

# Great Lakes Regional Conference

## Chicago

### May 7, 1999

Beginning to feel like a native of these here parts ... Haven't been to Wisconsin – yet.

I'm told that outside of New York, the Great Lakes region has more members than all the rest of the AFT combined.

So you've been doing great work.

And I know you've been struggling and fighting, too –

- for collective bargaining where we don't yet have it and to build unions in those places – like Kentucky and West Virginia – that are real frontiers.
- and you've been struggling to save collective bargaining in states like Illinois and Michigan, where in K-12 and higher ed, longstanding contract provisions were eviscerated by Governors and legislatures...
- you've been fighting to stop privatization of PSRP services and other public services, rampant throughout so many of your states.
- You're also the region where vouchers have actually been enacted – Wisconsin and Ohio – and we're in an ongoing fight to get the truth out...
- But there is also good news here, of course; in Minnesota, we've got a strong merged union – and Jesse "The Mind" Ventura is a champion of public education now.

But just in case you think you've got all the action going, let me report about what's happening at the national level:

#### Social Security and Medicare

1. Strong economy → less urgency → politics taking over even more than usual
2. President Clinton's proposal
  - to use the surplus for Social Security first
  - to provide USA accounts (saving 401K-type accounts outside of Social Security) instead of individual accounts
  - investing in Social Security and instead of a tax cut for the wealthy
  - to use part of the surplus – 15% for Medicare and to start providing prescriptions drug benefits – other proposals coming.
3. AFL-CIO (through the Social Policy Committee I chair) strongly opposed private accounts; educated leaders and rank and file; prepared for big fight. Now working on Medicare. We're developing materials to educate; we're working with the White House. The plan will be announced soon.
4. Republican leadership – Trent Lott – now saying nothing will happen on Social Security – trying to blame it on the President. (Won't work) But still have to watch very closely. Congress can do much mischief. Still – a victory, so far.

5. On Medicare

- a. The right wants – guess what? – vouchers: “Premium Support” (like “opportunity scholarships”)
- b. will be solvent to 2015; but cost growing → technology, drugs; in AFL-CIO, we’re talking about purchasing coalitions, standards for quality care. Unions competing in organizing but also working together.

6. Also working on HMO Reform

Trying again for patients bill of rights, including whistleblower protection for health care professionals. Our nurses have been in the forefront on these issues.

7. And School Construction

- very partisan debate – shamefully!
- We and AFL-CIO supporting President Clinton proposal; working with NEA
- effort to include Davis-Bacon – finally got a bill introduced
- very controversial, believe it or not!
  - because in the tax code, not the usual appropriation
  - Republicans will not support Davis-Bacon
  - will be a big fight

Violence and Gun Control

- Since Littleton, met with Carolyn McCarthy; she and President Clinton submitting legislation; you’ll hear from us on it.
- Now is the time to get commonsense controls put in to keep guns out of the hands of kids! Curb violence in media, video games
- I am staying in touch with NEA leadership ...
- Summit at the White House on Monday  
Would love to hear your thoughts on what could be done...Inner cities have come a long way in metal detectors, expulsion for weapons...suburban gun culture very difficult.

Another very important issue: ESEA Reauthorization

- First, Title I major life’s blood for most of our larger locals
- Ed Flex passed – allows waivers; we fought for certain accountability requirements; to make sure funds are still going to poor kids ... will watch closely. Couldn’t oppose flexibility but need to make sure targeting works.
- Professional Development – looking to increase funding and consolidate some programs to make them more meaningful: Maybe some mischief here coming from the committee.
- Teacher Quality in general – Talk of requiring proper assignment in field; proper certification – But always have to watch like hawks when this issue gets discussed by politicians.
- Mainly; in Title I: Preventing Vouchers and Block Grants – agreement with Catholics and other private school folks who are getting Title I →
  1. Child Benefit Theory
  2. Public trustee → services

### 3. Supplement don't supplant

#### Most Difficult and Serious Issue:

Attack on para role in Title I schools.

- Too many "teaching."
- Too many unqualified for remedial reading work
- Too many "too involved" in direct instruction without supervision

AFT very involved in this:

- Finding exemplary programs
- Sponsoring research in para effectiveness
- Fighting for language that keeps para role but provides for proper training and supervision
- Highlight on fight for para certification in the states

#### International

Much going on in the international area as well ... want to say just a few words about our involvement.

- Agim Hyseni, president of Kosovo teachers ... asked for support (Bob Chase and I at EI meeting) (Teachers had been singled out for assassination; before that, Albanian schools had been closed for years, kept open by the teachers)
- Joint letter went out
- AFT contributed \$20,000 to relief effort; so did many locals. May come to you for additional aid. David Dorn going to Macedonia to see how we can help teachers setting up schools in the refugee camps
- Long tradition of AFT, supporting human rights and democracy ... and very often teachers leading the fight
- China: Human rights: WTO admission debate  
Global Petition Campaign  
Tienanmen Square anniversary  
Internet: Worldwide dot June 4

Now back to the states.

Vouchers passed in Florida – NEA and AFT and our affiliates working closely there. Jeb Bush's "A+" plan –

- rewards successful schools
- punishes schools whose kids are failing by taking away funds
- proposes to punish teachers in those schools by cutting salaries 5%

There are lots of other battles going on around the country. But you've got more than your share here.

Detroit is particularly noteworthy – but our locals there really handled the takeover beautifully, putting themselves in a position to work closely with the Mayor, as our colleagues did in Chicago to bring about real change in the schools.

Chicago really showing the way – and it's tough; maintaining a relationship through all that change...Vallas and Daly have become ambassadors for teachers' unions...

In Cincinnati, fighting horrendous budget cuts and to keep nationally recognized effective programs.

-- doing a great job ... but what a shame we have to have that fight!

Vouchers in Cleveland

In higher-ed, our locals are in real struggles:

- Fighting to limit part-timization; and at same time to organize adjunct and graduate assistants to save the quality of higher education
- Brought in young leaders from Illinois and Minnesota (big organizing drives on state university campuses) to AFL-CIO meeting and press conference. They were great!
- FPE locals – fighting for professional development and against privatization

FNHP – very tough battles:

- Working on whistleblower legislation in Wisconsin
- But mainly ongoing life-and-death struggle to organize in the face of consolidations and mergers bringing wrenching change to their work. And great threat to existing unions...employers keep changing.

I could go on ... it seems no good deed goes unpunished; and our fights are never over.

But these fights just make it more and more obvious why we need a strong union. And why we need to strengthen state federations, which you are doing, I'm proud to say.

I'm glad Ohio passed a dues increase ... that Illinois and Michigan are really gearing up for political action and professional issues ... Because without resources, including COPE funds, we can't make these fights.

At AFT, we want to help even more... we're taking a good look at ourselves ... You'll be hearing about the Futures II effort from Vice President Herb Magidson. We're successful and strong... But we want to be sure we're doing all we can and to help our affiliates, to organize new members, to make the fights for quality and to strengthen our ability to do political action.

Next year, we have to elect a democratic President.

We're five seats from a democratic majority in the House. We have to defeat the voucherites, privatizers, anti-union forces!

At AFT, we've reorganized our national Government Relations work, including a new field component headed by Juanita Dunlap Smith to help build and leave infrastructure in place when we do campaigns – i.e., California – hit over and over: Prop 226 – Vouchers – various other initiatives; we learned the hard way we can't just gear up for crises. We have to do it in partnership with our affiliates. Statewide strength is essential...the onslaught is there in every region. Remember – majority of governors are Republican and the source of much of this anti-union legislation.

We're winning many of these battles – but we're in a war.

And though the voucher advocates have millions of dollars we can never match, we've got the ability to agitate and advocate and organize that they don't have. We got to maximize our people power.

And we have to keep working on improvement.

In schools, thanks to the efforts of our members, kids are doing better: NAEP results up – Graduation rates up – Standards movement growing...but in too many places the needed supports are not being put in place... and the high stakes tests and accountability programs are going to be big problems. Standards without support could be a Trojan horse for vouchers!

We can't give up. We shouldn't have to fight so hard for what we need to make this happen – to put what works into place – but we do, even though it's common sense, and now we even have research to back it up.

On Smaller Class Sizes, for example. The single most powerful argument we can use against vouchers.

The Tennessee STAR small class size study has been going on since 1985, so there are 14 years' worth of results here. By the way – at Al Shanker's urging, AFT and NEA helped fund the continuation of the study. Here's what they found:

- Students in small classes in grades K-3 continue to outperform students in larger classes through high school graduation – even though they go into larger classes themselves after grade 3.
- Students in small classes were more likely to pursue college (i.e., take SAT or ACT ), especially black\_students.
- Students in small classes were more likely to graduate on time, less likely to drop out, and more likely to graduate in the top 25% of their class
- Students who were in small classes in K-3 were between 6 and 13 months ahead of their peers in regular classes in grades 4, 6, and 8 and they graduated with higher grade point averages.

One of the arguments against smaller class size is that there aren't enough Qualified teachers → Well, better pay can solve that.

OTHER NEEDS SO OBVIOUS

- Early childhood education – pre-kindergarten works!
- After school and summer school – kids who are behind need more instructional time.
- Timely support for kids who need it all during the school year and in every grade.
- Meaningful quality professional development – (Illinois really getting into that.)
- Decent school buildings, technology well equipped labs for science arts.

ONLY POOR KIDS DEPRIVED OF THESE.

AFT will continue to provide leadership and support for these efforts and we do have allies, including the President of the United States. We'd better make sure the next one continues to support our agenda.

In many instances, we're working closely with the NEA. Despite what happened at their last convention, I know the NEA leadership remains committed to merger and so do we.

We're working well together on the national issues, and in a number of states.

- Recently held a terrific conference on school discipline in Chicago.

I know some of you were not devastatingly disappointed when merger failed – (I got that feeling in Ohio.)

But I still believe that to do the things we want to do – the professional development support for our members, the quality campaigns, certainly the political and legislative action, we'd be so much better off as one organization.

I'm so proud of Education Minnesota. I wish you all could have been at their first merged convention. It was inspiring! The spirit, great! and frankly – you really couldn't tell who was who.

Montana may be next ... Others are talking ... Both national organizations are trying to develop guidelines for state mergers ...

Meanwhile, we are working together when we can, which we really need to do:

32 states have private voucher initiatives.

Charter school legislation a real problem in some states.

In places like Michigan, Arizona, California – no accountability – for results or for use of funds. And yet – we need to figure out how to pre-empt the anti-union forces on this, because these are, at least theoretically, public schools. And the teachers in them should be union members and many of them don't know it yet. We have to figure out how to reach them...

Some of our locals are working out partnerships – with their districts, with community organizations, to collaborate on developing charter schools which are small, focus on a theme and try to deliver real quality. A really good idea if you can do it.

Because as we've said over and over, delivering real quality is ultimately the only way we're going to win the major war for the public schools.

And believe me – fighting for higher pay and benefits and dignified working conditions is a fight for better education, for better services to kids.

And the people who want to kill the union want to kill it because they want to provide those services on the cheap.

The tenure bashers and voucherites can talk about teacher quality all they want – but if they don't want to pay for it, they'll continue to have huge shortages and classes covered by people who shouldn't be there. And they'll continue to blame the union for that.

In the end, who suffers? We do – and the kids.

So – while we continue to fight for quality care, for better public services, for staff development – we still have to make sure we're agitating and advocating for what our members and our students need to do that work.

And I know you're all still doing it and doing it well.

The AFT is a fighting union. We're known as a fighter for quality and professionalism.

But we'll also make the down and dirty fights that are needed if management doesn't do its job. That's what a union's all about!

With strong unions at the local state and national levels, working together, helping each other – we'll prevail, undoubtedly in a very different landscape...but we will prevail just as we always have, because working people need unions – and the people we represent need the work we do.

So, thanks for being so smart, so hard working, and so good at what you do.

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