

Neither a Moment nor Mind to Waste

An International Conference on College Access

Remarks of

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Good Morning. I am privileged to be with you today to address a topic to which I, as you, have dedicated the better part of my professional life: college access for disadvantaged students. I recognize and salute my many American colleagues here at the conference who have had such a powerful impact on access in the US.

I have come to my commitment to access as a debt of gratitude, since I am a first generation Irish-American and college graduate. Some have suggested this debt could never be fully repaid as I spent the better part of the years from 1958 when I entered kindergarten in our parish school in New York City to 1990 when I received my doctorate making up for my family's lack of access to higher education over the centuries.

It is especially meaningful to address this group which has convened these three days examine the common challenges that an increasing number of nations face in providing college access for its most precious resource—its citizens—and sharing research about promising strategies and effective programs from the participating nations.

I have been asked to address the power of partnerships, an issue with which many of the excellent papers presented at this conference deal. I will take a slightly different approach and suggest that strategic partnerships with business and thought leaders are essential to supporting long-term college access strategies and programs. And perhaps the most important component of that partnership is strategic alignment within the P-20 education pipeline, our policy metaphor for pre-kindergarten to graduate education.

I will speak from an American perspective and that of my organization. In the spirit of Sir David Watson's admonition to practice cross-national humility, I offer the caveat that these perspectives may not be applicable to your context. I offer one observation that will punctuate this issues of context, by quoting the late Tip O'Neill, arguably one of the most insightful and successful American politicians of the 20th Century, who said: "All politics are local." Indeed in the U.S., all education is local and this structure of state and local control of primary and secondary and to some degree higher education poses very significant challenges in creating access.

By way of addressing partnerships, I would like to describe the Business-Higher Education Forum, its membership, and its current activities. The

Forum is an independent membership organization of Fortune 500 CEOs, prominent college and university presidents, and foundation leaders working in partnership to advance innovative solutions to our nation's education challenges in order to enhance U.S. competitiveness. BHEF brings together an extraordinary coalition of corporate, academic, and foundation members to advance public policy and inspire other corporate, academic, and foundation leaders to act.

We currently have two member-led initiatives underway that are particularly relevant to this conference: A STEM initiative, led by Bill Swanson, CEO of Raytheon, and Warren Baker, President of the California Polytechnic Institute; and a College Readiness and Success Initiative, led by Herb Allison, CEO of TIAA-CREF, and David Skorton, President of Cornell University.

I want to focus on the College Readiness and Success Initiative, as it is most germane to this conference and sets the stage for highlighting key issues for addressing access and success at least in the US context. This initiative is a dynamic platform for business and higher education to work in partnership to promote college readiness, access, and success for underserved

populations. The Initiative harnesses the influence and resources of BHEF and its corporate, higher education, and foundation leaders.

This Initiative employs five interrelated components:

- **Engagement of corporate CEOs** to raise awareness of the urgent need to improve college readiness and success, and promote leadership by them, including a strong philanthropic response to tackle these challenges.
- **Convenings** to build and share knowledge about these issues in a philanthropy community of practice. The first of these, the **Institute for Strategic Investment in Education (ISIE)** this past week, convened senior corporate philanthropy staff and other key stakeholders at Harvard University to develop strategies for collaboration and investment in education improvement efforts.
- A Web-based **Resource Center** to equip corporate leaders and other philanthropists with the information and tools they need to maximize their strategic investments in education.
- **Advocacy and action on the ground** with teams of corporate, university, and foundation leaders in selected communities. And,

- **Public awareness campaigns** to change public and parental attitudes about the imperative of college readiness and success.

Our Chairman, Herb Allison has met individually with two dozen Fortune 100 CEOs and hosted a meeting of CEOs and corporate foundations leaders at his offices in New York encouraging their focus on college readiness and success. We are scheduling similar mid-west and west coast meetings to encourage CEO leadership on these issues.

I flew here on Sunday from Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the conclusion of the Institute for Strategic Investment in Education, co-sponsored by Harvard University and the Forum, for which we brought together 50 corporate and private foundation leaders to explore strategies for investing more effectively in education.

We also brought teams of corporate and community foundation, university, and school staff, including school superintendents to begin developing plans for our “on-the-ground” work to improve college readiness and success in: Louisville, Kentucky; Columbus, Ohio; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In each of these cities, our business, university, and foundation members are leading community-wide efforts to forge strategic partnerships for college readiness, access and success. Our member CEOs are leading larger business groups in these cities, creating a vision for the economic and educational future of these cities and regions, as well as educational and policy initiatives to operationalize that vision.

In Louisville, David Jones, Jr., Chairman of Humana, and Paul Varga, CEO of Brown Forman, are leading a broad effort to increase the flow of successful students through the P-20 (primary, secondary, tertiary) pipeline. This effort will bring businesses, the schools, community college, and universities in a common focus on college readiness and success.

In the U.S., our access challenge mirrors that in many countries: income and class trump virtually all else in determining whether young Americans enjoy access to college—irrespective of level of academic preparation. The highest achieving low-income students attend university at the same rate as the lowest achieving high-income students.

Addressing this issue in the U.S. will require a fundamentally different approach from the past—and new partnerships like those emerging in cities

in which our members are at work. This approach acknowledges the less exclusive role of government in the US in leading these initiatives. We are a bit preoccupied south of the Canadian border these days with some events in the Middle East and the financial markets. It recognizes that leadership for change in the U.S. likely will not come exclusively from government.

The first component of this approach is the creation of strategic partnerships among business, government, higher education and our P-12—that is, primary and secondary schools. This partnership will play a critical role in shaping public attitudes and policy, and funding priorities that support programs and practice.

Changing the public's attitudes is essential in the U.S. An inexplicably large number of our citizens—and policymakers—seem to have failed to read Thomas Freedman's *The World is Flat*. Shockingly, over 70 percent of Michigan adults surveyed several years ago felt that higher education was not necessary for a middle-class lifestyle—this is in a state that has lost virtually the highest number of manufacturing jobs in our country. This perception interacts with an equally potent perception among our parents and students that rigorous preparation in math and science is unnecessary, indeed irrelevant, for higher education or the workplace in the 21st Century.

I find it ironic that the *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes this week that federal government's so-called Spellings Commission chairman Charles Miller has written College Board president Gaston Caperton challenging their calculation of the earnings differential between a high school graduate and a college degree holder. He argues that the price of college may be so high that the difference is not worth the individual's investment or the government's funding student aid. Apparently, Mr. Miller didn't read *The World Is Flat* either, because in the face of global competition, the future jobs that those high school graduates can obtain will be at Burger King, and I think even Mr. Miller will agree the wage differential there is huge. My corporate members believe that the U.S. economy is rapidly moving toward a bifurcated model in which good jobs require postsecondary education and the rest will be at Burger King.

Fortunately, survey data also point to the power of higher education and business attitudes about the demands of college and the workplace in the 21st Century, though perhaps not Mr. Miller's. Large percentages of parents and students indicate that if rigorous preparation is a prerequisite for getting a job or getting into college in the 21st Century, their attitudes toward rigorous preparation for college would change.

Business and higher education leaders must use their power—the bully pulpit—to shape public attitudes and public funding priorities, as well as the behavior of parents and students with regard to preparation for college.

Viewing the problems and solutions in the context of state and local education pipelines, in which essential outcomes at one point are dependent on earlier successful outcomes, is key to this new approach. A newly interdependent business, higher education, and P-12 partnership can develop local P-20 educational access and success strategies that will support programs and practice.

But these policy, financial and programmatic solutions must be systemically aligned in order to reinforce one another. Early notification of eligibility for financial aid represents one of the least frequently utilized alignments, in spite of its power to change aspirations and increase college readiness and the likelihood of college success.

I was not surprised that Sir David highlighted reduced price meals as a key indicator of under-represented populations in the UK. It is in the U.S. as well and we have attempted—though only partially successfully—to align maximum eligibility for federal Pell grants with eligibility thresholds for our

Free and Reduced Lunch Program. This will give us the power to reach into schools and assure all such students early that maximum federal Pell and state grants will be available to them and that they should prepare for college to take maximum advantage of this aid. And the delivery system must be restructured to enable this program feature.

Finally, accountability represents one of the realities of the U.S. policy context. The standards and testing movement in the U.S. has created a new constraint for access and success strategies. As a result, we are developing mutual accountability agreements to drive these integrate P-20 strategies and solutions. In these agreements each party will contribute to defining the expected outcomes, but then each will also be responsible for supporting change, including financial support, and creating a favorable policy climate.

Business in the U.S. has been most effective in the standards movement, but has not contributed equally to broader solutions and put their dollars behind the desired P-20 changes. Our efforts in the in CRI will yield models that can be replicated and used to develop broad support for programs and practice.

In conclusion, broad partnerships involving business, higher education and P-12 are necessary for significant change. These partnerships in the U.S. can fashion comprehensive solutions that align policies and funding strategies. They can alter public perception and policies in order to support programs and practice. And they can create a strategic balance between calls for accountability for improving outcomes with realistic support for improving college access and success.

This new approach may be relevant to varying degrees in other countries and I urge you to explore the power of business in partnership with higher education in support of college access and success in your own country.