

**Remarks by Richard Trumka
President, AFL-CIO
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Thank you, Randi, for that great introduction, and thank you all for inviting me here as a warm-up act for Bill Gates.

I bring the greetings of the 11.5 million members of the AFL-CIO. And I also bring our gratitude for all you do to lead our movement and build the living standards we so desperately need in the 21st century economy.

In the midst of an economic crisis, large-scale layoffs, and funding crises in our public schools, our colleges and universities, our health care system and our state and local governments ...

...the AFT has grown to 1.5 million members.

You're not only helping classroom teachers organize.

You're also enabling the organizing of college faculty ... school aides ... healthcare professionals ... state employees ...

... and early childhood educators.

You are proving that people in what the economists call "non-standard employment arrangements" -- temporary and part-time employees -- should not have to settle for substandard wages and benefits ...

... and that higher ed should not mean "higher abuse."

By bringing the benefits of unionism to the new frontiers of the knowledge economy ...

... you are giving the entire labor movement a glimpse of our future.

And we thank you for it.

You are doing a great job under great leadership.

Your president ... Randi Weingarten ... reminds me of the toughest ... smartest ... and most caring teachers I ever had.

You know ... I've even seen her "school" our friends in the Obama Administration.

As you know ... I'm a strong supporter of President Obama.

When he speaks ... I frequently feel like standing up and cheering.

But on the morning of March 1st ... he said something that left us all upset ... to put it mildly.

He used the mass firings of teachers in Central Falls, Rhode Island ...
... as an example of what should be done in the schools when all else fails.

On that same day, Randi and I were in Orlando, Florida ... for a meeting of the AFL-CIO executive council.

That afternoon, Vice President Biden came to talk to us.

Now, usually at these meetings we try to be respectful.

But on that afternoon, Randi -- understandably -- wasn't feeling too deferential.

As you know ... the toughest thing to do as a leader ... is to tell your friends when they're wrong.

Joe Biden is a friend to this union and the entire labor movement.

But Randi stood up and told our nation's Vice President that the Administration was wrong.

Wrong to celebrate what happened at Central Falls.

And even more wrong to hold up the mass firings as a panacea for our public schools.

She was powerfully articulate ... but I'm not going to lie.

She got a little heated.

The Secret Service guys started to look a little jumpy ... when Randi put her finger to the veep's chest ... to emphasize her point.

But you know what happened after that exchange?

The conversation changed.

Instead of Central Falls being a bold action to be celebrated ...

... political leaders from Rhode Island to Washington, D.C. ...

... started seeing it as a problem to be solved.

And, with your help, it got solved.

When it comes to great leaders ... the AFT goes to the head of the class.

I want to acknowledge your Secretary-Treasurer, Toni Cortese ...

... your Executive Vice President, Loretta Johnson

... and your retired president and secretary-treasurer, Ed McElroy and Nat LaCour ... who are here with us today.

And I'll never forget two other great leaders who are here with us in spirit --

... Sandy Feldman ...

... and the towering Al Shanker ...

... who always said – as Randi reminded you this week – “you can’t beat something with nothing.”

In that spirit ... the AFT stands tall because it stands for something.

You stand for excellence ... equality ... and quality ... in public education and public services of all kinds ...

... when there are problems, you don’t just complain, you offer up your expertise to solve them.

You stand for a strong and growing labor movement ... that includes workers from every industry and occupation.

You stand for building strength by making common cause with allies and entire communities.

And you stand for the simple but powerful idea ... that the aspirations of professionals in public service ...

... are inextricably linked with the well-being of the working families whom you serve.

The themes of this convention ...
... unions reaching out to the community and serving as agents of change ...
... couldn't be more timely ...
... or more deeply rooted in your history and your heritage.

Our economy is in crisis.

Working Americans are concerned about keeping their jobs ... their paychecks ...
and their retirement security.

The institutions where AFT members work ...
...our public schools ...
... our colleges and universities ...
... our hospitals ... our preschools ...
... and our public agencies ...
...are more essential than ever.

But our public schools ...
... our public services ...
... and public employees of all kinds ...
... are also endangered.

In fact, you're up against a triple whammy:

With the severe recession and soaring unemployment ...
...tax revenues are taking a dive ...
...and state and local governments and school districts are facing fiscal crises.

As always ... when hard times hit ...
...the demands on our public schools ... and our public services are actually increasing.

You see it all first-hand:

More kids who need subsidized school lunches.

More patients in the emergency rooms.

And longer lines for unemployment insurance and public assistance.

But because Americans are so anxious and angry ... and rightly so ...

... there is a growing danger that they will shortchange public services ...

... and scapegoat public employees.

That is one more reason why we have to provide the real reasons why America got into this mess ...

... and a roadmap for how to get out of it.

As you know so well ... George Bush left us the worst economy since the Great Depression.

He gave away trillions in tax breaks to the wealthy.

He let Wall Street and the Big Banks run wild.

He inherited a rare federal budget surplus ... and he gave us record federal deficits.

Since the recession started in 2007 ... we have a 10.5 million jobs hole.

And even those who are fortunate enough to be working ...

... are living in fear of pink slips and givebacks ...

... hollowed-out health care ...

... foreclosures and pension freezes.

The Pew Research Center recently reported what we know from our families and friends ... neighbors and coworkers.

More than half of all Americans have been hit ... and hit hard ... by this recession.

Too many have lost their jobs.

Some have had their pay or hours cut back.

And others have had to take part-time or temporary jobs ...
...because full-time and permanent jobs just weren't available.

Last Friday, we learned that the private sector's job-creating machine ... is sputtering to a halt.

The creation of 83,000 jobs by the private sector last month ... is better than losing 700,000 jobs every month ...
... as we were doing when Bush left office.

But it is not enough ...not nearly enough ... to put America back to work.

We need a jobs bill with a scale and scope as serious as the crises we face.

We absolutely must provide emergency assistance to hard-pressed states ...
... cities ... and school districts.

We've got to head-off the layoffs of teachers ...
... school aides ... college faculty ...
... police officers ... firefighters ...
... and other public service employees.

We need "pink hearts, not pink slips," – as your pins say ...
... I'm proud to wear one ...
... I wish that every member of Congress would wear one ...
... and, even more importantly ... would take that message to heart.

We've got to extend unemployment benefits to those who are looking for work ...
in the worst economy in 70 years.

We've got to extend COBRA benefits and provide Medicaid assistance to the
states.

And we've got to fund local infrastructure projects ...
... and invest in the brilliant new technologies of the future ...
... from biotechnology to alternative energy sources ...
... so that science and math teachers can tell their students to study hard ...aim high ...
... and build their futures in their classrooms ... libraries ... and laboratories.

Now, every time that we try to dig ourselves out of the 10.5 million jobs hole ...
someone says ... "What about the deficit?"

This is not to say that the federal budget doesn't deserve attention.

It does, but over the long-term.

Right now, we have a jobs crisis that must be addressed immediately.

And ... unless we do it soon ... we will only make the nation's economic crisis
worse ...

...depress federal revenues ...

... and deepen the deficit for decades to come.

And, if we fail to invest in education ...

... we will saddle future generations ... with deficits that they will never be able to dig
their way out of ...

... a skills deficit ...

... a technology deficit ...

... and an economic competitiveness deficit.

When it comes to passing a jobs bill ...

... we have heard excuses that sound like kids telling their teachers ... that their dogs ate
their homework.

On the heels of an economic catastrophe that was created on Wall Street ...

... we have even heard some members of Congress proposing to cut workers' unemployment benefits by \$25 a week ...

... while at the same time protecting wealthy investment managers from being taxed at the same rate as working people.

I don't know about you.

But, if I were grading the members of Congress who haven't turned in a jobs bill ...

... I would give them an incomplete for failing to turn in their most important assignment ...

... and a truancy notice for heading home for the July 4th recess without fulfilling their responsibilities.

And, if anyone tries to tell you that we should cut unemployment compensation

...

... and wipe out public services in the midst of a recession ...

... I would give them an F in history ...

... an F in economics ...

... and an F in civics.

In the elections this November ... you can give your elected officials ... and every candidate ... the report cards they deserve.

If any member of the House or Senate ... from either party ...

... really wants to see teachers lose their jobs ...

... kids lose their teachers ...

... and families lose their health insurance ...

... then they had better believe that we will remember in November ...

... and send them back to the public sector ...

... that they claim to love so much.

When public officials don't provide solutions ... they try to pick on scapegoats.

It's bad enough that public employees are being made the fall guys for the economic crisis.

But now politicians and pundits are trying to present public employees as fat cats.

The Governor of Indiana, Mitch Daniels, used to serve as George W. Bush's budget director ... which must be one rung above captaining the Titanic.

He recently called public employees "the new privileged class in America."

The Governor of New Jersey, Chris Christie, is making the TV talk show circuit ...

... bragging about balancing the budget on the backs of the public school teachers.

And the publisher of US News and World Report ... the real estate magnate Mort Zuckerman ...

...has condemned what he calls ... "the new privileged class in America."

And, believe it or not, it's you.

As public school teachers ... you have always had to cope with every social and economic problem in our communities.

And now you're being blamed for them.

When kids come to school from fractured homes ...

... when they don't have Internet access or dictionaries and encyclopedias at home ...

... when they're distracted by hunger and health problems ...

... you have to help them make up lost ground.

And now, with the economic crisis ... millions more kids are being hobbled by hardships beyond their ... or your ... control.

Yes, we must pursue excellence in education.

But we cannot win what our Education Secretary calls ... "the race to the top" ...

... when our economy is continuing its race to the bottom.

We need to revive our economy.

We need to restore our middle class.

And, to accomplish those missions ... we need to rebuild our labor movement.

In the AFT ... you have always understood that the challenges of low-income families end up in your classrooms ...

... that the struggles of cleaning workers and clothing workers are your struggles ...

... and that the best way to build what your founders called “education for democracy”...

... is to build a stronger labor movement.

That is why the AFT and the AFL-CIO support the Employee Free Choice Act ...

... and we will keep fighting until every worker who wants a union ... can have a union.

We understand that we are all in this together ...

... whether we work in the private sector ...

... or the public sector ...

...and whatever our background or walk of life.

That lesson of American community and our common destiny ...

... is what you teach in your schools ...

... and practice in this union.

I was reminded of those lessons last month ... when I spoke at the graduation ceremony at my high school.

It’s in the coal country of Pennsylvania.

It’s called Carmichaels Area Senior High School.

And we called ourselves – and please don’t laugh now – “the Mighty Mikes.”

Many of our moms and dads worked in coal mines ... construction sites ... or clothing factories.

Many of our grandparents were immigrants from Eastern or Southern Europe.

Most of us figured we'd follow our parents to jobs where we'd be paid by the hour.

Our teachers taught us to respect ourselves ...

... to enrich our lives with the love of learning ...

... and – for some of us – to follow our dreams beyond the world we knew.

And we learned the lesson ... still not always put into practice ...

... that Americans do better when we stand together ... and answer the challenges of our times.

When this convention is over and you return to your responsibilities back home ...

... I ask you to reach out to all the working people in your communities ...

...and build a movement that can change this country forever ...

...and for the better.

Tell your friends and your fellow workers:

If you want to build better lives for yourselves ...

... and a better chance for your children ...

... stand together.

If you want Americans to have world-class skills ... so that we can create and preserve middle class jobs ...

... stand together.

If you believe that America must invest in education and the environment ...

...training and technology ...

...health care and homeownership ...

... stand together.

If you believe that when someone calls 9-1-1, they should get a cop ...
...a firefighter or a healthcare worker ...
...not Halliburton ...
... stand together.

If you believe that Wall Street got us into this mess ...
...and must pay its fair share to get us out ...
... stand together.

If you believe that quality public schools are our solemn responsibility to our children and grandchildren ...
... and that Social Security and Medicare are our moral responsibility to our parents and grandparents ...
... stand together.

Work together.

March together.

Stand together.

And no one – no one – can stand in our way.

Thank you for everything that AFT is doing ... and for the inspirational and educational experience of being here with you today.

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