



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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# **CTU President Karen Lewis - City Club of Chicago April 20, 2016**

**CHICAGO** - Today, Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis gave the following remarks at the City Club of Chicago. (This transcript may not include any supplemental remarks made during the course of this presentation.)

Good afternoon. It is always a pleasure to stand before the City Club of Chicago to share in the ideas and visioning for our city. I want to thank Jay Doherty, as always, for the invitation and I look forward to our exchange at the end of my remarks, which I will keep brief so we can have time for a meaningful question and answer period.

Let us cut to the chase.

Is the City of Chicago headed toward another teachers' strike? Yes. Should this happen, it will be the third one since 2012. We have 26 more days of "cooling off" as required by state law, and then our members will decide whether the CTU will deliver a 10-day notice of our intent to strike.

No decision has been made, and I will tell you all as I have told the press a number of times—I am not going to give out strategy. We will not hand over our playbook to CPS and their broke on purpose bureaucrats. They have their strategy and we have ours—theirs will cripple the teaching force, ours will protect it and the students we serve.

Neither side has a crystal ball. While contract negotiations have not yielded the results we want, we remain at the table. We cannot rule out a strike.

I know some of you are saying—especially the people on the Tribune's editorial board—that the CTU should just roll over and accept the contract being offered to our members. Again, teachers, paraprofessionals and clinicians elected me and three others to office to carry out their wishes in collective bargaining, not to be authoritarian dictators who tell them who's who and what is what. We have a deal when they say we have a deal.

As brilliantly stated by our fact-finding panel member, Atty. Robert Bloch:

“The Neutral Fact Finder's report (was) dead on arrival.... The reality is that the Chicago Board of Education cannot afford to sign a contract with the Chicago Teachers Union. CPS finances have surpassed the danger zone and are now (nearing) a meltdown. We need revenue solutions to finance public education, not more cuts to the system, which has already been cut well past the bone and now threatens the vital organs.”

“The recommended contract proposal, which CPS now tells us it can no longer afford, actually reduces teacher and PRSP take-home pay over the four-year period of the contract. It offered no solution to ballooning class sizes. Even with the positive non-economic elements to the contract designed to enhance instruction and the academic environment for students, the CTU cannot ignore the devastating economic impact this contract would have on our members.

Cutting educator compensation is not the answer to CPS’s extreme financial problems. The district desperately needs stable, sustainable and increasing revenue to finance its operations. Without it, the mayor’s handpicked Board of Education cannot afford *any* contract proposal, even its own.

What then is the answer?

Sustainable revenue. Long-term revenue. Otherwise, we will be in the same position year after year after year.

Today, a group of our members is in Springfield lobbying for revenue solutions. CPS stays on its strange message about “joining them in Springfield,” but for what purpose? We are not going hand-in-hand with them to cut our own throats.

CPS claims a deficit of \$1.1 billion for next year, although they have recently said they have already found ways to reduce this budget deficit by \$335 million. However, those reductions come at a great cost to our members and the schools. About \$120 million of that amount is from keeping in place the February cuts to school budgets for all of next year. Another \$130 million comes from eliminating the CTU pension pick-up, which is the result of a 7 percent pay cut for our members. So full funding for CPS means that we still need to close the full budget deficit of \$1 billion. But to get us to have on-par per-pupil funding for the classroom (\$20,000) as some of the richest districts in the state (Winnetka, or Rondout) we are talking about getting thousands more per pupil and we need billions more in annual revenue for the schools Chicago’s students deserve.

The CTU has been clear on its revenue positions: tax the rich, reign in the banks and close the budget gap. Structural solutions require progressive income tax. We are also looking at a way to tax the billions traded on the Chicago Board of Trade, which currently is at no tax, and as I have said before, closing corporate loopholes.

## **CPS & MIS-MANAGEMENT**

Mr. Claypool and the rest of his team should repurpose the district’s administrative direction and actually get back to managing the business of the district. They have spent hundreds of millions of dollars outsourcing management functions. Just recently, we have learned that CPS intends to phase out unionized building engineers—people who provide a critical function in our buildings. We have seen what has happened with Aramark—dirty school buildings, rodents and overall filth making the teaching and learning environments unsafe.

It has been six months after the first of three carbon monoxide poisoning incidents in CPS buildings, and the Chicago Teachers Union has yet to be provided full reports of the poisoning of educators, students and other school personnel. The three incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning the Union is investigating are at Prussing Elementary School (10/30/15), Shields Elementary School (11/20/15) and Mann Elementary School (12/3/15). Hundreds of students and staff were poisoned and evacuated from these schools. We are demanding answers and we implore CPS to honor our FOIA requests on the matter. How does this happen in a 21<sup>st</sup> century school system?

At the June 2015 Chicago Board of Education meeting, CPS voted unanimously to approve a \$30 million, four-year contract with RCM Technologies for supplemental nursing services, professional development and scheduling. Nine months after the RCM contract was signed—a contract that was promoted as a cost-savings move—nurses throughout the district are reporting shocking stories of untrained, contracted nurses who cannot perform basic tasks like operating an epinephrine injection (EpiPen®).

And need I remind you of the embarrassing SUPES scandal that will send one handpicked CPS CEO to prison?

This is why there is rampant distrust of Chicago Public Schools.

## WAR ON YOUTH

Gross mismanagement, the closing of schools, the starving of school budgets, the disruption of education services, the dismantling of special education programs, the revolving door at Central Office, and the removal of beloved teachers, coaches and school employees who have made meaningful differences in the lives of so many **is the rule of the day**. How does this provide our students with a high-quality, world-class education?

We see this as an assault on public education. We see this as an assault on public school teachers and we know this is an assault on our students' futures.

Why are they doing all of the school-based experiments that will ultimately lead to a decline in the educational product in Chicago? All of these amount to a war on Chicago's youth because education is a lifeline out of poverty, and away from neighborhood violence and marginalization. Our schools are places where dreams become realized—places where our students are inspired to not only change their lives, but to enhance the lives of others and improve the world we live in. Let's look at this war on our youth:

**In terms of youth poverty:** More than 1.3 million children in the Chicago metro area are in poverty—meaning 14 percent or 1-in-5 children in Chicago—89 percent of whom we teach in our schools. In addition, they are not invisible. One-in-five residents in deep poverty live in the neighborhoods of Burnside, Riverdale, Englewood, East Garfield Park, North Lawndale, Washington Park and West Garfield Park.

**In terms of youth criminalization:** According to the Chicago Youth Justice Data Project, Black youth are 37 percent of the population but 79 percent of arrests. Latino youth are 40 percent of the population and 18 percent of arrests.

In terms of homeless children, during the 2013-2014 school year, 22,144 students in CPS were classified as homeless (according to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless). They were 84.4 percent African-American, 12.2 percent Latino, 1.6 percent white and 1.6 percent from other ethnicities. It was also noted that of the 4,369 homeless students who were also identified with a disability, appropriate supports were more difficult to obtain.

**In terms of children in state custody or care:** In Illinois, the percentage of wards that spend more than two years in state custody is nearly twice as high as in other states. Despite its problems and perceptions in communities of color, the Department of Children and Family Services can be a lifeline for children in crisis. The budget appropriations for this critical agency:

- FY15 appropriation was \$1,165,961.80
- FY16 appropriation is \$10,511.60 (*TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS!*)
- This is a difference of NEGATIVE 99%

What is going on here? This is not just statistical fodder—these numbers represent real people, real lives. We give tax breaks to the wealthy and give banks a pass, yet cut budgets that help poor, troubled children to bare bones? And you wonder why young people are angry and vocal about the political hypocrisy going on?

### **RAUNER, THE NEW ISIS RECRUIT?**

“If a man tells you he loves America, yet hates labor, he is a liar! There is no America without labor, and to fleece the one is to rob the other,” said Abraham Lincoln.

I say today, that if Governor Rauner says he loves Illinois, yet he hates labor, he is a liar! There is no Illinois without labor, and to fleece the one is to rob the other.

Bruce Rauner is a liar. You know, I’ve been reading in the news lately about all of these ISIS recruits popping up all over the place---has Homeland Security checked this man out yet? Because the things he’s doing looks like acts of terror on poor and working class people.

People are hurting across Illinois while this so-called governor plays chicken with the state budget. He has launched a personal crusade against the CTU and every other labor organization in our state. Rauner understands that strong labor means those who toil in these systems should reap their fair share of the wealth, stability and progress they helped produce.

The governor’s vicious attacks on the CTU, and District 299, quite frankly, is a purposeful distraction to redirect our attention from his inability to govern and manage this state’s finances. In addition, his holy war does not stop there—he is destroying the lives of the disabled, college students, the elderly, the poor, the displaced and the dispossessed.

His “turn us down” agenda is not just being felt in Chicago, but throughout the state. The East Side Health District facility in East St. Louis will have to close its family case management unit by the end of the week, affecting new mothers and their infants. Organizations that provide meals to seniors that are food insecure, of which 60 percent are women, are offering scaled down services or none at all. Meals on Wheels, a provider to those seniors, and others with disabilities, has had to close some locations that stopped receiving funding in July—all of this at a time when 1-in-6 people in Cook County face food instability.

### **RICH NOT SMART**

I am generalizing here, but I find it amazing when I talk to people who assume that just because someone is wealthy, this person is somehow smarter than the rest of us. Intellect may have nothing to do with one’s ability to obtain capital, because if that were the cause, all of the fine people at Chicago Public Schools would have figured it out by now.

Rauner lacks the ability to govern. He purchased his seat, conned the people of Illinois and is clueless on how to “turn around” Illinois to better serve its citizens. And, as a slap in the face, he even said he would take no salary. Therefore, what is the governor’s seat about? It is about power—plain and simple.

Despite his constant attacks on the Chicago Teachers Union, he had no problem clouting his daughter into Walter Payton High School, where CTU members work. We find it so ironic that Mr. Rauner blames CPS teachers for failing students, yet chooses to send his daughter to a city school instead of New Trier, one of the most highly funded schools in the state and the nation. With nine houses, who knows where he and his children actually lived when he clouted his daughter into the school. According to 2014 stats of out-of-district tuition rates of \$11,707, the governor owes the school district \$46,828. Maybe we ought to call the governor and ask him to pay his fair share.

This so-called governor clouts his child into one of our high schools, but then has the audacity to deny about 130,000 college students MAP grants to assist them in their higher education. He is threatening to close Chicago State, a predominantly African-American university that will reportedly graduate three physicists this school year. It should also be noted:

- More than half (58 percent) of MAP recipients are so low-income that the federal government does not consider them able to contribute *any* resources to pay for college. In FY2014, the average family income of a dependent (“traditional”) MAP recipient was \$30,000 per year, and the average income of an independent (“non-traditional”) MAP recipient was \$16,000 per year.
- Of the undergraduates at Illinois public universities who identify themselves as Black or Hispanic, more than half receive a MAP grant.
- Despite their financial challenges, MAP recipients graduate from college at about the same rate as their peers at the same institutions.
- MAP recipients are enrolled in all sectors of higher education, with the largest percentage of students in the community college sector.

So while Rauner is busy blocking teens and young adults from pursuing higher education, on the local level he and his allies, such as Mayor Emanuel and billionaire quasi-school consultant Ken Griffin, are destroying K-thru-12 education in Chicago. Do you see a pattern here?

To quote Giroux:

“The greatest threat to our children does not come from lowered educational standards, the absence of privatized choice schemes, or the lack of rigid testing measures. On the contrary, it comes from a society that refuses to view children as a social investment, one that consigns 16.3 million children to live in poverty, reduces critical learning to massive testing programs, promotes policies that eliminate most crucial health and public services, and defines masculinity through the degrading celebration of a gun culture, extreme sports, and the spectacles of violence that permeate corporate-controlled media industries.”

We have a crisis of values in our city and in Illinois.

We need to change the conversation.

Someone asked me, “Karen Lewis, what will you tell parents, if the teachers go on strike?”

I tell them to join us in the movement to protect our students (their children) and the future of public education. Join us in the fight against this austerity agenda that targets the young and old, and those considered weak, powerless and voiceless. Teachers, paraprofessionals and clinicians are not the problem. We have families. We pay taxes. We live under extreme economic conditions that call on us to continue to give up more and more in a ham and egg justice scenario. We drop the ham (which means a whole leg) and CPS gives up an egg and keeps on moving.

I want parents to know that their children are not pawns or points on the board. If adults do not fight for their futures, who will? They will only inherit the mess we leave behind.

Fighting is not easy. It is not pretty. Feelings get hurt and lines are drawn. People will ask, “Whose side are you on?” If you say you’re on the freedom side, then that means you will join us in asking the rich to pay their fair share; calling on the city and state to stop the attacks on public and higher education; in asking the banks to end

their predatory deals that strip vital dollars from our schools; in fighting for stronger neighborhoods and job creation, and access to health care and not just health insurance.

These are not ideals. This is a necessary framework for public policy and democracy if we are to have a just school system and a just Chicago.

Thank you.

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The Chicago Teachers Union represents nearly 27,000 teachers and educational support personnel working in the Chicago Public Schools, and by extension, the more than 400,000 students and families they serve. The CTU is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers and the Illinois Federation of Teachers and is the third largest teachers local in the United States and the largest local union in Illinois. For more information please visit CTU's website at [www.ctunet.com](http://www.ctunet.com).

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