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State Council – June 2009

Good Morning State Council.

There's no way to sugar coat it and there's no reason to.

We are living in a time of great challenges and uncertainty.

As the economy continues to free fall, things aren't looking good for the state of California.

It seems like everyday, there's a new astonishing number in the news:
The largest recession in 80 years.

47th in per-pupil spending.

More than 12 billion dollars in cuts to public schools and colleges – the single largest cuts to education since the Great Depression.

27,000 pink slips issued to educators – with possibly more to come in August.

Class sizes of 35 to 50 students.

And on Thursday, the Governor announced we are facing a \$23 billion deficit if the initiatives fail in the Special Election.

That's cutting another \$950 from every california student.

But the story these numbers don't tell is the true cost to our students and our future. Just listen to what a few of them had to say in the latest Educator.

MIKE-AH Herbert is an eighth grader at Vista Verde Middle School. He's worried about going on to college because he knows the elimination of sports programs at his school jeopardizes his chances for a scholarship. Kendrick Liu (LU) at Madera High School, where class sizes have increased, said "It's harder to get the teacher's attention and it's harder to learn."

Sareesha Sims attends BEST High School in Oakland, which is closing because of budget cuts. She said, "I don't understand why they put more money into jails than schools. They should put more money into schools, period. If children don't learn, they will end up in jail."

These are our students. They are our future. And it is our responsibility to fight for them. It's why Tuesday's election is so important.

Now, I know this has been a tough election. We knew it would be.

The Legislature clearly didn't put a perfect set of initiatives on the ballot. Voters are angry. They're worried about the economy and rightfully upset with lawmakers for not doing their job.

The timing is bad. The campaign came quickly, many voters aren't engaged and turnout will be low. And, unfortunately, the labor community is divided on some of the initiatives.

Like I said, no one thinks these initiatives are perfect. But one thing is certain, if they fail, everything gets worse.

We are looking at more cuts to education, health care and public safety. The opportunity for additional revenue increases from this Legislature is gone.

Just look at what happened to the handful of Republicans who voted for temporary tax increases. The leaders in both houses have been replaced and recall elections have been launched against three others.

This is not a climate that bodes well for any new revenue increases if voters send the Legislature back to start all over.

It's why I'm so proud of this Council for having the courage to make the tough decisions. It's always easier to sit on the sidelines, throw stones and say no.

We supported these initiatives as part of our short-term and long-term strategy to help provide schools with the resources they need and to help get California back on track.

I'm not overstating it when I say the future of our schools is on the line this Tuesday.

It's not just the 27,000 CTA members who received pink slips who are counting on us; it's all 340,000 members who don't want to see their jobs made nearly impossible.

And it's the 9.8 million students in Pre-K through 18 who don't have a voice. I know the latest polls don't look good, but we've got to do everything we can in these last few days to get our members out to vote.

I want to thank all of you who have been working the phone banks, talking to your friends and neighbors, and organizing local events to raise public awareness about Propositions 1A-1F.

Our phone banking is making a difference. We're using a new automated system, and so far, CTA members have reached over 135,000 voters and the response has been very favorable.

Proposition 1B is particularly important. As you know it calls on the state to repay \$9.3 billion that is owed to education under the state's minimum school funding law. If it fails getting that money back gets harder.

We are going to continue those phone calls today. Phone banking will take place in every committee on proposition 1B for about one hour.

And to add a few incentives, there will be special prizes, including plane tickets, a free stay at the Westin and dinner certificates at LA Prime.

We've got to reach out to make sure our members, our family and our friends remember to vote YES in Tuesday's election. Because not voting or voting no – doesn't hurt the politicians. It hurts our students, our schools and our future.

That said, regardless of what happens on May 19, know that CTA will continue to lead the fight for the future that we all want for California.

We will continue to lead the fight to guarantee that our schools and colleges get the resources they need they deserve and are owed under law.

We will continue to fight for affordable and universal health care.

We will continue to push for long-term reforms that overhaul the state budget process once and for all.

And we will continue to lead the fight for federal education reforms that help students rather than punish them. Just as we did in CTA v Gould 15 years ago or CTA v Schwarzenegger in 2005.

CTA attorneys were the first to expose the Legislature's illegal manipulation of Proposition 98 in the budget agreement. Our attorneys have been preparing for a possible lawsuit since January.

But we know this lawsuit is not going to be easy to win, and it's why the one filed by CFT and SEIU last week was a little premature.

For the most part it was a campaign publicity stunt, coming at a time when the best message we can send is to vote YES on 1B.

The fact of the matter is the outcome of Tuesday's election will weigh heavily in a judge's decision to repay schools.

Our attorneys are working with other members of the Education Coalition to ensure we have the best legal case possible when we file in court.

While this election is an important short-term answer to stop things from getting worse, California's budget process remains fatally flawed.

The two-thirds vote requirement to pass a budget keeps our state in constant dysfunction. It's one of the things that has brought us to the brink of disaster in the first place. And it's time to change that process once and for all!

As long as a small minority can hold our state budget and our schools hostage, we're not going to be able to fix the problem.

CTA is working with a group of labor unions and other organizations to end this ridiculous requirement. It's time to bring democracy back to California and eliminate this unfair roadblock that puts our schools and our state in turmoil year after year.

You will get more information about this issue in your committees today so we can begin discussions with our members.

But we also have to be smart about it.

There is still strong voter support for the two-thirds vote requirement – especially when it comes to raising taxes.

CTA is going to continue to fight for and support every member who receives a layoff notice.

We've already spent more than a million dollars to ensure that every member who got a notice was represented at their reduction-in-force hearing.

We've provided resources to help members understand their rights and have worked to keep them informed all along the way.

I know that through your own local organizing efforts or by working with CTA attorneys and staff in RIF hearings, many jobs have been saved.

But the layoff numbers are still too high and some districts are looking at sending notices in August. If that happens, CTA attorneys will be there once again to help.

In one bright spot, the Obama administration listened to us and seems to understand how important it is to keep educators employed in order to stimulate the economy, both in the short-term and long-term.

The President's stimulus package has four basic categories of money for education.

Last month additional money for Title 1 schools and Special Education was sent to California school districts.

This week, more than \$2.5 billion in State Stabilization funds was made available to California schools and county offices of education.

As president Obama stated, these stabilization funds are meant to save educator jobs, and local districts need to use that money to rescind layoffs – period.

For more information or to see how much your local school district is getting, visit the CTA website.

We have listed breakdowns for all the funds that have gone out so far. And if you need bargaining support, contact your local staff.

And finally today, I want to talk to you about a visit this month that myself, Dean, Gail, Carolyn and other staff had with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at his office in Washington.

This meeting marked a change in our relationship with the White House. I told the Secretary that it was the first time in my 10 years as an Officer in CTA that we had ever been invited to U.S. Department of Education.

We told him about the progress California students and schools are making in spite of the mounting challenges we face--including the budget disaster we're staring down—and we told him how those stimulus funds will help.

We talked about No Child Left Behind and all the problems with that law and the need for major changes in the upcoming reauthorization.

Secretary Duncan said there would be changes, including a name change. But at the risk of starting any swine flu anxiety by resurrecting that phrase from a few months ago--"lipstick on a pig"--there's a lot more wrong with NCLB than just its name.

The whole punitive structure needs to be overhauled so that it's not just one more sledgehammer hanging over teachers, students and their schools.

This one-size-fits-all model and its emphasis on testing is hurting kids and taking the joy out of teaching!

The reauthorization is on a fast track and could be finished as early as September...which means we are going to have to be ready to work over the summer.

We talked about merit pay, because let's face it, President Obama and Secretary Duncan have some pretty strong ideas of their own when it comes to improving lower-performing schools and rewarding teachers.

I explained to him, that merit pay means pay based on test scores, and that CTA members would NEVER support a pay system based solely on test scores.

And thanks to the work of this Council, we were able to give him guidance for any alternative means of compensation, starting with the facts that it must be bargained, come from additional funding, include all bargaining unit members and be on top of existing salary schedules.

We also talked to Secretary Duncan about CTA's innovative programs to improve student learning, like the Quality Education Investment Act and

the CTA Institute for Teaching. I invited him to visit one of our QEIA schools when he comes to California.

I want him to see firsthand how teacher-led programs that include all school and community stakeholders can help struggling schools turn around. He's agreed to take us up on that invitation.

Much of the discussion with Secretary Duncan was spirited, and obviously we don't see eye-to-eye on everything, but we're now part of the conversation in a way that we haven't been for a long time.

It will be up to us to keep reminding them about what works best in our public schools and institutions of higher education.

The old curse "May you live in Interesting Times" has a lot of us wishing for just a little boredom and contentment these days. But I can't think of a group of people who are more up to the challenges we face today than all of YOU.

I thank you for all you do and all that you'll continue to do. We must remember our students. Remember our future. Because this is why we fight.

Thank You.