Solidarity Forever

Good Morning Council, Officers, CTA Board and CTA Staff.

It is again an honor to be here with you today.

But if I am honest, it is also with a somewhat heavy heart, as June will be my last State Council as your Executive Director.

In January, I talked about the importance of participating in politics and the difference CTA has made for students, educators and the citizens of California through our involvement.

Today, I want to talk about the power of the union and fighting for the rights of women – as the two have always gone hand-in-hand for me.

I always knew I wanted to be a teacher.

My mom was a teacher, my grandmother was a teacher and they were the most inspiring people I knew.

Now my father, like most farm boys of those times, only went through 8th grade, but he instilled in all five of us Doggett kids his values of being good citizens:

Work hard.
Pay your bills.
Be honest.
Always take care of your family.
If you can't say something nice, don't say it.
And you always persevere.

Growing up near Etna in Siskiyou County, daddy was a logger.

When I was 10, he was struck by a tree he was felling and suffered a severe head injury.

The doctors said he would never walk again.

Through perseverance and the help of my mother, daddy was back in the forests within two years.

He fought hard to unionize the logging industry, but it never happened as owners routinely fired loggers for trying to organize.

Watching him, I learned workers need unions to fight for salaries, for benefits and for safe working conditions.

Armed with those beliefs, when I took a teaching job in Alaska at the age of 23 in 1969, I immediately got involved in the union as my school's site rep.

Four years later I was elected President of the Anchorage Borough Education Association.

The headline in the daily paper simply read “Teachers Elect Woman.”
And I guess you could say I’ve been an outspoken education activist, feminist and union organizer ever since.

Unions helped build the American Dream and it is only through the labor movement, engaging with the broader community, that we will reclaim it for the next generation.

And as education unionists, honestly, we have even a bigger role to play. Not only because we have the power of numbers, but because as educators we have the responsibility to teach the value of citizenship and participatory government in our public schools and colleges.

So let’s take a look at where the labor movement stands at this time.

The number of union workers has been in constant decline and union density has shifted from the private sector to the public sector.

The majority of union members are now in the public sector, a significant shift in the last 40 years.

This shift is part of the reason labor attacks are more squarely focused on public employees.

And that becomes even clearer when you look at the number of union members by industry.

Public education employees are the largest group of union members in the country. The NEA is the largest labor union in the United States.

So it is no coincidence that attacks on labor are targeted at education unions.

The importance of labor unions in our economy is also very clear.

As the number of union members has declined, the rich have gotten richer and the share of wealth by the middle class has shrunk.

On average, unionized workers earn 27 percent more than nonunion workers.

Unionized workers are 54 percent more likely to have employer-provided pensions.

And more than 83 percent of union workers have jobs that provide health insurance, compared to only 60 percent of nonunion workers.

In the words of one of my heroes, Eleanor Roosevelt, “Everyone who is a worker should join a labor organization.

And only where they are organized do women get equal pay for equal work.”

Over the years, I have seen opportunities for women change tremendously.

I am proud of how far we have come, and as the first female executive director of CTA, I am proud to have been part of that change.

I remember shortly after becoming Executive Director and getting introduced to then Assembly Speaker Curt Pringle.

He looked at me kind of puzzled and the first words out of his mouth were, “But you’re a girl.”

I took a deep breath and said, “You’re a boy. Now, that we’ve clarified that, let’s talk about what’s important for educators and our public schools.”
We’ve come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. Tuesday, April 9 is Equal Pay Day.

This date symbolizes how far into 2013 women must work to earn what men earned in 2012.

The wage gap remained statistically unchanged last year as women earned 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man.

For African American women that rate falls to 69 cents for every dollar earned by a man, and for Latinas 60 cents.

According to the National Women’s Law Center, the wage gap persists at all levels of education and is exactly the same for women with a high school diploma or a bachelor’s degree.

Over a 40 year period, the typical woman who works full time makes $443,000 less than the typical man.

She would have to work another 12 years to make up this gap.

As union women through collective bargaining we do get equal pay for equal work, but it’s time to correct this wrong for others.

Congress needs to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act to protect workers and strengthen penalties that courts may impose on employers who practice wage discrimination against women and minorities.

Hillary Clinton, whose campaign for President I certainly hope to spend a lot of retirement time volunteering for, said it best last week in her speech before the World Summit.

“Now, I have always believed that women are not victims, we are agents of change, we are drivers of progress, we are makers of peace – all we need is a fighting chance.

But fighting to give women and girls a fighting chance isn’t a nice thing to do.

It isn’t some luxury that we get to when we have time on our hands to spend doing it. This is a core imperative for every human being and every society.

If we do not complete a campaign for women’s rights and opportunities, the world we want to live in…the country we all love and cherish will not be what it should be.”

I ask you to join the National Campaign to wear RED this Tuesday on Equal Pay Day to symbolize how far women and minorities are in the red with their pay.

Let’s be agents for change and drivers of progress!

And that’s exactly the way I feel about our opportunities in the labor movement, our opportunities to keep driving the public education agenda and our opportunities to reclaim the American Dream.

Yes, there are challenges.

Educators are under attack by billionaires who know nothing about teaching and by corporate special interests that only see dollar signs when they look at our schools.

Public employees and our rights to a secure retirement are under attack.

And the right to collective bargaining is being challenged in several states.

How many of you have seen this little book?
It's called *Axioms for Organizers*.

CTA reproduced it in honor of legendary organizer Fred Ross Sr, who trained Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta and many other farm workers.

It’s a collection of insights and wisdom for organizers.

Fred would say, don’t waste time fighting the competition, use that time to fight the issues and win… that will take care of the competition.

We have the issues on our side.

We have the ability and the capability to reclaim our public schools, the education profession and the American Dream for everyone.

It starts with some old, tried and true principles:

Educate…
Agitate…
Organize…

And I’m going to add…Evaluate.

We must Educate and help light a union fire for other members. This isn’t just about what CTA can do, but what opportunities can you – as individuals – create to light that fire.

Back in 1945, Verna M. Moran, President of the CTA Classroom Teachers Department, North Coast Section wrote this to her colleagues in the Sierra Educational News.

“*We, the present-day teachers, must be willing and ready to fight the battle of the future. The battle for such things as good salaries, security, small schools and health insurance for all.*

“We, the teachers and the future teachers as well, must sincerely believe in tolerance, and then go, as the disciples of old, and teach the doctrine.

She further challenged: “*Have you studied yourself lately in your attitudes toward your professional organizations? If you are professional-minded to CTA and NEA – are all of your friends likewise? If not, what can you do to create in the desire to support these very worthwhile groups? If each and every one of us would constitute himself a “one-man army” we could shortly become a 100% organization.*”

We must Agitate through involvement.

We need to move away from fear, apathy, self-doubt and isolation.

And move toward urgency, hope, making a difference and solidarity.

When people unite under the leadership of labor, there is no power of wrong that we cannot openly defy.

Labor united with its allies is an irresistible force that can return the American Dream to the people whose blood, sweat and tears have made it great.
We must Organize into action.

Organizing is providing people with the opportunities to become aware of their own capabilities and potential.

While action is how we turn what we have into what we need to get what we want.

Organizing is lighting fires, building relationships and involving people in collective action.

In fact, a good organizer is a social arsonist who goes around setting people on fire.

That’s our job as leaders, managers and staff.

We don’t build union capacity by fiat.

It’s built by the equal support of all of us working together to support members.

And then after all of that, we must not be afraid to Evaluate.

That is why I am so proud of this body’s decision and the leadership of Dean in moving CTA through our strategic planning process.

We must always – even in good and successful times like last year’s incredible election victories – stop and evaluate.

This planning process is about using Your Voice, to build Our Union and determine Our Future!

CTA has led the charge for students, public education, workers, democracy and social justice for 150 years.

We have to continue doing so for the next 150.

Our time is NOW!

I close today, with the famous words of Ralph Chaplin that have been sung by many.

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold...Greater than the might of armies magnified a thousand-fold.

We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old for

But the union makes us strong.

Solidarity Forever...

Solidarity Forever...

Solidarity Forever

For the union makes us strong!