

THE TEACHING PROFESSION

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

RECRUITMENT AND INTERNSHIP

PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

REMARKS BY

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A.F.T.-CHICAGO

I am pleased to be here for today's announcement of the American Can Company Foundation grant to the American Federation of Teachers.

Increasingly, the American business community is realizing the vested interest we share in the quality of our system of public education for today's students represent the workforce of tomorrow. American business can and should participate in and support efforts to improve our public schools.

No better statement to this effect can be found than last year's report by the Committee for Economic Development entitled "Investing In Our Children".

But we must all carefully define our roles and responsibilities. Business is not government. Public-private partnerships should not amount to private sector substitution for public sector responsibility.

The level of financial support that is going to be needed to restore public education to its rightful place among America's priorities can only come from the public sector -- from local and state governments as well as the federal government.

In the long run, the real measure of business' contribution to helping public education will be the impact we have on the policy and funding decisions that are made in our city halls, our state capitols, as well as in Washington.

From a more programmatic viewpoint the business community's support for public education might be most effectively targeted to system-wide issues, because there are vast and fundamental improvements that must be made within our public schools.

The purpose of the grant we are announcing today-- the program the A.F.T. and its local affiliates are developing and supporting -- is indicative of the kind of bold and imaginative steps that are going to be needed.

For the past several years, there has been a great outpouring of words and concern at the national, state, and local level about the status of public education in this country.

Recently, two national reports in particular the Carnegie Forum Report "A Nation Prepared", and the Holmes Group Report "On Tomorrow's Teachers" have directed our attention on the most basic of educational reforms, the teaching profession itself.

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The sentiments illustrated by these reports have been genuine. They reflect the concerns of education, government and business leaders that our system of public education either is not what it once was, or it is not what we would like it to be.

We face, for example, a formidable challenge over the next seven to ten years in maintaining a high quality professional teaching staff for our children. Many teachers are nearing retirement, and many of the best new young teachers are those most likely to leave the profession earliest because of better career opportunities elsewhere.

The concerns we have about our teachers are long-standing ones.

Teaching after all, comes with large responsibilities but modest material rewards. Good teachers must be knowledgeable, but they have few opportunities to use that knowledge to improve their profession, or to help their colleagues improve. And despite their considerable skill and knowledge, good teachers have few opportunities to advance within their profession.

Teaching has long been an underpaid and overworked occupation, making it difficult for universities to interest students in teaching as a profession or to take it as seriously as they have taken education for other professions.

On May 20th, a New York Times editorial on the Carnegie Forum Report also expressed some of these sentiments and pointed out that to get teachers who can teach deserves more than exhortation.

I agree. It deserves energetic development and encouragement, follow-up of alternative options and attentive review. We need results.

We need the kind of change and experimentation that provides for an action plan which is credible enough to attract the best college students into the teaching profession. I believe the AFT Teacher Recruitment and Internship Program is on the right track, and I hope it can help to address the nation's teacher shortage problem.

The AFT Teacher Recruitment and Internship Program is a collaboration of uncommon characteristics. It is a collaborative effort between labor and business, between teacher unions and local school systems, between local school systems and institutions of higher education and finally between college students and experienced classroom teachers.

Most important, this is a collaborative process of strengthening old and creating new relationships through which teacher recruitment models will be continuously explored and developed in a systematic way.

The approach Al Shanker and the AFT is taking through this collaborative process is well conceived and affordable. At the same time, this is an ambitious effort. If the AFT program works, -- and we think it will -- it will bring significant benefits to public education and the teaching profession.

Moreover, because this effort is unique, its success will make it a model for replication -- both throughout the AFT and the teachers it represents -- as well as for other school districts and universities nationwide.

I am of course pleased that the American Can Company Foundation is underwriting the costs of this pilot project. Nevertheless, our funds pale in comparison to the real efforts that the AFT, the local affiliates, the local school systems and the universities will contribute to this demonstration program. Our combined efforts pale against the level of need that reputable projections indicate must be met over the next few years.

In the final analysis, there is no more valuable down payment that any of us can make in our future than to invest in efforts to strengthen America's public elementary and secondary schools. It is of unquestionable value.

I hope all of us -- business and labor, public sector and private alike -- will work together to rise to the challenge.

Thank you.