

Carolyn Doggett
The Blame Game – Union Proud
State Council – October 2010

Good Morning Council.

It is good to be here with you today...and I really mean that.

I spent a good part of the summer on the sidelines – having surgeries on my back and hip.

I'm still moving a little slow at times, but it is definitely good to be here.

It's also a good day because...let's hear it for the Giants!!

The Giants win the pennant!

Come on, even you Dodger fans.

The rag-tag team that no one thought had a chance is headed to the World Series.

And yes, that might have been me last night leading cheers in the bar with my friends from Redwood service center.

Thanks for that personal moment - now back to my speech.

Having been a classroom teacher for 15 years, a local chapter president, President of NEA-Alaska and the Executive Director of CTA ...it saddens me to tell you that I have never, ever seen attacks on educators and their unions like we are witnessing these days.

Whether it is education reform, our pensions, the right to bargain...or using our dues as we see fit in this election, the “blame game” that David mentioned and I want to talk to you about today is running rampant.

And it is aimed right at us.

But in the midst of all this finger pointing, I have never...ever been more proud to be a union member.

I'm proud to be a 4th generation teacher.

I'm proud of the work we do on behalf of students and educators.

I'm proud of the values we have fought and stand for:

- Free public schools, along with access to affordable higher education.

- Civil and equal rights for all – regardless of your race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- Fair pay and decent benefits.
- And the right to have a voice in our own workplace.

Yes, I'm proud to be a union member.

And I hope you are too.

Because we have a responsibility to lead and to make our voices heard for our students and for all workers.

This blame game is all a diversion from having to deal with the complex issues facing our schools, and it is an effort by the leaders of corporate industry to once again, try to destroy the labor movement.

That effort is transparent in this year's election.

Let me start with education reform.

How many of you read an article called: "How to Fix Our Schools: A Manifesto by Joel Klein, Michelle Rhee and Other Education Leaders?"

I'd really call it a manifesto of blame.

It was written by several superintendents from urban school districts.

On a good note, no one from California signed it.

But following the "Waiting for Superman" script, these know-it-alls laid out what's wrong with our schools – and of course the only problem is teachers and their unions.

The authors said, it's time for all of the adults – superintendents, educators, elected officials, labor unions and parents – to start acting like we are responsible for the future of our children.

Honestly, I couldn't agree more.

Then, they laid out their solutions:

- Move money from neighborhood schools to charter schools.
- Make children take more tests.

- Move money from classrooms to online learning.
- Make it easier to fire teachers and take away their due process rights.
- And, Tie teacher jobs and salaries to student test scores.

So what happened to THEIR responsibilities?

That's the question that Kevin Welner, Director of the National Education Policy Center, asked.

His response was so good; I'm going to share some of his words and add a few of my own.

He asks: "Are these adults acting responsible when they bash teachers and only teachers?"

What about the superintendents and elected officials who are conveniently never mentioned again in the Manifesto, but who actually have control over the resources available to students and teachers?"

Every teacher I've talked to is willing to accept responsibility when they have the resources they need to do their jobs.

"Does this group take responsibility for the waste of taxpayer money – and teacher time – on reforms that we all know don't work?"

"Are they acting responsible advocating for more testing and school choice?"

When test-based accountability has dominated the reform landscape for the last decade, and it hasn't improved student learning?
And all the research shows charter schools don't perform any better than regular schools.

Online learning?

Sometimes it can be a good supplement, but research doesn't support it as a replacement – unless of course you're an investor in one of the companies who would profit from it.

Like, say a computer manufacturer who started his own foundation that is now heavily influencing the U.S. Department of Education and who paid \$2 million to promote Waiting for Superman.

What about making it easier to fire teachers?

They want to indict unions for using such "thoroughly evil legal maneuvers" as dues process rights to keep educators from being fired for no reason at all.

What happened to an administrator's responsibility to do fair and formative evaluations?

You would think they have no role at all!

And they want to point to other countries that do a better job educating children – like Finland.

Well, those teachers are 100 percent union.

Finally, test-based merit pay.

We all know the truth about that.

Another study in Tennessee, released last month, proved once again, it just doesn't work.

The Manifesto also ignores the importance of providing basic school needs like up-to-date textbooks, class size, working bathrooms, training and curriculum.

And, it down plays all life issues our students face.

Is it responsible to think poverty and high unemployment have no impact on students and their families?

Yet, the charter school that is touted as the crown jewel of reform, the Harlem Children's Zone, rightfully incorporates health and social services for kids along with schooling.

Yes, blaming is much easier than taking responsibility.

That's why it is up to us to step up to the plate.

And it is why I am proud to be a union member, because we at CTA are leading the way – just as we always have.

I'm so proud of the CTA Board for establishing the Teacher Evaluation Workgroup.

I listened in on a few of the discussions yesterday in committees, and there certainly was a lot of good discussion.

This workgroup is about CTA setting the agenda in the evaluation discussion.

With the reauthorization of ESEA pending, as well as possible legislation being discussed in the State Legislature, we know the issue is not going away.

We must define it on our terms.

Any evaluation system must be fair, and designed to improve student learning and advance the teaching profession.

And CTA wants to be ready to assist any local chapter that is being asked to bargain new evaluation procedures.

CTA is also demonstrating proven education reform with the Quality Education Investment Act and the Institute for Teaching.

For the second year in a row, QEIA schools showed significant gains on their Academic Performance Index scores.

On average, QEIA schools achieved a 21-point increase compared to a 14 point increase for non-QEIA schools.

Nearly 400 QEIA schools showed improvement.

Two schools – one in Compton and one in San Francisco – moved more than 100 points.

Forty schools had API gains of more than 50 points.

And 26 exited Program Improvement status.

Now we know these are just test scores, and that's why CTA is leading a comprehensive evaluation of the program that will look at many other variables of success.

CTA is holding a statewide QEIA symposium on November 30 in Sacramento to discuss some of those early results.

I recognize that the state budget cuts have certainly added pressure – statewide and locally – to maintain this program.

And it does create schools within your districts that continue to have lower class size, while others do not.

But we are trying to show that resources do matter.

Smaller class sizes make a difference.
Counselors are necessary.

Professional development works best when it is focused and teacher-led.

And we are trying to show that collaboration among teachers, principals and parents improves student learning.

Overall, the program is showing early success.

I want to recognize all the members on the QEIA Workgroup and thank our IPD Department for their outstanding effort.

The CTA Institute for Teaching is another effort that showcases our union leadership in the education reform discussion.

Under the umbrella of the CTA Foundation for Teaching and Learning, the IFT is bringing a new approach to school change.

It must be teacher driven and it should be based on what is working and successful in our schools and classrooms.

Strength-based models for change allow teachers to emphasize talents over weaknesses to create learning environments that support and encourage students to do their best.

The first year of the IFT's Mini Grant Program was a major success.

Nearly 50 grant applications from individual teachers, teacher teams, and local CTA chapters were submitted.

In the end, 12 grants, ranging from \$4,000 to \$20,000 were awarded.

Next year's deadline is April 30th.

So sharpen your pencils.

The IFT also continues the Algebra Project with members of Twin Rivers United Educators and the Merced High School Positive Deviance Project.

The IFT has really taken off in the last two years.

It is becoming what we all hoped it would be – a place for educators to show what they can do when given the freedom to develop their own ideas.

Now, of course, you know I have to talk about the election.

First, thank you all for phone banking yesterday.

What an amazing sight in this ballroom as tables were packed and people were even standing and phoning.

It really was the state's largest phone bank.

Are you ready for the total?

All of you made 8,700 calls!

Give yourselves a round of applause!

We also had 700 members text in messages.

The prizes will be announced later, but 8,700 calls is just amazing and is exactly what we need to keep doing for the next nine days.

As I said, the “blame game” is being played out loud and clear in this election.

David told you what Whitman said about teacher unions during the debate.

Well, if you have watched or listened to her ads, union members are to blame for just about everything.

Our salaries and secure retirement are responsible for the entire state budget deficit.

When in fact, a U-C Berkeley study shows that public workers in California earn 7 percent less than private sector employees.

It is only after our pension and health care benefits are factored in that public employees make about the same as private sector workers.

The study also shows that these similar wages and benefits exist despite the fact that 55 percent of public employees have a college degree, compared to just 35 percent in the private sector.

Education levels are usually the most important factor in determining wages, but public employees do not get the same return for their education.

Another misguided Whitman attack:

According to her, the collective bargaining law that Jerry Brown signed the first time he was governor back in 1970 caused our current economic recession.

That’s right, the downturn in the economy didn’t have anything to do with stock market collapse, home loan foreclosures, record unemployment, or Wall Street and the big banks ripping us off.

It’s all because, you have the right to bargain a contract.

And yet, she has the audacity to say we’re crying class warfare for challenging her plan to eliminate the capital gains tax.

A move that would save her \$15 million a year, while doing absolutely nothing for the average worker.

We all know, Whitman has set an all-time record for spending in a Governor’s race.

\$163 million so far.

\$141 million of her own money.

A BBC reporter was so astounded by this figure that she went in search of what you could buy for \$140 million dollars.

This is the list she came up with:

- Six million large pepperoni pizzas from Lombardi's Pizza in New York.
- More than six thousand Toyota Prius cars.
- Three seasons of the show Mad Men.
- A fancy cupcake from Sprinkles in Beverly Hills – those of you who live in LA know those cupcakes are expensive, and very tasty.
- You could buy a Sprinkles cupcake for every Californian...and still have \$20 million left over.
- You could buy Jackson Pollock's Number Five painting.
- Or...you could pay college tuition for 11,700 students at UCLA.

That certainly would be a much better way to spend the money.

Finally, I want to talk to you about two other CTA recommended initiatives on the November ballot.

While we must vote YES on Props 24 and 25, we must also defeat Propositions 22 and 26.

These initiatives are locked in very close races right now and will have devastating impacts on our schools if they pass.

Prop 22, which sounds like it would protect funding for local police and fire services, actually cuts \$1 billion from public education immediately and another \$400 million every year after that.

Prop 26 is a seriously flawed proposition that would require a two-thirds vote of the legislature to raise environmental fees.

Big oil companies like Chevron and Exxon-Mobil are pumping in millions to pass this initiative because it lets polluters off the hook and forces taxpayers to pick up the tab.

Now, because I didn't want David to have all the fun, I too am going to end today with a little video.

Just like all of you, your CTA staff has been working hard in this election.

Field staff have been working with you in your local chapters to ID members, coordinate phone banks and assisting in local school board elections that are so critical to changing the education reform debate.

The Controller's Office and Legal Department work behind the scenes – making sure the bills are paid and keeping us out of trouble.
Community Outreach is assisting to broaden our coalition support.

And then of course, Governmental Relations and Communications coordinate our campaign strategy and make sure you have the resources you need to talk about the issues in this election.

This video was created by communications and training information and development staff – with some help by a couple of CTA members.

This election is serious, but we also need to have a little fun.

So I hope you enjoy what we call the Meg Whitman Sampler.

I knew you would like that.

It is on the CTA website and YouTube.

Pass it around to your colleagues back home, as well as your family and friends.

And one more, quick thing you can do in this election.
There's an extra copy of the California Educator on your chair.

It was a great issue, right?

It really lays out what's at stake in this election.

Take that with you and leave it in a coffee shop, a doctor's office, give it to your spouse to take to work, or just drop it in a public place where someone else can pick it up and read it.

One more way....to Get Out the Vote.

Because as David said, what is our mantra?

Turnout!

Turnout!

Turnout!