California Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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CFT Secretary-Treasurer Dennis Smith's response to Governor Schwarzenegger's State of the State address

What was billed as the Year of Education is shaping up as the Year of Cutting Education. Cuts in school programs, especially midyear reductions to budgets that are already allocated for the year, send our state backward, not forward towards higher student achievement. The education budget—along with other necessary social services—must be protected against cuts, but just preserving the current inadequate funding is not sufficient, nor is it progress.

The governor is proposing questionable school reforms while slashing funding. This is not reform, but it is destructive of quality education. The governor blames cost of living increases for the budget deficit. The Governor admits that he blew a $4 billion yearly hole in the state's finances with his car tax repeal. If we had the cumulative revenues that he removed, we might not even have a budget deficit. We won't allow school kids to be penalized so SUV drivers and yacht owners can get tax breaks. That's not progress; it's the same old politics where kids, who can't vote or contribute to political campaigns, take the hits. COLAs are necessary to keep pace with prices – schools are not immune to higher energy, health insurance or other price increases.

Some education reforms the governor proposes – such as "merit pay" - have been proven ineffective and counterproductive. CFT backs research-based school reforms that improve student achievement. School reform must also include support for new and struggling teachers and working conditions that keep educators in the schools. Preparing and retaining the 100,000 teachers needed to replace the ones retiring in the next decade is urgent. Cutting school funding will ultimately undercut this effort and harm our schools.

We call upon the governor and the Legislature to balance cuts with new revenue streams. It's time to show political courage and not recycle failed policies. Fair taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society – a society that takes seriously its shared responsibility for the education, safety, health and well-being of its members. Anything less than that is unacceptable.

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