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June 29, 1983

STATEMENT OF
ALBERT SHANKER, PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, AFL-CIO
BEFORE THE
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

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Chris Smith

I want to express my support for the nominees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Morris Abram, John Bunzel and Robert Destro, distinguished Democrats and civil rights advocates who will bring commitment and prestige to the Commission, and for Linda Chavez, nominee for Commission staff director.

Morris Abram has spent a lifetime fighting racial and religious discrimination. His victory before the U.S. Supreme Court in Sanders v. Gray established the one-man, one-vote rule that opened the door to black political participation in the South. As a former president of the American Jewish Committee and chairman of the United Negro College Fund, Mr. Abram knows first-hand the fight to secure civil rights for every citizen. Mr. Abram was one of the original drafters of the United Nations treaty outlawing all forms of racial discrimination and was a member of the American Prosecutorial staff at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremburg, Germany.

John Bunzel, former president of San Jose State College, California, is a longtime advocate of civil rights. Dr. Bunzel's fight for equal justice goes back to 1947 when he was president of the Liberal Union, a student activist organization at Princeton University founded to oppose racial and religious discrimination in the University and in society. In the intervening 35 years, Dr. Bunzel has never swerved from his commitment to equal rights for all Americans.

Robert Destro, former General Counsel for the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, developed a legal service department for

a nationwide civil rights practice. Mr. Destro is an expert on religious and ethnic group discrimination.

Of the four nominees before you today, the one whom I know best and with whose work I am most familiar is Linda Chavez. As you know, Ms. Chavez has been with the American Federation of Teachers since 1975, except for a brief period in which she served in the Carter administration in 1977. In her nearly eight years with the AFT, she has assumed increasingly greater responsibility, starting as an assistant director in the department of legislation, later becoming editor of the American Educator and then taking responsibility for all AFT publications, which included four monthly newspapers, a weekly newsletter and a quarterly journal. In that capacity, Ms. Chavez managed the single largest department within the national office, managed a budget of \$1.4 million, excluding staff salaries, and consistently won more national awards for the publications she edited than any editor in the labor movement.

In March 1982, I appointed Ms. Chavez to a new position as assistant to the president responsible for coordinating and supervising the approximately 40-member professional staff of the AFT national office. She has authority to approve the expenditure of the bulk of discretionary funds in the national office budget, managing \$1.9 million for travel and printing. In addition, she, along with the Secretary-Treasurer of the union and the assistant to the president for organizing, negotiated for the union management a \$6 million, three-year contract with the employees of the AFT in the last round of staff union negotiations, thereby

participating in establishing the terms, wages and conditions of employment for the entire AFT professional staff.

I named Ms. Chavez to her current position because she has proved herself an outstanding manager who was able to gain both loyalty and performance from those whom she supervised at the same time as she cut costs and saved money for the organization. Her loss will be sorely felt by the AFT.

Knowing Ms. Chavez, as I do and having promoted her on the basis of her managerial skills to the top management staff position in the national office, I was somewhat dismayed to read in the press that a majority of the incumbent civil rights commissioners had expressed reservations about her managerial qualifications to be staff director of the Commission. Neither the Secretary-Treasurer of the AFT nor I have ever been questioned by these commissioners concerning Ms. Chavez's position on the AFT staff or whether in our view she is an able administrator. I find it somewhat surprising that the incumbent commissioners would pass judgment on Ms. Chavez's qualifications without any attempt to talk to me or to the Secretary-Treasurer, the two people most directly responsible for promoting Ms. Chavez to her current position and with whom she has worked directly for nearly eight years. I can think of no institution requiring greater tact and skill to manage than a labor union. In my opinion, Ms. Chavez has already succeeded at what may be the most difficult task of her managerial career.

It is clear that the qualifications of the four nominees whose appointments you are considering are impeccable and that their commitment

to civil rights is a matter of record. What opposition these nominees face while clouded in rehtoric about the independence of the agency is clearly based on the nominees' history of abhorrence of racial quotas. All four nominees have publicly stated that they oppose the use of racial quotas. I urge this committee not to allow quotas to become the defining issue in establishing commitment to civil rights. If these nominees are rejected, no one will believe that it had anything to do with independence or with qualifications. You would be sending a clear signal to the American people that the United States Senate believes adherence to racial quotas to be the ultimate criterion by which to judge all candidates for civil rights positions in the government. If that were to happen, it would make a mockery of the civil rights laws of this nation and would belie the promises of the Senate supporters of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that nothing in the bill would ever require preferential treatment for members of minority groups or women.

I urge you to reaffirm the integrity of this body in enacting the civil rights laws of the last twenty years by confirming these nominees.

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