

WHAT MATTERS MOST

Election Postscript: Rejecting Hate and Economic Inequity

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The recent presidential election revealed a deeply divided and disaffected America. While Donald Trump won the electoral vote and, therefore, the election, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by well over 1 million votes. Since the election, we have seen incidents of bias and bullying that invoke the president-elect's name and slogans. For many Americans, this is a frightening time; Trump must use his unique position to quell this dangerous climate.

Despite these deep political divisions, most American voters agree the economy is the most important issue facing our country. Economic changes from deindustrialization, globalization, technology and the recession have left so many people behind. It seems the only ones who have fully recovered are the wealthy, leaving many to feel that both our government and our economic system are rigged and unfair.

Improving the lives of working families is the chief aim of the labor movement. A true test of Trump's willingness to help America's families is whether he will work with unions, not try to destroy us—as many Republican governors have done, further eroding wages in states like Wisconsin. While Trump's populist positions seem to have resonated with some, where the rubber meets the road will be with issues that are key to real economic populism, like the right to a voice at work and collective bargaining, a living wage, retirement security, and an end to austerity and bad trade deals like the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Lifting wages, and building and making things in America again—as vital as these are—will not address our nation's economic and civic insecurity if bigotry and hate are enabled. Just as the March on Washington in 1963 was for both jobs and justice, “Communities of color need physical and economic security,” Jamelle Bouie wrote this week in *Slate*. “Strong wages and freedom from discrimination. Without the latter, a rising tide will not lift all boats.” This is not an either-or matter; it is both-and.

We have daily reminders that discrimination, intimidation and hatred persist, too often even in our schools and colleges.

The day after the election, a student at a California high school handed out “deportation” letters to minority classmates. In Michigan, a man threatened to set a college student on fire if she did not remove her hijab. Black students at a Pennsylvania university received lynching threats with graphic images.

We cannot be silent, or allow bigotry and hate to be normalized. This week, joined by groups representing millions of people, the American Federation of Teachers and the Southern Poverty Law Center sent Trump a letter calling on him to unequivocally denounce such acts and the ideology that drives them. Trump's election-night call for Americans to come together and his subsequent statement against hate-fueled violence were welcome. But the appointment of Steve Bannon as his chief strategist—a hero of white supremacist groups—sends

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the exact opposite message. So do his choices for national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who has made biased and incendiary comments about Muslims, and for attorney general, Sen. Jeff Sessions, who was previously rejected for a judgeship because of his racially charged actions and comments.

The AFT will continue to champion the things American children, their families, and working people need

in order to have good lives and a chance at the American dream.

That dream rests on four key foundations: 1) The economy must create and maintain well-paying jobs and a ladder of opportunity for all, not just those at the top or who currently benefit from the political and economic system. 2) Our public education system—from pre-K through college—must keep children safe and be strong and supported, not privatized or defunded, so it can help them develop skills and knowledge, to maximize their opportunities and foster respect and understanding. 3) Our democratic values, including a free press, an independent judiciary and a thriving labor movement, are rooted in pluralism and equality, and we must stand up against any threat to them. 4) Finally, every person deserves dignity and respect, and freedom from discrimination, bigotry and bullying.

When we strip away the labels of identity—of religion, birthplace, gender, race or sexual orientation—we all want the same things: to be able to provide for ourselves and our loved ones, to have opportunities that match our abilities, to live free of fear. Everyone should have opportunities to thrive in and contribute to the United States: the Latina Dreamer in a Texas medical school; the white working-class voter in Youngstown, Ohio, who feels abandoned; and the young man in Baltimore who worries whether the color of his skin amounts to a target on his back. We must rise above our fears and fight for our dreams—and for those of every American.



Weingarten speaks at a press conference calling on President-elect Donald Trump to denounce the hate-fueled acts occurring in the wake of his election.

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