January 2012 State Council – CTA Executive Director Carolyn Doggett

Good Morning Council. What a tremendous weekend. Good friends…a great cause…and how can you beat 80 degree weather in January? As I got ready for this week’s meeting and thought about what I wanted to talk about today…I reflected upon the big speeches I’ve heard over the last few days.

There was the State of the State by Governor Brown. The State of the Union by President Obama. And my favorite, the truth about public education and the billionaires who want to destroy it by Diane Ravitch. I know many of you got the opportunity to hear Diane while she was in California. I’m proud that CTA was able to help arrange some of the events and pay for her to be here. I went to the event in San Francisco. She was tremendous!

I know she inspired educators here in Los Angeles. And she brought the house down in Sacramento, as more than 3500 people turned out to hear her speak. Kudos to Erik Knudson and the Sacramento City Teachers Association, as well as the other eight local chapters for their outstanding organizing. If you didn’t get a chance to attend, her speech from San Francisco is available on the CTA website.

And then of course, in January, when you think of speeches, you can’t help but think of Martin Luther King Jr. and his “I Have a Dream” speech. And while almost 50 years later, we are still struggling to fully achieve that dream…it changed this country. He challenged us to overcome our struggles, to look past barriers, to dream of a better future for our children…to be better. All of these speeches had a theme of challenges, hope and the need to take action. And that really is where we find ourselves today.

I have hope. I am an admitted, eternal optimist. I have hope because of all of you and the work you do every day. You are the heroes of this generation. I have hope because I know that when we all come together and work as a team, we are successful.

It’s what makes us a stronger union, a stronger state and a stronger nation. I have hope because I know despite whatever obstacles those who want to destroy unions and the middle class throw in our way this November…they will not break us. We will take action! We will make our voices heard! And we will not be silenced! So today, I want to start with the hope I draw from all of you. You are real heroes. You open minds and inspire greatness. Let me share a few stories that demonstrate success that no test score could ever tell.

Head Start teacher Rosa Hernandez, who belongs to the Teachers Association of Long Beach, doesn’t just teach her students how to read, she also brings their parents into the classroom and models how they can help their children read at home. One woman told Rosa not only did my three-year old daughter learn to read…I became a better mother. Many family members that Rosa has worked with have gone on to college or found successful jobs.

Cynthia Siemsen is the chair of the Department of Sociology at CSU Chico and a California Faculty Association member. She coordinates a service-learning program that connects classroom learning with hands-on experience. While studying sociology, her students also
volunteer at a homeless shelter in Chico. Every time they learn a theory about sociology in class, they also experience how the theory comes into play through their volunteer work. Her class contributed more than 350 hours of service work to the community.

Armando Hernandez is a member of the Montebello Teachers Association. He teaches auto shop during the day, but his after school program at Schurr High School is preparing at-risk students in East LA for the fastest-growing industry in the country – green technology. Most of his students are English learners and assigned to the program because they are struggling to graduate. Every year, his students design and build an energy-efficient vehicle as part of an international competition. In 2008, his students designed a car that ran on liquid petroleum gas. They won first place, outperforming teams of engineering students from colleges across the country, including UC Berkeley.

Margaret Fujisawa is a guidance counselor at Culver City High School and a member of the Association of Classified Employees. She recently received this letter from a college-bound student: "Thank you so much for all your help. Already you have assisted me in ways that I couldn’t even imagine and opened doors that I did not know were there. I would like to take this time to show my gratitude for recommending me to receive the scholarship for Santa Monica College. You went out of your way to fight for me and still continue doing so today."

And, at a time when school librarians are scarce in this state, it is important to remember their roles in a student’s life. Karen Boyarsky, a librarian at Beverly Hills High School and a member of the Beverly Hills Education Association, received this note of thanks from a former student. The student, who spoke no English when she started hanging out in the library, wrote this from college. "While wandering around and checking out the books, many caught my attention, such as languages. It’s beautiful to understand where the words we speak every day come from. And it amazes me that now, learning my fifth language, Russian, I am powerful enough to start a business around the world. I would like to thank you Mrs. Boyarsky for helping to teach me English. One day I will come back to Beverly Hills and the high school library is the first destination."

This is what Michelle Rhee, Bill Gates and Arne Duncan don’t understand. There’s no test or value-added score to measure these successes. But all of these educators are more than highly qualified. Be proud of who you are and the work you do. And make your voice heard in this education reform debate.

Diane Ravitch challenged all of us to individually take action. Write letters to lawmakers. Invite lawmakers to your classrooms so they can witness the challenges of budget cuts and poverty…and so they can see first-hand how our schools work and how learning actually takes place. Get online and respond to every article Michelle Rhee writes. Or better yet, post your own story and tell her who really puts students first. Remember this affirmation: My voice is important and I pledge to make it heard today.

Second, I said I have hope because when we all come together we are unstoppable…whether that’s coming together as CTA, as labor or even as a broader coalition. You will debate a very
important funding initiative today. I have faith that you will make the right choice for our students, schools, colleges and our state. I firmly believe that in the end, we must join with others and unite around one initiative, because if there are multiple tax proposals on the ballot, votes will be divided, voters will get discouraged and there will be no new revenues. That would be a disaster.

I want you to know that as we face the challenges of this year, your CTA staff and management team will be there with you. I continue to work very closely with the Budget Committee to ensure that our members get the services they need, while recognizing that some cuts must be made. As you know the management team took a two percent pay cut. And I’m happy to announce that we have tentative agreements with both of our staff unions. I have pledged no layoffs, but there will be vacancies that are not filled through attrition. We all want to be united as we go into the November battle.

And that brings me to Paycheck Deception, our role in politics and taking action. We all know that this is a deceptive piece of crap. Let me tell you a few outcomes if it passes:

- CTA and your local unions could not contribute to any state candidate or any local school board member – no matter how we collect the money.
- Eliminating payroll deduction for politics wipes out the ABC Fund, the CTA initiative fund, and your local PACs. Think about the victories, we’ve had over the years with those resources.
- And to collect political money outside of payroll deduction, unions would be required to get written permission from every member, every year.

So, the big corporate special interests want to tell us how to run our union, but they still would not be required to get the same permissions from their stockholders. Plain and simple this is a big corporate power grab. As Dean said yesterday it’s an attack that goes to the heart and soul of everything we do. So…if someone asks you why is CTA involved in politics in the first place? You tell them this:

--We’ll stay out of politics when they stay out of our classrooms.
--We’ll stay out when they stop wanting to pay and evaluate teachers based on student test scores.
--We’ll stay out when they stop trying to deny teachers basic due process rights to a hearing before being fired.
--We’ll stay out when they stop cutting $20 billion from our schools and colleges.
--We’ll stay out when California’s per-student funding doesn’t rank 47th in the country or more than $2,800 less than the national average.
--We’ll stay out when California doesn’t have the largest class sizes in the nation.
--We’ll stay out when all students, including low-income kids and students of color have the
resources they need to succeed.

--We’ll stay out when we actually have enough nurses, counselors, psychologists and librarians to provide services to our students.

--We’ll stay out when art, music, drama, and career technical education classes are available to every student in every school.

--We’ll stay out when they let teachers teach and treat us as the highly-trained professionals we are.

--We’ll stay out when teachers earn a salary competitive to other professions that require the same level of education and training.

--We’ll stay out when all students and educators can attend safe, clean schools.

--We’ll stay out when they stop trying to take away our secure retirement benefits that we paid for.

--We’ll stay out when educational support professional jobs are not contracted out to private companies.

--We’ll stay out when millionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

--We’ll stay out when classrooms have enough computers to actually bring students into the 21st century.

--We’ll stay out when all students who are eligible can afford to attend a community college or state university.

--We’ll stay out when they stop trying to tell us how to run our union and take away our collective bargaining rights.

--We’ll stay out when they stop trying to impose one set of rule for workers and another set for big corporate contributors, who already out spend unions 15 to 1.

Until then…you bet we’re going to play in politics…and we’re going to PLAY TO WIN! So in the spirit of Dr. King…use your voice…and keep the dream alive.

Keep the dream alive for our students; keep the dream alive for our profession; keep the dream alive for CTA and every union in this country; keep the dream alive for every Californian who knows we can do better; and…keep the dream alive for our future!