



**REMARKS BY RANDI WEINGARTEN
SAVING PUBLIC EDUCATION,
NOT AS WE KNOW IT, BUT AS WE KNOW IT OUGHT TO BE
AFT CONVENTION
JULY 8, 2010**

I. INTRODUCTION: HONORED, HUMBLLED, HOPEFUL—AND HORRIFIED

Brothers and sisters, normally your national president would start a convention speech with the niceties one would use on the first day of class or a new job, or when you haven't seen an old friend for a while.

But today, I am going to dispense with those niceties because it has been a pretty tough two years—tougher than I've ever seen.

Two years ago, I stood before you honored, humbled and hopeful.

I still am.

Since you elected me president, I've made more than 150 trips to 31 states, visiting members in 73 cities and towns. I return from each visit in awe of the work you do every day.

I remain deeply honored to lead our union.

And I'm humbled by the contributions you make on a daily basis: those of you who have made America's institutions of higher education the envy of the world; those of you who keep our health system strong; the public employees who ensure that vital government services reach those who depend on them; and the teachers, early childhood educators and PSRPs who educate and inspire America's nearly 50 million public school students.

And I remain hopeful, hopeful that we can overcome the formidable obstacles before us: an economy that has battered families and state budgets, an energized and concerted movement to tear down public service and public institutions, and a growing pundit class that has engaged in the browbeating of unionized teachers and public schools—in other words, affixing blame rather than fixing schools.

We are doing our part to make things better. We have been proactive and innovative, flexible and cooperative with our partners in school districts and the federal government. We have lived up to our responsibility and asked others to do the same. And, when there have been problems, we have sought common ground to solve them.

I stand before you today sure in the knowledge that we have examined our policies, looked at our practices, and made changes when we've needed to change. That has sometimes been hard, but it

gives us needed credibility to hold a mirror up to others. But frankly, I am shaken to the core—in fact, I am horrified—by the immense threats to public services, particularly public education, that exist in the corridors of power in this country.

I suspect many of you in this hall feel the same way.

I never thought I'd see the superintendent of a major city's public school system call public education, and I'm quoting here: "crappy."

I never thought I'd open a major newspaper to see us described as (again I'm quoting): "self-interested adults trying to deny poor parents choice for their children."

I *might* have expected to hear the House Republican Leader say that preventing teacher layoffs is a scheme to, quote, "Pad the education bureaucracy."

But I never thought I'd see a Democratic president, whom we helped elect, and his education secretary applaud the mass firing of 89 teachers and staff in Central Falls, R.I., when not a single one of the teachers ever received an unsatisfactory evaluation.

And I never thought that I'd see a documentary film about helping disadvantaged children in which the villain wasn't crumbling schools, or grinding poverty, or the lack of a curriculum, or overcrowded classrooms, or the total failure of No Child Left Behind.

No, the villain was us.

Look, I can take it. It's part of my job.

But taking abuse shouldn't be in the job description of more than 3 million public school teachers who work hard every day to do right by their students.

Brothers and sisters, never before have I seen such attacks on public employees, teachers and the unions that represent them.

Never before have I seen so few attack so many, so harshly, for doing so much—often with so little.

I don't know if I should call the people attacking us, quote, "reformers," as they like to be known—or performers, which might be more accurate. Because many of them seem more interested in engaging in political theater than constructive conversation.

So I'll just call them the "blame-the-teacher crowd," and even though many of them have set their sights on all public institutions, I will focus on the institution that has gotten the most abuse—public education.

The blame-the-teacher crowd would have Americans believe that there is only one choice when it comes to public education: either you're for students, or you're for teachers.

That is a bogus choice.

When a school is good for the kids, it's also good for the teachers, and vice versa. And if our leaders fail to recognize this, and fail to create a positive vision for our schools, we must lead the way.

II. INCONVENIENT TRUTHS

I know of no other institution that has lifted up so many, so advanced our democratic principles, and instilled in all of us something beyond the three Rs—a limitless sense of possibility.

That sense of possibility is under assault as never before. Public education is facing a perfect storm so severe that even some of our allies are seeking refuge in cheap and easy approaches.

For starters, we are still reeling from the effects of the worst recession since the Great Depression.

We appreciate that, in last year's stimulus bill, Congress and the administration created a \$100 billion investment that blunted the crippling cuts that were looming last year.

And you saw the results. In K-12 education, the stabilization fund kept the worst effects of the recession from being played out in children's classrooms.

The investment in Pell Grants kept students in college.

The investment in FMAP allowed public hospitals to stay open and public services to continue.

But even with last year's help, this year's outlook is bleak—and that's despite the Herculean efforts of AFT members like you, and the efforts of members of Congress as late as last week to find the funds to mitigate the continued devastation from state and local government cuts.

We are grateful to the House of Representatives for once again leading the way, and to Chairman Obey and Speaker Pelosi in particular. But look what's happening: Already, more than 120 school districts across the country have shortened the school week to just four days.

Higher education has been hit hard, too. At the University of California last year, while tuition increased a staggering 32 percent, our affiliate reports that 10 percent of the contingent faculty members were either laid off or not renewed. And the chancellor of the California Community Colleges System estimates that 140,000 students were turned away from the system's 112 campuses this academic year, a trend he expects to continue.

Others are "solving" budget crises by cutting art, music and physical education, slashing prekindergarten programs and help for students who fall behind.

Many of you are taking furlough days both to prevent the interruption of core services so many depend upon and to save a colleague's job.

Many of you have agreed to other cost savings—in pensions and benefits, salary freezes, increases in class size, and other shared sacrifices.

I honor all of you who have walked that walk.

But after all the personnel cuts, after all the RIFs and buyouts, who is left to deal with this recession's consequences in the classroom? The individual teacher.

Of course, we're far from the only ones feeling the impact of the recession on our schools: A study conducted by the Foundation for Child Development found that the current recession will effectively wipe out 35 years of social progress in combating poverty and increasing community safety and family stability. That's more families that will need the healthcare and public services you provide. That's more kids showing up to school cold or sick or homeless or hungry.

So, one front of this perfect storm is the rocky economy.

The second is that, as much as we wish it were not true, out-of-school factors really affect kids.

Whether it is something systemic like poverty, or stressful experiences like a death in the family, or losing one's home, or a parent losing a job—these factors matter.

They matter a lot. Out-of-school factors are responsible for more than half of the achievement gap. And you know that, when budgets are cut, often the first to go are school counselors, programs to help struggling students, and the very supports that help kids overcome barriers to success.

When we point out these inconvenient truths, it's more likely that people confront us rather than join us in confronting the problem. When we speak the truth, they accuse us of looking for excuses.

Once again, who gets blamed? The individual teacher.

A third truth is that the world is changing. Yes, today's students need a strong foundation in the basics, but they need much more.

They need to be able to engage in the creative problem solving and innovative thinking that are essential to success in today's knowledge economy.

True educational success isn't just a test score, just as economic success isn't just GDP growth. And it's also not simply knowledge of math or the ability to read.

Education should be about developing young people who are informed, engaged and enlightened.

That takes a lot—and who do we ask to do it? The individual teacher.

So, we are caught in this vortex—with recessionary forces, socioeconomic forces and global economic forces swirling around. And what does the blame-the-teacher crowd say? "*If only there were fewer bad teachers, all would be right in the world.*"

No teacher—myself included—wants a bad teacher in any classroom. And the AFT and our locals are taking real steps to solve the problem and to strengthen teaching. But equally if not more important, we don't want good teachers—the vast majority of teachers in this country—driven from the classroom by a lack of support or just plain weariness at being responsible for everything.

It's simply wrong to suggest that there is an epidemic of bad teachers, and at the same time to ignore poverty, budget cuts, the absence of curriculum, the huge attrition of good teachers—all the things we know truly hamper student success.

Blaming individual teachers may please deficit hawks because it is “cheap”; in reality, though, it's a cheap shot masquerading as a strategy.

When we gathered at our last convention, I spoke about strengthening public institutions.

Today, sadly, we are called upon to do something even more fundamental, even more vital.

As Bob Herbert wrote in a recent column in the *New York Times*:

“We have become a nation that is good at destroying things—with wars overseas and . . . self-destructive policies here at home—but that has lost sight of how to build and maintain a flourishing society. We're dismantling our public education system and, incredibly, attacking our spectacularly successful system of higher education, which is the finest in the world.”

And although we cannot do it alone, we must do nothing less than save our public institutions. That begins by working in common cause to save public education.

But our job is more than simply fighting for resources, or saving public education as it is today, or even as we knew it in the past.

We are going to lead the fight to save public education as we know it ought to be. That is our charge. That is our goal. And that will be our legacy.

III. PUBLIC EDUCATION AS IT OUGHT TO BE

Now, just as teachers can't educate a generation of students alone, we can't create a new, better system of public education alone. But if we don't lead this charge, who will? And if not now, then when?

Here's our vision:

Our vision is that every neighborhood school should be an excellent school that all families know they can count on, every year, for all of their children.

Our vision is to build on what works, and replicate it for all kids, in all schools, in all communities.

Our vision is of schools where good teachers can work together to meet each child's individual needs, where students develop their unique talents through a well-rounded curriculum, where all children have the support they need to reach their full potential.

Our vision is for teachers to get the necessary support to constantly improve, in an environment in which students have what they need to succeed.

And what is our critics' vision? Constantly hiring tens of thousands of new teachers, leaving them to sink or swim, and then losing many of them within the first three years; shutting down schools, firing all the teachers—particularly if they're veterans—and relocating kids regardless of how it affects them or their neighborhoods; constantly opening new charter schools and hoping the successes of the few will somehow rub off on the many.

Now, while there are some who seem opposed to our efforts on principle, many others want the same things that we do. They want what's best for the kids of this country, and can't understand why it's not happening.

So I don't hold it against people of good will, who are just trying to find a way to help our kids. We will work with anyone who offers us an open door and an open mind.

But, bottom line, we're not going to just stand still and be a punching bag. We're not going to be bullied into silence. And we're not going to wait and oppose—we're going to lead and propose.

That's why we're launching, here and now, a full-on campaign in support of public education as it ought to be. We're going to do what we do best: fight hard and fight smart. We're going to fight on behalf of all children, no matter where they live, or their economic or social status. We're going to educate, agitate and mobilize.

We're going to hold up what works and call out what doesn't. Starting next month, we're going to take our message across the country, to our locals and our schools and our communities, right into the heart of the neighborhoods we serve. Meeting parents and residents where they live, working in common cause with the community, toward our shared goals and aspirations. Building futures together.

IV. COMMON CAUSE WITH COMMUNITIES

The AFT, and the labor movement in general, have a well-deserved reputation for having political and legislative clout. But what some people don't understand is that clout has always stemmed from our connection to average working people and their connection to the vision that our movement made real: a fairer society where people had a voice in the workplace, retirement security, and a wage that allowed them to provide for their families, and where job security was respected, not reviled.

That connection is being frayed by the economic upheaval that's affecting all of us.

The great irony is that the very movement—organized labor—that is largely responsible for elevating millions of workers and their families into the middle class, that has provided a counterweight to the exploitative and arbitrary practices of governments and corporations; the

movement that has won a measure of economic stability and protection for all workers, not just our members, is now under assault for doing the very job it was conceived to do.

What a sad commentary that these hard-won, worthy achievements now are seen as things that separate us from our communities rather than connect us to them.

We must work to change this. One way is by organizing—bringing the benefits of AFT membership to more people. Since we last met, we've won 85 organizing victories across all constituencies, and we have chartered more than 53 new AFT locals.

We've organized everyone from maintenance workers in California, to hospital techs in Connecticut, to university professors in Montana; everyone from lifeguards and librarians in New York, to nurses in New Jersey and, yes, charter school teachers in California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania—150 charter schools where educators now have a voice.

But organizing—at a time when the labor movement represents only 7 percent of working Americans—is not enough. We don't want to be perceived as islands of privilege. We must be beacons of what's possible. We can't just lean on our political power. We must be deeply rooted parts of our communities. And that, too, is what we are launching at this convention.

It starts with putting a face on our members.

The Montana “Work That Matters” campaign, spearheaded by our brothers and sisters in the MEA-MFT, does exactly that, and demonstrates that services that can sometimes be invisible are actually indispensable.

Our sisters and brothers at John Dempsey Hospital in Connecticut led a fight to keep open a public hospital that the community really needed. Our local there wasn't just fighting to save jobs, but to save critical services for the community.

The AFT's Pink Hearts, Not Pink Slips campaign was started by parents in San Francisco who wanted to put a face on the impact that budget cuts would have on children and educators.

Connecting with community means reminding people that we need their support, and that they need our support.

And it means reminding ourselves that—especially in tough economic times—we have a responsibility to work with communities to strengthen the institutions in which we work, and upon which they depend.

We are affected by and care about the same issues that everyday people care about. That's why this October we will march on Washington. The AFT will be a full partner in the One Nation March on Washington that is being organized by a broad range of civil rights, labor, faith, youth, immigrant rights and other progressive organizations. This march will highlight the need for an America that focuses on good jobs, good public education, taking good care of our environment, and immigration reform.

This is not simply about marches for us, as important as they are. This is not about street actions, as important as they are. This is about fully embedding ourselves in our communities, one school and one neighborhood at a time.

The words in this hall mean nothing if not translated into action.

That's why we're calling on all of our 3,300 locals across the country to start this campaign with a day of action, when we'll link arms with our community partners to highlight what we need to do together to fight for public services, to fight for our universities, to fight for our healthcare systems, and to fight for public education.

In other words, to build futures together.

V. THREE FOUNDATIONS

We'll be fighting hard. But we're also going to be fighting smart—the AFT, as we have always done, will find what works and build on it, and at the same time invest in promising, new ideas.

As Al Shanker always said, “You can't fight something with nothing.”

So why not just ask educators? Which is what we've done.

Since we last met, we've created the AFT Innovation Fund to support our members' bold ideas for improving public education. The fund, also supported by private foundations, is providing grants to seven AFT affiliates across the country.

To give one example, a grant we made in Philadelphia last year is expanding a successful community schools program so it can reach an additional 4,000 students.

The second round of Innovation Fund grants will be announced later in the convention. This unique, union-led fund respects, reflects and advances the wisdom of educator ideas.

Fighting smart also means constantly searching for solutions we believe will work, even if those solutions force us to think outside the box or initially make us feel uncomfortable.

But let's be very clear—taking responsibility does not excuse others' irresponsibility.

But take responsibility we must.

In these two years of traveling the country, and from looking at the nations that outcompete us, it has become plain as day what the foundations are for building a system of public education as it ought to be—that is, of course, if we want to ensure that all kids are treated equitably and have the resources they need regardless of where they live. These foundations are:

- Good teaching supported by good leaders;
- Curriculum and conditions that promote learning and provide kids the opportunity to learn; and

- Shared responsibility and mutual accountability.

Here is what I mean by each.

V. A. Good Teaching

Good teaching is central to public education.

Much of the talk about teacher quality seems to assume that teachers enter the profession as either good or bad—and stay that way. The truth is that great teaching is much more of a learned skill than it is innate, and all of us who have taught know this.

Right now, there's no system that makes great teaching a reality for all kids, in all schools, in all communities.

Evaluation should be a milepost and a path forward, but right now it's neither. It's an ill-suited approximation for where teachers stand, and an underutilized tool to help them move forward.

Rather than reforming evaluation, the blame-the-teacher crowd wants to use it as a hammer to pound individual teachers for everything that happens in a child's life.

Although it would have been easier for us to simply join the blame-the-teacher crowd in a war of words, the AFT has decided to offer ideas. We tapped AFT rank-and-file leaders, who worked for six months in collaboration with leading educational researchers, to develop a real teacher development and evaluation system—one that embeds support and leads to continuous improvement, rather than one that is subject to vague impressions, politics and favoritism.

A real teacher development and evaluation system involves rigorous reviews by trained expert and peer evaluators, based on professional teaching standards, best practices and student learning.

Yes, real student learning. But not measured and used in the way the blame-the-teacher crowd wants.

There's a huge difference between using multiple indicators of student learning as part of a teacher's development and evaluation, and requiring that students' standardized test scores essentially dictate a teacher's hiring, firing and promotion.

The first is a process we should be part of. The second is something we must fight against.

We teach kids. We should be assessing whether or not they're learning. But we're going to assess it the right way.

V. B. CURRICULUM AND CONDITIONS

We also believe that students need a great curriculum, delivered within an environment that eliminates barriers to student success.

There's no way that our students can become the thinkers, innovators and leaders of tomorrow if they have been taught only the subjects tested.

All students need rich, well-rounded curricula that ground them in areas ranging from foreign languages to phys ed, civics to the sciences, history to health, as well as literature, mathematics and the arts.

Right now, those curricula aren't routinely in place, and a lot of teachers are forced to make it up every single day. When I say this, people look at me like I'm crazy. What do you mean, teachers don't have the tools they need to teach? What do you mean, they don't have a scope and a sequence of what should be taught? That's like asking members of an orchestra to play a symphony without sheet music.

This is an area where the blame-the-teacher crowd has been totally silent.

And that silence extends to the outrage that just happened in Texas, where the state school board tried to keep teachers from talking about the slave trade.

But the same crowd is pretty loud when they talk about other countries outpacing us. If we want to be No. 1 in the world, doesn't it make sense to look at what the current No. 1 is doing? And No. 1 today is Finland—90 percent of its students complete the equivalent of high school and two-thirds of graduates go on to college or vocational school.

What is Finland doing right? They're investing in teachers: Every teacher receives three years of high-quality graduate preparation at state expense.

They've overhauled the curriculum and have rigorous national standards.

They keep class sizes small. They make sure students get a good meal each day, and have access to health services. They treat teachers not as technicians whose work is to implement strictly dictated syllabi, but rather as professionals who know how to improve learning for all.

The result? In three decades, on international assessments, Finland has moved from subpar to a world leader.

Oh, and one other thing—they're virtually 100 percent union.

There's no reason we can't provide an environment that eliminates barriers to student success.

There's been a lot of attention focused recently on small islands of success, certain charter schools that benefit from huge amounts of outside funding, much of which goes to fund intensive cradle-to-college wraparound services, such as after-school, extended day, nutrition, health and early childhood programs.

Many of these are lovely schools. But they are the educational equivalent of boutiques—fashionable limited editions that, in the main, are selective in their enrollment. Boutique schools, by definition, can never be the answer. Of course, the blame-the-teacher crowd disagrees.

The theory goes something like this: If these supposedly standout schools can do it, why can't others? Or alternatively: These schools provide competition, and that competition, in and of itself, will create such pressure on the system that we'll see dramatic change.

They have had 20 years to prove that theory, and what have the results been?

Last year, the largest national study of charter schools to date found that the vast majority achieve results that are worse than or equal to comparable traditional public schools. A second authoritative study, released just last week by Mathematica and the U.S. Department of Education, reinforced these findings.

And there is no evidence to support the frequent claim that the success of some charters has to do with being nonunion. These two important studies contradict that notion. There is no school in America so good that it couldn't be even better if teachers had a voice.

But there is a lot of evidence that some of the things these schools have do work—such as required parental engagement, additional resources, and environments that are conducive to teaching and learning, and that help combat outside challenges like poverty, poor health, hunger and family instability.

Those services work just as well for neighborhood public schools as they do for celebrated charter schools. I know this, because I've seen the role they play in strengthening schools like John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary in St. Paul, Minn.

Johnson is a community school that gets the important pieces in place and lined up—great teachers and staff, strong curriculum, fun and engaging activities for summer and after school, and an amazing array of services that remove barriers to success for the kids and their families.

These things make a huge, huge difference.

Even knowing that all of this is essential—a path to creating great teaching, a way to embed good curriculum, and providing sufficient wraparound services to eliminate barriers to success—the blame-the-teacher crowd wants the public to believe instead that it just takes an iconic boss, an iconic principal, an iconic teacher. Get rid of everyone else, and it will all work out.

Well, they can keep waiting on that next superhero to change everything.

But I've found the people I know we need, and I'm looking at them right now: a whole union full of hard-working educators, professors, PSRPs, who are doing extraordinary work, for all children, every day.

V. C. MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The third foundation for success is true accountability—accountability that is meant to fix schools, not affix blame; accountability that takes into account the conditions that are beyond the teacher's or school's control; and accountability that holds everyone responsible for doing their share.

As I said at the outset: We take our responsibility, and we ask others to do the same.

Principals, administrators, policymakers—all of these people have a role to play, as well.

Should administrators be evaluated on creating schools with teaching and learning conditions that help retain teachers? Of course they should.

High staff turnover is a huge problem.

It's costly and counterproductive to hire thousands of well-qualified people every year, wish them luck instead of providing the support and tools they need to succeed, and then watch as more than one of every three of them leave by the end of the third year, and half leave within five years.

It's bad for schools, and it's even worse for our kids.

We know that schools excel when all of the adults in the school—teachers, parents and administrators—work together as a team, with a laser-like focus on student achievement and student social development, which is exactly what I saw in the amazing turnaround under way at Ernie Pyle Middle School, which I recently visited in Albuquerque, N.M. Shouldn't an accountability system give credit for this kind of teamwork?

If the federal government can find ways to hold teachers individually responsible for the standardized test scores of their students, surely they can find ways to hold responsible their administrators and others who make the decisions and hold the purse strings.

That's why we proposed broadening accountability—not simply to make it top to bottom, but also bottom to top—in our ESEA recommendations to Congress.

And shared responsibility should extend to the bargaining table.

These days, when we sit down at the negotiating table, we're often being met by district representatives who believe that collaboration is a waste of time, and that Race to the Top and other administration initiatives give them the right to undercut collective bargaining.

We're often faced with the uninformed attitude that collectively bargained contracts themselves are the obstacle to making schools better, rather than the understanding that collective bargaining is a process where our voices, together, help improve schools, other public services and communities.

We've increasingly been able to use collective bargaining as a creative tool to codify collaborative approaches that improve teaching and learning. We've seen this across America—in Pittsburgh; New Haven, Conn.; Douglas County, Colo.; St. Paul, Minn.; Philadelphia; and the list goes on. And, as of today, we've just added Cleveland to that list!

We're never going to end up with the contract we would get if we were on both sides of the table. But I'm proud that—in local after local, in some of the worst economic times any of us can

recall—we've been able to use this process as a way to give teachers a voice not just for themselves, but for their students and their schools.

In putting forward these ideas, we're not waiting for other people to tell us what needs to happen. We're using the power we have to make the difference we can. Lead and propose, not wait and oppose.

VI. CONCLUSION: LIFTING UP INSTEAD OF PUTTING DOWN

Earlier, I mentioned the thousands of public employees being laid off. Behind these numbers are people, and I want to close with a story of one of them:

On May 24, Beth Eckerd, a paraprofessional in northern Delaware—one of 43 teaching assistants notified that she may not have a job this fall—stood up in front of the school board to read a letter. Ironically, this happened in one of two states to win millions of dollars in Race to the Top funds. Her letter wasn't addressed to the board members, though. It was to her students.

I want to share part of it:

Dear Friends,

I am sorry to tell you that I will no longer be here every day to help you. ... I am sad I won't be there each morning as you arrive, to greet you with a hug and a smile, to tell you how happy I am to see you, how each one of you is so special, and to help you start your day. Next year, there won't be enough people in the hallways waiting for you. ... You will be on your own.

To my friend who could not even write your name when you came to school, I worked with you every day all year and now you are reading first-grade books. When you struggle next year, I am sorry, but no one will have the time to be there to help you. ... You are on your own.

To each of you who I loved and cared for every day, thank you. I am so very grateful for the opportunity to have helped you learn and grow. I love all of you, and I will miss you terribly.

But, I am sorry, it has been decided I am not an important or necessary part of your lives and your education anymore. My dear friends, I am so very sorry. You are on your own.

With much love, your friend,

Mrs. Eckerd¹

Beth Eckerd is exactly the type of educator our children need—patient, skillful and dedicated.

When I look out at all of you, and think about all those we represent, I know that if we are to ensure children are not left to fend for themselves, dedicated public employees like Beth Eckerd can't be left to fend for themselves, either.

¹ <http://www.aft.org/newspubs/news/2010/052610para.cfm>

That's why we stand together—for each other, and for America's working people, their families and their children.

So today, let me leave you where I began: horrified at what many of us are going through, but hopeful nonetheless.

Hopeful because nobody else does what we do, rain or shine, good economy or bad—educate all children, pre-K to 16; tend to the sick; and serve a nation.

Hopeful because we are going to make common cause with community.

Hopeful because we know we have the ideas that will advance public education as it ought to be.

Hopeful that together we will mobilize a nation to adopt and embrace those ideas.

Hopeful because there are people like Beth Eckerd, and all of you, who go beyond the amazing work you do individually, to work through your union to have an even greater impact for the greater good.

Yes, these are tough times. But unions were born of tough times, and we are built for tough times. The strength and solidarity on display in Central Falls show what we can accomplish when we work collectively.

Times such as these remind us of who we are, and of what we can and must accomplish. We don't give up on our kids, and we won't give up on our commitment to fight for what is right for them. Our students need us to be united, and our communities need us to be strong.

And in saving our schools, we will be saving America and our nation's most important public institutions. My friends, your work is vital, your cause is great, and your honor is unbowed. I am proud to stand with you.

Thank you.

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