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Thank you, thank you so much. The panel that I'm sitting with . . . I'm very honoured to sit with such distinguished people and very honoured to present to my colleagues here.

My name is Julie Washington, and basically, I'm a kindergarten teacher from Los Angeles that believed in social justice and believed that my union needed to speak to the needs of the children that I served and that's what caused me to get more active and to push and to make sure that the voices of my children and the voices of the teachers that I worked with that served my children were heard. And so that is what inspires me on a daily basis to continue this struggle.

I think that sign says a lot: *No Decisions Without Us*. In the United States we are facing tremendous obstacles and everything that is being done to us without our permission, without any say, and in the name of someone's righteousness, but I don't know whose.

As I said, there are multiple challenges that we're facing in the United States. Nationally, everyone applauded when President Obama was elected, and we had great hope, we had hope, but now, we don't. His education policy, unfortunately, in the opinion of many of us, has done nothing but to further the right wing, and it's actually caused a greater, a tremendous push because now the face of this looks like me, looks like you and it looks like it should be right, and it's very wrong. Behind this push to privatize and to gut public education are forces like Eli Broad, like Gates, the Ford Foundation—we're talking about huge money, pots of money that is being thrown around to strip our education, our public education. And then also some of the obstacles that we face in functioning, are from our own national affiliates. They refuse to understand the true essence of the struggle and are so busy continuing and propping up their institutions, they're more worried about keeping their institutions going than they are about protecting public education.

Then particularly, in many places in the United States we have challenges that we face from the state and local levels. There is a real push from mayors, now, mayors in charge of cities, to take over the school system. In Los Angeles our budget is three or four times

larger than the city budget, the school budget, so there's a pot of money there that they want to tap into. I don't know about the rest of you, but for us, our mayor is not knowledgeable about teaching (audience chuckles) and we feel like he should do the job he was elected to, and not worry about us. As a matter of fact, we feel the best thing that he could do is make sure that the area surrounding the schools are safe places, clean places, drug-free places, violence-free and then he can effect change inside the school by doing his job, that he was elected to do in the first place (applause). With him he brings, what many mayors—sure, you heard about New York there, Bloomberg there is in charge of their schools and with that comes a lot of legislation, and a lot of prescriptive things that they are forcing on teachers and forcing on school sites.

So this is assault comes in many ways. There's what we see, the frontal assault. Right now, across the United States, from state to state, from local to local, we're seeing an all-out attack on tenure and seniority. Where they are trying to, where teachers are being fired. They're saying that they want to have the ability to reach and fire the most veteran teachers, because the young teachers, now they say, are the best teachers. Most of us realize that is not true. However, the young teachers are the cheap teachers and the older (you are), the more time you spend in it, the more they have to pay you. And what they really want to do is to lower the wages of teachers. That's what it's about. And besides the fact that many—I'm not going to say *old* teachers—many *veteran* teachers, maybe we don't listen so well. Maybe we don't mind as much. Maybe we push back and we talk too much. And they can control the younger teachers a little bit better. Then there's this program called "Teach for America" where they pull in very young teachers that are really not dedicated to the teaching profession *per se*, so they only stay a few years, but they come in; their training is very anti-union, and they come into the schools, and they bring with them that anti-union training and really undermine the schools' policies.

We also have merit pay on a national level. I don't know how it's playing out in other places, but they want to and are trying—this goes along with the teacher evaluation—they are trying to wed the testing of students with teacher pay. So if your students aren't testing well, then you do not get paid well. Or you get fired. And we all know that is the complete opposite of trying to attract teachers to schools where students are struggling. Why would you go to a school where most of the students are struggling and the test scores are going to be low, if you're going to get paid according to that? So we're fighting that, of course.

And then we have charter schools. It came to the United States; actually, unions supported it. New, innovative ways to do practices that are out of the norm, that other public schools could look at. Indeed this is nothing but draining and privatizing public dollars. They're private organizations, most, they do not go by the same rules, and most of them do not have unions. Most of them, the teachers have no, no due-process rights at all and can be fired at a whim. The students are housed in buildings that many times, are not / do not come up to code, the same way that public schools have to, and the teachers are mandated to, for instance, give home phone numbers to parents, and the parents can call them all time of day or night. It's really tragic what's going on in some of the charter programs.

Then if you go down a little bit you see the school board and see what the school boards are doing. Our school board in Los Angeles passed a motion called "Public School Choice." This is where they put up for bid, just put up for bid, thirty-two of our schools. And anyone that could write on a piece of paper could make a bid for the school. We fought very hard in my local union to win back our own schools. And we had to put many resources in. I don't know if many of you heard, but we actually won twenty-eight of our schools back of those thirty-two. It was a tremendous victory. And the night that the results were announced, a charter person came up to me and he said: "You know, you guys, those teachers, they didn't really write those proposals, you know you had professionals writing those proposals." And right then I understood how little respect that man had for teachers. Because he thought that we did not have enough intelligence or professionalism to write a good plan. He thought we had to pay someone. And that's really, that's a lot of the gut of this, that they do not believe in our profession.

We are facing, in the United States, and particularly in California, with the budget crises, a tremendous amount of lay-offs. And I don't have to tell many of you here, what happens to a system when people are worried if they're even going to work the next day, or the next month, or next year. And it's very very difficult to provide a good service to the student when you don't know if you're going to be able to pay your mortgage next month. So they are destabilizing the system underneath it. And again, yes there is a financial crisis in America, but we seem to have plenty of money to spend on bombing children and people across the water. We seem to have plenty of money to put people in prison. We spend money on what we want and what we prioritize. And it is so evident that we do not give priority to our children. That is what's evident.

And then of course, there's this intimidation factor. You destabilize; you have people worried about their jobs; you have people scared to talk to each other, and then, it's very easy to come right in and begin to intimidate and make people very frightened and shutting down. And again, this does not bode well for providing a quality education for children.

Further, in the United States, most of you know, we have a testing frenzy. They *love* to test. And not just test our children but test our teachers too. And so we have high-stakes tests for children; we have high-stakes tests for teachers. And right now, we are firing teachers if they do not pass certain tests. Some of the teachers have been working twenty, thirty years. All of a sudden, they're faced with some test that they have to take and pass. When I left kindergarten, I was losing seventeen days a year to testing four- and five-year-olds. What I could teach in that seventeen days, compared to just having them test us, and testing the children is almost—I almost felt like a criminal.

And then, we have, because you're testing and specifically just language arts and math, you have, as a result, a watered-down curriculum. Where children no longer are taught the arts, or social studies, or even have time to go have PE and run around and be a normal child. Everything is drill and kill on language arts and math. Language arts and math. And without the other content areas, they don't know how to apply what they've

learned from language arts and math. No science, except for the children in certain areas, and we know where those areas are. I don't have to tell you, I'm sure.

Teachers have scripts to teach by. You're given a book; you're told to read it to your students, line by line. No more teacher choice, or teachable moments—where sometimes something comes up and you want to say “Ah!” because a principal may come in, and you're not on your script. You need to be on your line, on that page. And they check; they make you write it on the board, so when they walk in the room and they can look at the board and see where you're supposed to be, and they have the book and if you're not there, you're doomed. And again that's probably why they don't want so many veteran teachers around because we don't like that too much. And we push back.

And the teacher evaluation, where they come in with hordes of people with clip boards, writing down what you're doing, intimidating you in your classroom, connecting, wanting to connect your evaluation to your students' performance on certain tests. It has created this hostile environment of fear.

The inside attack, something maybe we don't see right off the bat. I spoke somewhat about it already. We have President Obama who was elected—Democrat—supposed to be our friend, yet he is holding hands with our enemies. This is disappointing. I'm not going to stand here before you and say I didn't vote for him, because I did, but I had no clue that he would take this agenda as far as he has. And despite the fact that many in the United States supported him, we need to hold his feet to the fire and hold him accountable for what he is doing to public education. You see his wife on TV, visiting schools? Those are *charter* schools. She doesn't go to *public* schools. You see him praising the school for doing well? It's a *charter* school! Again, money talks, because the system is being bought out. Eleven billion dollars is my local's budget. LAUSD's budget. Eleven billion dollars. That's a large piece of money. And they want it.

Then they use language to undermine us. And it's hard to fight back. *No child left behind*. If you push back on it, you say you don't want it, then it's implied that you want to leave somebody's child behind. It's difficult. We must find ways in which to push anyway. Then they start labelling schools. *Persistently low-achieving* schools. I'm not just *low*, I'm *persistently low*. Achievement gap. Doesn't that kind of put that back on the child? The child is suffering from an achievement gap. No, the child isn't suffering from achievement gap, the school, the community, the country is suffering from a caring gap. Not putting enough care, quality, priorities into children. Every child is able to learn if given the opportunity, the nurturing, the resources and the support, and if they come to school and they haven't been given all that, that is not their fault. Much of this language is blaming-the-victim language.

Choice. They say that they want to offer parents *choice*. Charters, private school, vouchers! You don't have to go to that terrible public school! But I ask you, who do you think has choices? Who? Is it the child that's in their fifth foster-care home? That they don't even have a parent to even go to the school to see? That child doesn't have a choice. Is it the child whose parent has three jobs? And can't run back and forth to the school board? That child doesn't get a choice. The choices, again, are for the elite.

Highly qualified teacher. As if going to school for four years, then doing two years of work to get your credentials, somehow, you're not qualified. You have to do more. You have to pass a test. You have to satisfy some other requirement. So you can be *H.Q.T.* Another label.

So, what does it look like? When a local decides that despite a national push, despite the fact that their national affiliate is weak and their state affiliate is weak, what does it look like when we fight back? That's us, fighting back. *United Teachers Los Angeles*, I am proud to say, is the second largest teachers' union in the country. We have over forty thousand teachers. We are affiliated with the AFT, the American Federation of Teachers and the NEA, the National Education Association. So, I'm blaming both of them, just in case you want to know (audience laughs). And if you don't know me that well, I will tell them to their face, too. Our members consist of teachers and health and human service workers, nurses, speech therapists, audiologists, people that service children. My union is driven by elected officers. That means we are directly accountable to our members. And again, as I told you, we had an eleven-billion dollar budget that represents 10% of California's education budget. A full 10% of California's education budget comes to us. So you know, they are greedy and they want the money.

We're fighting back on our *riffs*. Last year, we suffered two thousand teachers being laid off. This year, another three thousand teachers were threatened, on top of the two thousand we lost last year. This is the demonstration that we had, protesting those teachers being laid off. They're carrying a coffin of a teacher that's laid off. Those are the chairs representing every single teacher that was threatened to be laid off. We put all of these chairs in front of our headquarters, central headquarters, over two thousand chairs, and every chair (I don't know if you can't read it), but they were labelled fifth-grade teacher, sixth-grade teacher. We labelled each chair to represent each teacher or professional that was being "*riffed*" as we call it: *reduction in force*.

This is one of our teachers that got a letter. We made a human face to this. Because it's easy to lay off someone, to discard someone if there's no human face.

And then, our officers, our members were even willing to get arrested and go to jail. To prove the point. Because every teacher that was laid off represented another child crammed into a classroom, because they were increasing class size. That's how they were rifting the teachers. So in two years, our classes went up from five, last year, from twenty to twenty-four point-something. And then this year, this is kindergarten to third grade—the other grades are just tremendously high—and this year they threatened to go to 29 to 1, for the primary grades. Our teachers accepted furlough days, pay cuts, to pay for those teachers not to be riffed, and to keep these class sizes low. But this is a constant struggle, and without the great national push, we believe that the fight-back has to start at a local level. And then we will make them respond from the local up.

So, I am very very proud to say that I represent the great teachers from Los Angeles.

Thank you.