

Funding our future

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There's a new musical on Broadway, "Suffs," about the movement to win women's right to vote. The lyrics from one of the songs, called "Keep Marching," have been stuck in my head:

Progress is possible, not guaranteed It will only be made if we keep marching ...

The future demands that we fight for it now It will only be ours if we keep marching.

I recited those words (I didn't sing!) to thousands of delegates attending the AFT convention last week in Houston to reflect on the moment we are in.

Progress is possible. We have made it through the chaos and suffering of the pandemic. The Biden-Harris administration has created more jobs than any other in history, wages are up, inflation has cooled, and America's economy is the strongest in the world. Unions are having a renaissance. Indeed, the AFT has grown to our largest membership ever, with 1.8 million workers in education, healthcare and public services.

While progress is possible, so is the eradication of the rights and freedoms we hold dear. Just look at the Supreme Court. Over the last two years, the court's extremist, activist majority has rewritten the Constitution, thrown out long-settled precedents, scrapped gun regulations and environmental protections, eliminated the deference given to science and expertise, granted corporations new powers over us, and stripped individual rights, including women's freedom to make one of life's most personal and significant decisions.

And now, as the Republican candidate for president has said he will be a dictator on day one, the Supreme Court's majority has granted presidents near-total immunity that enables this, creating a rule of one, not a rule of law. They have laid the legal foundation for American autocracy. And extremists are ready to build on that foundation.

The broad coalition of far-right activists behind Project 2025 has drafted a 900-page radical wish list that they intend to implement in the first 180 days if Donald Trump is elected president.

Here's a taste of what they'd do: Cut Social Security and Medicare. Let employers stop paying overtime. Strip healthcare protections for people with pre-existing conditions. Replace thousands of federal workers with ideol-

ogues, dismantle civil rights protections, end efforts to combat climate change, cut taxes for the wealthy, and weaponize the National Labor Relations Board against workers.

Their plans for public education are equally draconian. Title I would go—swelling class sizes and eliminating paraprofessionals. Educators and public librarians could have to register as sex offenders if they disseminate material the Heritage Foundation vaguely describes as pornographic. And their holy grail—limitless funding for private and religious schools, would lead to the end of the separation of church and state and of public education as we know it.

These extremists see it as a zero-sum game. To seize power, they must subvert others'. So they remake the judiciary, roll back freedoms, reduce taxes on the wealthy, rig democracy, wreck public education and restrict unions—because we, the people, stand in their way.

The president of the Heritage Foundation publicly warned that "we are in the process of the second American revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be." That explicit threat of violence is the stuff of demagogues and dictators, not democracies.

This is the backdrop for the next presidential election, an election that has seen unprecedented twists and turns already. Joe Biden has been incredibly effective at moving the country forward. But he is passing the baton, and the 1.8 million-member AFT is the first union to endorse his vice president, Kamala Harris.

Harris has led the fight for our freedoms—women's freedom to make decisions about our own bodies, the freedom to live safe from gun violence, the freedom to marry and the freedom to vote. As president, she will continue to fight for a better life for all.

Vote for a future where every person has the opportunity not just to get by, but to get ahead.

Speaking to AFT convention delegates, Harris laid out two different visions for our nation, one focused on the past and the other focused on the future. "In our vision of the future," she said, "we see a place where every person has the opportunity not just to get by, but to get ahead, a future where no child has to grow up in poverty, where every senior can retire with dignity, and where every worker has the freedom to join a union."

Harris posed our choice for this November: "Do we want to live in a country of freedom, compassion and rule of law, or a country of chaos, fear and hate?"

Voting is our best defense against autocracy, and it's our best offense to create the better future we dream of and march for. *Progress is possible, not guaranteed.* Vote.



Weingarten, right, welcomes Vice President Kamala Harris to the AFT convention in Houston on July 25.

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