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PSRP
ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT SHANKER

and

INTERVIEWS

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1 LORRETTA JOHNSON: I would just like to add
2 a very personal note to the introduction. When Al retired
3 as the president of the UFT he did an article and nationwide
4 newsmen what was his greatest accomplishment as president
5 and it was us that he spoke about, the paraprofessional
6 school-related personnel.

7 (Applause)

8 PRESIDENT SHANKER: Thank you very much,
9 Lorretta. The incident that Lorretta referred to which I
10 referred to at the time that I retired from the UFT turned out
11 to be one of the best moments, not only in my career, but
12 in the history of the organization. For a while it was
13 one of the saddest moments in the history of the organization
14 and also in terms of my own career and I can remember it very
15 well.

16 I said that the incident which Lorretta
17 referred and which I will refer to for a few minutes is one
18 that was both a high and a low point in my own career and that
19 of the organization. Back in 1969, the United Federation of
20 Teachers was in a collective bargaining campaign to organize
21 the paraprofessionals in New York City. After a very bitter
22 and dirty campaign we managed to win the 10,000 para-
professionals with a very narrow vote. I don't remember

1 whether the margin was 30 votes or 50 in a unit of 10,000.
2 It was very, very close. We then sat down to negotiate with
3 the Board of Education, and the Board of Education had a really
4 terrific, nifty idea as to the argument that they felt they
5 should use in order to keep paraprofessionals' salaries and
6 benefits low.

7 The Board of Education used the following
8 argument. They said that the best thing about
9 paraprofessionals is that they are people living in the
10 community, and it is because they live in the community that
11 they bring something special to the school. And if we give
12 paraprofessionals a salary increase, they will move to
13 another community (laughter) and they will no longer benefit
14 us. That was their argument, their argument for perpetual
15 poverty.

16 (Laughter)

17 PRESIDENT SHANKER: So after many months of
18 negotiating, the paras who had been very, very patient met
19 and voted to strike. Now at that time many of the teachers
20 in the school system didn't want paras in the union. Many
21 of them didn't even want paras in their classrooms. They
22 felt that they had the privacy of their own rooms and if any-
thing ever went wrong, nobody would ever know about it,

1 or they hoped that no one would. Here is somebody they
2 didn't know, a parent from the community, and they didn't
3 know if something went wrong in the classroom, that parent
4 would go out and report it to other parents. In other words
5 they didn't know whether they might not get into deep
6 trouble because there were paras in the classroom, so there
7 was hostility and fear, and a good deal of anxiety.

8 So when the paras started to strike, many
9 teachers sent me letters and I started getting phone calls
10 and they said "We are not going to stay out just because
11 they are on strike. So we faced the problem that we could
12 have two groups of members in the same union, in the same
13 local with one group undermining the solidarity of the
14 other group. Now I went around to a lot schools, and I
15 changed some teachers' minds and I didn't change other
16 people's minds. People were very angry. The teachers had
17 been on strike the previous two years and the paras who were
18 not yet organized, some of them did cross picket lines and
19 some didn't because they were not in the union and they
20 also had no security. Some of them were afraid that they
21 would be fired if they stayed out. About that time, something
22 happened that was terrible, but it turned off to be very
good. I went off to jail (laughter) for the strike of the

1 previous year. And just a few years before that, I remembered
2 that Dr. King sent a letter from Birmingham jail. Mine was
3 nowhere near Dr. King's letter, which is a great historic
4 letter for all history, but I did write a letter from jail
5 for all members in which I said that if the teachers
6 didn't respect the picket lines of their colleagues in
7 schools that there was no future for the union in New York
8 City because instead of pararas and teachers being united and
9 fighting for better ocnditions, against the Board of Education,
10 that everytime one group was out, the other gorup would
11 deliberately go in and they would have no power at all in any
12 set of negotiations, and if you read the letter carefully--I
13 didn't want it put out as a direct threat because I don't
14 like threats and people don't respond very well to them--but
15 if you read it very carefully, I pretty much said that no
16 union leader in his right mind would want to hang around and
17 stay with the union where the whole business was one group of
18 members fighting another grup of members. I felt that way
19 very strongly. I felt that I would leave just because it
20 would be hopeless, and so we had a big membership meeting
21 and teachers came down and they voted. They came down and
22 they voted and they were very angry. They kind of looked

1 at me and said," Well, we are voting the way you want us to,
2 but we don't believe in it."

3 At the same time they were expressing anger,
4 but they voted and we got that vote to support the para-
5 professionals, and once that happened, there didn't have
6 to be a strike because the Board of Education knew that
7 the school going to be shut tight and the paraprofession-
8 als got a good contract.

9 Now fortunately as time went by, the teachers--
10 I think there is no question--almost unanimously realized
11 that they were wise in making that decision, and both paras
12 and teachers have realized over the years how important it
13 was for them to be together. But it doesn't happen easily
14 and it doesn't happen automatically.

15 And I could tell from what you said in your
16 earlier remarks that the same kind of experiences of rejection
17 and a certain amount of hostility, and non-acceptance occurs
18 almost everywhere at the beginning, and usually it takes some
19 ~~rough~~ tough times where paras, teachers, and school-related personnel,
20 everybody, works together and they see by working together in-
21 stead of separately or against each other that they are able
22 to be so much more successful. It is so obvious a lesson,

1 but it takes a long time for people to learn. Often, they
2 have to re-learn it. That was the incident that Lorretta re-
3 ferred to and when I retired from the presidency in New York
4 City a year ago at New Years, a lot of reporters were around
5 asking me to reminisce and asking me to pick out one thing
6 in all the years that I had been the leader of the local
7 that I was most proud. It was the organization of the para-
8 professional and the ability to get teachers and para-
9 professionals to work together in behalf of each other. I
10 have not changed that view one bit (Applause). That is
11 precisely what we have to ~~talk~~ **all across** the country.

12 (Applause)

13 Sometimes it works in reverse. Many of you
14 may not know that in Baltimore for a long time we had the
15 paraprofessionals, but we had lost the teachers, and it was
16 really the work ~~that~~ Lorretta and the paraprofessionals did
17 as a base to bring the teachers back into the AFT, so it is
18 not always the teachers who are there first with a strong
19 union. It works the other way as well. We hope to do
20 that across the country.

21 All of you have been here before, just by
22 looking around and seeing the number of people who are here,

1 and also by looking at what you are doing back home, we
2 know that we now have over 100,000 paras and school-
3 related personnel in the American Federation of Teachers.
4 It's an all-time high.

5 We have won a large number of elections this
6 year, thirteen of them with almost 4000 new paraprofessionals
7 and school-related personnel in that group. We were able
8 to win against challenges by the NEA in Detroit and St.
9 Louis and also in Portland.

10 We also have several locals Cincinnati
11 secretaries and San Francisco Paraprofessionals who have
12 done an extraordinarily good job in something we often forget.
13 We organize new locals and new members. That is great, but
14 sometimes in many of our locals we have onky got half of
15 the people who should be in the union are in the union,
16 and the other half is just waiting for us to do the work for
17 them. They are not even contributing. You know, the free-
18 riders who say: Maybe I will join if you raise my salary to
19 \$2 million dollars (Laughter), some reasonable request that
20 you haven't been able to do.

21 We have found that after you win an election
22 and you negotiate a contract, a contract or two or three, that

1 you have to keep asking people over and over again. You
2 have to keep going back to them. You have to keep telling
3 them what you did yesterday and the day before and what you
4 are going to do tomorrow. If you keep after them, they do
5 sighn up, but they don't just come automatically.

6 They don't understand the things that we under-
7 stand in this room, how important increased strength is.
8 Those two locals have done an increasingly good job of
9 organizing people who should have been ~~in~~ long ago,
10 weren't.

11 We have school-related and paraprofessional
12 committees now in 15 states, and 13 of those states have
13 special conferences. It is important to know that large
14 numbers are teachers and new groups start coming in, and at
15 first those groups are small numbers, it is hard to have
16 special activities because the number of people in those
17 groups is kind of small, you know. The first conference,
18 you could hold in a telephone booth (laughter) so you don't
19 bother, but now the fact that so many states are holding
20 these conferences is an indication of the large numbers who
21 have come in and the recognition on the part of states that
22 this group is growing and very significant in size.

1 So we have classified personnel in community
2 colleges. We have bus drivers, food service employees,
3 secretaries. We have got materials being developed on
4 everything from lunch programs to school bus safety,
5 and this is obviously with a base of 100,000 and growing
6 very rapidly.

7 You will see more and more in the way of con-
8 ferences, periodicals and services because now there is a
9 membership base to support that and you are going to see
10 great improvements in that, and Lorretta mentioned those
11 too. I can think of nothing more important than
12 creating certification especially in some of our fields.
13 I know that there are many groups represented her, and for
14 certain issues, I will move to other groups.

15 Paraprofessionals in many districts were for
16 years considered sort of an experiemnt. We don't know
17 if we want to keep you. You are here on these special funds
18 that we got. We got them from model cities, the career
19 program or in those days Title I, so paraprofessionals were
20 sort of kept on a string. We don't know if we want to keep
21 you and this is sort of a temporary thing.
22

1 Well, it has been temporary now for about 20
2 years, and it is like some of the buildings that they built
3 in Washington during the war and 30 years later, they still
4 call them temporary buildings. I don't know if they expect
5 a bicentennial and finally they will turn around after 200
6 years and finally say, now we think we will keep you.

7 But it is pretty clear now that paraprofessional
8 programs are here to stay and they not only are here to stay,
9 the ones we have, but they should be vastly expanded, and
10 therefore we ought to have certification requirements and
11 this ought to be recognized as a permanent part of the
12 occupational structure of schools, and everybody else who is
13 permanent in these institutions is certified.

14 It will mean several things. First of all
15 we will get away from this game that may be some day we
16 will not have paraprofessionals. That is nonsense. No
17 school system that has had paraprofessionals would seriously
18 think of returning to the time when they did not have them,
19 but it also means that the public needs to be guaranteed
20 that there are standards in the field. These are very
21 important, and I will get back to this later. The career
22 ladder concept is the important one.

1 Several years before the paras were employed
2 in New York City there was a big conference at the Bank
3 Street College of Education. I remember the people who were
4 there. There were members of congress. They were all
5 talking about how we were going to create paraprofessionals
6 and they thought what people would come in at--\$1.50 they
7 were talking about at that time at that conference--
8 and that they said was great. The name that year was
9 "The Teacher and Her Staff."

10 (Laughter)

11 So the teacher was now going to be a boss,
12 and paras were going to be the cheap labor, and they were
13 figuring out how great it was going to be at \$1.50 an hour
14 you could hire a lot of people. They never had the idea
15 that maybe somebody couldn't live on \$1.50 an hour or maybe
16 somebody might want more, or that maybe somebody who was
17 in a classroom with a teacher might eventually want to be a
18 teacher and that there ought to be an opportunity to do that.
19 I mean there are people who do want to remain as para-
20 professionals. There is nothing wrong with that. It is
21 wonderful work.

22 There are other people who say I can see what

1 the teacher is doing and if I had some more training and
2 preparation and had the opportunity to do that, I can do
3 that and I would like to. So that is a very key part of
4 the program. Of course in the years to come, almost every
5 one of the reports--I don't know if you read the Carnegie
6 Report--but the thickest, biggest part of the Carnegie
7 Report is about a very important issue and that is how the
8 country is getting close to the point where we are not going
9 to have any minority teachers.

10 On the one hand, the examinations screen out
11 whites and minorities who don't pass exams. On the other
12 hand, the world has opened up. You get a college graduate
13 who has made it and there are all sorts of other opportunities.
14 It is just not for minorities alone, it is true for everybody,
15 so the big problem though is with one third of the
16 kids in school a minority, and we are going to have no
17 minority teachers--that is going to be a rather bad lesson
18 to teach kids, so there all sorts of special efforts.

19 Well, what sort of better effort can you
20 make than if you have paraprofessionals who are already
21 there and they are doing parts of the job and they under-
22

1 stand that it is an avenue to advancement.

2 Now I would like to spend a minute or two on
3 what I think is one of the major issues not for para-
4 professionals in this case, but for practically all the
5 other school-related personael which is a matter of
6 contracting out which is a big national thing.

7 The University of Pennsylvania Wharton
8 School has just established a permanent center to study the
9 notion that the government should get rid of their employees
10 and contract out for services with other groups. I was a
11 speaker at a conference there several months ago.

12 There is going to be a regular magazine that
13 is going to come out six months a year, and you can be sure
14 it is going to be full of things like San diego decided to get
15 rid of all its bus drivers and they contracted out with this
16 other company and they are getting model service and they are
17 saving this money.

18 Well, you have been reading about private jails
19 (Laughter) I wish it were funny. I want you to know that
20 we are working with the public employee department of the
21 AFL-CIO and there are several things we are doing. First
22 you will see coming from another bunch of people. We are

1 going out to professors in different colleges and universities
2 who don't agree with this contracting out and we are asking
3 them to make studies. Why are we always hearing the good
4 news about how they are contracting out and they got better
5 services for less ?

6 Why don't we hear the stories about how
7 they contracted out and the services were lousy and the people
8 stole money and there was bribery to the politicians to pick
9 which private company? There are more of those stories than
10 there are stories of success. Occasionally there are stories
11 of success, but not usually.

12 So what we are doing is a lot to get out
13 the story that the whole privatization question is not one of
14 these magic thing where you go to a private company and get
15 rid of all your employees and everything is going to be won-
16 derful because there is a big story to be told out there
17 about fraud and corruption, about the inability of delivering
18 services, about the lowering of standards, about a whole
19 bunch of things like that.

20 The second thing which we have done in this area
21 is that we have started meeting, and this is going to get me
22 a little bit to my next topic, but we have started meeting
with all the people who are running for the presidency of the

1 United States and quite a few of them were down just three
2 weeks ago when the AFL-CIO's Executive Council spent a week
3 at its council meeting in Bal Harbour, Florida. There were
4 quite a number of people there who are either candidates or
5 thinking about running, including a couple of republicans.
6 Governor Kane was there and Governor Thompson of Illinois and
7 ~~there~~ were just about all of the democrats.

8 And the question that we threw to every single
9 one of them is where do you stand on the notion of
10 privatizing or contracting out? Every single one of them
11 got that question. I can tell you that they are all very
12 sensitive to the idea including Governor Thompson and
13 Governor ~~Kane~~. They made excellent statements saying that by
14 and large they feel that the things that the government is
15 doing ought to be done by government employees, and if we
16 don't think that the government employees are efficient or
17 effective enough now, that that is something that we ought
18 to resolve through negotiations to try to improve the
19 institution instead of closing it down and giving it to a
20 private company.

21 So those answers will be on the record, and
22 you are going to see during the campaign, that we will have

1 a record of practically all the candidates. Then, of
2 course, if there is any candidate who says "Well, public
3 employees are lazy and they are not good, and they don't
4 care, so let's get rid of them and let us go to a private
5 company," that is a message that we have to get to our
6 members. We know exactly what one of the big issues
7 will be in the campaign in terms of who gets helped and
8 who does not get helped.

9 That is an introduction of the whole question
10 of the presidential campaign. I know that I don't have
11 to underline this or stress this with the group here because
12 you and I know how much damage having the wrong man in the
13 White House can do. (Applause) We know that. Let us not
14 forget that not all of our members know that, and I am sure
15 that some of our members voted for somebody who is the best
16 actor and not the best president.

17 (Laughter and applause)

18 We now know how dangerous it is to elect
19 somebody who has no other ability than to make a good
20 speech (Laughter) I am sure he could not pass one of the
21 minimum competency tests.

22 (Laughter and applause)

1 Well, in order to pass one of those exams, you
2 have to remember a few things.

3 (Laughter)

4 Now you remember that last time in a way it was
5 kind of easy. By the way until last time, the AFL-CIO never
6 had endorsed as an organizer, never endorsed anyone in
7 the primaries. They always waited until the democrats
8 nominated somebody and the republicans, and then the AFL-CIO
9 would decide which candidate to endorse, the republican or
10 the democrat.

11 What happened is that 1972 and 1976--in 1972 the
12 party was all ripped apart. You had McGovern and you had
13 Hubert Humphrey and you had Jackson at one stage and you had
14 other people. And you had Carter and Muskie and Jackson
15 et cetera. The press started hitting the AFL-CIO saying hey,
16 why are you guys sitting it out and waiting until it is all
17 over and then you have got McGovern who can't win an
18 election or you have got a Jimmy Carter who was elected and
19 viewed as somebody who was not going to be very friendly to
20 labor when he was nominated. Why are you guys sitting it
21 out?

22 Furthermore, what would happen in those days

1 was that one union would support Carter and one union would
2 support Muskie and another union would support some-
3 body else and it was ridiculous because here is all of our
4 hard -earned money from our members and what are we doing?
5 We are doing just what I said in the beginning in terms of
6 having the paras fight with the teachers in the same district.
7 Why have one union fight another one?

8 We are kind of cancelling each other out, so
9 by the time 1984 came along, there was just a feeling that
10 the whole labor movement ought to put it together and pick
11 someone early and go with that person and see if we couldn't
12 have an important role inside the party in picking a candi-
13 date.

14 It turned out to be pretty easy in 1984 because
15 Kennedy didn't run, he could have had a lot of support, and
16 so when you compared Mondale with all the others that were
17 running in 1984, for most people in unions, they knew who
18 Mondale was. He had been around a long time as a senator.
19 He sponsored almost every piece of legislation for public
20 employees, for paras, for teachers, for health benefits, for
21 daycare and early childhood--you name it and it was the Mon-
22 dale bill or the Mondale dash dash and other names there.

1 And these people were good at some things and
2 not at others, but for most people there was just no compara-
3 son, so it was kind of easy. And that was true of other
4 unions too. It was kind of easy to get a two-thirds vote
5 and that is what it takes in the AFL-CIO, and that happened.

6 This time it will not be so easy because you
7 have got a whole bunch of candidates and we all know Hart be-
8 cause he ran last time ~~He~~ **came pretty close.** So knowing him is
9 a plus, but knowing him is also a minus. His name is
10 known. We have heard him and he makes good speeches and all
11 that, but we also know when he didn't get the endorsement, he
12 started attacking the AFL-CIO as though we were General
13 Motors or some big corporation which was trying to manipulate
14 it.

15 It is not very nice for somebody to ask you
16 for the endorsement, which he did, and then the minute he
17 doesn't get it, he turns around and says that those are sort
18 of wicked people and anybody who has their endorsement isn't
19 very good. He has changed his mind again and he wants our
20 endorsement. This time we will put him on film.

21 (Laughter)

22 We ought to keep our minds open. It was not
a speech. We are not committed against him. We should pick

1 the person that we think would be best for us and that will
2 have the best chance of winning, so what we have to do this
3 year, the AFL-CIO is going to give the same question to all
4 the candidates, including republican candidates. Last time
5 we didn't have to interview Ronald Reagan. We know what he
6 stood for. He was very pro-union in the PATCO situation.
7 We knew where he stood. We knew where he stood on education.
8 We knew where he stood on public employees' employment.
9 We knew where he stood on merit pay. We knew where he
10 stood on union busting, so there was no point in interviewing
11 him because we knew we were going to oppose him.

12 This time that is not so. You have an open
13 situation in both parties. It is possible that somebody could
14 emerge in the republican party who is pro-labor. Governor
15 Thompson has an excellent record and so does Governor Kane
16 of New Jersey, and there might be some others, so we are not
17 married to one party. In recent years only the democratic
18 party has given us presidential candidates that we could
19 support and the other party has given us some bad ones. I
20 hope that is not true forever. I would love to have a
21 situation where it didn't make much difference who it was be-
22 cause they are both good. Frequently we get the opposite

1 situation. They are both bad, but we hope that both parties
2 would nominate somebody who did the right things.

3 But what the AFL-CIO is planning to do is
4 this., we are going to ask them all the same general question
5 or questions, and we are going to give them a short time to
6 answer because they are essentially going to them a
7 video tape of it, and pass it around to the unions so that
8 all of our members can watch the answers to these questions.

9 The reason it will be short is that it looks
10 like there will be 12 to 15 people running, so if you had
11 each one of them doing an hour, it would probably not compete
12 with other television shows.

13 We will, however, ask them a lot of other
14 questions that are specific like some of the things that
15 interest us on the contracting out, and where they are going
16 to go on education and all the pro's and con's, and other
17 programs. What we are going to do is give them those in
18 writing and have them write those out, so we are going to
19 ship out to you a video tape where these candidates will
20 have an opportunity to talk to us as unions and say that
21 is why you should vote for me and then there will be a
22 little booklet where they have all the things in writing

1 and you will be able to see who answers directly
2 and who is trying to duck the question and who is on the
3 wrong side. We will have all of that in front of us.

4 We are also going to encourage you in your
5 states when you have a big meeting, when you have got a
6 convention or a big conference, invite the candidates to
7 come there. You won't get all of them at any conference,
8 but you will have a chance to meet them. And anytime you
9 come to one of our meetings, it is likely that they will make
10 a speech saying the things we want them to and they will be
11 saying those things for the record and that is good.

12 But between now and next September we will run
13 articles in our newspapers. We will ask the candidates to
14 present position papers and we will be taking a close look at
15 them and somewhere around between August and September, we
16 are going to have to find a way of polling our members. All
17 of you and the people you represent out there are going to have
18 to get back to me and get back to the AFT Executive Council
19 because somewhere in early October I am going to be called
20 to a meeting of the General Board of the AFL-CIO and I am
21 going to be asked to vote the AFT 630,000 votes for one candi-
22 date or another, and my votes and the votes of all the
others, if somebody get s two-thirds, the AFL-CIO will

1 then support one candidate and all the union offices across
2 the country will go to work for that candidate. If we don't
3 get two thirds, we will have to sit down and figure out what
4 to do. There may then be different unions going right back
5 to the old game, supporting different candidates.

6 It may be that the unions will say well, we
7 don't have two thirds for any one of them, but they are all
8 pretty good. We couldn't get two thirds of them, but there
9 might be something where everybody agrees to stay out.

10 The problem if you stay out is that you won't
11 get any delegates to the convention -- and then when you watch
12 the convention on television, they will say that business
13 has a lot of people and this has a lot of people, the NEA
14 has a lot of people and you have them saying that the
15 AFL-CIO has no people or just a few.

16 So there are problems in not getting into it.
17 There are also problems having different unions going for
18 different people. But there is no substitute. We do
19 not want to endorse a candidate because the candidate
20 is a candidate that Al Shanker likes the most, and then
21 the members say "Who gave him the right? Is it not what
22 people in other districts think. It is not what other

1
2 people in my district think. It is not what the people I
3 talked to think."

4 The reason that we are respected and in
5 some cases feared by political figures is that they know
6 when we get in there we deliver. We have got a
7 tremendous reputation. And we have a tremendous repu-
8 tation because we never pulled a thing where the president
9 went out and shoved something down the member's throats
10 and the members stayed home and didn't do anything be-
11 cause they were angry at the president because the president
12 did something that was not very smart.

13 We listen. We poll. We do all sorts of
14 things and by the time we get there I am doing it because
15 I know how the overwhelming majority of the people feel,
16 and then when I do it, everybody out there says, "This is
17 great. Let us go to work," and then they get the telephone
18 banks and start going out distributing literature and
19 the candidate knows it because everywhere he is somebody
20 says "I am from the AFT." And they know that. We want to
21 make the same thing happen. We want to make the same
22 thing happen again. We do not want an endorsement that is
a paper endorsement and otherwise doesn't mean anything. We

1 will only endorse if we know that our members are with us,
2 and I don't mean 51 percent because if you have got 51 per-
3 cent and the other 49 per cent are really against, there is
4 no candidate worth splitting the union for because the
5 candidates only serve for a couple of years and the union
6 is going to be around forever. So we don't want to break
7 that up.

8 Of course we don't want to be unanimous
9 either. We have differences on that. When you get a
10 certain overwhelming number, you just have to decide to
11 go with it.

12 So that is the process, and I urge all of you
13 to watch it very closely and to keep giving us some in-
14 formation and feedback. The unfortunate thing about it is
15 that we have got to decide early. You might say, "Why do
16 we have to decide in October? You are not getting your
17 primaries until a couple of months later. Why don't we
18 watch them in Iowa and watch them in New Hampshire and
19 watch everywhere else ?

20 Well, by that time it is too late to slate
21 delegates. By that time--this process actually started
22 a year ago. A candidate who decided that he is going to run

1 tomorrow is going to almost have an impossible chance of
2 getting into it. This isn't the old days when you just
3 went in and ran.

4 I don't know how many of you recall, but in
5 the last primary, Gary Hart won a number of states and he
6 was not able to get the delegates because he had not filled
7 out the forms and put the names in. There are a whole
8 bunch of things that have to be done, technical things.
9 In order for us to be in on it and to meet the filing dates
10 and to be part of the process of caucuses, be able to start
11 getting delegates, the decision has to be made in October.
12 By that time we will not have seen any debates. All these
13 people will probably look fairly good. They will go out
14 and read prepared speeches. They will have one or two
15 television interviews where they can go out and impress
16 people or fall on their faces or whatever.

17 But in a sense you have to make the decision
18 before you see any of these performers in a real crunch and
19 before they develop tremendous differences. If you wait a
20 few months and really see them in the thick of things, it is
21 a lot easier. You can say "I like that one. I like that one."

22 I don't like the process, but that is the one

1 that is there. We did not enact it. We just have to figure
2 out the best way of making an intelligent decision, given
3 the fact that the process is not one which is really great
4 for us.

5 In terms of this political process, and that
6 is not just in terms of the presidential campaign, but it
7 is happening just now. There are really some terrific things
8 that are now happening which is just as when Ronald Reagan
9 came in, we started seeing all sorts of things that we were
10 accustomed to having, start moving away.

11 Things are now starting to run in the opposite
12 direction. We have two democratic houses of congress, and
13 we have a White House that is too busy covering up or
14 trying to remember, so the congress is really able to
15 aggressively move forward now. The president is really in-
16 capable now of really opposing or proposing anything. The
17 result is that there most likely will be an increase in
18 funding for education.

19 But on top of that you have to watch very
20 carefully some of the discussion to see if things will
21 actually come our way both in responsibilities and money,
22 and it will probably mean some increased positions and
jobs and various other things. Very interesting.

1 First was that all the governors met down
2 here just a few weeks ago. They also met with the
3 President and the top item was welfare reform. Essentially
4 they said that welfare has to be linked to work.

5 How can you link welfare to work? Well, there
6 is only one way to do it and that is that you have to provide
7 educational programs to those who are on welfare to en-
8 able to do certain things. Many of them do not have the skill
9 to do the work that needs to be done. So there will be, as
10 welfare reform moves along, there will be two things.

11 One is an expanded educational program
12 for adults; and secondly, there will be expanded child
13 care and early childhood education for the children for
14 those who are who are now at home taking care of their
15 children. You have those two aspects.

16 That is an expansion of what we are doing.
17 Then you have to look at something else. That is that they
18 are talking about how to change unemployment insurance
19 and trade adjustment insurance.

20 What is trade adjustment assistance? That means
21 in the United States, when a lot of auto workers are laid
22 off because of the tremendous number of Japanese cars that

1 have come into the country, the United States government
2 says to those auto workers, in effect, you are being laid
3 off because of foreign trade and therefore we are going
4 to give you some money every month for the next--whatever it
5 is--12 or 13 months to help you get through this thing.

6 The government now realizes that helping
7 an auto worker with money, that auto worker at the same time
8 may be getting other assistance. but to help the auto
9 worker to eat for several weeks when you know that that
10 factory is not going to reopen is not very smart; that the
11 smartest thing that you can do with trade adjustment is put
12 assistance into a program where a worker gets re-educated
13 for a year so that they can go into another field where
14 there are jobs.

15 There is no point in just feeding someone for
16 a year and keeping them alive to return to a job that is
17 never going to exist again. So that is a massive adult
18 reeducation program.

19 And the same is true with unemployment in-
20 surance. Until recently if you were unemployed and you
21 then went back to school to learn something, then you
22 were considered that you are no longer unemployed. You are a

1 student. So you lost your unemployment insurance. Well,
2 they now realize that that is kind of stupid. One of the
3 smartest things that unemployed persons can do is to
4 go out and learn something different to get a job, so
5 they are about to change that.

6 This is very important. It is certainly im-
7 portant for community colleges but it is also important
8 for secondary and elementary schools. That is because there
9 is going to be more and more opportunity for schools to offer
10 programs for adults and in early childhood, probably with
11 some substantial federal funding. These are probably new
12 opportunities for all of us.

13 Well, this leads me now to what has probably
14 been the major thrust of the union over the past couple
15 of years and that is the reform agenda, the effort to
16 change and to improve our schools. The governor's
17 association has a five year program. The business
18 community continues to talk about it. In a couple of
19 months you will see a major report by major
20 business groups in this country dealing with what schools
21 should do for young people who are at risk, and this is
22 not going away. What is happening so far in most states is

1 that more money has been put in education and a lot more rules
2 and regulations, a lot more testing, a lot of it okay and a
3 lot of it not very smart and a lot of it absolutely silly.
4 A lot of what has happened in this field is that the drop-
5 rate for students is actually beginning to go up in this
6 country because if you tell students who are staying in
7 school to get a high school diploma, that you used to be able
8 to get it by just staying around and breathing until you were
9 18, and a lot of kids were willing to do that to get a
10 diploma.

11 But if you take someone who is not now able to read,
12 write and count very well, and he is not 15 and you tell
13 him unless you can read and write and count at the following
14 level at the age of 18, we are going to give you the
15 competency test and not a diploma, the kid looks at that
16 stuff and says I am never going to be able to learn that
17 in three years--a lot of those kids will just say good-bye,
18 we are leaving.

19
20 As they say good-bye a lot of people say
21 what is going on here? We thought we were improving schools.
22 and all of a sudden more kids are dropping out. Some of

1 of these dropout figures are very inaccurate. You saw what
2 happened in New York a few weeks ago where the school put out
3 one set of figures and another group put out another set of
4 figures. The school said it was three per cent dropping out
5 and another group said it was 55%. Fifty-five looks more
6 accurate there. But all they are doing in those schools is
7 that they are counting the kids who enter high school and do
8 not graduate. They are not even counting the kids who manage
9 to leave when they are in junior high. or some of them in
10 elementary school. They just leave and they don;t come
11 back. If they don't come back long enough, they leave their
12 names off and they are gone.

13 So we have got very large numbers of kids
14 who are not making it, and that continues to be a very, very
15 important concern. Now we have been doing in many states
16 quite a few things and I have a list of some of them here
17 that we prepared for the state of Massachusetts where our
18 federation has gone to the Committee on the Condition of
19 Teaching and to get them to define to include the role
20 of teacher aides and the legislation has been introduced
21 there to provide tuition help so that aides and paras
22 can move up a career ladder and eventually get to be teachers

1 if they promise that when they graduate they will indeed
2 be teachers for a while. Texas is trying to introduce a
3 bill which would develop a career ladder for parapro-
4 fessionals as well, as well as the one that was in the re-
5 form bill for teachers.

6 The State of Georgia is responsible for our Fed
7 establishing a study committee to examine the role of
8 paraprofessionals and secretaries in the schools and make
9 recommendations on certification and expanding roles for
10 the people.

11 In Florida, the FEA-United has a full legis-
12 lative program for paras and school-related personnel
13 including a teacher-aide task force bill and one dealing
14 with safety issues and a whole series of programs that
15 would stop the reduction in funding for the school lunch
16 programs.

17 And I have a listing of programs for Virginia,
18 Portland and San Francisco. Portland and San Fransisco
19 are working on a grant which we have through the American
20 Can Company which develops a program of developing teachers
21 through the ranks of aides.

22 Sarasota, Detroit--the list is really too

1 long, but the amount of activity going on at the state level
2 to improve the role, to provide career and professional
3 opportunities is great. We have got these models which have
4 been around longer than others. Of course there is the
5 UFT which was the very first, and Baltimore which has a
6 tremendous program, but we keep pushing these and we will see
7 from the list that is here of all the things that are
8 going on that this is being carried out throughout.

9 The importance to the country of having
10 career ladders like this was revealed by the research that
11 was carried out several months ago. I have used this in a
12 couple of columns, but now I want to share it with you.

13 Because if you are out there going to a state
14 legislature or going to a school board saying look what we
15 want you to do is to give us some time and some money for
16 tuition and allow school-related personnel and paras to ad-
17 vance and improve themselves provided that they agree to
18 continue to work in different roles within the system.

19 How important is this in the national
20 perspective? This may be something that you want to get out
21 in a little booklet about paras and school-related personnel
22 and how this fits into this research.

There is a group called the National Assessment

1 of Educational Progress. They go around and they test
2 kids at different ages. The most interesting test I found
3 recently is that test usually a sample of kids across the
4 country, 200,000-3000,000 youngsters and that gives a
5 pretty good picture of what is going on all over.

6 They tested youngsters who were 17 years old
7 and still in high school. They tried to find out how well
8 these kids could read. Almost all of them could read an
9 exit sign or or stop sign, and then if you got to the next
10 level of reading, something very simple, that tells you how
11 to open a jar or do something like ⁴ most of them could do
12 that too.

13 Then when you get to the next level which is
14 like reading a comic book or a very easy newspaper, not as
15 many, but still the overwhelming majority could read that.

16 Then when you got to something like reading
17 the Washington Post or the New York Times, then you got down
18 to about 35 per cent. Now mind you, these are not the
19 ~~dropouts~~. They are gone already. This is 35 per cent of those
20 who are still in school and were 17 years old.

21 Now you get to how many can read a book which
22 has a little technical material like a first-year college

1 textbook, and you get down to about six percent. Six per
2 cent of the kids who are in high school at age 17 can read
3 a first-year college textbook that has a little bit of
4 technical material.

5 What does that mean for the United States of
6 America as we try to do various things? Well, it is pretty
7 disastrous That is the bad news. The good news is you
8 pass people at age 23 and 24, that 5 or 6 percent goes up
9 to 24 per cent can now read that technical material.

10 What does that mean? That we should not stop
11 learning at the age of 17 or 18 and that if you give people
12 an opportunity to keep learning and going to school, you can
13 educate more people in the general public, so you don't have
14 to be stuck with a handful of people who can do the work
15 that needs to be done.

16 You can have more and more people who can do
17 the work. Now that is a very important thing. Now when you
18 sit with your school boards or your governors or your legis-
19 lators, you ought to pull out that little chart
20 that says that we are going to participate in that. We are
21 going to take a lot of people who are at different levels
22 in this thing, some of them are down here, some are in

1 the middle and some are at the top. Whereever they are,
2 they can all benefit by getting more education and more
3 training wherever they are. And when they do that they
4 will get different positions within the system and that is
5 going to make room for other people to come in here to take
6 those positions, and then what you see is a system that keeps
7 employing and training and educating more and more people
8 and you are doing something very creative and very productive.
9 We will be getting that out.

10 Finally, I want to talk about school reform.
11 What we have been talking about in school reform is
12 that we need to have a school which is a basically dif-
13 ferent institution from what it is right now. I am sorry
14 after last year giving a little description of what that
15 school might look like, I can't stand in front of you today
16 and say that all you have to do is go down the road nine
17 miles and you will see a school like that.

18 There are a lot of people talking about it
19 and a lot of people thinking about it. and I hope that next
20 year that I will have a chance to chat with you again, and
21 I hope that next year I will be able to say that there are
22

1 40 of these places and you can actually see them and there
2 are 40 on the way. I am actually convinced that within the
3 next few years there will at least be hundreds of models
4 where people have a totally different type of school, and
5 a totally different school will mean a different role for
6 each and every one of you and it will mean a different type
7 of life for teachers and school-related personnel. And
8 most important it will mean a different kind of life for
9 students because right now about 20 per cent of the kids
10 in the United States, really learn how to read at the
11 higher levels and learn to do mathematics at the higher
12 levels and 11 writing at the higher levels.

13 What does that mean? It is about 20 per
14 cent in England. It is about 20 per cent in Germany.
15 It is about 20 per cent in almost everyone of these countries.
16 What does that mean, that God only made 20 per cent of us
17 smart and rest are doomed forever? Is that what that means?
18 Some people would take that as a conclusion. I don't buy that
19 at all. It used to be that we would buy cars and 40 per
20 cent of them had bugs in them and they had to recall them.
21 And what did the car companies say? They said well that is
22 the nature of the factory--20 to 30 per cent or 30 or 40

1 per cent will always be no good, so you manufacture them
2 and you sell them and then when somebody complains, you
3 bring them back and re-do them.

4 Then along came the Japanese and they found out
5 that you could make a factory where the cars they turn out
6 had nothing wrong with them. And they figured out that it is
7 always cheaper to do it right in the first place, than it is
8 to make it wrong and call it back, especially with kids.
9 An automobile can be called back easily, but when a kid
10 decides that he is dumb or he can't learn, or that he doesn't
11 want to learn, then it is too late.

12 What am I saying this for? I am saying that
13 the schools that we have now are like factories, and the
14 reason that 80 per cent of the kids are not making it
15 is not because the kids are dumb, it is because if you force
16 kids to sit still from nine in the morning until three in
17 the afternoon listening to somebody talk, not everybody
18 learns that way.

19 (Laughter)

20 PRESIDENT SHANKER: As a matter of fact, even
21 grown-ups can't still and listen that long.

22 (Laughter and applause)

1 PRESIDENT SHANKER: Okay, take the rest of
2 the day off.

3 So when we say only 20 per cent of the kids
4 can make it, what we are saying is that 20 per cent of the
5 kids can sit still and learn a lot by listening and the
6 others might learn in other ways if they were given a chance
7 to learn in other ways, but the way school works now, we
8 don't give them that chance.

9 (Applause)

10 PRESIDENT SHANKER: We are about to make a
11 school where they can be given that chance, where they
12 won't have to sit still and listen to somebody, where they
13 can get individual help from paras, where they can learn by
14 working with a computer, where they can get individual
15 help from older students, where they can learn by watching
16 video tapes, where they can learn by listening to audio
17 tapes, where they have a whole variety of different ways to
18 learn, and that is going to make a wholly different life for
19 teachers, for paras for the whole school. A lot of what
20 kids do now that is damaging, a lot of stuff that demands
21 control, the reason we have got all those problems with kids
22 is that we are forcing them to do things that are very

1 unnatural.

2 I think everybody gets a picture of what I
3 think a good school ought to be like, and I think a school
4 like that would have very different roles for all of us.
5 We don't want the principal to be the authoritarian over the
6 teachers and we don't want superintendents to be authoritarian
7 over the teachers, and we don't want the teachers to be
8 authoritarian ~~ver~~ the students.

9 It is a different kind of school, That places
10 the paraprofessional in a different relationship, it places
11 teachers in a different relationship. It puts everybody in a
12 very different role. In building modes for these schools,
13 we are getting very much away from the notice that kids keep
14 quiet and still and teachers sort of pour knowledge into
15 their heads as they sit there. It doesn't work that way.

16 Very few people work that way. Very few people
17 learn by being passive. How do you learn? You do something.
18 You fool around with it. You try something. You say Aha!
19 You say that after you have tried several times. Kids learn
20 that way. We all learn that way.

21 If you think of a school in which the teacher
22 is not viewed as an enclyopedia pouring out the information

1 but the adults are people who are trying to figure out hey
2 if Mary didn't learn it by watching that video tape, what
3 other experience could Mary have that would get her to
4 learn it? What other kid here didn't learn it that way?
5 How did the other kid learn it and you keep working away
6 not at yesterday's lecture and then go on to the next
7 lesson whether or not the kid learned it or not, but you
8 keep trying to figure that out.

9 The role of
10 everybody in the school becomes quite different from what it
11 is today. I think it is going to be very exciting.

12 I think it is going to offer tremendous
13 opportunities, tremendous opportunities for all of us.

14 I heard of a school the other day, several
15 schools where they were teaching spanish not just to the
16 youngsters, but to the youngsters and to the teachers. The
17 teachers, were not spanish teachers. They were doing it
18 through sattalite transmission.

19 Now think what that does to the classroom if the
20 kids and the teachers are doing the samething together. It is
21 kind of refreshing, isn't it, for the kids to know that the
22 teachers have to study to learn too. And for maybe one kid in

1 the class to learn spanish a little bit faster than the
2 teacher?

3 (Laughter)

4 PRESIDENT SHANKER: There is nothing wrong
5 with that.

6 I think everybody gets the picture of what I
7 think a good school ought to be like. I think that a school
8 like that would have different roles for all of us.
9 We don't want the principal to be the authoritarian over
10 the teachers and we don't want the teachers to be the
11 authoritarian over the kids or the paraprofessionals.
12 It is a different sort of relationship.

13 That doesn't mean the adults are not going to
14 decide what the curriculum is and what kids are going to
15 learn. We are not going to go back to the 1960s. School is
16 not going to become a playground. Kids are there to learn.
17 But that is an image that we have and we hope that next
18 year we will have some places where we can show it.

19 This list that I have shows that we are
20 really moving on reeducation, promotional opportunitites,
21 opposition to privatization, advancement, career ladders,
22 certification. We are working to get all presidential

1 candidates to make their speeches so that they are with
2 us and I want to thank you for your tremendous support. I
3 know what it takes to have the kind of growth that you have
4 shown. It means that you have not only been doing your
5 regular jobs, but you use every spare minute of time at
6 work and after work talking to your colleagues and building
7 the union.

8 I know that you feel great about it. We all
9 feel great about you are doing. We all feel great about it.
10 I look forward to coming back here next year and I am sure
11 that the group will be even bigger than it is now.

12 Thank you very much .

13 (Applause)
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