

***Jennifer Proffitt, UFF President, Rally Remarks (as prepared):***

Good afternoon sisters and brothers.

I am proud to greet you that way because you are my sisters and brothers—all of you—teachers, education staff professionals, parents, clergy, students and community activists, joined by so much more than the bonds of our union but by our love for and dedication to our society's most cherished institution, public education. Today we celebrate that bond as we link our voices, fueled by our unwavering determination to turn back the tide of 20 years of disastrous education policies, telling the governor and the Florida Legislature, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

The thousands of faculty and graduate teaching assistants across the state represented by the United Faculty of Florida understand and respect the frustrations of our teachers, parents and students in the K-12 system and in many ways share those same frustrations. As the Florida Legislature has increasingly tied the hands of our K-12 teachers and worked to stifle their creativity and professionalism, we have seen the effects first hand in our own classrooms. Today we are seeing far too many students who reach our colleges and universities who have had the passion for critical and creative thinking, the excitement and spirit of inquiry, and the flame of free expression extinguished by policies that get in the way of what you have dedicated your lives to: the education and inspiration of future generations.

Make no mistake: these policies haven't been driven by an honest debate over pedagogy or a fair disagreement over the best ways to educate our students; they have been driven by profit and the zeal of powerful individuals who see an opportunity to make a buck regardless of what that does to our students, parents and teachers.

School privatization and all of its ancillary components including incessant high-stakes testing, school grading, charters and voucher schemes are all designed to destroy our most important, most cherished institution so that it can be recreated with an eye on profit, not on building up future generations to take their place in society. This is the fight of our lives, and today I can commit to you that the members of the United Faculty of Florida will be with you in that struggle.

I'm also here to ask you to join us in our own battles against the school privateers. The powerful forces of privatization and corporatization have launched a new front in their campaign with their eyes fixed on our public colleges and universities. Each session, bills are filed that mirror the destructive policies for higher education that have plagued our K-12 system. Our colleges and universities are graded, using irrational metrics, and funding is being awarded—or potentially taken away—based on those metrics. Professors are increasingly under pressure to teach what the state and its corporate masters want us to teach. Critical institutions like tenure are increasingly under threat. Political appointees are making critical decisions about our institutions, and these so-called experts are encroaching on our ability to do our job. Graduate assistants earning low wages are being forced to pay for their jobs through unfair fees. Florida is

dead last in the nation in funding higher education, and the gap is increasingly being filled by corporate funded think tanks and foundations. All of you here who have been fighting in the trenches to protect our K-12 system are desperately needed in the fight to protect public higher education, and we all hope that we can count on you for your support and guidance.

We are all in this together, a sisterhood forged by our commitment to the field and institutions we care so much about, and I stand here today full of hope and determination for the victories that lie ahead. It is time for us to stand together, united with one voice, and tell the Florida Legislature and Governor Scott: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

While the rally was important in conveying the level of frustration being experienced by all stakeholders in public education, it can only do just that. If we are to really make changes in the K-12 system and stop some of the disastrous things they want to do to higher education, we must become more engaged in policymaking and politics, and I look forward to working with all of you to make that happen for UFF.