

EVENT: NEA Representative Assembly

DATE: Friday, July 3, 2015

TIME: 10:45 a.m.

NOTE: The NEA RA begins Friday morning at 10:30 a.m. You will be seated on stage at 10:15 a.m. You will be the second person to speak, after Andy Ford welcomes everyone to Florida. You will have up to 15 minutes to speak to an audience of more than 8,000 delegates and guests. Lily will introduce you.

OVERALL FRAME: We both believe that our job is to amplify the voice of all educators and work to reclaim the promise of public education. While we may not always agree, we share the same values and AFT is committed to working together with NEA.

INTRODUCTION:

- Thank you Lily.
- It is an incredible honor for me to be here.
- From the moment Lily spoke at the AFT convention, just after she was elected as your president, I've watched her take on the powers that be, and I can assure you --you have no better champion.
- I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with you, Lil – well, actually, if I'm going to be accurate, it's more like I'm standing with my head at your shoulder. And while we usually see eye to eye on things – I think my eyes come about up to your chin. Okay, enough with the short jokes...
- The last time an AFT president addressed the NEA RA was in 1997, when Sandy Feldman was here. Sandy, who was my mentor, really championed the idea of our two unions cooperating -even merging. And, no, I'm not starting any rumors, but if she was alive today she would be pleased that we are working together.
- And I might add that this AFT President is also a member of the NEA.

- Last year, by the way, I was with you all--but as a rebetzin as Lily and Alberto were married by my partner Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum.– And Sharon if she were here today would say to both you and Alberto: Hola, Yo envio mi amor. (I send you my love).

KEY POINT 1: As Lily proclaimed at AFT’s convention: Well-behaved women don’t make history. And – Lily, Becky and Princess – please know that Loretta, Mary Cathryn and I look forward to making history with you, with a lot of misbehaving. (That’s right, both of our unions are led by women and none of us are particularly well-behaved!)

Enough about us...I want to use this opportunity to thank you for everything you do to help every child succeed. To the unparalleled passion and dedication represented by the sea of faces in front of me.

- From the hundreds of dollars you take out of your own pockets each year to buy food, clothing or school supplies for our students, to the many ways in which you work to meet kids where they are – not where the Broad Foundation, or the Walton Foundation, or Campbell Brown wants them to be. But where they really are. That’s what you do.
- You wake up every morning thinking of ways to lift your kids’ hearts, to see their souls, to mold them so they will not only dream their dreams but achieve them.
- That is who you are. And I’m so grateful to share with your leaders, the honor of representing the soul of the United States of America.

KEY POINT 2: The AFT and the NEA may take different roads, but we head to the same destination. We’re all fighting to reclaim the promise of America.

- That promise means you can send your children to a great neighborhood public school that is safe, collaborative and child-centered, not test-obsessed.
 - o You can give your kids the advantage of a college education without incurring crippling debt.
 - o When you get sick, you'll get good healthcare.

- o You'll be treated fairly at work, getting a real raise every once in a while.
- o It means you won't have to choose between your job and taking care of a sick child or an aging parent.
- o It means a lifetime of work culminates in a retirement with dignity.

KEY POINT 3: Today, that promise is under attack ... in a battle that's ultimately about our economy, our democracy and who holds the power.

- As we fight our way back from the recession, it's clear our economy isn't working for everyone. Frankly, you know the economy is out of whack when 25 hedge fund managers earn more than all the kindergarten teachers in this nation combined.
- Sadly, for too many working families, the American dream is out of reach. Meanwhile, the rich get richer and government grows increasingly gridlocked as money drives politics.
- The Scott Walkers, the Koch Brothers, and the hedge funders, they all want to preserve today's status quo-- a rigged, trickle-down economic system.
- A large part of their calculus has been to undermine unions. Why? Because we get in their way. They know when unions were at our peak, more workers—upwards of 50 percent – were in the middle class. Shared Prosperity. But now, as unions have declined, income inequality is the highest it's been since the Gilded Age. (o.k. Once a social studies teacher, always a social studies teacher)
- So, we're seeing an all-out war on workers and their unions. From statehouses to courthouses, our opponents seek to wipe us off the map.
 - o Take the *Friedrichs* case that the U.S. Supreme Court just agreed to hear, or the *Bain* case in California. These are outright attacks to silence us.

KEY POINT 3: Which is why it is so important for us to stand shoulder to shoulder. We don't always have to agree, but, as we have shown in the merged states and in the non-merged states, we can find ways to come together and win.

- In our merged states -- North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, Florida and, yes, my home state of New York – we are making progress.
 - o FEA – your herculean efforts have actually reduced the impact of high-stakes testing on students and teachers alike.

Yes, there's more work to be done. But you've made a real difference--even with Rick Scott as Governor.

- o And NYSUT – when Gov. Cuomo doubled down on high-stakes testing and tried to dump on teachers, you took him on. And first parents joined that fight, and then the public rallied with us. And now this governor who is as poll-obsessed as he is test-obsessed... is still stunned by the way his numbers have plummeted.
- And what about our merged locals -- we are also breaking thru...
 - o Take Los Angeles: UTLA in the Schools LA Students Deserve contract campaign engaged both the community and our members. And won a contract where students got lower class sizes and after 8 long years, teachers got a raise.
 - o Then there is Austin, Texas where we have worked to bring everyone together – parents, teachers, administrators and community members – to create community schools that meet the social, emotional and health needs of our students and their families.
- Even in states where at times we have been at odds, we are coming together.
 - o In Louisiana, we overcame past differences to combine forces and beat back an effort that tried to make it impossible for educators to use payroll deduction to pay their union dues.
 - o In Michigan, together, we're taking on the privateers and we're seeing results in two suburban Detroit districts
- And on a national level, we are on the cusp of overhauling No Child Left Behind. In days from now, the U.S. Senate will consider the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act. Just last week, Lily and I stood – with PTAs and principals, school boards and superintendents – calling on the Senate to bring this bill to a vote.

- o Because Schools should be places of learning and joy, not stressing and testing. Because Teachers need the time, tools and trust to do their jobs well.
- o And in April, in this polarized political climate, something unheard of happened in the US Senate. There was a unanimous, bipartisan vote in committee to overhaul NCLB and return to the original intent of the ESEA. The bill addressed poverty and educational inequality by maintaining targeted funding for poor children. It reset accountability measures to get back to teaching and learning and move away from the counterproductive fixation on test scores, sanctions, and school closings. And it stops the federal Department of Education from being the Human Resource Office of every school district in America.

- o Let's be real, we worked incredibly hard to get to this moment

- o But, as every civics teacher and every activist in this hall knows---(ok, once a social studies teacher always a social studies teacher) the Senate committee vote is just the first step. We need the current Senate bill to pass, and be the basis for what the House and the President take up.
- o We need this reset. We demand this reset. And together we will keep the pressure on to secure it.
- o So, this Fourth of July, let's declare our independence from No Child Left Behind and from our policymakers misguided obsession with high-stakes testing!

CONCLUSION: This has been a year where we've taken it on, and where we've fought the fight. We can't stop now.

When public education is demonized and denigrated--rather than respected and funded, we must raise our voice.

- When corporate-backed politicians starve and sell off our schools, we must raise our voice.
- When our students don't get the supports they need or leave college saddled with debt, we must raise our voice.
- When racism rears its ugly head and nine churchgoers are gunned down in Charleston, we must raise our voice.
- Brothers and sisters, we must raise our voices. For our kids. For our families. For our communities. As NEA. As AFT. As America's educators.
- Thank you, and have a great RA.