

NYSUT RA

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1 the front of the microphone and always got there
2 with the exact compromise that was needed to bring
3 our whole body together and that's kind of the way
4 I think of Al. It's with a great pleasure today
5 that I bring to you our president, somebody who
6 Toni Cortese once described as AFT's national
7 treasurer. The president of the American
8 Federation of Teachers, Al Shanker.

9

10 ADDRESS BY AFT PRESIDENT ALBERT SHANKER:

11

12 ALBERT SHANKER: Thank you, Tom. It's good to be back
13 here for the annual pool. I was told a little
14 earlier today that it's getting to be very complex
15 and I really need to get an explanation before
16 participating, so I'll get your advice for the next
17 time. I would like to start by asking each of you
18 to remember a year ago when this body I think
19 started with some great deal of skepticism as we
20 were about to hear a candidate for president of the
21 United States and one of the things that happened
22 at last year's NYSUT convention as I talked to many
23 delegates after Bill Clinton spoke was that a very

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1 large number pretty much the same thing, I had a
2 lot of doubts or I didn't like him before or he
3 really changed my mind today. It's been quite an
4 event. There are not many cases where a large
5 number of people come together and end up changing
6 their minds. Usually we get angry or we can be
7 more inspired or more committed or we can get a
8 little more knowledge or information, but it's not
9 usual that we change. That was a very different
10 kind of occasion. Most of us had not heard him
11 speak. We had seen him on television on these talk
12 shows or we had seen the little clips and we
13 certainly did not see or heard a talk in which
14 education was related to so many of the other
15 issues in our society. I think at the outset it's
16 very important for all of us to realize that
17 without NYSUT he probably would not be the
18 president of the United States today. The
19 primaries were filled with problems. As it turned
20 out, he suffered a number of losses and the
21 projections were already saying that he's moving
22 backward and had he not done well in this state it
23 probably would have been the end. The work that

1 all of you did and our members really made a
2 difference. We know it and I think everybody in
3 the administration knows it because whenever I call
4 up to talk to somebody or walk into an office I can
5 see that American Federation of Teachers sometimes
6 if they are from New York NYSUT they really know
7 what we did, they understand it, they appreciate
8 it. It makes a difference. I think that as the
9 program for this administration moves forward we'll
10 all have reason to feel really good about what we
11 did and we don't have to wait for that because
12 there are already a number of things that have
13 happened. I like all of you and like our members I
14 watch the news in the evening, I pick up the paper
15 in the morning and I get very disappointed when I
16 see what happened to the stimulus package, that
17 involved a very substantial amount of money,
18 chapter one money and summer money which is really
19 going to be missed unless there's some way of
20 reintroducing that, but there are a lot of things
21 that they happen one day and they don't even make
22 headlines or we forget. For example, you'll
23 remember that not very long time ago a whole bunch

1 of people down south who were plucking chickens and
2 packing them died in a fire. They died because the
3 place was kept locked up and because the safety
4 conditions there were terrible and one of the
5 reasons that happened is that under the Regan and
6 Bush Administrations they got rid of a lot of
7 safety inspectors and instead they employed a lot
8 of inspectors to look at how unions were spending
9 their money on political action. I don't mind them
10 looking at our books and we get examined quite
11 regularly and we have not made any headlines and
12 we're very careful and I'm sure that we won't, but
13 this president of the United States knows that it's
14 a lot more important to go after people who are
15 putting the lives of their workers in jeopardy,
16 that that takes priority over looking over some of
17 the books of unions. One of the first executive
18 orders of the president was you remember that
19 George Bush made sure that every federal employee
20 received a notice saying that he was not required
21 to belong to a union. Just think about it. Here's
22 a Federal Government with all sorts of problems and
23 deficits and one of the priority items was to tell

1 every federal employee that they didn't have to
2 belong to a union. Well, that's ended. When
3 Secretary of Education Reilly was up for
4 confirmation, one of the people on the committee
5 said to him if you're against vouchers, what about
6 having a small experiment somewhere with vouchers
7 and Governor Reilly looked at him and said if
8 something is bad for the country doing it on a
9 smaller scale doesn't make it any better and he
10 just dismissed the idea very quickly. Now we have
11 a proposal from the president which is a
12 combination of taxes and stimulus and I was pleased
13 to be present a few days after his speech before
14 Congress and a number of union leaders and
15 President Clinton managed to bring together a very
16 broad group of people from business and labor to
17 support that program, but it's very clear that
18 unless there is ongoing support that you can't
19 count on the polls and the enthusiasm and the
20 speech that builds up one week. If you wait a week
21 or two or three or four that dissipates. You have
22 to keep working on them. We will see a national
23 health care program proposed in the month of May.

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1 We will see the president proposing to abolish to
2 repeal the current law which says that you have a
3 right to go on strike and you may not be fired for
4 going on strike, but you can be permanently
5 replaced. I don't quite know what the difference
6 is between being fired and being permanently
7 replaced, but for the first time in many years we
8 have a president who is not only supporting
9 Congress, but is pledged to a commission has been
10 created. Again, it didn't make headlines, but it
11 should have. An actual commission has been
12 appointed to review the labor laws of this
13 country. You'll remember that back in the late
14 '70s we came very close to getting somebody called
15 labor law reform. In Canada which is not very far
16 from here the labor movement is growing. The
17 reason it's growing is if the union walks in and
18 signs up fifty percent of the members plus, if that
19 union is recognized they don't have to have an
20 election. In the United States you can get sixty
21 or seventy percent of the employees signed up and
22 then the employer conducts a big campaign,
23 frightens the people and before you know it the

1 sixty or seventy percent that signed up don't
2 bother voting or they're frightened of voting the
3 other way. This commission is going to look at why
4 it is at least, at least part of their mission is
5 to look at why it is that union movements are
6 larger in other industrial countries whereas in the
7 United States the trend movement is departing.
8 Clearly the implication is there is not a level
9 playing field, that the rules of the game are sort
10 of loaded. That's a pretty gutsy thing for a
11 president to do in the first hundred days to say
12 that we're going to review the labor laws for this
13 country and perhaps come forth with some which will
14 be fairer than the ones that we have now. Today I
15 was asked to be with the president down in New
16 Orleans. I'm here because I couldn't miss the
17 pool. He's moving ahead and very soon we will have
18 this school board transition program, safe schools
19 and a whole bunch of other programs which he has
20 promised. Now, I think it's very important for all
21 of us in this room and our members who are not here
22 today, but with whom we need to communicate to
23 share the idea that when you've got a friendly

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1 administration in office you've got a different set
2 of responsibilities. For twelve years we knew that
3 we could not get a good piece of legislation
4 through, it would be vetoed and in most cases the
5 Congressmen never even bothered to try very hard,
6 why try that hard when you know it's only going to
7 get vetoed in the end anyway, but now we have the
8 possibility of passing legislation. All we had to
9 do was wait for the administration to propose
10 something that was very bad which they did
11 regularly and then get the word out saying here's
12 what they're going to do to you, this is going to
13 be terrible, and start calling your members of
14 Congress and work again. That's not difficult to
15 do when something bad comes along to mobilize
16 people again. Now we're in a very different set of
17 responsibilities. Look what happened in the last
18 two months. We had some very good proposals out
19 there in the stimulus package. A lot of that money
20 would have come to schools. A lot of that money
21 would have been used for programs that would help
22 students and teachers to hire professionals to
23 provide some additional help, care for youngsters.

1 I'm sure that there was overwhelming support for
2 that program among our members, not all of them.
3 Here's where the rug comes in. I didn't like the
4 idea for assistant president of the United States
5 to propose that federal workers take a pay freeze
6 for two years. That's the unilateral proposal by
7 an employer that a large number of employees be
8 frozen. I thought it was a wrong thing to do. I
9 also thought it would have a negative affect on
10 many of us, that our school boards might very well
11 turn around and say if the president can require
12 federal employees to be patriotic by taking a
13 freeze, how about you, our state and our community
14 is not in very good shape. There may be other
15 parts of it that we didn't like that much. That's
16 the different position you're in when you got an
17 overall package that's good. It's like negotiating
18 an agreement, contract with the Board of
19 Education. When you all finish, there may be one
20 or two or three things in it that you'll like.
21 There's certainly lots of things in it, but it
22 would have been a lot better if you didn't have to
23 negotiate them, but you could have written them

1 yourself. A contract is always a compromise and
2 legislation always is too and what happened is that
3 very few of the groups that wanted this legislation
4 to go through mobilized. We didn't do it, other
5 unions didn't do it. As a matter of fact, I think
6 the White House was so confident that this was
7 going to go through that they didn't even call
8 anybody to ask them to do it because they were
9 pretty sure it was going to happen. I think we're
10 learning a lot too. We're learning that when a
11 program comes out that's pretty good and that we
12 like we should wait until all the opponents go out
13 and get the postcards, letters, telegrams in and
14 get their shot and for kids and for teachers and
15 people that we represent and good for the country
16 we should sit back and wait and we're going to have
17 to work for each and every one of these things and
18 we're going to have to go out and explain to our
19 members cases of which they're not going to be that
20 enthusiastic about. That I think is probably the
21 most important job that we're going to have
22 throughout the rest of this administration and I'd
23 like to deal with a few of the issues that are

1 coming before us which we need to play a very
2 important part. One of the pieces of legislation
3 that undoubtedly will resurface is something that
4 we've been for for many many years and that's the
5 idea that every kid who needs a head start should
6 have a head start and we've been for that for a
7 long period of time. However, throughout the
8 period of Republican rule where we knew that they
9 wanted to cut a lot of programs back, we were
10 pretty quiet, we did not express the views that
11 we're expressing now on some of these programs
12 because we knew that if we said not everything
13 about Carter is so good, we should expand it, yes,
14 we should get more kids on it, but we should do the
15 following because here's what's wrong with it, we
16 knew somebody would grab hold of what's wrong with
17 it and said let's get rid of the whole thing
18 altogether, but now we've gotten an administration
19 that's not going to get rid of it and so one of the
20 things that we can do is be very open, honest and
21 shape up some of these programs that have been
22 there for a long time and they can be improved.
23 About one-third of the Head Start programs across

1 this country are very good programs, but about
2 two-thirds are not particularly good and they're
3 not particularly good because the wages that they
4 pay are a terrible shame. They are so bad that
5 there is tremendous turnover, people come in, work
6 a few weeks, a month or two, out they go, somebody
7 else comes in and the last thing in the world that
8 youngsters who are in poverty need is this constant
9 movement from one person to another. Another thing
10 that's not good about the program is it's just part
11 of the day. Then perhaps an aunt or mother in the
12 evening and there's constant shuffling of the
13 youngster from one caretaker to another is very
14 destabilizing and very bad. It's not a year-round
15 program, it's not an allday program and there is
16 no -- basically there are no training programs that
17 are worth anything. We are supporting more money,
18 lots more money to the program, but first priority
19 needs to be take the program we've got now and make
20 it all excellent, make it really good and then
21 experiment. We're working with the administration
22 in terms of trying to do that. Another big one is
23 going to come forward is the reorganization with

1 the elementary and secondary education. A major
2 part of that is chapter one. When that legislation
3 was first established, the Federal Government was
4 very worried that when the money for kids who are
5 poor kids got to a district the people in power
6 would take that money that was meant for poor kids
7 and they would give it to the kids who weren't poor
8 because they had more power, more voice, more
9 influence in the system and so the way the law was
10 designed to say to always spend this money on the
11 kids who are supposed to get it and in most places
12 that meant that the kids had to be pulled out for
13 periods of time to get special instruction and of
14 course when they were pulled out they missed the
15 regular instruction and there's a lot of research
16 now that shows that most of these programs are not
17 working for precisely that reason. What you're
18 getting, you're getting some plus in the program,
19 but then the minus from the program and therefore
20 there is likely to be a big overhaul and the
21 overhauls are going to be something like this,
22 we're not going to tell you how to use that money
23 any more, we're going to give it to you and you can

1 use it but we're going to hold you responsible
2 because we're not going to tell you what the rules
3 and regulations are any more, we're not going to be
4 bureaucratic any more, we're going to let you use
5 it any way you think is going to improve the
6 achievement of these youngsters, but in exchange
7 for letting you use that money we're going to hold
8 you responsible and we expect that these youngsters
9 are going to improve and if they don't improve
10 something is going to happen. Now, what that is we
11 don't know yet, but that's a set of proposals that
12 we're going to need to work out with the
13 administration and it's going to be tough because
14 there are a lot of anti-teacher groups out there
15 who essentially want a piece of legislation that's
16 going to end up being very punitive and very
17 hostile teachers without -- one of the proposals
18 was they either divide the school up in four parts,
19 the top achievers, the next to top, the third and
20 then the bottom and the school would be considered
21 a failure unless students in all four groups make
22 progress. Well, we haven't made any educational
23 progress in this country over twenty years. I

1 would think if you can make progress with
2 one-fourth of the kids you would be doing more than
3 we've done in twenty years, but here the proposal
4 here is that unless you make progress with all four
5 groups of kids you get punished, silly things like
6 that. That's going to be one. Look out. We will
7 be getting lots of material to you. We will be
8 informing you and please inform your members
9 about -- and as proposals in the Congress what the
10 hot issues are. There's another hot issue and that
11 is how much money. There is now an increase in the
12 number of children in poverty in California.
13 There's no decrease here, but the fact that the
14 proportions have changed will mean that New York
15 State will lose a huge amount of money unless
16 chapter one gets more money. In other words, why
17 should we say that just because more kids are
18 moving to California from other countries, we still
19 have all of our kids who got special problems,
20 there's no reason why we should take that money
21 from our kids and provide enough for the new ones
22 in California and keep the money that we have for
23 our kids who still need it. That's going to be a

1 big fight because of the entire budget deficit
2 situation, but it's one that we need to get ready
3 for. I'd like to spend a few minutes on the
4 national health care proposal. I was worried at
5 first that the administration was going to come in
6 with some sort of very modest proposal, something
7 that would be sort of a health care for people who
8 didn't have any health care and that it would be
9 something that would not help most of us because
10 most of us with all the problems we've got with
11 health care, namely increase in deductibles and
12 increase in co-pays and frequent negotiations with
13 efforts to take back and the squeeze where we got
14 if we want to keep our health benefits up we have
15 to suffer in terms of salary increases, with all
16 those problems by and large our members and for the
17 most part across the country have some of the best
18 health plans that anybody has in our country and so
19 we were concerned that the Federal Government would
20 create a mild plan which would make ours look so
21 rich that there would be pressure to move ours
22 down. Well, from the meetings that we have had,
23 we've had a number of meetings with Hillary Clinton

1 and we've had a number with the other people who
2 are working on the team who developed the program,
3 the latest that we have is it's going to be a very
4 good national health care program, that it's going
5 to be one that our members would be happy to be
6 part of. They're not going to say that's okay for
7 someone that doesn't have anything, but keep me out
8 of it. It looks like they're going to come out
9 with something which is very bold and very brave.
10 The philosophy they have is the one successful
11 program we got in this country that is very well
12 protected is Social Security because everybody pays
13 into it, everybody feels that's something I'm going
14 to get when I retire and if somebody tries to go
15 after it everybody is out to protect it and the
16 philosophy that the Clinton Administration has with
17 respect to health care is we'd like to create a
18 health care program that the American people like
19 so much that if anybody comes after it four or
20 five, eight, ten, fifteen years from now it's going
21 to be like coming after Social Security, people are
22 going to say that's a great health plan and I want
23 to keep it intact. There will be, however, some

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1 things in it that may be better than what some of
2 us have now and there will be other things in it
3 that may not be as good. The important thing to
4 understand is that we are not going to hold on to
5 the plan that we now have because they have gone
6 from proportioning eight percent up to thirteen,
7 fourteen percent now, had it up to twenty-two
8 percent, but costs are escalating very rapidly,
9 we're not going to be able to afford, the bubble
10 will burst and if we pay more it's going to be by
11 getting those salary increases or by actually
12 working backwards on salary. There's no way we can
13 maintain it without creating a new plan which has
14 cost controls, so that's what this is about. There
15 will be a tremendous fight on this. It started
16 already. You can be sure that it's going to be a
17 tremendous fight. I can tell you the UFD for many
18 years has managed a health and welfare fund and one
19 of the parts of the health and welfare plan is a
20 prescription drug plan. You go to a pharmacy,
21 almost every pharmacy, and you go in and for a very
22 small amount of money you get your prescription
23 drugs. Well, some of these pharmacists decide that

1 they will cheat the union. There are a number of
2 things that they can do where they are essentially
3 taking money from the unions' welfare fund without
4 actually providing the services that the union has
5 contracted with and the union has a bunch of
6 pharmacists working for the union and the union
7 analyzes these things and from time to time we were
8 able to discover that a pharmacist was cheating.
9 We had the right to go in and examine the person's
10 books and what we found out the pharmacist was
11 cheating. We would generally take him into court
12 and we will also suspend him from the plan, you are
13 cheating out the teachers, that money belongs to
14 all of them and when you take that money and use it
15 for something we would be throwing away money
16 that's there for everybody, you're stealing from
17 our members is what it amounts to, you're not part
18 of this plan any more. The next day somebody would
19 come downstairs, walk into this pharmacy, one of
20 our members and the pharmacist didn't say I was
21 cheating from you so I'm not in the plan any more.
22 He would say, your union is very good for teachers,
23 you want them to get higher salaries and

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1 everything, they treat us so shabbily, they don't
2 want to give us decent amount of profits so that we
3 can pay our employees enough money and so we've
4 gotten out of the plan and you want to get your
5 prescription filled for this nominal fee you're now
6 going to have to walk to some other pharmacy
7 because we're out. Well, what do you think
8 happened? Well, the member was very angry. First
9 of all, the member thinks we are mistreating the
10 pharmacist. Secondly, that member now can't just
11 walk downstairs and get the baby's medicine. They
12 have to walk four blocks. That's a great
13 inconvenience. What happens? That member goes to
14 the school and says to all the other members do you
15 know what the union's doing, my pharmacist told me
16 a lot of pharmacists are going to get out of this
17 thing because they're mistreating pharmacists and
18 before you know it we have to send representatives
19 out to a hundred schools to talk to teachers and
20 tell them that we're not mistreating pharmacists.
21 The relationship between doctors and their patients
22 is a very intimate one and when your doctor tells
23 you that there's something you need and you're not

1 going to be able to get it address that little
2 phrase, that little expression is going to be
3 enough to turn a lot of our members into
4 opponents. The only thing that's going to get a
5 good proposal through is cost education on the part
6 of our members during this whole campaign. Without
7 us and without other people like us in similar
8 organizations, it's not going to go through. I
9 know the polls right now show seventy-five percent
10 of the American people are afraid they're going to
11 lose their coverage. We haven't seen the campaign
12 yet. All of us who watch the president speak to
13 Congress, I was sure that the whole package was
14 going to go through and we saw the polls the next
15 day, we saw the people be interviewed and we saw
16 the president going on for campaign. Sure, it was
17 a done deal, right? Right now it's a dead deal.
18 Health care will be a dead deal unless we take it
19 as something which is not just the president's
20 proposal to the Congress, but we ought to go
21 forward and put on a tremendous campaign to make
22 sure that it goes through. Now, in this range of
23 issues, there's going to be a lot of tough points.

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1 For instance, schoolwork proposal, apprenticeship.
2 They can do it in Europe. It's going to be very
3 difficult to do here. When new employees are
4 training as apprentices, the unions over there are
5 not worried that the company is going to hire the
6 apprentice at a lower wage and try to get rid of
7 the unionized workers. Actually it's the unionized
8 workers over there who do the training, train the
9 apprentices. In the United States of course that's
10 quite different. A lot of these things are going
11 to have to be worked out. There is going to be a
12 conflict in the Congress on the whole issue of dues
13 in education. The administration has taken a very
14 good position on this, but there are members of
15 Congress who believe very strongly I believe very
16 wrongly that you can't raise standards for
17 youngsters unless you make sure that all the
18 youngsters have an absolutely equal opportunity to
19 learn. They've got a point. They're not typically
20 even in tough areas, but they certainly show us how
21 bad things are and something certainly needs to be
22 done about that, but the fact is that some kids are
23 always going to have advantages over other kids.

1 If we gave every kid in the United States a
2 computer or if every kid had a computer some
3 parents would use their own money and give their
4 kids private computer lessons so they that get
5 additional instruction over what they get in
6 school. Foreign languages and the arts have just
7 been added in the legislation to the national goals
8 and that's going to be a very good thing. There
9 will be kids who got to try to learn the foreign
10 language in a few hours of classroom and there will
11 be some parents that take their kids to another
12 country for a couple months and give them the
13 experience of using the language, so the idea that
14 we can't have any standards in this country until
15 every single issue is taken care of and we've got
16 to remember that while we have temporarily pushed
17 back the school voucher it's still there. The
18 people of California will have a referendum on
19 this, Illinois has proposals in the legislature.
20 They came very close to passing the Pennsylvania
21 legislature last year. We're not out of the woods
22 on this. It's great to have a president going
23 across the country saying good things about

1 teachers and about schools and about standards and
2 new assessments or whatever and speak against
3 private school vouchers. That all helps, but still
4 it's a movement within states and it's a movement
5 within localities and unless we can convince
6 parents and citizens of this country that things
7 are going to change in the next ten years they will
8 look for other answers even if the answers are
9 wrong. That's another one. I can't see many of
10 our members writing letters to members of Congress
11 saying we want legislation that supports high
12 standards and better assessments. Very hard to get
13 teachers to sit down and write. Now I'd like to
14 spend just a few minutes talking about relations
15 with the National Education Association because
16 you've undoubtedly read these in Education Week and
17 elsewhere, most of which -- well, some of them sort
18 of indicated that were on the verge of merger for
19 teacher unity, national. That is not so. What is
20 so is this. We sat down and we said you got the
21 most here, you take them, we've got the most here,
22 we'll take these, we don't have anything here,
23 let's go and do it together and nobody spent

1 millions of dollars and we're basically doing it
2 peacefully. We are instead of trying to beat each
3 other to the gun and going to the president and
4 Congress, we do a lot of things together. It's
5 more effective that way. The AFT has had a
6 committee and that committee is going to report to
7 its convention and then we'll probably take a step,
8 a big small step or a small big step, but it's just
9 a step. Basically I think it's going to say that
10 they're going to spend next year rethinking the
11 question about what their relationship should be to
12 the AFL-CIO or to the AFT, that they're not looked
13 at in a long time, they're going to look at it
14 again. I think it will propose that they meet with
15 us and with the AFL-CIO to have these discussions.
16 I think that's perfectly fine. We're working all
17 together, we're cooperating, we work very closely
18 together and engage in a joint campaign. Well,
19 these are the challenges before us. As I
20 indicated, we're going to have a lot of exciting
21 pieces of legislation as you can see. Bill Clinton
22 is not a person who says I can only handle one
23 thing at a time. He's handling a lot. The

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1 criticism may be too much. I don't think it's too
2 much in terms of what the country needs. If we're
3 all in there working, it won't be too much in terms
4 of what can actually be dealt with and what could
5 be passed, but for us it's just going to be a tough
6 period, but an exciting one. It's tough because
7 we're not going to get any of these things without
8 substantial and massive member support and
9 involvement. We could see that now with the
10 Congress, with the way the press handles everything
11 which they think is a tiny little mistake. These
12 things are not going to be easy. These are all
13 things we could not have and would not have them
14 during previous administration. The answers would
15 have been very clear. We would have been losers on
16 them. Here we have a chance to be tremendous
17 winners, but it's a chance and only a chance.
18 Whether we're winners in that chance depends on
19 whether we can mobilize all of our members for each
20 of these pieces of legislation the same way that we
21 mobilize them to support the election of Bill
22 Clinton. I'm here to urge you when you get these
23 messages from Washington that we're going to send

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1 in the messages that mean that whether or not we're
2 in and in strong is going to make the difference of
3 life and death. When you get those, please get the
4 message out and we can have a great four years.
5 Thank you again for your support and good luck.

6 THOMAS HOBART: I know that when Al finishes speaking
7 there's a rush to the doorway, but since it is
8 about three minutes to six if you wait three
9 minutes we can recognize some of the people that
10 are with us today. I'd like to introduce to you
11 Arnold Gardner. Arnold is the vice chairman of the
12 Board of Trustees of the State University of New
13 York. He's from Buffalo. He's a very old friend.
14 He was the president of the Buffalo Board of
15 Education when I was president of the Buffalo
16 Teachers Federation. We learned about employee
17 management relations early on. I also would like
18 to introduce to you representing the bargaining
19 units of the employees of NYSUT Bea who is the
20 president of Local 1141 WCA. From PSA, the
21 Professional Staff Association George Rubenstein.
22 George. From the AFT, the regional director Sandy
23 Nelson. Sandy. The director of higher education

