

THESE TEACHERS DON'T SEEM "GREEDY"

By odd stroke of timing, the American Federation of Teachers is meeting this weekend in Detroit—just as the city's Emergency Manager insists that the solution to Detroit's budget woes is to teach the next generation in classrooms of 61 students. That means AFT President Randi Weingarten will go lobby the school district's Emergency Manager, Roy Roberts, herself this morning. It means AFT members will join Michiganders in canvassing to support the Protect Our Jobs referendum, which would add collective bargaining to the MI Constitution.

The AFT is in Detroit at a time when Detroit is the latest ground zero of the attack on public teachers.

But at least as represented by Weingarten's opening speech, the emphasis is on larger social issues, of which education is just one key part, not just teacher's salaries or class sizes.

Weingarten noted, for example, that public education is the best way to reverse the loss of wealth brought about by the banksters' crash.

A study by the Federal Reserve found that the average American family has lost approximately \$50,000 since the start of the recession—nearly 30 percent of their wealth. That figure is 53 percent for the average African-American family and 66 percent for the average Latino family. Yet our opponents want to abandon our best long-term strategy for broad-based prosperity: a world-class system of public education.

She focused on the AFT's partnership in McDowell, WV (among others, with Joe Manchin's wife) to address both the educational challenges but also the underlying poverty.

The area's educational challenges are inseparable from many other problems affecting the county. So our focus is not just on schools, but on jobs, transportation, recreation, housing, healthcare and social services. And then there is our intangible, but perhaps most important goal—that Reconnecting McDowell will bring back the light of hope. [snip]

Is what we're doing in McDowell our job? Technically, no. But as a labor union with most of our members working in education, the AFT stands at the intersection of two important social movements—creating educational opportunity, and advancing economic dignity. That's who we are.

And she talked about investing AFT pension funds in projects that will create jobs.

By working with pension trustees and encouraging allocations of some of our pension money—in a responsible and sound manner—to support projects to rebuild our infrastructure, and retrofit out-of-date buildings to make them more energy efficient, we're creating win-win-win situations.

In other words, at least as Weingarten kicked off the Convention, the focus is as much on solutions to the problems of society generally, as it is on more focused educational issues.

These are the people the billionaires are demonizing as greedy.