

Walking the Walk for Working Families

Randi Weingarten, President
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As we fight our way back from the recession, it's clear that our economy isn't working for everyone. Too many are out of work or have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Too many don't have the skills they need for the jobs available in their communities. Too many get the skills they need only to be saddled with crippling debt or faced with unaffordable housing. For too many, the American dream is out of reach. Meanwhile, the rich get richer and government grows increasingly gridlocked as money drives politics.

We're working with willing businesses, communities and allies in government to get America back to work.

As a union, the American Federation of Teachers takes on these issues. Indeed, our members and those we serve count on us to fight back. So, yes, we confront corporations like Pearson in front of their shareholders for business policies that lead to gagging teachers and spying on children. We protest for-profit colleges like Corinthian that leave students with a worthless degree and a load of debt. And we call out hedge fund managers who denounce teachers' pensions as they profit from teacher pension funds.

At the same time, with the same passion and commitment, we're working with willing businesses, communities and allies in government to break through the inertia and get America back to work. This work isn't loud or provocative, but it's vital for our communities, our union and our nation.

We're working with a coalition of public and private partners to turn workers' pension funds—monies essential for a secure retirement—into engines for economic growth and job creation. Beginning in 2011, we've led a commitment, in partnership with other unions and through the Clinton Global Initiative (an instrumental convener), that has resulted in more than \$14 billion of investment by pension funds in U.S. infrastructure.

So far, \$11.5 billion has been used in projects nationwide to produce a steady return. At least 50,000 jobs have been created and more new jobs are on the way, with a total of 140,000 expected, including 15,000 jobs for the renovation and upgrade of LaGuardia Airport. That's right—the airport New Yorkers

love to hate will soon be getting a much-needed makeover.

Former President Bill Clinton characterized the idea as a long-overdue model: "It's the proper way to invest in our economy because it works. These types of investments are a better job-growth strategy than financial transactions."

While we're creating these good jobs, we're working to give people the skills they need to fill them. In the past four years, one of our labor partners, the North America's Building Trades Unions, has trained nearly 1 million workers.

And just last week, the AFT announced a five-city compact to expand high-quality career and technical education. Building on a successful and growing approach in New York City, we are jump-starting CTE in Miami; Peoria, Ill.; Pittsburgh; and San Francisco, with grants from the AFT Innovation Fund. In each city, unions, businesses, community colleges, school districts and local government are coming together to support and expand CTE pathways that match the local labor market.

The goal is to create a human pipeline, connecting students, the skills and knowledge they need, and the available jobs of today and tomorrow. Students get career and college options, and employers get employees with great qualifications.

Obviously, no sector is closer to our heart than public education, including how we recruit, retain and support great educators for today and tomorrow. Which is why we also are cre-

ating partnerships to address one of our biggest challenges—affordable housing.

In McDowell County, W.Va., the eighth-poorest county in the nation, we're working with a public-private partnership that we spearheaded three years ago to reverse a severe lack of housing for teachers and other professionals. Together with the AFL-CIO Housing Investment Trust and other private sector partners, we are raising funds to build a \$6 million complex where teachers and other professionals will live.

On the other coast, in San Francisco, educators can no longer afford to live in the same neighborhoods where their schools are located. The city's median rent is now an astronomical \$4,225 a month. The median home price is now more than \$1 million. So, we are partnering with the school district and the city to develop housing on school district-owned land, increase rental assistance and expand existing homeownership assistance programs.

As the AFT embarks on its 100th year, we are continuing our long-standing tradition of advancing the common good, which includes fighting to reclaim the promise of public education and affordable and accessible higher education, but also working to ensure all Americans have the opportunity to achieve their American dream. That is 21st-century unionism—calling out the excesses, rebalancing our economy and walking the walk for working families.



Former President Bill Clinton and AFT President Weingarten speak at the Clinton Global Initiative America meeting last year in Denver.

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