PSRP
ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT SHANKER

and

INTERVIEWS

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

(Applause)

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

I said that the incident which Lorretta referred and which I will refer to for a few minutes is one that was both a high and a low point in my own career and that of the organization. Back in 1969, the United Federation of Teachers was in a collective bargaining campaign to organize the paraprofessionals in New York City. After a very bitter and dirty campaign we managed to win the 10,000 paraprofessionals with a very narrow vote. I don't remember
whether the margin was 30 votes or 50 in a unit of 10,000.
It was very, very close. We then sat down to negotiate with
the Board of Education, and the Board of Education had a really
terrific, nifty idea as to the argument that they felt they
should use in order to keep paraprofessionals' salaries and
benefits low.

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

(Laughter)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: So after many months of
negotiating, the paras who had been very, very patient met
and voted to strike. Now at that time many of the teachers
in the school system didn't want paras in the union. Many
of them didn't even want paras in their classrooms. They
felt that they had the privacy of their own rooms and if any-
thing ever went wrong, nobody would ever know about it,
or they hoped that no one would. Here is somebody they
didn't know, a parent from the community, and they didn't
know if something went wrong in the classroom, that parent
would go out and report it to other parents. In other words
they didn't know whether they might not get into deep
trouble because there were paras in the classroom, so there
was hostility and fear, and a good deal of anxiety.

So when the paras started to strike, many
teachers sent me letters and I started getting phone calls
and they said "We are not going to stay out just because
they are on strike. So we faced the problem that we could
have two groups of members in the same union, in the same
local with one group undermining the solidarity of the
other group. Now I went around to a lot schools, and I
changed some teachers' minds and I didn't change other
people's minds. People were very angry. The teachers had
been on strike the previous two years and the paras who were
not yet organized, some of them did cross picket lines and
some didn't because they were not in the union and they
also had no security. Some of them were afraid that they
would be fired if they stayed out. About that time, something
happened that was terrible, but it turned off to be very
good. I went off to jail (laughter) for the strike of the
previous year. And just a few years before that, I remembered that Dr. King sent a letter from Birmingham jail. Mine was nowhere near Dr. King's letter, which is a great historic letter for all history, but I did write a letter from jail for all members in which I said that if the teachers didn't respect the picket lines of their colleagues in schools that there was no future for the union in New York City because instead of teachers and teachers being united and fighting for better conditions, against the Board of Education, that everytime one group was out, the other group would deliberately go in and they would have no power at all in any set of negotiations, and if you read the letter carefully—I didn't want it put out as a direct threat because I don't like threats and people don't respond very well to them—but if you read it very carefully, I pretty much said that no union leader in his right mind would want to hang around and stay with the union where the whole business was one group of members fighting another group of members. I felt that way very strongly. I felt that I would leave just because it would be hopeless, and so we had a big membership meeting and teachers came down and they voted. They came down and they voted and they were very angry. They kind of looked
at me and said, "Well, we are voting the way you want us to, but we don't believe in it."

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

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

And I could tell from what you said in your earlier remarks, that the same kind of experiences of rejection and a certain amount of hostility, and non-acceptance occurs almost everywhere at the beginning, and usually it takes some tough times where paras, teachers, and school-related personnel, everybody, works together and they see by working together instead of separately or against each other that they are able to be so much more successful. It is so obvious a lesson,
but it takes a long time for people to learn. Often, they have to re-learn it. That was the incident that Lorretta referred to and when I retired from the presidency in New York City a year ago at New Years, a lot of reporters were around asking me to reminisce and asking me to pick out one thing in all the years that I had been the leader of the local that I was most proud. It was the organization of the para-professional and the ability to get teachers and para-professionals to work together in behalf of each other. I have not changed that view one bit (Applause). That is precisely what we have to tell all across the country.

(Applause)

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

All of you have been here before, just by looking around and seeing the number of people who are here,
and also by looking at what you are doing back home, we
know that we now have over 100,000 paras and school-
related personnel in the American Federation of Teachers.
It's an all-time high.

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

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

We have found that after you win an election
and you negotiate a contract, a contract or two or three, that
you have to keep asking people over and over again. You have to keep going back to them. You have to keep telling them what you did yesterday and the day before and what you are going to do tomorrow. If you keep after them, they do sign up, but they don't just come automatically.

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

We have school-related and paraprofessional committees now in 15 states, and 13 of those states have special conferences. It is important to know that large numbers are teachers and new groups start coming in, and at first those groups are small numbers; it is hard to have special activities because the number of people in those groups is kind of small, you know. The first conference, you could hold in a telephone booth (laughter) so you don't bother, but now the fact that so many states are holding these conferences is an indication of the large numbers who have come in and the recognition on the part of states that this group is growing and very significant in size.
So we have classified personnel in community colleges. We have bus drivers, food service employees, secretaries. We have got materials being developed on everything from lunch programs to school bus safety, and this is obviously with a base of 100,000 and growing very rapidly.

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

Paraprofessionals in many districts were, for years considered sort of an experiment. We don't know if we want to keep you. You are here on these special funds that we got. We got them from model cities, the career program or in those days Title I, so paraprofessionals were sort of kept on a string. We don't know if we want to keep you and this is sort of a temporary thing.
Well, it has been temporary now for about 20 years, and it is like some of the buildings that they built in Washington during the war and 30 years later, they still call them temporary buildings. I don't know if they expect a bicentennial and finally they will turn around after 200 years and finally say, now we think we will keep you.

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

It will mean several things. First of all we will get away from this game that may be some day we will not have paraprofessionals. That is nonsense. No school system that has had paraprofessionals would seriously think of returning to the time when the did not have them, but it also means that the public needs to be guaranteed that there are standards in the field. These are very important, and I will get back to this later. The career ladder concept is the important one.
Several years before the paras were employed in New York City there was a big conference at the Bank Street College of Education. I remember the people who were there. There were members of congress. They were all talking about how we were going to create paraprofessionals and they thought what people would come in at--$1.50 they were talking about at that time at that conference--and that they said was great. The name that year was "The Teacher and Her Staff."

(Laughter)

So the teacher was now going to be a boss, and paras were going to be the cheap labor, and they were figuring out how great it was going to be at $1.50 an hour you could hire a lot of people. They never had the idea that maybe somebody couldn't live on $1.50 an hour or maybe somebody might want more, or that maybe somebody who was in a classroom with a teacher might eventually want to be a teacher and that there ought to be an opportunity to do that.

I mean there are people who do want to remain as paraprofessionals. There is nothing wrong with that. It is wonderful work.

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

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

Well, what sort of better effort can you make than if you have paraprofessionals who are already there and they are doing parts of the job and they under-
stand that it is an avenue to advancement.

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

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

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

Well, you have been reading about private jails (Laughter) I wish it were funny. I want you to know that we are working with the public employee department of the AFL-CIO and there are several things we are doing. First you will see coming from another bunch of people. We are
going out to professors in different colleges and universities
who don't agree with this contracting out and we are asking
them to make studies. Why are we always hearing the good
news about how they are contracting out and they got better
services for less?

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

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

The second thing which we have done in this area
is that we have started meeting, and this is going to get me
a little bit to my next topic, but we have started meeting
with all the people who are running for the presidency of the
United States and quite a few of them were down just three weeks ago when the AFL-CIO's Executive Council spent a week at its council meeting in Bal Harbour, Florida. There were quite a number of people there who are either candidates or thinking about running, including a couple of republicans. Governor Kane was there and Governor Thompson of Illinois and there were just about all of the democrats.

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

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

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

(Laughter and applause)

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

(Laughter and applause)
Well, in order to pass one of those exams, you have to remember a few things.

(Laughter)

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

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

Furthermore, what would happen in those days
was that one union would support Carter and one union would support Muskie and another union would support somebody else and it was ridiculous because here is all of our hard-earned money from our members and what are we doing? We are doing just what I said in the beginning in terms of having the paras fight with the teachers in the same district. Why have one union fight another one?

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

It turned out to be pretty easy in 1984 because Kennedy didn't run, he could have had a lot of support, and so when you compared Mondale with all the others that were running in 1984, for most people in unions, they knew who Mondale was. He had been around a long time as a senator. He sponsored almost every piece of legislation for public employees, for paras, for teachers, for health benefits, for daycare and early childhood—you name it and it was the Mondale bill or the Mondale dash dash and other names there.
And these people were good at some things and not at others, but for most people there was just no comparison, so it was kind of easy. And that was true of other unions too. It was kind of easy to get a two-thirds vote and that is what it takes in the AFL-CIO, and that happened.

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

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

(Laughter)

We ought to keep our minds open. It was not a speech. We are not committed against him. We should pick
the person that we think would be best for us and that will have the best chance of winning, so what we have to do this year, the AFL-CIO is going to give the same question to all the candidates, including republican candidates. Last time we didn't have to interview Ronald Reagan. We know what he stood for. He was very pro-union in the PATCO situation. We knew where he stood. We knew where he stood on education. We knew where he stood on public employees' employment. We knew where he stood on merit pay. We knew where he stood on union busting, so there was no point in interviewing him because we knew we were going to oppose him.

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

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

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

We will, however, ask them a lot of other questions that are specific like some of the things that interest us on the contracting out, and where they are going to go on education and all the pro's and con's, and other programs. What we are going to do is give them those in writing and have them write those out, so we are going to ship out to you a video tape where these candidates will have an opportunity to talk to us as unions and say that is why you should vote for me and then there will be a little booklet where they have all the things in writing
and you will be able to see who answers directly
and who is trying to duck the question—and who is on the
wrong side. We will have all of that in front of us.

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

But between now and next September we will run
articles in our newspapers. We will ask the candidates to
present position papers and we will be taking a close look at
them and somewhere around between August and September, we
are going to have to find a way of polling our members. All
of you and the people you represent out there are going to have
to get back to me and get back to the AFT Executive Council
because somewhere in early October I am going to be called
to a meeting of the General Board of the AFL-CIO and I am
going to be asked to vote the AFT 630,000 votes for one candi-
date or another, and my votes and the votes of all the
others, if somebody gets two-thirds, the AFL-CIO will
then support one candidate and all the union offices across the country will go to work for that candidate. If we don't get two thirds, we will have to sit down and figure out what to do. There may then be different unions going right back to the old game, supporting different candidates.

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

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

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

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

We listen. We poll. We do all sorts of
things and by the time we get there I am doing it because
I know how the overwhelming majority of the people feel,
and then when I do it, everybody out there says, "This is
great. Let us go to work," and then they get the telephone
banks and start going out distributing literature and
the candidate knows it because everywhere he is somebody
says "I am from the AFT." And they know that. We want to
make the same thing happen. We want to make the same
thing happen again. We do not want an endorsement that is
a paper endorsement and otherwise doesn't mean anything.
will only endorse if we know that our members are with us, and I don't mean 51 percent because if you have got 51 percent and the other 49 percent are really against, there is no candidate worth splitting the union for because the candidates only serve for a couple of years and the union is going to be around forever. So we don't want to break that up.

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

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

Well, by that time it is too late to slate delegates. By that time--this process actually started a year ago. A candidate who decided that he is going to run
tomorrow is going to almost have an impossible chance of getting into it. This isn't the old days when you just went in and ran.

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

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

I don't like the process, but that is the one
that is there. We did not enact it. We just have to figure out the best way of making an intelligent decision, given the fact that the process is not one which is really great for us.

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

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

But on top of that you have to watch very carefully some of the discussion to see if things will actually come our way both in responsibilities and money, and it will probably mean some increased positions and jobs and various other things. Very interesting.
First was that all the governors met down here just a few weeks ago. They also met with the President and the top item was welfare reform. Essentially they said that welfare has to be linked to work.

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

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

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

What is trade adjustment assistance? That means in the United States, when a lot of auto workers are laid off because of the tremendous number of Japanese cars that
have come into the country, the United States government
says to those auto workers, in effect, you are being laid
off because of foreign trade and therefore we are going
to give you some money every month for the next--whatever it
is--12 or 13 months to help you get through this thing.

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

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

And the same is true with unemployment in-
surance. Until recently if you were unemployed and you
then went back to school to learn something, then you
were considered that you are no longer unemployed. You are a
student. So you lost your unemployment insurance. Well, they now realize that that is kind of stupid. One of the smartest things that unemployed persons can do is to go out and learn something different to get a job, so they are about to change that.

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

Well, this leads me now to what has probably been the major thrust of the union over the past couple of years and that is the reform agenda, the effort to change and to improve our schools. The governor's association has a five year program. The business community continues to talk about it. In a couple of months you will see a major report by major business groups in this country dealing with what schools should do for young people who are at risk, and this is not going away. What is happening so far in most states is
that more money has been put in education and a lot more rules and regulations, a lot more testing, a lot of it okay and a lot of it not very smart and a lot of it absolutely silly. A lot of what has happened in this field is that the dropout rate for students is actually beginning to go up in this country because if you tell students who are staying in school to get a high school diploma, that you used to be able to get it by just staying around and breathing until you were 18, and a lot of kids were willing to do that to get a diploma.

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

As they say good-bye a lot of people say what is going on here? We thought we were improving schools, and all of a sudden more kids are dropping out. Some of
of these dropout figures are very inaccurate. You saw what happened in New York a few weeks ago where the school put out one set of figures and another group put out another set of figures. The school said it was three per cent dropping out and another group said it was 55%. Fifty-five looks more accurate there. But all they are doing in those schools is that they are counting the kids who enter high school and do not graduate. They are not even counting the kids who manage to leave when they are in junior high, or some of them in elementary school. They just leave and they don't come back. If they don't come back long enough, they leave their names off and they are gone.

So we have got very large numbers of kids who are not making it, and that continues to be a very, very important concern. Now we have been doing in many states quite a few things and I have a list of some of them here that we prepared for the state of Massachusetts where our federation has gone to the Committee on the Condition of Teaching and to get them to define to include the role of teacher aides and the legislation has been introduced there to provide tuition help so that aides and paras can move up a career ladder and eventually get to be teachers.
if they promise that when they graduate they will indeed be teachers for a while. Texas is trying to introduce a bill which would develop a career ladder for paraprofessionals as well, as well as the one that was in the reform bill for teachers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now you get to how many can read a book which has a little technical material like a first-year college
textbook, and you get down to about six percent. Six per
cent of the kids who are in high school at age 17 can read
a first-year college textbook that has a little bit of
technical material.

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

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

You can have more and more people who can do
the work. Now that is a very important thing. Now when you
sit with your school boards or your governors or your legis-
lators, you ought to pull out that little chart
that says that we are going to participate in that. We are
going to take a lot of people who are at different levels
in this thing, some of them are down here, some are in
the middle and some are at the top. Wherever they are, they can all benefit by getting more education and more training wherever they are. And when they do that they will get different positions within the system and that is going to make room for other people to come in here to take those positions, and then what you see is a system that keeps employing and training and educating more and more people and you are doing something very creative and very productive. We will be getting that out.

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

There are a lot of people talking about it and a lot of people thinking about it. And I hope that next year that I will have a chance to chat with you again, and I hope that next year I will be able to say that there are
40 of these places and you can actually see them and there are 40 on the way. I am actually convinced that within the next few years there will at least be hundreds of models where people have a totally different type of school, and a totally different school will mean a different role for each and every one of you and it will mean a different type of life for teachers and school-related personnel. And most important it will mean a different kind of life for students because right now about 20 per cent of the kids in the United States, really learn how to read at the higher levels and learn to do mathematics at the higher levels and 11 writing at the higher levels.

What does that mean? It is about 20 per cent in England. It is about 20 per cent in Germany. It is about 20 per cent in almost everyone of these countries. What does that mean, that God only made 20 per cent of us smart and rest are doomed forever? Is that what that means? Some people would take that as a conclusion. I don't buy that at all. It used to be that we would buy cars and 40 per cent of them had bugs in them and they had to recall them. And what did the car companies say? They said well that is the nature of the factory--20 to 30 per cent or 30 or 40
per cent will always be no good, so you manufacture them
and you sell them and then when somebody complains, you
bring them back and re-do them.

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

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

(Laughter)

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

(Laughter and applause)
PRESIDENT SHANKER: Okay, take the rest of the day off.

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

(Applause)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: We are about to make a school where they can be given that chance, where they won't have to sit still and listen to somebody, where they can get individual help from paras, where they can learn by working with a computer, where they can get individual help from older students, where they can learn by watching video tapes, where they can learn by listening to audio tapes, where they have a whole variety of different ways to learn, and that is going to make a wholly different life for teachers, for paras for the whole school. A lot of what kids do now that is damaging, a lot of stuff that demands control, the reason we have got all those problems with kids is that we are forcing them to do things that are very
I think everybody gets a picture of what I think a good school ought to be like, and I think a school like that would have very different roles for all of us. We don't want the principal to be the authoritarian over the teachers and we don't want superintendents to be authoritarian over the teachers, and we don't want the teachers to be authoritarian over the students.

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

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

If you think of a school in which the teacher is not viewed as an enclyopedia pouring out the information
but the adults are people who are trying to figure out hey if Mary didn't learn it by watching that video tape, what other experience could Mary have that would get her to learn it? What other kid here didn't learn it that way? How did the other kid learn it and you keep working away not at yesterday's lecture and then go on to the next lesson whether or not the kid learned it or not, but you keep trying to figure that out.

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

I think it is going to offer tremendous opportunities, tremendous opportunities for all of us. I heard of a school the other day, several schools where they were teaching spanish not just to the youngsters, but to the youngsters and to the teachers. The teachers were not spanish teachers. They were doing it through sattelite transmission.

Now think what that does to the classroom if the kids and the teachers are doing the samething together. It is kind of refreshing, isn't it, for the kids to know that the teachers have to study to learn too. And for maybe one kid in
the class to learn Spanish a little bit faster than the teacher?

(Laughter)

PRESIDENT SHANKER: There is nothing wrong with that.

I think everybody gets the picture of what I think a good school ought to be like. I think that a school like that would have different roles for all of us. We don't want the principal to be the authoritarian over the teachers and we don't want the teachers to be the authoritarian over the kids or the paraprofessionals.

It is a different sort of relationship.

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

This list that I have shows that we are really moving on reeducation, promotional opportunities, opposition to privatization, advancement, career ladders, certification. We are working to get all presidential
candidates to make their speeches so that they are with us and I want to thank you for your tremendous support. I know what it takes to have the kind of growth that you have shown. It means that you have not only been doing your regular jobs, but you use every spare minute of time at work and after work talking to your colleagues and building the union.

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

Thank you very much.

(Applause)