



February 4, 2009

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

I write on behalf of the more than 1.4 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to urge you to support swift passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

In addition, I strongly urge you to reject any amendments aimed at removing or reducing funding for key programs, such as education, healthcare (including Medicaid) and unemployment assistance. These are all programs that will both stimulate the economy and provide a long-term investment in our economic strength.

Our country needs a robust and bold recovery package. Overall, the plan will provide vital aid to children, students and workers, as well as create jobs and jump-start the economy. We are particularly pleased that education is being provided for in a way that will strengthen learning opportunities for children and that recognizes the key role education plays in the vitality of our economy.

The AFT applauds efforts by Senate leaders to establish a State Fiscal Stabilization Fund that will focus primarily on restoring cuts in state aid to school districts and public universities. This assistance will help avert draconian cuts that could lead to larger class sizes, overcrowding and attendant disciplinary problems; less access to proven and promising programs that are improving student achievement; delays in the purchase of up-to-date textbooks and state-of-the-art technology; and higher tuition rates at public universities. In addition, the package includes essential support for priority programs such as Title I, IDEA, Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Pell Grants and other forms of financial aid, as well as training for healthcare providers. We also are pleased the bill provides significant financial support to help make infrastructure improvements in our public schools and public universities. It also includes assistance to underwrite the issuance of local school bonds; interest on these bonds will be paid by the federal government, thus lowering the borrowing costs for districts seeking to improve their facilities.

Investments such as these will help to maintain and create new jobs for thousands of educators, nurses, construction workers and college students. The initiatives also will help ensure that generations of high school and college graduates are fully prepared for the challenges of the 21st century workplace.

The AFT appreciates the strong commitment to providing a significant increase in the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) to the states. Medicaid accounts for approximately 21 percent of state budgets and is the fastest growing part of most state budgets. Its growth accelerates when the economy declines and more

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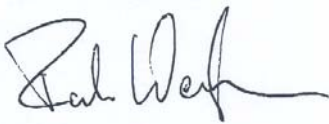
citizens become eligible for Medicaid. As a result, during tough economic times, states are forced to dedicate more of their revenue base to provide Medicaid services to their citizens, which leads to higher budget deficits and cuts in essential public services such as education and healthcare. The Senate proposal will help to avoid or lessen cuts in these crucial areas by providing significant federal funding to states to help cover their increased Medicaid costs. The AFT hopes that the final recovery package will provide at least \$100 billion for FMAP. If this is done, states won't have to "rob Peter to pay Paul."

Students and their families face many challenges outside the classroom, which have a direct impact on student learning. The AFT is very pleased that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 lessens the impact of these challenges by providing significant resources toward unemployment benefits, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other programs that support struggling families, and by offering tax relief for working families.

The AFT looks forward to working with you to make any needed improvements that will ensure the final package delivers the assistance and support needed to boost our economy, assist states and revitalize our schools at this critical time. However, needed improvements should not be construed to mean changes that undermine the key components of the ARRA, such the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund and funding for key education and health programs at the highest possible levels.

Again, the AFT urges you to oppose any amendments to the ARRA that would eliminate or decrease funding for the key programs outlined above and to support passage of the underlying bill. It is a vital economic program that deserves your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randi Weingarten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Randi Weingarten
President

RW:emc opeiu#2 afl-cio