

**REG WEAVER**  
**President, National Education Association**

**Take Back America Conference**  
**Campaign for America's Future / Institute for America's Future**

**Opening Address**  
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Thank you very much, I have been in office for ten months and when I came in office, John Sweeney extended his hand in well being. John, thank you very much. Robert [Reich], I used to see you on TV. Such a powerful, powerful voice on labor. And Jo'ie [Taylor], you are what it is about, the students. I am so happy to see you actively involved in something to change this whole thing around.

It is a shame that George Orwell did not live to see the Bush Administration. He would get a kick out of the way some ways these folks attached nice sounding names to legislation, legislation that does the exact opposite of what the name leads you to believe. For example, the administration is pushing something called the "Healthy Forest Initiative." That is their plan for the logging companies to cut down vast stretches of the forest. Then there is the "Clear Skies Act:" the administration's plan to allow the utilities to pollute the air in new and creative ways. And surely the worst abuse of the language is the newly re-authorized elementary and secondary education act, which the administration calls No Child Left Behind. The truth is this: the way this law is written and funded it is going to leave millions of children behind.

Do not get me wrong, the National Education Association (NEA) strongly supports the goals to close the achievement gap. You know what, that is not new, to guarantee a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, that is not new, to leave no child behind. I have been teaching for over 35 years and those are some of the things that I have been trying to get for the students of this country for years. These things are not new. So I have to ask very pointedly, how will the federal and state governments make good on these spectacular promises? What is their game plan and more importantly, where is the money? In fact, I would go one step further, it is now clear to me, that the new law is setting up many of our public schools up to fail. It is setting up many children to fail and many teachers to fail. For example, the No Child Left Behind law says that within a certain period of time, 100 percent of the children will be achieving at high levels, or else. Never mind that 20 percent of American children, nearly 10 million kids, are growing up in poverty, and never mind the dilapidated schools and overcrowded classrooms, especially in many of our cities. And never mind the growing number of children coming to school not speaking English. Despite these realities, the No Child Left Behind act, issues an ultimatum; 100 percent of these children must achieve as prescribed by the law or else the US Department of Education will label our schools as failures and open the floodgates to vouchers and privatization.

And so my friends, the good news is that for the first time in history, we made a national commitment to education all children, regardless whether they are rich, poor, smart, slow, to the same high standards. You know I embrace this revolution. As a teacher I believe that is wrong to hold poor and minority children – it is wrong to hold any child – to lower expectations and lower standards. But as a teacher, I believe it is no less wrong to hold children to a high standard, to threaten them with failure, to deny them diplomas unless we are willing to give children the teachers and the tools that they need to succeed.

I have a simple message to our political leaders and policy makers all across the country. Setting high standards and passing a law that makes big promises is easy. The hard part, the part that has been seriously, seriously neglected, is giving every child good schools, quality teachers, and individual assistance that he or she needs to have a fighting chance to succeed. Bear in mind everyone wants to talk about student achievement, measuring achievement with a test score. But remember a test score is nothing but an output; don't get boxed into believing that a test school is the only way you can measure achievement. That is what has happened. The future of too many of our children is determined by the results of one ultra high stakes test. That is not right. Folks don't let it happen, When everybody wants to talk about only an output, wait a minute now, let's talk about some input, let's talk about class size, let's talk about adequate and equitable funding, let's talk about high standards, let's talk about parental involvement, let's talk about counselors, let's talk about safe and orderly schools, because it is the input that helps to determine the output. Don't let folks take us away from there.

My friends, we know what it takes to make a great school, its not some secret, like the colonel's recipe for Kentucky Fried Chicken locked in a safe somewhere. We know what it takes to make a great school: modern well-equipped school facilities that tell children what is going on here is important. High standards and expectation, intervention that give every struggling student the opportunity to be successful. Small class sizes, especially in the early grades. Quality teachers and support professionals, state of the art technology. We know what it take to make a great public school, and when politicians deny these qualities ingredients to schools attended by the poor and the minority and immigrant children, they are making a conscious choice to leave these children behind. I say to you my friends, the politicians love to talk about holding teachers accountable. Well, in 2004 America's teachers and support professionals intend to hold the politicians accountable.

We at the NEA are mobilizing, organizing, and strategizing to use our tools for 7 million members, putting them where they need to be. We are in every community. We are the mothers, fathers, nieces, nephews, aunts, brothers, sisters, of everybody in these communities. With your help, we are going to make some changes. There need to some changes in the No Child Left Behind act, but I want you to recognize, on this day, June 4, at approximately 5:25 you heard the president of the NEA say that at the NEA, we are in support of standards that make sense, we are in support of student

achievement, we are in support of high quality teachers. You tell me that any piece of legislation that has ever been passed, that need not be amended if in fact we see the need. We are saying to you that many pieces of the No Child Left Behind law need to be amended. Why? It needs to be amended to make it possible to leave fewer children behind and to help many children to succeed. That is what we want to do. My friends, I wish I could say that we could do it by ourselves, but we can't, we really can't. You have folks that have already turned up the heat, talking about the NEA, how dare they submit some kind of amendment that talks about changing the law. We have not even had a chance to do anything with it yet. It has not been tested. Folks, I am a schoolteacher. I am out in the communities. I am out in the schools and what I am talking about is not something I think, I am talking about something that the people have told me. I am talking about something that the administrator has told me, I am talking about something the parents have said. They said it cannot be done in its current form.

So my friends, lets work together to make this happen. We deeply value the friendship and partnership with the progressive community. And we are grateful for your steadfast support of quality public education for all children. But before I came over here, I was doing an interview, with a lady who wanted to talk about vouchers. You know what I feel about vouchers, I don't like them. So we were talking about the things I would like to see all children have. I want to see all children have what 85 percent of the richest parents have for their children. Eighty-five percent of the richest parents in this country, you know where they send their children; they send them to a public school. They attend a public school, because their public schools have small class sizes, they have high standards, certified and qualified teachers, state of the art technologies, adequate and equitable funding, parental involvement, the school are safe and orderly. If it is good enough for 85 percent of the richest, then why is it not good for all children? That is what I want for all children.

People ask me, what does the NEA want? The NEA wants for all children, the atmosphere that is conducive to good teaching and learning, and that is safe and orderly for them to be able to be successful. That is what I want. And when you talk about all these things that 85 percent have and that all of the other kids have. Well, Reg, how is it going to be paid for? You know what I tell them? I tell them I don't care, I don't care how you pay of it. You know why? Cause when you wanted to have a tax cut you came up with \$1.3 trillion, last week it came up with a \$350 billion tax cut. Arguing over whether it should be \$350 billion or \$550 billion, but Congress settled in \$350 billion. When they wanted to curry favor with the farmers, they came up with \$180 billion. When they wanted to bail out the airline industry, prior to United, they came up with \$15 billion. And after 9/11 and they wanted to enhance the military, they came up with \$48 billion. A couple of months ago, they tried to give Turkey \$30 billion. Turkey turned it down, which means that there is \$30 billion out there.

I say to you my friends, your program is an excellent program. But I had a person come in before I came over and they said, Reg, you know what, on that program, no topic there is no workshop that deals with education. If we wanted to take back America and America's future is important you cannot have a bright future in American without an

education. But let me point this out to you to show you the importance of an education and some way weave and work in something about education into your program. It is a story, a story about a mousetrap.

Once upon a time, a mouse looked throughout the crack in the farmhouse wall to see the farmer and his wife opening a package. What food could it contain, the mouse wondered? He was shocked to discover that it was a mousetrap. Retreating to the farmyard the mouse proclaimed the warning, there is a mousetrap in the house, there is a mousetrap in the house. The chicken clucked, scratched, raised her head and said, excuse me Mr. Mouse, I can tell that this is a grave concern to you but it is of no consequence to me and I cannot be bothered. So, Richard, the mouse continued, to go through and talk to the pig. There is a mousetrap in the house there is a mousetrap in the house. I am so sorry Mr. Mouse, the pig sympathized, but there is nothing I can do but pray, and Robert he said, be assured you are in my prayers. The mouse turned to the cow, Joyce she said, Like wow, Mr. Mouse, a mousetrap, looks like I am in grave danger, Not. And so, the mouse returned to the house head down and rejected to face the farmers mousetrap alone. That very night, was a sound heard throughout the house, like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey. The farmer's wife rushed down to see what was caught and in the darkness, did not see that it was a venomous snake whose tail had been caught by the mousetrap. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital, but she returned home with a fever. Everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup. The farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soups main ingredient. His wife's sickness continued so that friends and neighbors came to sit around the clock and that so many came that to feed them, the farmer had to butcher the pig. The farmer's wife did not do very well, and a few days later she had passed away. So many people came to the funeral, that the farmer had to slaughter the cow to provide meat for everybody to eat.

So I am saying to you the next time you hear that someone is facing a problem and you think it does not concern you, just remember that when there is a mousetrap in the house the whole barnyard is at risk.

As you begin to talk about America's future, remember that education is part of America's future and that when the mousetrap is in the house the whole barnyard is at risk. You know you will do everything that you need to do to be successful. People will try to say you are losers, but just remember if you think you are beaten you are. If you think you dare not you don't. If you like to win but you think you can't, it is almost a cinch you won't. Life's battles don't go to the swiftest or fastest person. But sooner or later the person who wins is the person who thinks they can. I think you are winners. But you know what, it does not matter what I think, it is what you think. This is a great conference here, we are energized, mobilized, we will be organized. But do you know what are you going to do when you leave here, what are you going to tell people needs to be done to be successful? Are you just going to tell them, oh we just had a great conference. We had some great speakers. That is not going to mean anything. Martin Luther King said a time will come when your silence will not protect you. And I am saying to you my friends; your silence will not protect you. Stand up, organize, mobilize,

strategize, speak up. When you do that, you will do everything that needs to be done. People will still try to put you down, but you will say, I can't take it anymore, and you will say, can I continue? Let me tell you something folk, there have been many times when I have felt that way and I wondered whether or not I could continue but I just get back up again and keep fighting. And before you say, I can't go any further, I want you to remember one thing: when things go wrong, when the road you're trudging seems all uphill, when the funds are low and the debts are high, you want to smile but you have to sigh and when a tear is pressing you done a bit, Campaign for America's Future, rest if you must, but dog gone it don't you ever quit. Peace and Party.