these things is not to create a sense of hopelessness or depression or paralysis. It's to say that we have got tremendous problems. We are working against terrible odds, but we have all worked against terrible odds before. I don't know how many of us didn't start with a very small organization and a pretty tough administration and maybe some established organization that we are fighting against. Most of us are here because we didn't roll over, we didn't get depressed and we didn't get paralyzed. We continued fighting even against odds that were practically impossible. That's true for most of this organization, it's true for you and it's true for all the groups that we represent. So, bad as this all is, the message is not to accept it, or to go back and say to people "this is what's going to

happen” but to go back and say “this is what can happen unless we do something about it.” And we can do something about it by creating a different atmosphere. Right now there’s already some change. Some members of Congress and the President have done a pretty good job of getting on television almost every day and explaining what these cuts mean and how they will affect people. If you look at the polls, every week or so there are more and more people who say “Well, we want to balance the budget, but they are going to far or that’s not the right way to do it or they are going too fast.” We have to increase the number of people who are saying that.

Part of what’s happening is something that’s very confusing to most people and that is that the Congress is taking a lot of programs, like child nutrition, and they are putting them into block grants. Block grant means that you take a whole bunch of programs and instead of saying “Here’s what this money is for and here’s what that’s for and here’s what that is for and here’s how to use it,” they say “Here’s money and you are supposed to use it for all these things.” Some of the Governors are saying “If you give us the money and don’t attach the strings or tell us exactly what to do, we are willing to take less money because we can do it better if you don’t tell us exactly how to do it.” But of course, that means that once they get the money, they don’t have to deliver the goods because there’s no longer the mandate to do what you are supposed to do with it.

There’s really several things wrong with it. One is that you don’t end up with a mandate to perform the services that need to be done. It’s all put into one package and then you let the people at the state level decide what they are going to use the money for and which programs will continue and which will suffer. The other thing is that we went through this before during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. They took a lot of programs and put them into block grants and reduced the money. You know what they did the second year? They reduced it more and the third year they reduced it more. Before long the state had all these things they were supposed to do but they had none of the money left.

If you've got a particular program that says this is for food for children, it's very hard for the Congress and the President to take that away. You are taking food away from children who would perhaps otherwise starve or at least they wouldn't get the nutrition they need. It's not too difficult to get up and fight against that. But when a governor says "You take the child nutrition money and put it in with this money and that money, and give me less and then let me handle it." It's no longer a child nutrition program, now it's just money. Now you can't go back to the Congress because Congress is going to say "Well, we put all that money in the block grant. We gave them what they wanted. We gave them the right to use it the way they wanted." Now you have got to go to 50 different states to get back what you had guaranteed in the first place. You have to fight for it all over again and the states are going to turn and say "Well, we would like to do it but they gave us less money and they are giving us less money next year and so we just don't have it. Why don't you go back to the Congress." You get into this merry go round thing where the Congress says we did for the Governors what they wanted and the Governors say they didn't really do it the way we wanted and we don't have the money. Here's something you have got now and it's protected. But once they do it this way, it disappears. It's like one of those shell game things where you have to follow where the thing is and you always lose. I always lose on those things. That's where we are on this, it's going to be very difficult to defeat. We have to work away at it but it's going to be very difficult because a lot of Governors are shortsighted. They are thinking one year looks good, they can make a few savings here and there but if they look at what happened in the 80's, when they are all finished they will have all the responsibility and they won't have any of the money. So that's another piece when people talk about block grants for child nutrition programs. Explain it because that means they don't have to use it for this anymore. that means that now they have 12 or 15 or 20 different things and all the money's now in one pocket and it's less money and it's going to be less down the road and that's why you have got to fight for this. Most people don't understand if you talk about block grants. We can educate people and there is a lot of that going on. Some of it through the media but with a lot of it we have to bring the message back to our schools and make sure that our

representatives know it. By the way, make a lot of noise with Governors. Say that we don't like it because some of them are sending the wrong message.

We also have a major piece of legislation that passed last year called Goals 2000. In a number of states we now have proposals for vouchers. Illinois is one. The Governor of Pennsylvania ran committed to it and it's moving there. There's another referendum moving in California on the issue. In Texas it's passed one House and we hope that we can stop it in the other one. We may be able to but, nevertheless, it's got a lot of steam and a lot of force to it. Legislation has been introduced in Congress by two Senators - one a Democrat and one a Republican - that would have a certain number of experimental districts with vouchers and I am sure there will be quite a few bills introduced on this.

Why do I link the vouchers with Goals 2000? I link it because our schools are not in good shape. Our students are not achieving anywhere near as well as they should. Voucher proposals and certain types of charter school proposals and various privatization schemes are all being put out there to solve the problem of poor achievement. There's one other problem I will talk about later which has to do with school violence and disruption, but those are really the two issues.

Why is there a demand for some alternative to public schools? The public schools are not doing well in student achievement and they are not doing well in terms of protecting students. Of course, I don't think for a minute that having a lot of private schools around is going to improve the achievement of students. There is absolutely no evidence for it. All the students in other countries who are doing very well are going to government schools. They have unionized staffs in those schools and some of them are school systems run by their federal government. If you think we have bureaucracies ... They used to say that in France you could go into any classroom and you could look at your watch and if you knew where they were, on what page of the curriculum, you could know exactly what the teacher was going to say one second from

now. (Laughter) It's not that way now but nevertheless, all these systems that are working are not voucher systems and they are not market systems. They are all systems that are run by governments and they are all public school systems.

If other countries can run good public schools and their students can learn, then we can have good public schools that run well and where our students learn. That is what Goals 2000 is about. It asks why is it that students in other countries are doing much better than students here and if we can see what it is that they are doing that's different from what we are doing, we ought to do what they are doing. Not exactly of course. You have different types of automobiles, different brands but they all have windshields and they all have steering wheels and they all have carburetors and motors. Those are all different, but they all have those parts. What we are talking about is not creating a photographic copy of those other countries and placing them here. We are saying that maybe we are missing a carburetor or a steering wheel or something and what are those essential parts that we don't have.

Well, we don't have standards. What is it that kids should know at 18? If you don't know the answer to that question, then what should you do in the second grade or third grade or fourth grade. What are you preparing kids for if you don't know where you are going? If you don't know where you are going, you are not going to get there. We are really the only country that does not have this picture out there of what we want these kids to know and therefore, this is what you should do when they are 17, 16 and 15. Then there is the question of how do you measure that. We are not talking about doing that nationally. We are talking about having the national government support states and provide some funding and provide some inspiration for states to do it. Forty-four states have signed on -- voluntarily. The others have not and they don't have to. That is a process that ought to continue. We have an attack on that. I testified before the House of Representatives Committee two weeks ago with some people who want to shoot the whole thing down. I think we are in pretty good shape. I think that we have convinced the members of Congress that while they want to make a few changes in the

legislation, this is the right way to go. We are also going to get some reductions in the funding on this thing, but I think we will bring that through. It's very important to support it. It's very important for the states to participate and it's very important for our members in these states to get on these committees and talk about real standards, not some of the ones that states have now. They don't say anything about whether a youngster should be able to read or write or know math, science or history. They have standards like this person should have great self esteem. Well, I hope that people do have great self esteem; but if they know math, they will have more self esteem than if they didn't. At least I hope so. (Applause). And if they don't know math, it wouldn't bother me if they had a little lower self esteem. The thing that bothers me is the kid who doesn't know anything but he has great self esteem. Then I really worry.

We are in that and I know that all of you know that and we have a lot of materials on it. It's very important to be involved in this and to support it because you can't fight something with nothing. The other side has something. They have an idea and the idea is that schools are not good. We are going to give you some other schools. We are going to give you a way to get out. If you just say "Well, they are wrong or I don't like what they are saying or I'll lose my job or whatever," that doesn't cut it with the public. You have got to say "The schools are not what they should be. They have an idea of running it that nobody has ever tried. They want to roll the dice and do something brand new with all the schools in the United States of America. That's a big gamble. That's not a very smart way of doing something with a whole national system." What we have to say is "We have got some ideas and the idea that we have is that some other countries are doing it right. If they are doing it right, we can do it right and here's how to do it. So you can fight their ideas which are not very good but you can't just fight them by saying you don't like them. You have to fight them by saying you we have a better idea. Our idea makes sense. If you were in a private business and your business had been going very well for a long period of time and all of a sudden your business is not very good and you start falling behind. The thing that any intelligent business owner would do ... he wouldn't do something that nobody had ever done

before because the whole thing would probably go down. Most new ideas don't work. He would look to see what his competitors were doing and he would go out and hire somebody or steal somebody who's got their good ideas. He would put some spies into their place to find out what they are doing.

All I am saying is that we in education ought to behave the way intelligent people behave in other areas. They don't just roll the dice on something that's never been tried before. What they do is look at successful examples in their own fields. I'm not saying they copy them. They adapt them. They may even turn them into something better but they pull in something that's like the successful models.

Now, we also have major concerns about Title I and I know that you do. Somebody is going to be before you tomorrow who knows many more of the specifics on this because she sat there as they were doing the regulations - and that is Bella Rosenberg. I know she's here on a little different topic. There wouldn't be anything wrong if you raise this issue. Essentially there has been a change. By and large it's a good change, but it's one that we have got to know about so we can work with it. If we think that nothing's changed, we are going to get hit over the head in a couple of years. The change is this. Up to now, Title One has said this money is for the kids in poverty. Therefore, if you have got a class and there are kids who are not in poverty and some kids who are in poverty, we don't want you to use that money for the whole class because then you are going to be diluting that money and giving it to some kids who shouldn't be getting it. The result is that most schools had pull-out programs. You took the kids who were in poverty and you pulled them out and you did something special for them. That's good, but meanwhile they were missing what everybody else got. So you had a plus and a minus at the same time. People said that's not very smart because you are giving something but you are taking something away at the same time. Our organization and others said "In schools where there's a high percentage of youngsters in poverty, why don't you let them use the money for schoolwide projects because they'd have more flexibility and they could do a better job." So this year the Congress

said "Okay, we are going to let you do it, but since we are not telling you how to do it, we are going to hold you responsible for the outcomes. You now have the flexibility of using the money but if the kids don't improve, we are going to punish you." So that's in the law. It's going to take a little time because they have to develop the assessments they are going to use. They don't have them set and they are developing those. Pretty soon, maybe 3, 4 or 5 years down the road, if progress is not made, there's a listing of all sorts of things they can do. For instance, they might just come in and give you help or give training. But ultimately they could reconstitute the school. That is they could empty the whole school out of students and adults and rebuild the school with a small group of students and a small group of adults. It is already being proposed in a number of places. Baltimore is facing it. San Francisco has already had it under court order. New York actually has been doing it for a number of years under an agreement between the union and the Board of Education.

And there are other punishments there. By the way, the original proposals were a lot worse. They could have fired everybody. We changed those pretty significantly. But at any rate, we have a new Title I to work with. There are going to be committees of representatives of practitioners and we urge you to look at those and get somebody on there so that you know what's going on and can share the ideas and what's happening with your colleagues. Don't let somebody else do it because then you will get the news after it's too late. We are going to be getting materials out on this. We are going to be doing workshops. We are going to have printed things. We have got a little time yet, but all this is in the works. Part of what the AFT will be doing for our members throughout the country on this is to acquaint them with what is coming and how to deal with it.

There are some very good aspects of this. If 4 or 5 years from now the whole school is subject to some punishment because it doesn't succeed; I hope people will come out of their self-contained classrooms. I hope that they will sit with you and with each other and say "What are we going to do to change things. What are we going to do to

improve things.” So while it is threatening and not particularly pleasant, I think it has the positive aspect that it forces people to talk to each other and to think about the changes that they need to make and pulls them out of their own “I am doing my stuff and I don’t care what you are doing” attitude. They can no longer think that way because it’s now a group effort.

Fortunately, we had some success with the Congress. We didn’t get a balanced budget amendment at least not yet. We were part of that campaign. It went down by one vote in the Senate and I think we can keep it that way.

Let me move on to the second big issue that creates this demand for “Hey, give me some vouchers so that I can get my kid out of the school.” As a matter of fact, the one I am going to talk about now is really the first, not the second, demand because most parents who want to pull their kids out of public schools to send them to private schools are not doing that because they think their kid’s going to get more algebra or more history. They may or may not, depending on the school they are coming from and the school they are going to. But one thing is pretty sure and that is that the school they are going to will probably be safer because public schools have been absolutely terrible and derelict in their duties in terms of tolerating violence and disruption. Tomorrow you are going to get a much more extensive report on the Public Agenda Foundation which conducted a very interesting survey of parents across the country. Not only polls but also focus groups. They also over-sampled African American Parents and Born Again Christian Parents to see how everybody in the country feels about it. What all these groups said is that problem number one is violence and disruption. Not only violence. They were certainly concerned with kids with drugs and kids who come in with guns and knives and then are allowed right back in the school five days later after a very short suspension. But they are just as concerned with the kid who didn’t have a gun or knife or drugs but who yelled and screamed and threw things and created so much disruption that the other kids couldn’t learn anything. What this poll basically said is that we don’t believe any of this stuff about school

improvement or school restructuring or school reform or new curriculum or technology or anything else because you can put all that in there, but if you tolerate one or two kids who are going to cause all that disruption, none of this other stuff makes any difference. (Applause) It was very interesting because over 80% of the parents said we want these kids out of school so the other kids can learn. The highest percentage was African American parents because more of that is tolerated in schools which have large numbers of African American youngsters.

We had a conference in February. I think it was an excellent conference. We looked at ideas that were being tried out in a number of different school districts. We are about to conduct a national campaign on the notion of zero tolerance -- that the most important thing that a school has to take care of is to make sure that those kids who behave themselves and want to learn have a safe and learning environment.

(Applause) Now, sure we don't want to just put them out on the street. If a kid has a gun I don't know if it's any better that he has it out on the street or in a business or at home or on a bus. We should do something for those youngsters.

You know I had an experience just before I attended that conference on violence in February. I visited a private school here in Washington. It was a school for kids who had very severe problems - the public schools were paying for a lot of them to be there because they have severe disabilities and the public schools can't handle them. The principal of the school is also a professor at a local university and she serves as an advisor to a lot of the public schools and goes around looking at what some of their problems are. She told me of something she had encountered just a few days before. She went into this public school and here's this kid who, every 40 to 60 minutes whoever is next to him, whether it's an adult or a child, he beats them up. The other thing is he's a fire bug. He's started fires at home, in the community and in school. The people in the school live in a state of terror that something is going to happen. But because he is a disabled child, the procedure to change his assignment is before the courts and it might take 1 and 1/2 years with court procedures to move that kid to some

place where he's not a danger to other youngsters. There is no way to explain to parents why this is the case. There is no rationale for it. Suppose that I had 5 kids of my own and suppose one of them was that kid -- the fire bug who beat up others. Would I keep that youngster with my other four kids? I would love that youngster. I would spend lots of money on doctors. I would look for some special schools that might be able to help. I would do all sorts of things for that youngster. But at the same time, I would make sure that youngster didn't kill my other kids or hurt them and I would know that he could do it. All we are asking schools to do is to behave in the same way that a caring, intelligent parent would behave with respect to his or her own children. Not to be nasty. Not to be vindictive. Just to be smart. That is the way a parent would behave with his or her own kids. I know that the polls show that the overwhelming majority of parents are with us.

Now why do we have this problem? We have this problem because in the first place you have administrators in a school. I remember what happened when I reported the first incident when I was a teacher. The principal said, "Well if you were motivating your students, that wouldn't happen." (Laughter) What's he saying to me? He's saying you shut your mouth or I'm going to get you. He's saying we want to cover this up. We don't want anybody to know about this stuff and if you say anything about it, you're the one who is going to be in trouble not the kid. I got the message right away and so do other teachers. That's the first problem you have. I think that what we are going to do is press for legislation which will have penalties against any school officer who fails to report incidents like this. They ought to be required to do it.

Then you have the kid going to court and there's a child advocate lawyer there. I saw this piece in the New York Times a couple of weeks ago. It said New York School Chancellor Ramon Cortinez proposed that kids who come to school with guns will be suspended for a year and there would be special schools for them. It said parents liked it, students liked it, teachers liked it. Then it said, "But the president of child advocates said 'So a five year old comes to school with a gun - what's the big deal. Don't we have

more important problems to deal with.” That person is a child advocate!? Somebody who wants a 5 year old to be able to carry guns around. That person is viewed as a child advocate?! This is insane. That person is an advocate of one child who can potentially destroy lots of other children. The child advocates are the ones who want to separate that child so that other children are safe. We better start getting our language straight because if we don’t talk straight, we won’t think straight. (Applause) We are going to develop a campaign where teachers and PSRPs organize parents and people in the community - business people - on this issue.

By the time the kid goes to court, he looks pretty sad and says he’s sorry and the child advocate is there and says look at this poor child. Then, there’s the board’s lawyer who is usually some pompous character. He isn’t talking about the other children. He’s not talking about who might get killed or what’s happening to their education. He’s usually saying “Well, according to Section so and so of the education law, the Board of Education has the right to do so and so.” If you are the judge and you see this poor kid and you see this lawyer quoting law - you sympathize with the kid. What you need in that court are parents of some of the other kids. What you need are some of the other kids. You need the teacher. You need a whole bunch of people in front of the judge saying it’s not this nice little kid versus this lawyer. It’s this kid against all these other kids that this kid is potentially destroying. He’s certainly destroying their education. We have to put the right picture in front of the judge so he makes the right decision. Up to now, that hasn’t happened.

I think we can go a step further. One of the reasons that the schools don’t pursue these cases is that they do go to court and usually the principal has to be there. The first day you sit there all day and the judge says, “We couldn’t reach it today so we’ll set another date.” Maybe the second day he does the same thing. If you are the principal of a school and you have 1,000 kids and maybe you have 25 kids like this. That’s 25 kids multiplied times 3 days - that’s 75 days you are sitting in court. There’s only 180 days in the school year. Who’s running the shop? If I were the principal I

would resent it if I had to spend half of my time sitting in court while somebody else is running the school that I'm ultimately responsible for. First, it's expensive. It's time consuming. The other thing is when you are all finished, the judge sends the kid right back anyway so what's the point of wasting your time and all that money.

We'd like to experiment with a new idea. We have a system in labor relations. You have a contract and the contract has an arbitration clause. If we say the contract is violated we go to an arbitrator and the arbitrator renders a judgment. Basically, you can't go to court with it. If you try to go to court, the courts say you already went to the arbitrator - that's it. It's cheaper and it's faster and it doesn't take a year and a half. Why can't we develop a due process procedure within the school system? I think kids should have their day in court. Sometimes adults make mistakes. The teacher is not always right. Some are inadequate. Some principals are. I think if we are thinking of something as serious as suspending or removing a kid, we ought to hear the kid's story. Sometimes the kid is right, but we don't have to wait a year and a half. We don't have to have these expensive lawyers and you don't have to have people sitting in court. We could have retired judges or maybe people trained as educational arbitrators. We can set up our own system of due process which I would hope the courts would respect. If somebody went to the courts, they would say, "Unless you can show me that something was really way out of whack here, we respect the fact that you had your day in that other court." If we do that we could have a system that would be much more effective. Look for materials, ideas, stuff you need to take to parents, community groups and churches. This is going to be a major campaign and it's an extremely important one because even if we get the curriculum right, and the goals rights and the assessments right; if people feel that their kid's not safe and there's a firebug in their school, they are going to want vouchers. ~~I'd want a voucher too. So would you!~~ Unless we can take care of this issue of safety and disorder in the schools ... It's kind of ridiculous - just think of it. You have vouchers and you will end up with most of the kids who feel threatened going over to private school you will have 97% of kids going to private school. We'll end up with the 3% who are emotionally disturbed

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and violent. Well it's a lot easier to get rid of the 3% and keep the 97%. (Applause)
Matter of fact, I am willing to give vouchers to the 3% to private schools right now!

Let me touch on privatization. We have, as you know, EAI still in Baltimore although there are more and more people in Baltimore who see what they have done. Test scores have gone down and they have remained down. They have played games by issuing phony reports and phony statistics and they keep saying it was clerical error, or somebody else did it or "the devil made me do it" or something else. Never saw a bigger bunch of cheats and liars and it's getting more and more obvious to people. It doesn't mean that we won't have to suffer with them for a while longer but at least it's pretty clear now.

On the other hand, they have been hired to run the whole Hartford school system. The Hartford and the Baltimore situations with EAI are quite different. In Baltimore they promised they would have educational results in one year. They did get educational results (motion down with hand). It may be just as difficult to get kids to go down that fast as it is to get them to go up that fast. If we study what they have done, we may learn a lot about education because nobody has every managed to get kids to go down that much that fast before -- and for that much money. (Laughter)

However, in Hartford, they didn't promise to do anything educational at all. I was up there and I debated with John Golle and he said, "We are not going to do anything that's educational. That's up to the principals and the teachers and the superintendent." I said, "Well, how are you going to improve education if the same people who ran the system last year are going to do it this year? If they knew how to do it better they would have done it better last year!" He said, "We are here to get efficiency in the school system." They are there to save money and they got a deal where whatever they save, the board gets some and the city gets some and they get half. Well, if you get half the money you save, pretty soon larger class size looks good. Getting rid of paraprofessionals looks good. Lower salaries looks good. This has got

nothing to do with education. They don't promise to do anything educational. They just said we are going to save you money. We all know how to save money. You just spend less on all sorts of things and if you spend less on all sorts of things, they get half the money saved. So that's their whole motivation. That's it - not educational ideas.

They are not the only ones. Edison is about to start and there's an outfit called Alternative Public Schools fooling around outside of Pittsburgh and some other places. Sylvan Learning Centers are out there. So we will not see the end of this for awhile. Unfortunately, school boards and school systems are not doing this for very intelligent reasons. Let me say up front that if there were some company out there that had gone to two or three districts and had managed some schools and the kids were reading and they were writing and doing math, I'd have a very hard job standing in front of you and saying we should be against them going into any other place. I'd have a very hard time. But these companies haven't produced anything like that. They are not being hired because they can do anything. They are being hired because, if a superintendent brings them in, that superintendent gets a number of things. First, he gets terrific public relations in the newspapers. They say "Look at that superintendent. That superintendent is willing to do something totally new." Now they don't say even if it's stupid or even if it's untested. (Laughter) "It's totally new. Isn't that wonderful this courageous, wonderful person is willing to do something totally new." The fact that something is new doesn't mean it's smart. The next thing is that the superintendent gets invited to talk all over the country at very substantial fees about the great experiment that he's conducted. All of a sudden that person becomes a national figure. It's terrific for the superintendent. He looks good in the papers. He makes a lot of extra money. He becomes a national figure. And if he loses out in one district, he goes to another district. Who knows what else because there are no conflict of interest laws that seem to apply. You know governments have contracts with lots of private outfits and they know how to do it in many cases. They say we don't want a scandal. We want to protect ourselves as public officials and therefore there are certain

conditions that go with a contract. These conditions aren't here. These are all done in the interest of that company.

Once again, you can't fight something with nothing and we will not see the end of these folks until we look at the big thing that made EAI popular in Baltimore with the parents in those schools. They became popular because they painted the building. They took care of some of the graffiti and parents said "Look they have respect for us. The school system doesn't because they had us coming into schools that were filthy and the paint was peeling and these people respect us." Did it cost any less for that company to paint the school than it would have cost the Board of Education? No, It cost more. But everything that we fail to do, everything we do that's not popular, everything we do that sends a message to people like the kind of building they have to walk into or the kind of office they have to sit in ... We have got to get interested in those things and we have to understand that. There's no point in arguing with the parents. They feel something here. That's important to them. We have to push our school boards and we have got to make sure that our union is on top of these issues. How many of us would have thought about some private company that doesn't know a damn thing about education or about kids and all they want to do is make a buck; that they could come in and win over all the parents because they paint the schools. I never thought of that before. I think these people are pretty smart in their own way. But that's something we need to put on our agenda.

Now, I would like to finally just mention our merger talks with the NEA. As you know, we talked for two years. The NEA, two years ago, adopted a resolution that they would ask us to sit down and talk . We did. Then the next year they said there ought to be a time limit on this so we'll give you one more year. They thought they could wrap it up this year. It didn't turn out to be so. By the way, you know one of the issues was the issue of what rights PSRPs would have within the new organization. That was one of the unresolved issues. I am sure you all know that Lorretta is on our negotiating

committee so nobody here has to worry about what's going to happen in the negotiations. (Applause)

I would like to say the idea of having one strong union with over 3 million members, and of not wasting our money fighting each other when we have all these other problems, is a very appealing notion. It's one that I have had for a very, very long time. I am not, however, in favor of it at any price. We have very different views about issues like violence and discipline, like standards and assessments and making sure that the schools really deliver education. We have very different views on what the rights of all members ought to be within an organization. Those won't be easy to resolve. I hope that they can be. If they are, we'll have one organization; and if the can't, we won't.

I think that no matter what happens though, we will have better relationships. The proposal that's likely to come out of the NEA to continue negotiations, I think, is a good one. Some of the members of our own Executive Council who were somewhat skeptical about merger and merger talks are now much more enthusiastic because of the new proposal. The NEA is going to its representative assembly this summer to ask permission to continue negotiations and not to have any timeline on it so that there's enough time to work out these issues. They are going to ask that the preconditions they had come in with before be removed so that they are free to negotiate. They are going to propose that we don't start where we left off in the negotiations because in a lot of cases, we were compromising, and so were they, on things that we really didn't believe in. They are proposing that we start from scratch and try to build a better organization than either of the two that now exists. And finally, that during the negotiations, which might take a considerable period of time, we would try to do something which is very important. That is, to have our members and their members at the local, state and national level meet with each other, do things jointly, have legislative campaigns, hold conferences, deal with educational issues and do all sorts of things together. You know you can merge two organizations and instead of having the fights between two organizations you can have just as mean fights inside the

organization. You can be more paralyzed by having the fights inside than by having the two and having it outside. So, the fact that you put together one organization doesn't necessarily mean there's unity or any coherence or any direction. The proposal that we take enough time, that we work together to try to develop understandings so that we know where they are and they know where we are and we have a chance to influence them and convince them that on some things they ought to do things more the way we do, and the other way around because it will work both ways -- I think that's a very healthy proposal and our Executive Council is very enthusiastic about it. Much more than it was about what was occurring over the last couple of years. Of course, that means that it is unlikely that something is going to happen in three months, or five months or one year. But better to do it right than to do it wrong and quickly.

I want to thank you all for your loyalty and for your support and for many of your personal expressions when I was having a very rough time last year. As you see, I got my energy back and my fat. (Laughter and Applause) I want all of you to know what you already know. That is that in Lorretta Johnson you have a great leader of your group - she's not just great - she's there for you all the time. She's a real fighter and a thinker and participant in every aspect of education and politics of the organization. (Applause) I wish you well and I am sure you are going to have another great conference.