

CAROLYN DOGGETT COUNCIL SPEECH

CTA State Council
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It's Always Been Politics

Good Morning Council. Thank you so very much. So you heard. I have announced my retirement. I'm not going to talk a lot about it today, because I will be here with you at least through July and we'll have plenty of time to say goodbye. But I will say, when I started teaching in Willits in 1967, I never dreamed that I would be in public education 45 years later. I never envisioned that I would have the privilege and honor of working for what I consider the greatest union and the most effective advocate for children, educators and public education in the world:

The California Teachers Association.

It is an honor to work with this team of Officers and to be your Executive Director. As I was thinking about talking with you today, I decided to focus on my favorite topic: Politics. And it's certainly fitting as we celebrate our historic 2012 election victories. I know there are probably a few of you out there – and certainly, there are some in your schools – who think politics is all just noise.

The frustration with politics is understandable, but it's also dangerous. Over the years, I have given countless speeches on why politics matter to us as educators and union members. And today I'm going to give you one more. Because as we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of CTA, we must remember that we were founded for one reason...and one reason only...and that was to engage in politics.

We were founded to engage in the political process in order to create an organized system of public instruction and to elevate the profession of teaching in California. The fact that our establishment in 1863 coincides with the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation may be a beautiful coincidence, but from the very beginning, we were founded in the throes of political activism and social justice.

Listen to the words of John Swett back in 1867. "The highest purpose of the public schools is to train children to become good citizens. It is not enough that they teach the elements of an intellectual education. They have a higher and nobler duty. They should teach the duties, rights, privileges and honors of American citizenship. Fellow teachers, the work is in our hands. But your work is not, indeed, limited to the school room alone. You must make your influence felt on society.

"Attend the county Institutes, write essays and engage in debates and discussions. Write for the local papers. Subscribe for and read carefully half a dozen of the best school journals in the United States, and learn what is going on in the educational world.

"Instead of complaining about the lack of interest on the part of parents, visit every family in the district, and wake up the fathers and mothers from their lethargy. Hold frequent examinations and exhibitions, for the purpose of bringing the people in direct contact with the school and its influences. Harass the trustees until they purchase school apparatus, furnish new desks or build a new school house, if one is needed. If a special tax is necessary, canvass the district for it with the zeal and earnestness of a professional politician. The true teacher should be a thinker and a doer."

And when I look out at this room, I see nothing but thinkers and doers. And that's what makes me so proud of all our work in 2012. We encapsulated that California spirit and drive that Governor Brown talked about in his State of the State address.

At a time when many members and staff were beaten down by the challenges facing public education and the attacks on educators by the so-called reformers who know nothing about the profession of teaching or improving student learning...we stepped up and created change. Actually, we LED change for our students and our future.

We were the little engine that could. And we still are!

Over the years, I have been proud to be part of many great CTA election victories, defeating school vouchers twice, passing school bonds, electing Nancy Pelosi to Congress and then watching her be sworn in as the first woman to be House Speaker.

In 2005, we beat back the very bad ideas of a then very popular governor. We destroyed his attacks on the minimum school funding law, our secure retirement, our rights to due process, and to have a voice in politics. It was a grand slam election.

But our victories in 2012 were even more special to me. Yes, we sent the corporate billionaires, their special exemptions and their attack on our union rights packing. We exposed Gloria Romero, Democrats for Education Reform and Michelle Rhee, as they showed their real colors and agenda, which is to destroy educator unions and free public schools in this country.

But with the passage of Prop. 30, we were pro-active, took the lead and set the agenda for California's future. And as always with CTA, we did it in a smart, strategic fashion. We did the research, polling and voter targeting needed to win. Passion for an idea must be supported by the right strategy and thoughtful research to get the job done.

How many of you have seen the movie Lincoln?

It's not only the story of an amazing president - well-acted by Daniel Day Lewis - but it's the telling of the strategies, compromises and political wrangling it took to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery. As Dean said yesterday, it's an opportunity to learn from history.

We worked in coalition with other labor unions in defeating Prop. 32 and that partnership was certainly a key to our victory, but as the Executive Director of CTA, I want to boast a little more about your efforts. Thanks to the wisdom of State Council years ago to establish an initiative fund and a media fund, we, CTA, paid for more than half of the Prop. 32 campaign and were the largest contributor to Prop. 30. You should be proud of that.

It is how we bring our dues dollars together to remain strong advocates for our students and our profession. CTA staff and managers were integral to developing the overall campaign strategy, field plan, advertising and message of both initiative campaigns. CTA provided additional resources to ensure media outreach in our ethnic communities.

CTA used social media to engage voters online. And thousands of CTA members and hundreds of CTA staff made phone calls and walked precincts.

As part our repurposed State Council weekend and in the final days of the election, CTA member volunteers alone contacted more than 145,000 voters. As a coalition, we contacted nearly 2 million voters.

I am proud of the work of CTA staff during this campaign. In the headquarters office, we had phone banks running every night, with staff volunteering to make calls.

And since I love phone-banking, I was there almost every night...even nights when my San Francisco Giants were playing leading up to the World Series. I have to admit I surprised one voter when in the middle of the call, I screamed, "Go Pablo Go," as he hit yet another home run. Thankfully, the voter was also a Giants fan and screaming with me. More importantly, he was also voting Yes on 30 and No on 32.

And as an aside, I knew we would win the election, because my Giants won the championship. We're going to celebrate later today, but I say to all of you: Congratulations! Thank you for your hard work in your local chapters and communities. And thank you for demonstrating why politics matter.

As a fourth generation teacher, whose mother, grandmother and great-grandmother came through the prejudice and sexism of the early days in the profession. Even when I started teaching, I was told by my superintendent that I couldn't teach high school, because it wouldn't be right for such a young woman, I was 21, to teach high school boys.

And, as a feminist activist of the 1960's, I want to take a moment to mark another reason why politics matter and why we as union members must have a commitment to social justice. This month marks the 40th Anniversary of the Roe-v-Wade decision, protecting every woman's fundamental right to make her own personal medical decisions.

In California, and with the support of CTA, we have fought back three attempts to curtail a woman's right to choose, including measures that would have endangered the lives of teenage girls. Currently, California is one of only 10 states that have no additional restrictions on reproductive health.

Since 2011, the same law makers who are attacking collective bargaining and talking about "legitimate" rape have passed a record 135 laws in more than 25 states aimed at regulating women's health.

Those of us who trust women and who value health and equal rights must not stay silent.

After all our actions in November, I know it's tempting to take a break - and I hope you did get some time in December - but we must keep the enthusiasm, purpose and resolve of 2012 alive. Whether it's teacher evaluation, school safety, due process, affordable college, intellectual freedom, online learning, tax fairness or school funding... there will be a number of political issues that demand our attention.

And political issues are classroom issues. It's why, we must engage in our local communities to talk to parents and community groups about what's important for our public schools and colleges. We must speak the truth about public education and about those who want to destroy it. We must reach out to new members and members of color to engage them in the work of the union. We must continue to lead efforts to improve the teaching profession. And we must continue to fight for those students and schools that need additional help.

In closing, I again turn to our founder, John Swett, as he reflected on the role public education played in passing the 13th Amendment. "Thanks to the wisdom, prudence and patriotism of the Thirty-ninth Congress, victory again crowned the banner of progress, and the nation is to be reconstructed on the eternal principles of justice. No grander record of Freedom and Nationality was ever made.

During this eventful period, amid the upheavals...of the nation...the public schools have quietly and steadily gained strength. The war has proved their value, and demonstrated their necessity to the existence of a free people.

“Where would the nation have been today, but for the intelligence imparted by free schools during the last quarter of a century? In the great political campaigns since the war, what but the general diffusion of intelligence has kept the people true to freedom? The character and opinions of the men whose will, expressed through the ballot box, makes and amends constitutions, have been formed in the public schools.”

In the spirit of the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment...in the spirit of Dr. King and his dream for a better union...in the spirit of providing a free public education to all students...in the spirit of equal rights for all...and in the spirit of the political action and social justice that founded CTA 150 years ago...I ask you to continue being an educator...AND A DOER.