

STATEMENT FROM CESAR CHAVEZ PRESIDENT, UNITED FARM WORKERS

Sacramento, April 3, 1991

Some people may ask, "Why should the farm workers be concerned about the condition of public schools in California?"

Let me answer them: Who do you think are in the public schools today in California?

Public schools serve more farm workers than any other publicly-financed social institution in society.

Public schools provide the greatest opportunity for upward mobility to Hispanics and to all ethnic minorities in this state.

Yet today, it is a Republican governor and his allies in the Legislature who are less concerned than we are about preserving public schools. That is ironic because it was not always the case.

In the 1960s and early '70s, another Republican governor-- Ronald Reagan--was leading the fight for more support of public education. But there was a big difference. Back then, the majority of public school children were white and they were from middle- or upper middle-income families.

Today, the majority of children in our public schools are minority--African American, Hispanic, Asian--and they are from poor and working-class families.

Back then, under Ronald Reagan, Californians spent \$.05 out of every dollar of personal income on public schools. Today, under Pete Wilson, Californians spend a little over \$.03 out of every dollar on education. And if he has his way, it will go down

even more.

There is another institution in society that is funded by the state and that is dominated by minorities: the state prisons--and they have fared very well.

Over the last nine years--under Governor Deukmejian and now Governor Wilson--California has carried out a policy of dramatically expanding state prisons while it starves public schools.

What message do those priorities send? Does this mean that the only way our sons and daughters can get recognition from the state of California is by using drugs and committing crimes?

We have looked into the future and the future is ours! Asians and Hispanics and African Americans are the future in California. That trend cannot be stopped. It is inevitable.

Then why do they want to cut funds for schools and other vital services--now? Why do Governor Wilson and his allies seek to reduce the commitment to public education--now? If the majority of children in school were white and if they lived in affluent suburban communities, we wouldn't even be debating how much money to spend on public education.

But it is *our* children--the children of farm workers and Hispanics and other minorities--who are seeking a better life. It is for them, for their future--and for the future of California--that we must say "no" to suspending Proposition 98.

We must say "no" to cutting essential services for the needy instead of tax loopholes for the wealthy.

We must say "no" to making *our* children and *their* teachers scapegoats for the budget crisis.