**REMARKS**
**TWELFTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT**
**LIFTING THE PROFESSION: TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM**
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## INTRODUCTION

- It is a pleasure to be speaking before an audience of educators from around the world. I'm also pleased to be sharing the stage with my friend Bob Chase. Bob and I spent a lot of time together trying to negotiate a merger between the AFT and the NEA and though that did happen, our two organizations are enjoying very cooperative relations, as a result.
- Since this is an international audience, many of you likely know about Education International. EI is the international teacher union that resulted from the merger of the two large international teacher federations the AFT and NEA were respectively affiliated with. So Bob and I, and our unions, not

only work together on American educational issues; we also work on issues that cut across the broad and diverse spectrum of education across the world.

- Through the AFT, the AFL-CIO and EI, I've been privileged to be involved in a number of major international education and trade union issues, including helping teacher unionists who help them were leading dissidents in Poland and Czechoslovakia before the fall of communism and working with them afterwards to bring the teaching of democracy to their schools. That involvement has helped me see American education through international eyes: to learn what people in other countries find valuable and interesting about American education, and also to hear what astonishes and puzzles them.
- So, first, I want to talk a bit about the challenges virtually **all** school systems around the world face in the new millennium. Then, I want to talk about some of the challenges that are unique to America as an advanced industrialized democracy. And then I want to talk about the challenges America faces that

puts us, -- sadly, – in the league of the developing nations of the world.

COMMON CROSS-NATIONAL ISSUES

- Today, given the new global economy, the similarities in the themes and issues all nations face in education are striking. It's not quite the same in education as it is in financial markets, where a downturn in the stock exchange in Japan has instant repercussions in Europe, the US and elsewhere.
- But there's no question that the world is getting smaller in education, too: For example, it didn't take long for the various school "devolution" or decentralization and privatization schemes fashioned by the Thatcher government in Great Britain to be picked up here and elsewhere. And today, the idea of a "market system" of schools is being widely debated in a number of countries – and proving a peril to the future of public education and in my view, the educational ideals of our democracies.

- I also think that because the new global economy is proving to be particularly harsh on the poorly educated and the poorly skilled, there are new pressures on all of us to figure out how to educate disadvantaged students to levels we've never accomplished before – and ironically, new pressures not to give this issue our closest attention and, instead, let the fate of poor children be decided by the market.
- Immigration, too, has become an international and not just an American issue. So, finding more effective ways to educate immigrant children – who not only speak a different language but mostly come from impoverished circumstances – is another challenge we have in common.
- Today, too, the issue of teacher quality – or, maybe more accurately – teacher effectiveness is in the forefront -- and I'll say more about this later.
- And then there's the obvious common challenge posed by this new "information age": How do our relatively low-technology

schools teach our children to function in a high-technology, instant information world? And how do we do that in a way that recognizes the vast difference between knowledge and information and between a genuine education and mere training?

AMERICAN "ADVANTAGE"

- Now, it is fashionable among some to argue that, when it comes to dealing with these and other global education challenges for the next millennium, America is in the worst position among the advanced industrialized democracies.
- Our schools are all failing, we are told; our teachers are all ignoramuses, we are told; our students are so poorly educated, we are told, that they are unproductive workers and ill-informed citizens.
- Now, before we put on sackcloth and ashes for the year 2000, let me remind everyone of the last time we were told that

America was in ruins educationally and, therefore, facing ruin economically.

- The time was 1983, and the report was "A Nation at Risk" – a very good report, mind you, that started us on the road to reform, -- but a report that also launched an unrelieved and, often, baseless series of attacks on America's schools and how they would prove the undoing of our economy.

  - Instead, as we approach 2000, those very nations whose school systems ours was being compared to so unfavorably -- France, Germany, Japan, to name a few – <u>those</u> economies are struggling while ours is strong.
  - Of course, our schools get no credit – though they should. Something in the flexibility of our system, the creativity, the <u>teaching</u> – has worked.

AMERICAN "DISADVANTAGE"

- Still, while our public education system has many unacknowledged advantages, and the progress we've been making has been remarkable, we still have a ways to go.
- Our economy and our educational creativity and resilience give us an edge as we face the new millennium, but the other advanced democracies have some basics in place that we're still struggling with, -- and the gap or shortages of knowledge workers, in Silicon Valley and in our classrooms, is growing and has to give us pause.

- So, the first major point I'd like to make about "American Teachers and Schools for the New Millennium" is a decidedly non-"new millennium," low-tech" point: And that is, we have got to continue to put the "basics" in place – but by basics, I mean clear and rigorous academic standards for what students should learn, in the various grades and subjects. Because unless we know where we want to go – unless teachers, students, parents and the public alike all have a shared understanding about what schools are expected to do –

schools will be as knocked about by political struggles in the new millennium as they have been in the old. Maybe more so. The key to going from a system based on politics and power to one based on knowledge and professionalism is continuing with standards-based reform and deepening and accelerating the progress our states are making.

- That means not only greater clarity and rigor in standards, but also curriculum and materials to accompany those standards and support for teachers and students to meet them. (Isn't it sad that as we approach the year 2000, there are still schools without proper curriculum and materials without a clue as to how to help the students reach their new state standards?

  If we're serious about standards, and want to avoid a backlash against them when large numbers of kids fails, we need to put these things in place.

- If we're serious about so-called world-class standards, we need to recognize that lots of children will need extra time and

support to meet them – and that, being human, not every child will excel in everything.

- We also need to admit, – in more than rhetorical ways – that schools organized around an agricultural model of time are not exactly suited for **all** our kids meeting higher standards in the new millennium. It will take money, it will take experimentation, but in order to get the time we need for all kids to do well and for teachers to work with one another and to continuously improve their practice, we will have to reorganize our schools. And whether that means extended day or year or innovative scheduling or things we haven't figured out yet, parents and teachers must be part of the discussions and the work, so that change happens properly and without paralyzing conflicts.

SPEAKING OF WHICH – LEADS ME TO THE UNION

- Now, In thinking about teachers and schools for the new millennium, I believe we need a system of public schooling – while also introducing an unprecedented degree of flexibility.

- This is a very tough road to go down, especially for a union leader.
- Because for some in this country, "flexibility" means no system of education at all and no standards. It means charter schools or "market" schools, each doing its own thing, rising and falling by so-called competition and so-called consumer preference. And it means no teacher unions to speak for teachers – no formal, organized voice for teachers at all.
- That is not the flexibility I'm talking about.
- For one, I don't believe any civilized democratic society can long flourish without some system of schools. No expert gardener or solid democratic government, for that matter, has a "let a thousand flowers bloom" philosophy, and no good educator or citizen should have it about schooling, either.
- Second, flexibility without standards is not creativity; it's chaos.
- On the other hand, there are those who are altogether too attached to "system" in schooling -- the factory model system,

that is, in which everyone marches more or less in lockstep, teachers are interchangeable parts, and bureaucratic rules prevail over professional practice and what's best for kids.

- That is not the system of education we want to preserve in the new millennium.
- But the challenge for unions now, and for me and other union leaders, is how to lead the fight for change to a more flexible system of public schooling, with more choice, more professional responsibility, when, a) "flexibility" often means lowering standards, misspending, indoctrination instead of education, and, b) the factory model of schools still prevails and, therefore, the rightful role of unions in protecting teachers in that kind of system is still necessary. (I personally fought hard to eliminate time clocks for teachers to punch in and out a relatively short time ago in NYC.)
- Let me give you some examples:

- In a factory model system, seniority rules helped enforce fairness, but also respect for professionalism. Experienced teachers knew more…and it was better for kids for them to get certain instructional positions than the principal's cronies, which unfortunately was often the case.
- Tenure in elementary and secondary education grew out of the same need; job security protection against management whims and political patronage.

- So, the challenge for unions now is both to lead the fight for change, and to change when the schools do.
- For example: Seniority rules can go when faculties get more authority and when decisions are based on professional qualifications and knowledge; tenure rules which are bureaucratic and slow and cumbersome can and should be changed to fair dismissal procedures, or to peer review processes and will get easier to do when the culture of the schools changes.

- These changes are already taking place. Today, teacher unions are taking on new roles and responsibilities in these and other areas; in many districts, actually leading the reform. (1) Over 100 small "charter" schools in New York City could not have been done without union support;) 2) (and in some districts, staff development is jointly done…OTHERS – TURNING AROUND LOW PERFORMING SCHOOLS.)
- And certainly, as national unions, we're fighting for teacher quality. We're supporting:
  - rigorous teacher education in the academic disciplines and in pedagogy, including strong clinical training experiences
  - licensing standards for teachers, including testing, that are based on high standards of professional preparation; and incentives for higher certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (which Bob explained)

- well-supervised induction periods, including mentoring and evaluation by master teachers, and the granting of tenure only to teachers who meet professional standards.
- We're pushing for continual professional development, peer review and assistance, as part of ongoing evaluation of practice; not the punitive, often childish, occasional evaluation as at present, but ongoing; in schools organized with time for teachers to meet to discuss their students' work, their own lessons, and to observe each other's teaching. (Japan, etc)
- Unfortunately, too much of school management is still locked into the old industrial model, into a hierarchy of supervision. To change it requires a major change in the culture of our schools, and we need support to get it done.

But it is one of the changes we must make, or the opportunity to have a school system this nation can be unequivocally proud of – the opportunity to make each

and every school one we'd be happy to send our own children to – will be lost.

AMERICA AS A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

- One final point:
- Throughout this talk, I have often used, as many do, education systems in advanced industrial democracies as good examples for us.
- But the fact is, we have two school systems in America. And in one, we are astonishingly comparable to those in developing nations. In some ways, we are less like France, for example, where care is taken to make sure poor children get the same education as wealthier children, than we are like any number of countries in Africa or Latin America, where poor children are asked to learn in substandard buildings, with unqualified teachers and an astounding dearth of books and supplies.

- It is astounding – and inexcusable – that the U.S., despite progress over the last six years, still has the highest childhood poverty rate in the advanced industrialized world.
- Now, poverty cannot be an excuse for failing to educate poor children. We need to do a lot better than we have, and the fact that there are many schools already doing a terrific job educating poor children means that we can. But there's no question that poverty has a big influence on achievement everywhere on the planet – and it's time the richest country on earth did something about it here.
- And education is the right place to start. We need to commit ourselves to ending the inexcusable inequities – the rotting buildings, the higher class sizes, the uncertified "emergency" teachers…that characterize school districts poor children attend. We must commit to the high-quality pre-schools, the tutorial help, the teacher education and supports, the use of proven programs…that we know will make a huge difference in the achievement of our most vulnerable kids.

CONCLUSION

- As we think about the millennium, let's think about committing to stay the course we're on; to make the very best education free and universally available to **all** our children. Let's provide them good schools, good books, access to technology, and the best prepared teachers, who are themselves educated to the highest standard.
- Let's not take dangerous, costly forays into sideshows like vouchers, or even charter schools without accountability.
- Let's not lose children to schools staffed for profit and patronage instead of on the basis of professionalism as we enter a new century.
- Let's take the need to hire two million new teachers as an opportunity to raise standards, not an excuse or smokescreen

for lowering them. Let's raise both the rewards for teaching and the bar for entering the profession.

- The free market has worked for our nation. But I predict our future will be ever so much brighter if our very best graduates choose teaching over investment banking in the 21st century.

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