

**Great Lakes Regional Conference  
February 2, 1996**

**Tape 1, Side 1**

Tape begins at 000; AS speech begins at 552

Talks about 4 things: merger, AFL-CIO shoot-out, Lessons for Life, November elections

*"Lessons for Life"* segment (4710)

The National Gallup Poll recently had 67% strongly opposed to vouchers, so why are politicians moving for it? They're moving for it because there is, first of all, a strong minority who favor vouchers, especially those who are already spending money to send their kids to private school now and would like to be re-imbursed for it. But there are fewer and fewer people who are willing to come forward and defend public schools.

It reminds me of a small conference Keith Geiger and I had in Montana. There was a member of the press who had come to cover the meeting. We were discussing a lot of these educational problems, and at the end he got up and said, "My family and I have always been very, very strongly supportive of public education because our family came over umpteen years ago as immigrants and all the opportunities we've had... We weren't teachers or principals, but did all these other things because public education was there. But now, I'll tell you... Last night I was at the dinner table with my father and my father say to me, 'If you need help sending your kids to public school, I'll help you out'--and I hadn't even raised this with my father. But what my father said started me thinking on what I should do." He said this as a friendly critic, "Look there are a lot of people out there like me who've got this very strong loyalty and have had it, but they don't want to sacrifice their own kids, so even though we don't like the idea of private schools, we don't like the idea of vouchers, we love the idea of public schools and what it means in a democratic society to have all types of kids going to school together, what it does for the fabric of the country when that works; nevertheless, we are getting close to the point where we do not believe that the public schools are going to shape up."

So, what do you do about this? What we did was looked at a whole bunch of polls, very important were these Public Agenda polls, but also the last Gallup Poll. We also have a big fat poll done in New York, sponsored by the Lerman (spelling?) Foundation. They all say the same thing: The public says, "First of all, if you can't take care of disruption in the classroom--kids who are yelling, screaming, punching, using obscenities, doing all sorts of things to focus the attention of the class away from learning and onto some form of disruption--if you can't handle that, we don't give a damn about your textbooks, your teachers, your curriculum. Nothing is going to work if you allow that to happen. If you don't know how to figure that out, if you don't know how to take a kid who does this consistently--now mind you, I'm not saying a kid who does this once, only with one teacher, only when there's some problem at home. We're talking about youngsters who do

it regularly with most of their teachers over an extended period of time--if you don't know how to handle that, we give up." That's the first thing.

The second thing has to do with learning standards. These were done not only in polls but in focus groups. They say, "You know what, my kid comes home. He writes a composition. I sit with him and say, 'You should really re-do this. You have five words there that are misspelled.' And the kid looks at me and says, 'What's bugging you, Dad? The teacher says spelling doesn't count.'" Or, there's a high school youngster and there's some addition problem to do because and the youngster says, "I know how to do that, but I don't have my calculator with me." Essentially, the public says, "Look, we're putting a lot of money into schools. Kids are going all the time. We don't understand why you can't teach them to read, to write and to make spelling count, and to teach them to do arithmetic well enough... We don't want you only to do that, but the reason it's so important to get that done and get it done early is you can't do anything else unless you can do these things. You cannot read about history or about geography or about science or you can't do any of these things if you cannot read. It's not that we want you to return to the basics and stay only with the basics. These are basic to everything else, and if you don't do this and the whole thing fails."

Suppose you were a politician and you had a whole bunch of polls like that and they all told you the same thing. Well, if the public were wrong, then it would be our job to go out there and try to educate them, say, "Look, you don't understand. Here's why we're doing this," and try to change their minds. But does anybody here think that the public is wrong? Well, teachers don't. We have, as you know, polled our members and, by the way, the NEA has polled its members and they polled the same way: problem number one is disruption, number two...--I mean it's exactly, almost identical to the way... So you've got the teachers of the country feeling that way; the parents, the citizens of the country, feel that way; business people feel that way, but boards of education aren't doing anything about it.

You go to the board of ed or you go to the superintendent or principal and say, "There's this kid. My son comes home every day and says he can't learn anything because..." What does the principal say? "Well, lady, look, that's an exaggeration. It's not really happening." Or, "We can't really do anything about it. We have to educate ALL of the children. That child who's disruptive needs to be there MORE than your child does." Or, "We'd like to do that, but if we do that, the civil liberties union will come and take us to court and there's a law against removing students." Or whatever: they'll give them a run-around. And they'll do the same on standards. They'll say, "All of our kids are learning how to read. Why aren't they learning this in the third grade? Well, all children develop at different rates. Don't worry; your kid will eventually read (or write, or do something else)."

So, we know that 85-90% of the people are with us. Who's not with us? A lot of principals aren't, a lot of superintendents aren't, a lot of school boards aren't, and a lot of education professors aren't, and some teachers aren't because they've bought into this,

but the overwhelming majority of teachers are. Some parents aren't--the ones who send their kids to ultra-progressive schools, but that's a very, very small number.

If we've got this, we have in our hands something like what Newt Gingrich had in his hands a year ago. We've got polls showing the overwhelming majority want a balanced budget. What did he do with it? Do you remember that one day when Newt Gingrich stood in front of the Capitol with all the guys who were running as Republicans, and said, "All of us who are running pledge to support the Contract." The Democrats jumped with joy: "These jerky Republicans are creating a national issue out of the Contract instead of allowing each candidate to run individually on the basis of his own stuff! They have just committed suicide; no one has ever done a stupid thing like that." And they laughed--go back and look at the newspapers when that came out. Everyone from the President on down commented on how stupid an act this was. Well, not only did it get the Republicans elected but you it's hard to find a Democrat who doesn't talk like a Republican now: that's how much they scared the hell out of everybody. It's not just Evan Bayh. I don't want to excuse him, but he isn't the only one.

Look. We've analyzed the records of people in Congress. There were Republicans who used to vote with us 50% of the time and now they're down to 2%. If you look at the records of Republicans and Democrats--if you look at the AFL-CIO voting records, what you see is a shift on the part of almost everybody--except for the Ted Kennedys and people like that. A huge shift. Anybody willing to talk about taxes? A new program? Well, that's what was done by basically organizing a majority around unfortunately a bunch of lousy issues, bad issues.

Well, why can't we organize around these good issues? This campaign is about saving public education in America. This campaign is not voluntary. Now, of course, I can't go to you to your local or state and force you to engage in the campaign movement. I can't do that. But I can tell you that if you don't act on this, it's really the equivalent of having legislation abolishing collective bargaining...and you're not doing anything about it. If you don't like this campaign, then come up with a better answer to getting the public back behind public schools and getting them to see teachers and their unions as a positive force.

Now, yes, we want you to endorse it, and we want your executive board to endorse it, and we want you to go to some church people and get them to endorse it, go to some business people, go to some local politicians. By the way, we want Republicans to sign onto this as well as Democrats. But we don't just want a bunch of names and a bunch of endorsements. The point of this campaign is to do with educational issues exactly what Newt Gingrich did with certain economic and social issues; that is, where you have a superintendent and a board of ed that say, "No, we are not going to have alternative facilities. We're going to keep allowing this disruption," that we get some parents and business people and we go out and get a slate of candidates and we go out and knock the hell out of that board, and run on these issues--that we are not going to destroy the education of 25 kids in the class because they don't have the sense to remove one.

It's a winner. What we want to do is get enough boards defeated and enough stories around the country as to what's happened to them that we will do something like what Gingrich did--that all the boards and superintendents of the future are going to talk like teachers and like parents. They are going to have some common sense in the way they do these things, instead of being moved by an ideology that doesn't work.

That's what this is about. It's a political campaign, and an extremely important one. If we do this and succeed in doing this, I think we will have enough points with the public as being people who've got common sense, who agree with their positions, who are turning the public schools...

Let me go just one...The discipline standards--we have sent out materials. We know that you are very busy. That's why these boxes of stuff--you don't have to rewrite it (you can if you want to). We've tried to say, "These people are not lazy. Their time is already full with very important things. How can we package these things so we don't put a huge additional burden on them?" We think we've done that, and we're going to continue.

So that's what the campaign is about. And it's getting some very very good support. For example, Philadelphia...[AS goes on to with list of what cities, states have supported L4L and how--repetitious and monotonous]

The school boards are behaving this way because parents give up, we all give up. We say, "We've been talking about disruptive kids." It was the first thing I talked about at a union meeting in 1952, so it's not a new issue, and I'm sure the people there before me did too. So we've gotten to the point where we now accept it: nobody's ever going to do anything about this because it's always been like that. What happens, of course, is that you get a few people who go in and make noise with the superintendent and the board and he's afraid of them because the rest of us are quiet. But if we put together the kind of majority that all these polls show is there, this is an easy one. It really is an easy one because we don't have to convince ...You know, when you start out with 85% of the people on your side and even being pretty damn angry that the other side isn't doing anything about it, it's sitting there for us to do. We even have all the national groups in education sitting and thinking of doing something like it. Obviously, they all want to do their own thing, but it may end up having even more support.

**Tape 1, Side 2 (counter at 000)**

## **Q&A**

This campaign should take you to wherever the problem is. It might be a state board law. It might be your own board of education. It might be a piece of state legislation, but it might be Congressional stuff, and we are working on it and working very hard. We have a coalition. The principals' organizations are with us, and we have a very good shot at changing the law [IDEA] so that with respect to violence and disruption, disabled youngsters will be treated the same as any other youngsters: no double standards.

**Tape 2, Side 1** (counter at 000)

(Q&A continues to 607, with no L4L related discussion)

**Tape 2, Side 2**      BLANK