

MARCH 24, 2012

## CTA PRESIDENT DEAN E. VOGEL SPEECH TO STATE COUNCIL

Good morning State Council. I'm so glad to be here with you this weekend. It's so good to see friends and colleagues. To have time to talk about the important issues facing our profession and our state. And to make the decisions necessary to help put California back on the road to recovery.

### **Parent Trigger**

But before I go on, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the Adelanto District Teachers Association for their organizing and work with parents in the community. For those of you who don't know, Desert Trails Elementary School is the second school in the state where there has been an attempt to pull the so-called "parent-trigger" law.

After their first failed attempt in Compton last year, the Los Angeles-based Parent Revolution is now wreaking havoc in Adelanto. Once again the group has parachuted in and divided a school and a community. But by working with a core group of committed parents, ADTA fought back. They helped organize an education campaign in which dozens of parents, after learning more, rescinded their signatures on the trigger petition. Ultimately, the local school board rejected the Parent Revolution proposal. And we know ADTA must be doing something right because Parent Revolution has done nothing but blame CTA and make false accusations since their own campaign began to unravel.

Apparently Parent Revolution just can't believe that a few local teachers, CTA staff, and a group of committed parents could stand up to all the money and resources they've poured into Adelanto. Parent Revolution has 60 days to appeal the board's decision and they are using the same deceptive bullying tactics that they used in Compton. But whatever happens, we can be proud that ADTA was part of a collaborative, clean and honest effort that put students first. Congratulations Adelanto leaders. I salute you. This is the type of organizing and community work that all of us need to engage in as we move into a critical election year. The Parent Trigger is just one issue confronting us right now. There are so many complex issues we are dealing with in California, and most have no easy fixes.

Issues like new revenue for schools and colleges and communities. Issues like improving teacher evaluations and addressing childhood poverty. And issues like what is happening at Miramonte Elementary here in L.A.

It was serious and unconscionable acts that started the public outrage and national media frenzy. And we must move forward in the best way possible for the students and the Miramonte school community. But what has transpired since – administrators and others who should be the voice of reason and who should be supporting the other educators in that school – are using the situation to grandstand, to push their own agenda, to point fingers and blame. This isn't going to help anyone involved and it's certainly not going to help that community heal. We are going to be hearing from a few Miramonte teachers later today. Please join me in letting them know that we stand with them.

Yes, we are facing a lot of issues...and if our state doesn't start moving forward in the right direction, it could be too late for many of our students and too late for their families. Right now, one out of every 8 students in America is educated in California. They attend schools in some of the largest class sizes in the country. They have the fewest opportunities to talk with a school counselor or be nurtured back to health

by a school nurse. And once they graduate high school and move on to pursue a higher education, they are greeted with annual tuition increases and course reductions.

The four year degree is not within reach for many of our students. And yet, at the same time resources have been falling away from us, we've held our own and continue to help our students make notable improvements. That's on you...and the incredible work you do day in and day out in classrooms, colleges and universities.

Since 2003, we've seen a 43% gain in students reaching proficient and advanced levels in math. We've seen a 54% gain in reading scores. Even more exciting is, during the same period English Learners saw record improvements...up 130% in reading and 85% in math. And, these days, three of every four high school graduates will enroll in college. That's what you - all of you - have accomplished in spite of \$20 billion in cuts to our classrooms in the last four years. Imagine what can be done...imagine what we could do...if we had those resources put back into our schools.

### **Layoffs**

This month we saw over 20,000 of our certificated members get layoff notices, and thousands more ESP are facing the same threat. March pink slips have become a kind of grim spring ritual the past few years. We know many of these RIFs will be rescinded, and some may be called back in the fall, but the reality is that 40,000 educators have lost their jobs over the past four years.

That means larger class sizes, fewer opportunities for students, and schools that are less safe. It's a personal tragedy for each of those members and their families, as well a societal tragedy as California struggles with a weak economy and one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. We have an obligation to each of those members and the students they serve to do everything we can to support them.

I know in your locals you are doing everything you can to force your districts to make any needed cuts as far from the classroom and school sites as possible. I also know at the same time many of you have made concessions at the bargaining table to help our kids and communities. And while you do what is necessary in your locals, I assure you that CTA is going to do everything we can to make sure that schools receive the funding necessary to prevent future layoffs like this.

In the past two weeks, we worked with our Education Coalition partners and with local chapters to keep exposing the dangerous impact of the state budget cuts. We teamed with students and college professors for a statewide day of action. And we are fighting every day for students and educators in the State Capitol. But we also know California's funding crisis is now so severe that we have to do more than lobby lawmakers.

It's going to take a broad coalition to get voters to approve the kind of funding we're going to need to stop deeper cuts and get our schools back on track. This year is going to take even deeper collaboration than we've seen since we beat Governor Schwarzenegger's schemes in 2005.

### **Funding Initiative Update**

On that front I have some good news. I'm sure you all remember the spirited debate we engaged in at the last Council meeting. I remember it. We argued over which funding initiatives we would support on the November ballot. It was a thoughtful and comprehensive debate, and in the end, you voted to support the proposal put forth by the governor.

You did that because the governor's tax initiative aligned with CTA's progressive tax criteria, it provided needed revenue to prevent deeper cuts to schools, colleges and other essential services, and it had broad support. It was a responsible plan...helping pay down the state's wall of debt and closing the budget deficit. But since last Council, there has been a lot of activity on the funding front.

Backers of two initiatives – the governor, the California Federation of Teachers and legislative leaders – met and agreed on a compromise initiative. This was done because, ultimately, everyone realized that no one would benefit from having competing measures drawing votes from each other. The new compromise proposal uses the structure of the governor's original plan, but reduces the state sales tax increase from a half-a-cent to a quarter-of-a-cent. And it increases the income tax on the very wealthy. It also extends the income tax hikes by two years – giving the state more time to come out of this recession.

The CTA Board of Directors is recommending support for the compromise plan. There will be a full hearing in the PIC committee and discussion here tomorrow in the full body. By supporting the compromise measure we will unite labor and expand our coalition, which can only help its chance of passing. We will also have to work fast because the window for gathering signatures is extremely short. It will take all of us circulating petitions. Too much is at stake to fail.

If a funding initiative is not passed this Fall, the state is facing a \$9 billion deficit and our K-12 schools are facing about \$5 billion in midyear cuts. That's over \$800 per student or \$20,000 per classroom. That's like closing school for over three weeks or laying off 55,000 teachers or 120,000 support professionals. For community colleges, it means \$300 million in cuts. And for CSU's and UC's another \$400 million in cuts and more tuition hikes.

### **Corporate Power Grab**

The school funding threat is serious—thousands of jobs and the future for thousands of students are riding on the outcome of this fall's tax campaign. And if we want to keep having a voice in this fight – you know what I'm going to say – there's an even bigger threat this November, one that could make a funding initiative CTA's last political hurrah.

What we have been calling Paycheck Deception is now the Corporate Power Grab Initiative—because that's exactly what it would do—shift the balance of power to big corporations more than it already is, and it would silence the voices of the middle class and of working men and women. If the Corporate Power Grab passes, it will knock CTA, each of your locals, and our union brothers and sisters almost completely out of the political process.

Think about it. No voice or influence on school funding. You've got 60 kids in your fourth-grade class. The union would have no resources or ability to speak out for those students. Your school board decides to sit on a big cash reserve and layoff educators, or decides it wants to outsource custodial service. No means to use dues deduction, build a local PAC, or elect new board members who understand the priorities of the community.

Some misguided state lawmaker decides that eliminating an educator's secure retirement is the way to solve the state's budget deficit...forget it. We would have no means of collecting the money needed to defeat that initiative. What about free, universal health care for all? This weekend marks the anniversary of President Obama's health care reform act. You remember how much money big business and the insurance industry spent against it. With this initiative, there would be no voices telling the other side of the story. Or what if a couple of Billionaire brothers by the name of Koch decide to drop into California

and use their SuperPac to come after our collective bargaining rights? Not having the ability or resources to fight that attack is the real end-game.

If we are silenced, who will stand up for our members? Who will stand up for our students? Who will stand up for those who can't? Who will stand up for the working and middle class values that built this country and this democracy? The big corporations that already outspend unions 15 to one? I don't think so!

The forces behind this initiative want to do more than just silence our voice — they want to annihilate it! They can't stand the fact that we've been as successful as we have been. Two of the backers of this are Silicon Valley millionaire Tim Draper and Orange County conservative activist Mark Bucher. Some of you are familiar with both these guys. They've been at this kind of nastiness for years. They don't want you or me to get in the way of their attempts to turn public education into a money-making business.

Union members in Wisconsin and Ohio fought back. And you know as well as I do that we're going to fight back too. We will not be silenced. We will not be bullied. And we will not roll over. We will stand together and we will fight to win. And our first line of defense is doing something we all do quite well: teach. And it doesn't matter if you're driving the bus, serving lunch in the cafeteria or teaching math in community college.

We have to educate our colleagues and make sure they understand what the real agenda is here. And then all of us, working closely together with other labor unions and community groups, will have to educate voters. That means one-on-one conversations and small group meetings in your schools and chapters. That means dinner table conversations with our families and our friends.

This has to be our number one priority — because if the Corporate Power Grab initiative passes, we all lose. We will provide you with the resources you'll need to help you make the case. Materials are already available on the CTA website, including some new videos that look at the initiative from both educator and union perspectives. You can expect more materials and speaker trainings to be offered as well. The campaign is just beginning and we will need all of you to fully engage and mobilize your chapters. We're talking about pretty big stuff here.

We're talking about our ability to stand up and to speak out for our students, to stand up and speak out for our profession, and to stand up and speak out for our rights as union members. We're talking about speaking out for the resources we need to adequately educate students in California. And we are talking about beginning to change the tax structure in this state so that all Californians reap the benefit of being part of the ninth greatest economy in the world. For that, we need to work with each other, to reach out to our members, and to find allies in the community.

I think Cesar Chavez put it best when he said, "We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own." And that's what all this is about.

## **Conclusion**

There is nothing we can't accomplish when we put our minds to it. There's nothing we can't accomplish when we stand shoulder-to-shoulder and work together. We've done that time and again. The coming months are going to take us to new levels of determination and collaboration. But we will come out even stronger for it, and I'm going to say now, in advance, I'm already tremendously proud of what we'll accomplish on the road ahead. We've got some real challenges, but I can't think of a better group of people to work with to meet them.

We need more light about each other. Light creates understanding. Understanding creates love. Love creates patience. And patience creates unity. Guess you said that? Malcolm X. Think about that people. The coalition that's going to come together – that's going to hold us, that's going to be built for us. To not only pass a funding initiative in California, but fight back these maniac corporations who are trying to control everything we do. That coalition is going to come together because we hold it together – that we stand together, that we open our hearts and allow the light of who we are to shine. Not only on each other, but on the people in the communities who are depending on what we do. We are going to stand together, and we are going to get this done.

Thank you.