



A Union of Professionals

**Remarks of Randi Weingarten
Democratic National Convention
August 25, 2008**

I am honored to be here representing the American Federation of Teachers' more than 1.4 million members. We work in your schools and colleges, in your hospitals and in your government agencies.

And we believe that access to an excellent education is a basic civil right.

For the children who are denied the education they need to fulfill their God-given potential, it is a personal tragedy, and an inexcusable injustice. It's also an affront to American values, and a threat to America's role as an incubator of innovation.

This must change.

And that requires leadership, not demagoguery. That is why we need Barack Obama and Joe Biden in the White House. And why they need all of us working with them.

The American Federation of Teachers is ready. Our number-one priority is, as it has always been, strengthening our public schools to better serve our students. Let's do what we do in our best schools... in all of our schools. Barack Obama knows that teachers must be partners, not pawns, in federal education policy. And federal education policy must be about a lot more than testing.

I ask you to join us in this quest. Because you believe that strong public schools are cornerstones of our democracy. Because our aging population depends on future generations growing the economy. Because today's students will be the caretakers of tomorrow's environment, the sparks igniting our innovations, the tenders of our global relationships, the guardians of our prosperity and the creators of our arts. And simply because every child has a right to a fair and hopeful start in life.

When those children walk through the doors of our classrooms, they bring us their dreams, their potential, and their trust. And sometimes, they bring empty stomachs, untreated ailments, and life experiences that can chill you to your core. America's teachers take them all in their fullness, and we do all we can to help them reach great heights.

Good things are happening in our public schools—teachers and paraprofessionals who work tirelessly to inspire their students; students who struggle, yet strive and succeed; communities that value education and ensure students have what they need. I can't tell you how proud I am when I visit those schools.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden will both champion and challenge the people entrusted with our children's well-being – and we welcome it!

We are ready to work together to usher in a new era of excellence in America's public schools. We can do this—we must do this—and it starts with electing Barack Obama as the next president of the United States.