

file Shanker Speaks

ADDRESS OF ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
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Thank you very much. It's good to be here. This is the first time I have had the opportunity to speak at an AASA convention. I've been invited over the years, but usually this annual meeting conflicts with the annual meeting of the AFL-CIO, and this year I think you moved it to get into the Mardi Gras. So I was happy to accept this invitation and to have this opportunity to spend some time with you. And I will make some remarks and then leave plenty of time for your questions and comments.

I don't think that anyone here needs to be convinced of the proposition that the 80s will be the most difficult and most dangerous period that American education has ever faced. We've had difficult periods before. There have been periods of economic turmoil in this country, and that economic turmoil has usually meant hardship for the schools as well as for other sectors of our society. And we tend to call each year's battle with the state legislature "the crisis in education;" we tend to call each school budget as it comes up in the battle surrounding that "the crisis in education;" we tend to call each round of bargaining negotiations in the same way. Those are, of course, not "the crisis," they are episodes--some of them are annual rituals which we get quite excited about and should. But they are hardly "the crisis."

We face something now which is not merely a question of: Will we get a little less this year or next year? Will we have to cut back? Will we face some hard times. I don't think there is any question that we will in this next decade face economic problems and hardships due to the state of the economy overall.

But when we speak of the danger to education in this period, we are not speaking of something temporary, we're speaking of the fact that for the first time in our history there is a question as to whether ten years from now there will be a public school system in this country as we know it today. There is at least a 50-50 chance that, ten years from now, the educational system of this country will be a part of the private sector with various financial inducements and support, and with the public schools perhaps remaining strong in some places or in some parts of the country. But, on a national basis, it may very well be that, ten years from now, someone can say that an amazing transformation took place during the 1980s where, instead of what happened at the beginning of the decade--10 or 11% of the students of the country were in private schools and the rest were in public schools--in a period of a decade, 70 or 75% of the students had shifted over to private, tuition-paying schools with 25-30% remaining in the public schools, and the vast majority of those who remain in the public schools are students whose parents are too poor to afford any additional tuition or partial payment of the tuition, or they are students that because they are difficult and expensive to educate, were not accepted by any private schools; or perhaps were accepted, and at some point were then thrown out, with the public schools then becoming some sort of charity ward of the educational system.

Now before we can discuss this sensibly, we have to take a look at what the problem is and we have to understand it. While we recognize that this could be the picture ten years from now, I think that there are also very few who would said that it must be. The shape of education, ten years from now, will be determined by the struggles of the next few years. It is not inevitable that public education will decline and almost disappear, but neither is it

inevitable that public education will continue to exist as we have known it. It all depends on what we do.

And so, let's spend a few minutes taking a look at the context within which this struggle will take place. The first series of pieces involved in the understanding of the problem before us are pieces that are not directly educational at all. They're economic, and that in itself is quite amazing, because if someone had stood before you 15 or 20 or 25 years ago, the chances are very strong that they would have been few discussions on the relationship between the economy and the state of public education in the country. We tended, if you remember the old expressions, of "keeping politics out of education and education out of politics." It was kind of a vision we had that education could be separated from everything else: from politics, from economics. That it had a life and a justification of its own--and we didn't have anything to do with other groups within society. The notion that we were independent, that we were separate, that we didn't have to address ourselves to any of the other issues or even consider them. Well, I don't think you'll find anybody like that today.

We can't talk about education without talking about how many people will be our customers in the next ten years. How many customers did we once have? And what percentage of the population was that? How many will we have ten years from now? Which groups have greater power to get bigger slices of the public financial pie? And what other problems does government face and the private sector face which will limit the resources which we have for education?

And so I want to touch on what already are and what continue to be the major national themes of this period, because they set the stage for the educational problems and educational struggles.

First and foremost--and now we've lived with it for almost ten years and we almost stop mentioning it or thinking about it--is the huge, continuing economic drain on our society due to the energy crisis, which is the export of approximately \$90 billion a year from the United States to OPEC countries for the purchase of oil. Felix Rohatyn, the New York investment banker, pretty well described what \$90 billion a year means. Since figures don't really mean that much, he said, "Well look at it this way. In ten years the United States will have exported \$900 billion to OPEC and if you want to know what \$900 billion dollars will buy, that is the value of all the stocks on the stock exchange." So that, in a sense, the United States, in order to purchase oil in a ten year-period, will have to mortgage or sell the entire productive capacity that was built by this nation over a period of 200 years. A slight exaggeration, but not much. It's a vast transfer. Why am I mentioning it? Very simple. Monies that are sent to OPEC are monies that cannot be used domestically. They cannot be used for buying homes, buying automobiles, buying higher education, buying elementary and secondary, buying medical care. It's money that we didn't used to spend and that we now do spend and is no longer available. And it's huge.

The second has to do with the question of declining productivity in our country. When we had increasing productivity, when each year Americans got richer and richer--not only in terms of dollars that they had in hand, but how many cars or how frequently they were able to buy a new one or bigger and better houses--people were pretty generous. They said sure, we're better

off each year and so we'll take a little bit of this increased wealth that we have each year and we'll give a little bit of that to people on social security, and a little bit of it for people in education, a little bit to the colleges. And nobody in our country had to live on less and to make sacrifices in order to provide for an education. It was really not having that much more. Instead of having that much more, we'll take a little less, and we'll give the rest of it for these public purposes.

Well, now we're not in a period of increased productivity. We're in a very difficult time. Many things are not manufactured here anymore. We import so much of what we used to make ourselves. And as we look around, we have steel plants that do not compare with those in Taiwan or those in Korea, and we are thinking of the very real possibility that this country will be without an automobile industry completely. And we know that Chrysler is on the edge of bankruptcy but so is Ford. And when you see a union like the United Autoworkers making major concessions of the kind that they did, it's because they know that there is only one alternative, and that alternative is the complete shutdown of the industry within our country. So that tremendous amounts of money--again, money which used to be spent by us as consumers--will now have to be invested in building new auto plants, new steel plants, taking care of our harbors so that we can once again move coal and other things. And that's, again, money that we're not going to have for consumption, whether it be public consumption or private. And that's going to take quite a period of time.

Then there's a third aspect of this productivity and that is the entire decaying of what's called the "infrastructure" of our country. The fact that a number of major cities, north and south, in this country lose 40% of their

water through the pipes before it ever gets to anyone's faucet. And it's only a matter of time, a little bit of time, before the entire system has to be rebuilt. The number of bridges that collapse in the United States each month. One-half of the bridges of this country have to be rebuilt within the next ten years. There are already places where companies have to spend thousands and thousands of additional dollars because you can't use the bridges two miles away, you've got to go ten miles up or down river to use one that's available. We have no railroad system in this country to speak of. We have very little in the way of mass transit. When you get a magazine like Business Week--hardly known as a radical journal, featuring a special section and front-page story which says that unless this conservative, national administration invests billions of dollars in things like this the whole country is going to fall apart, and you're not going to be able to manufacture anything because you're not going to be able to deliver it anywhere reasonably. And you're not going to be able to manufacture if you don't have the water supply that you need and you don't have the other resources that you need unless that infrastructure is rebuilt.

Well, we're not talking about a few hundred million dollars, and we're not talking about a few billion dollars--we're talking about massive, massive sums of money to rebuild that infrastructure. So what we have done in this country--both in private industry, in our steel and auto plants, and many others--and in terms of the infrastructure, is that we haven't taken care of it. It's like buying a car and running it and not taking care of the scratches or the dents, leaks or anything else; we just rode it, and we had all the fun that we could have had and never spent a nickel on it, and now it's absolutely

falling apart, and we've got to do a very, very expensive overhaul or we've got to junk it and get a new one. It's going to cost a lot. And that too will be money--billions and billions and billions of dollars--not available for other purposes.

And then one more large item: that is, what we did after the Vietnam War. We didn't do very well in Vietnam. And one would think that when you don't do well, the thinking would be that we didn't do well because we didn't have enough power, and that we ought to keep the power that we have, or maybe we even ought to have more if we didn't do well. But that was not the psychology of the country after the Vietnam War. The psychology of the country was that it didn't work; therefore, let's dismantle it. And so we drastically reduced military spending while the Soviet Union increased and continued to increase. And there is hardly an expert in this field, hawk or dove, who does not believe that a substantial increase in military spending will be necessary over the next decade. Maybe not as much this year, maybe not as much as Ronald Reagan wants, maybe not on the MX, maybe not on the B-1, maybe not on something else; but the general concept that there will have to be a substantial increase, unless we become dedicated and philosophical pacifists who believe that if we disarm unilaterally, the Russians will follow suit. Unless you have that theory, which I do not and most Americans do not, if we continue to follow the theory of deterrence--the notion that the best way to prevent the war is to have your opponent know that it will be extremely costly, not just for us--as long as the concept of deterrence prevails, and there really isn't any other except pacifism, that will be a rather large investment during this period of time.

Now what does all of this mean. All of this means is that huge sums of money which we have not previously spent--we have not rebuilt our roads, our mass transit, our factories--we have to do it now. Otherwise, we're not going to be a major nation. And we will have rapidly declining productivity, and there will be even less for us to spend on all sorts of things. It has to be done. Military has to be done. We have to buy the energy, and when we develop alternate sources of energy, the chances are that they will not be cheaper than the ones we are importing. We may be able to keep the money in this country and we may be able to develop sources that do not make us dependent on other nations. All that is very important, but it is unlikely in the short run to be less expensive.

And so what we're living through right now is a period during which Americans each year are really earning less than they did the year before. And you feel it. Not in dollars, dollars keep moving up. With these IRAs were all going to be millionaires soon and we'll be able to buy a few apples with a million dollars. They don't tell us that, they just say you're going to be a millionaire in a short period of time, but they don't tell you why--what these interest rates mean and what you'll be able to buy with the money.

Essentially, Americans will have to live on less each year. And when you live on less, year one you say, "All right, I won't buy something I bought last year. It wasn't important anyway." The same thing happens the second year, the third and the fourth year. Eventually, you get to the point where you'll have to start making choices, and you cannot continue spending on all of the things you spent on before.

Well, what do you get rid of? You get rid of your house, get rid of your car, you don't take a vacation, keep your clothes for a longer period of

time. You'll do all of those things, but at a certain point, you're going to start thinking about whether the education of the kid who lives down the end of the block should cost as much as it does. Not your child. If your child is in school, why it's a little different. Nothing is too good for my child, but we shouldn't be spending all the money on the "frills" for that child who lives down the end of the block.

And, of course, we all know that, once upon a time in the recent past, the majority of voters had their children in the schools and, therefore, education and money for the schools was really "sexy." There isn't any politician who could really stand up against it because he would be standing up against the majority of the population. But we now know that because of the large increase in retirees and senior citizens, the "sexy" issue is no longer education, it's social security. And the President really had to backtrack on that very quickly, and nobody wants to touch that one because that's the large block of voters. And we're now down to a point--where is it now--it's one out of five voters with children in the schools, something like that. And, therefore, there is not a majority. We have these economic problems, there's pressure. Somebody--everybody--is going to spend less on something. What is it going to be? And then we have the political question where we no longer have the same percentage of voters automatically on our side.

And we've got a third problem. And that is this whole decline in the respect for education. And it's something that we did to ourselves because we were so good and so successful. I'm in debates very frequently, and it always comes up, you know, "Well, why, what's happened over the last thirty,

forty, fifty years? Why is it that teachers used to be so great, schools were so wonderful, and look what's happening now? Why have things deteriorated so much?" And I have to remind them because many of the people who ask me that question had experiences similar to my own. And I remember going to school in a working-class neighborhood in New York City. Nobody who lived in that neighborhood ever got near a college. There were very, very few--there may have been two or three people who were high school graduates--and they were considered the "intellectual elite" of the neighborhood. If anyone had gone to high school for one or two or three years, they were considered very, very well educated. And even an elementary school diploma was not something that the majority of the people who lived in the neighborhood had. People who had an elementary school diploma are people that others came to on a summer night when people were sitting outside and asked them, "Will you write a letter to my sister? I never learned how to write."

And so, when my parents sent me to school--they were people who came from Europe; had no education over here; who learned a little bit of the English language, enough to get along--and sure, they held teachers and the school in very high regard because there was this tremendous distance between where they were educationally and where everyone else was and where teachers and the school were. So there was this great respect because most people were uneducated and there were huge numbers who were illiterate. Not in the new sense where they say that anybody who can't fill out the tax form is illiterate, I mean illiterate in the sense which it is used in Third World countries--you can't read or write.

Well, what do we do? We educated everybody, everybody graduates elementary school; almost everybody graduates high school; half of our people go on to college; and people no longer have the same respect they for us that they once did because they've all gone to college. And they look at us and they say, "I'm at least the equal of the teacher and maybe superior. I'd like to teach my own kids--I'd be so good at it--but I'm too busy making more money than you are, so you go ahead and do it."

So what we're suffering from, to some extent, is that--you know there's still a great respect for teachers in Third World countries where everyone is uneducated and the teacher is one of the few educated people in society. We will never again enjoy the same respect and the same esteem because that was due to the relative deprivation in education of the overwhelming majority of the population. And we overcame that, so we don't have that.

Well, so here we are. And we have some very great ideas: vouchers and tuition tax credits. Please don't think that because we are facing economic problems in Washington and because there's going to be a \$90 billion or \$123 billion or \$150 billion budget deficit that tuition tax credits is not a live matter. It is! It is being pressed this year by the President of the United States. It will not be pressed to the tune of \$500 and it will not be put in as something to start immediately--this September 1st--it will be put in for a smaller sum, maybe only for \$100 to start or \$200. And it will be for 1984 or 1985 when the President will tell us that all of our economic problems will be solved by then, that the budget will be balanced and we'll be able to afford it. There is a tremendous push for tuition tax credits. There are sermons being given in churches and synagogues across the country. The Congress is being flooded with letters in support of tuition

tax credits. and the President has not said that he's backing off this year because of budget problems. As a matter of fact, we know that that proposal will be pushed this year.

Now, believe it or not, I go to quite a few teachers' meetings, and many teachers are not too excited about tuition tax credits because they say, "Well, you know, \$500. Not many parents are going to take their children out of public schools and provide the rest of the money." Well, \$500 is just the beginning. Once there is a tuition tax credit--whether it's \$100 or \$300 or \$500--we know what the annual fight will be in the Congress. It will be for equity and equality. Why should our children be supported less than children who go to public schools? And one of the things that many have not considered is the fact that tuition tax credits does not have to be a program which is a federal program alone. If the federal government should start a tuition tax credit program, many states would follow with their own tax credits on top, and the pressure would be there in each school district for school districts to provide additional tax credits, and the pressure might be quite great. Taxpayer groups might come to you and say, "Now look, if you're spending \$2,000 a year to educate a child in our schools, and if you could give a child a \$500 tax credit to get out and go to a private school so that you could save \$1,500 on each child who leaves, and make mother and father real happy and give them a choice, why don't you do it? It will happen as soon as this starts moving.

Well, so we've got to ask ourselves, "What do we do in this situation?" And it seems to me that the attack has to be on several fronts. First, we have to organize ourselves effectively to do the political job. Of course, a lot of what happens in things like tuition tax credits-- Why, there have

been many polls, and we think the majority of the American people are with us. I think everybody was surprised by the 91% opposition to tax credits in Washington, D.C. Many of us were confident that at one point it would go down. But when the voters have had a chance on this sort of thing, they've rejected it. But the Congress could very well pass it.

I meet with many members of the Congress. Many of them say to me, "Al, I really agree with you on tuition tax credits but I have to vote for it." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, I've got a constituency which is very strong on two issues: abortion and aid to private schools. And I am on the opposite side of abortion--I'm not going to change my vote on that--so I have to give them something. Otherwise, I'm going to lose votes." It's very, very tough.

So we've got to organize. Well, but the other thing we've got to do is we have to do everything in the years to come to improve both the quality and the image of public education. Part of our problem was indeed the fact that we enjoyed a monopoly. Fifteen and twenty years ago, no one, but no one ever thought that the public schools would be in danger in terms of their very existence. And so, as one unpopular program after another came our way, we did not resist these programs in the way we should have resisted them. Because while we didn't like many of these programs, none of us sat down and said, "Look, it's not just a question of whether we like it, it's not just a question of whether it's good for the children, there's another question involved here too." If you take enough unpopular programs and tell the schools to do them, you will eventually drive customers to some alternative. And that is something that we weren't thinking of ten or fifteen years ago.

And so, I'd like to discuss kind of a laundry list of: Where do we go? What do we do? How do we prevent disaster from occurring?

Well, first, we talked a little while ago about the fact that we no longer have a majority. Very few people within our society do have a majority. A lot of the question of effectiveness frequently is a question of how well organized. If you've got a majority, you don't have to organize too well. In the old days when a majority of people had children in public schools, all we had to do was whisper to the politician. He knew that we were all out there. But now we have to make the 20%, we have to look like 50- or 60 percent. And you look like 50- or 60 percent by making more noise and by being more effective. So we have to pull together the people we have. That includes you, that includes teachers, it includes parents. It includes businessmen who have an interest in the next generation of mathematicians, scientists, designers, and people who are able to work and to be productive--that includes people in the military who are interested in the future of the country in terms of the responsibilities they have. It includes strategies--very simple strategies. The Gallup Poll each year--very interesting thing in the Gallup Poll. It shows that there are two groups of people out there: one of them thinks the public schools are not very good and the other one thinks public schools are quite good.

Which group is this and which group is this? Well, the group that thinks they are good is made up of all of those people out there in the general public that walked into a public school at least once in the previous 12 months. Now what does that mean? It means that-- You know what's news, newspapers report on things that are bad--somebody got hit, somebody broke something, there was vandalism, somebody pulled a knife, test scores went down, there was a fire in

the place, taxes went up, some teacher got caught doing thus and so, etc. That gets in the newspapers, so in the mind of the public, that's the schools. Everything they hear about. So one of the things we've got to do is to get as many people into a school building as possible, because once they're there, what they see is quite different from what they imagined on the basis of the stories.

Now part of effectiveness, I am sorry to say, has to be to make those issues which are life and death to education, that we have to become a single-issue group. I don't like it. But if the side that favors tuition tax credits is a single-issue group, if they go to a congressman and say, "We don't care where you stand on any other issue. There is only one issue we care about and that's tuition tax credits." And if we teachers, administrators, school board members, parents and children in public schools, if we are reasonable people, if we go to the congressman and he says, "Well, I have to vote for tuition tax credits because I'm being pushed," and we say, "Well, Mr. Congressman, we know that you're a terrific guy on a dozen other issues, so we're sorry you won't vote with us on this one." If we are reasonable and they are unreasonable, what is the smart thing for the congressman to do? He's got our support anyway. He might as well get theirs.

And so, I don't favor doing this on every issue. But when the issue is life or death or an institution as basic and important to the future of our country as public education, we've got to do that.

Now I'm going to get maybe a little nasty on this one. But a few weeks ago, I read that another teachers' organization contributed \$1,000 to a senator by the name of Roth of Kemp-Roth fame. Now Senator Roth supports tuition tax credits. And the reason that he was given this \$1,000 contribution

by this other organization is that he supports the separate Department of Education.

Now I'd like to ask you, what kind of insane order or priority is it when an organization that is dedicated to the future of education decides that it is going to help re-elect someone who supports tuition tax credits because, apparently, the question of a Department of Education is a more important issue than tuition tax credits?

Now let's think about that one. That's not the only case, just the most recent.

Now there is something else we can do. So far, I've just been talking about the politics of it. And I guess before going on to this other point, I should for this group say something else. We did a good job in the last round on tuition tax credits. But let me say that we did not mobilize nationally even 5% of what we could have and should have mobilized against tax credits. Right now when this fight is on, and when churches across the country are having people sit and write letters on this issue--and you ask your congressman how many letters are coming in and have been coming in for the last five or six weeks on this and which side those letters are on. Now how many people here spent the last four weeks talking to parents' groups, making phone calls to the congressmen, getting letters written, getting phone calls, going out and speaking to groups as to how devastating that proposal will be. That at precisely the time they are cutting billions of dollars out of public education they are at the same time talking about giving billions of dollars to those who can already afford to pay for private schools for their students. I dare say that many few of the people here and very few of the members of the AFT have spent 5 minutes on this issue in the last couple of

months. Why? What are we waiting for? Why are we giving the members of Congress the impression that only one side cares and only one side is interested? So we better get to work on it.

Now the other issue we have to work on is the whole question of what do we do about public education and improving it--improving it in reality and improving its image. And the two are related, because I do not think that you can take an institution that has been around for a long time--and we hope will be around for a long time--you just can't sell it with little commercials on television. You can't just make people think it's good. Over a period of time, people see things. And over a period of time, they will see what's really there.

Now two major areas here: first, negative and secondly, positive. The first thing, I go back to a point that I made a few minutes ago, and that is since people in our country in the near future are going to be able to choose between the public schools or other schools, we have to evaluate each and every program on the basis of whether it is going to help us attract customers or whether it is going to get more and more people to join the bandwagon that says, "Public schools are horrible. They're terrible. Give us an alternative and let us get out."

Well what are some of these things, some of these unpopular policies and programs? Well, I'll mention a number of them.

One of them, which is unpopular all across the country and in every poll--it's just as unpopular with blacks as it is with whites, is school busing. No question about that. And there is no question that in many places where busing has been imposed, the number of private schools has

increased and the enrollment in public schools has drastically declined.

The second has to do with the whole question of policy on discipline and suspension of students who are engaged in violence. In the last decade or decade-and-a-half, students have acquired substantial rights--some of them through Supreme Court decisions, some of them through the fact that they are able to have attorneys--and that many people that used to be teachers or principals or school boards acting in loco parentis have now become adversary meetings where a principal may very well spend a major part of his school year in court; and it's hardly worth doing it because you can spend all your time in court, and by the time you finish, the judge says, "Well, what are we going to do with this kid? There's no other place to put him anyway. We'll send him right back to your school."

So if you look at every Gallup Poll, item #1 in terms of what's wrong with the schools, what are you concerned with, item #1 and #2 are the two law-and-order issues. Discipline and drug use are the two things, every single year over the last ten years, that's it.

Well, unless we can turn to legislatures and to courts and say, "You've got to stop hamstringing this institution. You must be able to allow us to deal with those students--not the student who is disruptive once; not the student who is only disruptive with Miss Jones because they didn't strike if off right; not the student who this week because something terrible happened at home--no. But the student who, day-in-day-out, not with one teacher but with every teacher in every setting, takes up 30, 40, 50, 80, 90 percent of the time of the class and of the teacher, makes noise; throws things; yells; screams; beats other kids up; beats teachers up; threatens. So that when

Johnnie comes home and mother says, "What did you learn today?" And he says, "Uh, you should have seen what happened in class today." And then he describes how the entire day's program was one or two very, very disturbed children.

We have to deal with this honestly, and we have to approach the public and demand that the schools have the authority not to have within their midst those who prevent the entire institution from functioning. If we can't lick that problem, we're finished. A major part of the movement from public schools to private schools is on the part of parents who have given up on this issue. It would be a terrible, terrible shame--and what an irony--if the federal government forces public schools to keep students who shouldn't be there, and then says to parents, "If you don't like it, we'll give you the money to go across the street to a school that will not take those very same children," which is what we're talking about in vouchers and tuition tax credits.

Another unpopular program: certain forms of bilingual education which, instead of teaching students to learn English as soon as possible, keep them on their own, original language longer and longer, and perhaps forever, because it never puts enough pressure on a student to learn the English language. Or even the notion that was popular a few years ago that this should become a bilingual society, and you really don't have to learn English to function; and those of us who insist on having children learn English in our society are denying the value of other cultures, or of other languages, or are being chauvinistic or super-patriotic, flag-waving, jingoistic. You know something: it may be that some educators believe that; some government officials believe that; maybe some courts believe that; but, thank God, the majority of the American people never accepted that. And neither do we.

Well when that sort of stuff comes along, we can't just say, "Well, they made us do it. And so we'll do it." Well maybe they will make us do it, but we ought to continue kicking and screaming and yelling and trying to change it. Because the longer we keep programs that the public says, "I'm going to pay for students who are not going to learn to function in our society--that's what I'm being taxed for?", we are undermining the credibility of public education in this country if we, as educators, do not forcefully and continuously speak out on issues of that sort.

Then, I don't have to quote to you many of the idiotic ways we are compelled to comply with the education for the handicapped. The notion that there is an obligation to educate the handicapped--fine, who would quarrel with that today? But some of the things we are compelled to do--crazy!

Racial quotas, the idea that you have to hire supervisors, hire teachers, place students into rooms so that everybody has to be arranged according to 10%, 90%, or 15%, 85--or some other mathematical arrangement--that that's the way you hire, that's the way you fire, that's the way you arrange people in rooms, that's the way you arrange them in schools. The American people do not accept that. And there is no reason why we should not be speaking out and speaking out very, very strongly on that.

School finance reform. Good idea. Why should some districts have this great wealth and be able to tap it, and right next door-- But you know something: while the idea is good, if you carry it out in certain ways, so as to take a high-paying district and say, "Yes, we know you moved there because you want very excellent schools for your children. But, you know, it's not fair if you have wonderful schools; therefore, we're going to prevent you from taxing

yourselves to pay for your own, better schools until that poor district next door catches up to you 50 years from now." Well, what choice do you give to people in that good school district except to say, "The heck with you, I'm going to shut down a public school, and I'll go out and buy my own private schools?"

And then, of course, we have the fights that take place in education--teachers, school boards, administrators--that is really very helpful from a public point of view also. Teachers are negotiating, they want a good contract. They figure, well the best way to get that contract is to weaken the image of the board of education in the eyes of the public. How do you do that? Well you stand up there and say, "Well, the board is really made up of a bunch of incompetent people, they waste a lot of money, they're only there for their own personal ambition--you should see the waste in this school system.

Well the public listens to that. Then, of course, the school board isn't going to just sit back and take that--that was a pretty nasty thing for the teachers to do. So the school board says, "Well, what about the incompetent teachers and the alcoholics, and the people who are insane and should have been taken away in a wagon a long time ago. And what about the ones who are constantly sick?" And this and that.

The public listens to the teachers hit the school board and they listen to the school board hit the teachers, and they believe both of us. There isn't any commercial we could put on television that would overcome the job we do on each other.

Well, do you see these Ford workers get up on television now that they have had to have givebacks. They must be seething inside that they are forced

to give back things that they have won over the years. They must be very angry. I would be very angry if I were a Ford worker today, I'd be very angry. But you don't see them getting on television saying, "Well, they took away some of our money and holidays, but I'm going to tell you those cars stink. They're really dangerous. I wouldn't buy one if I were you." Have you seen one Ford worker get on television and say that? Of course not. It's their company. It's their jobs. It's their future.

Well, we better start thinking about the things we say about each other. What we think about each other is something else. We can continue to have fun that way.

(Side two of tape missing some words)

...people a certain mission. And the schools have been weak in the delivery of what schools are supposed to deliver. Let's just take a number of signs.

One of these has to do--I guess one of the big campaigns of the last decade was the campaign to abolish standardized testing. Testing is terrible we are told. The tests are inaccurate. A child's life can be ruined because they flunk a particular test and it goes on their record. Tests are racially biased, because minorities don't do as well on tests as others do. Tests the children fail will make them feel bad. I should hope so. And I hope they work harder after they feel bad.

Are tests racially biased because minority group youngsters score lower? No. As a matter of fact, because minority group children score lower that was the justification for Title I and a lot of other programs. The assumption was not that blacks and hispanics and others are inferior, the assumption was

that because of prejudice and discrimination in the past, there needs to be compensation to assist them. It's like saying getting rid of tests is like getting rid of unemployment statistics. Or you get rid of the thermometer, then your fever will automatically disappear. Ridiculous. We still have groups that oppose testing. Well, the more we push away at let's get rid of testing, the more the public is going to feel the schools are doing a rotten job and that we're trying to bury the evidence.

And, by the way, there is no reason why we should not test teachers before they come into the profession. It is outrageous that lawyers--lawyers went to law school--but they've got to take a Bar exam. Doctors have to take examinations. Insurance brokers have to take an examination. Hairdressers have to take them. We take examinations for everything from within our society, but to become a teacher you don't have to take an examination. Why not? Because you went to college? Do all colleges have the same standards? Do some colleges allow people to graduate even though they can't read or write very well? Well, if not, then we don't have anything to worry about. Everybody will pass the test. But we know better than that. We know that standards in colleges have changed as well.

So that's one thing we can do: strong testing for teachers and for students.

The curriculum. How much English literature? Does a student get to read any books that the student likes to read no matter what its value? Or do we still insist that the students before they graduate have read some Dickens, some Shakespeare, and some of the great works of our heritage and of our culture, and works of certain difficulty and complexity. Do they have to take mathematics, or not? Do they have to take science, or not? Do they have to work

for an hour or two on homework or forget about that?

James Coleman did not prove that private schools are better than public schools. He proved that a school that compels the kid to take mathematics that the kid will know more mathematics than a child who has not taken mathematics. That was an astounding conclusion, and certainly worthy of front-page treatment of every newspaper in the country!

Hard subjects. No automatic promotions. Now, of course a child feels bad when they are left back and then they are with a peer group that is not of their own age group. And it does damage to a child. But it also does damage to a child to spend years in school to find out that you get the same reward whether you have made an effort or not made an effort.

So these are some of the things we can do in terms of standards.

Now, I would like to conclude by saying that I have not dealt with these issues as union issues or as job issues. Teachers will have jobs whether they are private schools or public schools. There are going to be the same number of children around. But the chances are that if we have tuition tax credits or vouchers, the same teachers will be hired. Public schools will have to sell their textbooks. They'll sell them to the new private schools, so you'll have the same books--even have the same buildings. Because when the kids leave our buildings the private schools are not going to want to build new ones, we'll be selling those off. There are quite a few communities where private schools are buying public schools. They don't want the old ones, they want the nice new buildings. They're pretty good negotiators.

What we're talking about in defending public education is a somewhat different issue than the question of jobs or the question of whether administrators will have jobs, or teachers, or school board members. We're really

talking about a basic institution within our society. We're talking about how did we get here as a nation? How is it that a country that started with a wilderness with people from many different countries and many different languages and with all the odds against it. And had there been any wise men around at that beginning, they probably would have said, "This is all going to fall apart. These are different religions and different groups, and they are going to end up fighting each other and killing each other, and it's never going to hold together."

But we not only made it, we became the wealthiest nation, the most liberal nation, the most democratic nation, and have preserved democracy longer than any other. And we did it to a large degree because of public education and because of the role that public schools have played in bringing people together from very different backgrounds and developing tolerance, respect, a common set of values and a common culture.

No one will convince me that tuition tax credits and vouchers will not ultimately result in separate catholic schools, and Jewish schools, and Protestant schools, and Fundamentalist schools, and Ku Klux Klan schools, and black nationalist schools, and communist schools, and other sorts of schools; that these schools will ultimately become religious, they will become ethnic, they will become political, and we will have problems that are not today imagined. If we think that Quebec has serious problems in terms of secession and in terms of possible civil war, and if we look around the world and see what has happened in those countries that have had such separate school systems, and what happens to them as nations, we could be planting the seeds for the destruction of our own country and of our own society.

And so, we enter this, not as a job question or a union question, and not merely because we want to preserve tradition, but because I think that each and every one of us has an image in mind of what this institution has meant to our country and what it will continue to be and to mean. It deserves support and defense, and it will need it during this period of time or we'll be in great trouble. I urge you to engage in major efforts in the coming weeks on this issue. It may very well be decided in this short period of time.

Thank you.

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