

CALLING ON AFT'S ENDORSED CANDIDATE TO BREAK WITH ECONOMIC AUSTERITY POLICY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

WHEREAS, in July 2015, the AFT became the first national union to endorse former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for President in the Democratic primary election; and

WHEREAS, the July 2015 endorsement committed the AFT and its state and local affiliates to “engaging and mobilizing our 1.6 million members, their families and their communities to reclaim the promise of America and to help secure the Democratic nomination for Hillary Clinton”; and

WHEREAS, the AFT has already devoted millions of dollars and significant staff time to support Secretary Clinton’s campaign and has called on members to prioritize supporting Clinton’s campaign; and whereas AFT will increase its support and continue to ask members for support if Secretary Clinton is endorsed in the national election by the delegates at the current AFT 2016 Convention; and

WHEREAS, economic austerity policies—which call for a reduction of government spending, a decrease in the economic power of labor, and a consolidation of the economic power of “the 1%”—have created a crisis for public higher education in the United States and led to the emergence of higher education as a major policy focus in the current presidential election; and

WHEREAS public higher education under economic austerity policies has seen continuing decline in public funding, soaring tuition costs, increased stratification of students and resources by race and class, growing exploitation of contingent and part-time instructors, and now, faculty and staff strikes a serious possibility at major universities; and

WHEREAS, while President Barack Obama, AFT’s previous endorsed candidate, advanced several important progressive initiatives in higher education policy, he has focused primarily on affordability and student debt rather than on increasing public funding or addressing the crisis in academic labor; in fact, his administration’s signature initiative in higher education fiscal policy was the “college rating” system, which would have deepened economic austerity for the public universities and colleges already most starved of public funds—frequently the colleges that serve large percentages of low-income students and students of color; and

WHEREAS, the most dramatic evidence of the hollowing-out of public higher education funding through economic austerity policies in the United States is the near-complete transformation of the workforce for higher education’s core function—undergraduate teaching: fewer than one-third of college teaching positions are now full-time and tenured or tenure-track, with nearly one million contingent faculty nationwide—a horrible model of employment in an industry that is purports to be about the transmission of enlightened ideas; and

WHEREAS, Secretary Clinton’s higher education initiatives, like President Obama’s, focus largely on affordability for students and leave the fundamental issue of public support and the crisis in academic labor untouched; her signature initiative, the “New College Compact,” would reduce the cost of student loans at four-year public colleges and make community college free for students who participate in the required work program, but it would replace funds that

otherwise have come from tuition—not add the funds necessary to restore genuine mass access to high-quality college education and transform higher education’s grotesque labor system; and

WHEREAS, even the more transformative proposals of Clinton’s rival in the Democratic primary election, Bernie Sanders, focus on student costs rather than on repairing the damage done to higher education by years of fiscal starvation:

RESOLVED, that the AFT communicate to its endorsed candidate for President that what is needed is a break with the economic austerity policies that have hollowed out higher education; that addressing affordability and student debt, while essential, is not a sufficient response to the crisis in public higher education; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT call on its endorsed candidate to name a Secretary of Education who is publicly committed to breaking with the fiscal austerity policies of the Obama administration on higher education; and

RESOLVED, that the AFT call on its endorsed candidate to make it a priority to provide funding to states that allows them to restore support for public colleges and universities, with the express purpose of ending the exploitative labor system, providing full-time faculty positions for current part-time faculty, and breaking with the economic austerity that has had the effect—if not the intention—of rationing high-quality education.

Barbara Bowen
President

Nivedita Majumdar
Secretary