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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 9, 2009
2 Pages

MEDIA ADVISORY – AVAILABILITY FOR COMMENT

24-YEAR VETERAN LAUSD SCHOOL TEACHER WHO CHALLENGES UTLA'S LAYOFF PROTESTS AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE PLANNED FOR TOMORROW AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT

LARRY SAND, PRESIDENT OF THE CALIFORNIA TEACHERS EMPOWERMENT NETWORK, AN UNPRECEDENTED AND ALTERNATE EDUCATION INFORMATION RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC OFFERS DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON BUDGET CRISIS AND LAYOFFS

WHO: Larry Sand, President, California Teachers Empowerment Network (www.ctenhome.org)

The California Teachers Empowerment Network (CTEN) was started in 2006 by Larry Sand, a classroom teacher for over 27 years (24 of those years in the Los Angeles Unified School District)

WHY: Sand offers an alternate perspective to UTLA from within the teaching community. He argues that teachers are not, in fact, the victims that UTLA is portraying them to be in the current budget crisis.

- 1. The district is mandated to send out Reduction In Force (RIF) notices by March 15. These notices go to teachers who *may* have to be laid off at the end of this school year. This is a warning shot, not a bullet to the head. With the state budget unsettled until at least the May 19 election and the effects of the federal stimulus package on school districts yet to be decided, no one really has any idea what will happen come September. Add to that a proposed early retirement bonus for teachers, which has been met by a great deal of interest by hundreds of teachers, and the waters get even murkier. **With so much up in the air, why is the UTLA throwing a tantrum at this time? To threaten civil disobedience when the civil rights of teachers have not been abrogated is bad enough (as far as CTEN knows, being laid off because of budget cuts does not constitute a breach of a teacher's civil rights); to do so without offering an alternative plan in light of the dire economic situation and painful cuts faced by so many fellow Californians and Los Angelinos is even worse, and seems to suggest that UTLA is using this as a cynical publicity ploy, and is not really interested in working with the LAUSD to find a workable solution to save as many jobs as possible and ensure that students' education is not disrupted during a very hard time.****
- 2. The union seems to be unaware of the budget crisis we are experiencing in CA, or not to care. They seem to be unwilling to give any ground at all on crucial issues. If we were to keep the**

present level of teachers, where does the union propose we get the money to pay them? We are already the highest taxed state in the country, as well as the state with the highest-paid teachers, on average. **According to the California Teachers Association's parent union (of which UTLA is an affiliate), the National Education Association, California teachers were the highest paid in the nation, with \$64,424 average annual salary in 2007-08.** According to a study by the American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO, another very large national public school teacher union, which was conducted a year before the CTA study, the data found that "for the second consecutive year, California had the highest average teacher salary in 2006-07 at \$63,640, or about 25 percent above the national average." The average pay for a teacher in LAUSD is \$63,391 (as of 2007, according to 2007-2008 Certificated Salary Data, California Department of Education). This places UTLA in the middle of the range for the county, and very close to the statewide average teacher salary in 2008, which was \$65,808, an increase of 3.4 percent from 2007. **With a generous pay scale, a Rolls Royce health benefits plan, pension benefits, and a tenure system that virtually guarantees a job-for-life, how much more pain is UTLA willing to inflict on the working people of Los Angeles and California?**

3. Make no mistake about it, losing young teachers who are new to the field could have serious ramifications for years to come. However, the union is complicit in this scenario. **Due to a ridiculous archaic tenure or *permanence* system, the layoffs, should they happen, would be by seniority, not quality. Hence, some terrific young, idealistic teacher would be let go, but not a mediocre or poor teacher who has been on the job for a longer period. The union does not care about teacher quality, only longevity.** The next time a union official starts talking about *the children*, please ask him or her why the union insists on this system, which clearly does not benefit children.
4. LAUSD has already agreed not to cut teachers' healthcare benefits. **As such, UTLA's Rolls Royce "full coverage, no deductible, very low co-pay, coverage until death" version of healthcare benefits continues, even during these hard economic times, when the Lexus version should have been considered since it would have sufficed, would have provided superior healthcare benefits, and would have saved much needed dollars. Despite this major concession, which continues to be an unfair burden on taxpayers, UTLA continues to portray teachers as victims who are under "dramatic threat."**
5. Regarding concerns about reducing the number of teachers, the UTLA is on shaky ground. In 2003-2004, there were 36,180 teachers and 747,009 students in the LAUSD. In 2007-2008 (latest year for which there are figures) those numbers became 35,785 and 693,680. **In other words, the student population decreased 7%, but the teacher population decreased only 1%.** In 2003-2004, the student/teacher ratio was 20.64. In 2007-2008, it was 19.38. If we went back to the 20.64 ratio, we

would need only 33,597 teachers – 2,000 fewer teachers than we have now. (Unions hate the thought of fewer teachers – it means less money in the form of dues for them).

6. UTLA has made large claims about areas where LAUSD can and should make budget cuts. However, **UTLA is short on specifics in some of the areas where it claims hundreds of millions of dollars can be trimmed from the budget.** To be sure the LAUSD bureaucracy has long been a bloated mess, but Mr. Cortines seems to be doing what he can to trim it down. For example, UTLA has claimed that the district has spent \$845 million on outside contractors. Mr. Cortines refutes that amount, saying that he is *authorized* to spend that much, but that last year the district “spent \$286 million on all contracts for all professional services”, adding that, “In my opinion, \$286 million is still too much.” If UTLA’s claims regarding areas where the district can cut are real and legitimate, UTLA needs to provide actual examples and back-up data.

Larry Sand/CTEN - Background Information

After graduating from college on the East Coast, Sand spent four and a half years as a classroom teacher in the New York City public school system. After leaving the profession for a number of years, he had a radical change of heart at age 38 and made the active choice to become a teacher because he passionately believed, and continues to believe, that teaching is a noble profession. He received his California credentials, and started teaching in the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1985. During his 24 years in the LAUSD, Sand has taught in inner city schools, as well as schools on the affluent Westside. He has taught Math, English, English as a Second Language, History, and he has also worked as a Title 1 Coordinator. Sand became aware of the need for an organization like CTEN three years ago, in the wake of Proposition 75. Prop 75, which was on the ballot in California in 2005, was a measure that was fiercely opposed by labor leaders yet alluring to many in the rank and file. The measure would have barred government employee unions from spending members’ dues on political campaigns without prior consent. Sand worked on the campaign to pass Prop 75, and the manner in which the teachers unions fought against, and handled that campaign, was an eye-opener for him. Sand realized that many of his fellow teachers were unaware of information concerning their union, as well as other education issues and policies, and he wanted to change that reality. Sand started the CTEN network with fellow teachers in 2006 as the first organization of its kind in California -- a non-partisan, non-political group dedicated to providing teachers with free reliable and balanced information that includes multiple viewpoints about professional affiliations and positions on educational issues, information teachers may not get from their unions or other information sources, and which is critical to them making informed choices about their careers.

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