

NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY FORUM SPEECH 1/27/89

NATIONAL HEALTH

POLICY FORUM

MEETING ON NON COLLEGE

YOUTH IN THE WORKFORCE

REMARKS BY

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THANK YOU,

I AM PLEASED IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY TO BE HERE TODAY, I HAVE SPENT A GREAT DEAL OF TIME THESE PAST SEVERAL YEARS WORKING ON EDUCATION ISSUES, ESPECIALLY AT THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL, I RECEIVE MANY INVITATIONS TO SPEAK TO EDUCATION GROUPS BUT RELATIVELY FEW FROM THE HEALTH CARE FIELD,

I APPLAUD YOUR WILLINGNESS TO VENTURE ACROSS TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES . MOST ORGANIZATIONS HAVE

A TENDENCY TO FOCUS ON ONE ISSUE THAT IS OF CENTRAL CONCERN TO THEM AND TO STAY WITH THAT ISSUE, THIS TREND IS PARTICULARLY POWERFUL AS OUR SOCIETY BECOMES MORE COMPLEX AND ISSUES BECOME MORE COMPLICATED.

BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN EVERY ORGANIZATION NEEDS TO
LOOK BEYOND ITS IMMEDIATE CONCERNS AND SEE WHAT IS
HAPPENING IN THE WORLD AT LARGE, THERE ARE TIMES
WHEN, TO USE A METAPHOR APPROPRIATE TO THE NATIONAL
HEALTH POLICY FORUM, IT IS IMPORTANT TO LOOK NOT JUST
AT PHYSICAL HEALTH BUT AT SOCIAL HEALTH AS WELL,

THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE DOING HERE AND WHY YOU DESERVE
OUR ADMIRATION AND APPLAUSE,

I HOPE OTHERS WILL FOLLOW YOUR EXAMPLE,

AS A SOCIETY, WE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND THE PIGEON-HOLE APPROACH TO SOCIAL ISSUES AND PUBLIC POLICY: THIS IS AN EDUCATION ISSUE, THAT IS A HEALTH ISSUE, THE OTHER ONE OVER THERE IS A HUMAN RESOURCES QUESTION, EACH OF US MUST MAINTAIN OUR INDIVIDUAL AND IMMEDIATE FOCUS, BUT WE ALSO NEED TO COME TOGETHER REGARDING THE LARGER ISSUES THAT SHAPE OUR SOCIETY AND BEGIN BUILDING THE COALITIONS THAT CAN ADDRESS, DEFINE AND HELP RESOLVE THOSE OVERREACHING PROBLEMS.

IN OTHER WORDS, IT'S TIME TO CARVE OUT SOME NEW ROLES FOR OLD INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING CABINET DEPARTMENTS, AFTER 8 YEARS OF NOT SPEAKING I SENSE A CHANGE.

SOME 2 YEARS AGO, I PARTICIPATED IN A STUDY CONDUCTED BY THE COMMITTEE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AN ORGANIZATION OF SOME 200 BUSINESS EXECUTIVES AND EDUCATORS, OUR REPORT, "CHILDREN IN NEED," EXAMINED THE STATUS OF THE EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILD IN THIS COUNTRY: CHILDREN WHO COULD NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THEM OR WHOSE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES WERE INHERENTLY UNEQUAL,

WE RECOMMENDED A BROAD RANGE OF EARLY AND SUSTAINED CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION PROGRAMS: PRE-AND POST-NATAL CARE FOR PREGNANT TEENAGERS AND OTHER HIGH-RISK MOTHERS, PRESCHOOL AND DAY CARE PROGRAMS, NUTRITION AND IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMS, PROGRAMS TO HELP PARENTS, AT LEAST 1 RECOMMENDATIONS WERE IN HEALTH AREA - AN OUTGROWTH OF CEDS 1985 REPORT "INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN".

WE RECOMMENDED CHANGES IN THE WAYS THAT SCHOOLS
DEFINED THEIR PURPOSE AND THE WAYS THEY ORGANIZED,
STRUCTURED AND MANAGED THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS,
ESPECIALLY THOSE SCHOOLS SERVING LARGE NUMBERS OF
EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN,

AND WE RECOMMENDED PROGRAMS AIMED AT STUDENTS WHO HAD
LEFT SCHOOL OR WHO WERE LIKELY TO BECOME DROP OUTS,

WE ALSO LOOKED AT THE DRAMATIC CHANGES SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC CLIMATE IN WHICH TODAY'S CHILDREN GROW UP.

TWENTY OR 30 YEARS AGO, WHEN THIS NATION HAD AN AMPLE SUPPLY OF UNSKILLED JOBS THAT PAID AN ADEQUATE WAGE, WE COULD "HIDE" OUR DROPOUT RATE AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL SHORTCOMINGS, INDEED, DROPPING OUT WASN'T REALLY DEFINED AS A PROBLEM BACK THEN, PEOPLE WITH LIMITED EDUCATION, TRAINING AND SKILLS COULD LITERALLY DISAPPEAR INTO THE WORKFORCE AND BE SUCCESSFUL, EVEN THROUGH DROPOUT RATE WAS SUBSTANTIALLY HIGHER THEN, THAN IT IS TODAY.

NO MORE. THE FARM AND FACTORY JOBS THAT WERE SO ABUNDANT IN THE 1950s HAVE THEMSELVES DISAPPEARED. AND THE SERVICE AND TECHNOLOGICAL ECONOMY THAT HAS REPLACED OUR OLD MANUFACTURING ECONOMY DOES NOT HAVE THE SAME CAPACITY TO ABSORB AND ACCOMMODATE LESSER SKILLED WORKERS AT REASONABLE WAGES. IT GOBBLES UP EVERY HIGHLY SKILLED AND WELL EDUCATED PERSON IT CAN FIND, BUT IT LEAVES THE UNSKILLED AND THE SEMI-SKILLED PERSON OUT IN THE COLD, ACCORDING TO THE SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE, ONE HALF OF ALL NEW JOBS THAT HAVE BEEN CREATED IN THE EXPANSIVE ECONOMY OF THE 1980'S PAY AT OR BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL,

THE CONCERN WE EXPRESSED IN THE CED REPORT THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFTS IN THE ECONOMY WERE CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROBLEMS OF POVERTY AND WOULD CONTINUE TO CONSTITUTE A MAJOR BARRIER FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN THE YEARS AHEAD, HAS SADLY BEEN RIGHT ON TARGET,

WHAT WE DIDN'T RECOGNIZE QUITE AS CLEARLY AT THE TIME, HOWEVER, WAS THAT THERE WERE LARGE NUMBERS FOR WHOM THIS ECONOMIC LANDSLIDE ALREADY WAS A MAJOR PROBLEM.

SOME CAME FROM AN EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUND.

SOME DID NOT, ALL, HOWEVER, SHARED TWO COMMON TRAITS. THEY WERE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16 AND 24, AND THEY WEREN'T GOING TO COLLEGE. THEIR EDUCATION STOPPED IN HIGH SCHOOL OR ON GRADUATION DAY.

A WILLIAM T. GRANT FOUNDATION COMMISSION RECENTLY SPENT TWO YEARS STUDYING THE 20 MILLION YOUNGSTERS WHO COMPRISE THIS "FORGOTTEN HALF" OF AMERICA'S YOUTH.

THIS IS WHAT THE COMMISSION HAD TO SAY ON THAT SUBJECT:

"THEY ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO BUILD OUR HOMES, DRIVE OUR BUSES, REPAIR OUR AUTOMOBILES, FIX OUR TELEVISIONS, MAINTAIN AND SERVE OUR OFFICES, SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS AND KEEP THE PRODUCTION LINES OF OUR MILLS AND FACTORIES MOVING.

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"TO A GREAT EXTENT
THEY DETERMINE HOW WELL THE AMERICAN FAMILY,
ECONOMY AND DEMOCRACY FUNCTION. THEY ARE ALSO THE
THOUSANDS OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN
WHO ASPIRE TO WORK PRODUCTIVELY BUT NEVER QUITE 'MAKE
IT' TO THAT KIND OF EMPLOYMENT, FOR THESE MEMBERS OF
THE FORGOTTEN HALF, THEIR LIVES AS ADULTS START IN
THE ECONOMIC LIMBO OF UNEMPLOYMENT, PART-TIME JOBS
AND POVERTY WAGES. MANY OF THEM NEVER BREAK FREE."

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YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT A COLLEGE EDUCATION OFTEN ARE SUCCESSFUL, BUT THE GRANT COMMISSION WAS TROUBLED BY THE NUMBER WHO ARE SWIMMING AGAINST AN ECONOMIC TIDE THAT OVERPOWERS THEM, THEY FIND JOBS ALL RIGHT, BUT THESE JOBS DO NOT PROVIDE THEM WITH THE INCOME THEY NEED, NOR IS THEIR SITUATION LIKELY TO IMPROVE, NO MATTER HOW HARD THEY WORK, THEY JUST CAN'T SEEM TO FIND A SECURE PLACE FOR THEMSELVES, THEY LOSE HOPE IN THE FUTURE, AND, AS THE COMMISSION NOTES, ONCE THEY FALL BEHIND, THEY TEND TO STAY BEHIND, NOT THE WAY THE AMERICAN DREAM WAS SUPPOSED TO WORK, AND CERTAINLY NOT THE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY THEY PROBABLY EXPECTED.

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TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE,
THESE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT JUST FALLING BEHIND OUR
COLLEGE-BOUND YOUTH; THEY ARE WORSE OFF THAN THEY
WOULD HAVE BEEN A DECADE EARLIER,

IN 1973, A 20 TO 24-YEAR-OLD MAN WHO HAD NOT ATTENDED
COLLEGE COULD EXPECT TO EARN AN AVERAGE OF \$11,572 A
YEAR, BY 1984, HE COULD EXPECT TO EARN ONLY \$8,072,
IN 1973 DOLLARS. -- A DROP OF NEARLY 30 PERCENT IN A
SINGLE DECADE. 56% CAN'T KEEP FAMILY OF 3 ABOVE
POVERTY LINE,

THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN WHEN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES
WERE ON THE RISE OR WHEN LEARNING AND JOB SKILLS WERE
IN DECLINE, THIS HAPPENED WHEN DROPOUT RATES WERE
STEADY OR DECLINING AND READING LEVELS SHOWED
SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT,

SO MUCH FOR CONVENTIONAL WISDOM.

IT SOMETIMES IS ARGUED THAT HIGH RATES OF JOBLESSNESS AND INADEQUATE EARNINGS, ESPECIALLY AMONG TEENAGERS, ARE TEMPORARY PROBLEMS THAT DISAPPEAR ONCE YOUTHS BECOME ADULTS. THE EXPERIENCE OF THIS GENERATION OF YOUNG ADULTS SUGGESTS THESE EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS ARE ANYTHING BUT TEMPORARY.

THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT ANY YOUNG AMERICAN WHO REACHES ADULTHOOD WITHOUT A FIRM FOUNDATION OF BASIC SKILLS AND WORK EXPERIENCE FACES THE PROSPECT OF PROLONGED JOBLESSNESS AND BELOW-POVERTY EARNINGS FOR YEARS TO COME.

STORY, THOUGH, THAT'S NOT THE WHOLE

HISTORICALLY, THE WAGES OF YOUNG MEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 20 AND 24 HAVE BEEN THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH FAMILIES HAVE BEEN BUILT AND NURTURED IN THIS COUNTRY.

BUT WHEN INCOMES DECLINE, FAMILIES BEGIN TO BREAK UP, SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS BECOME MORE COMMONPLACE, AND CHILDREN START HAVING PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL. FAMILIES CANNOT BE BUILT OR NURTURED WHEN THE EARNINGS OF THE BREADWINNERS ARE IN A TAILSPIN.

ALL OF US WANT A SOCIAL CLIMATE IN WHICH ECONOMIC INCENTIVES WORK IN FAVOR OF CREATING AND MAINTAINING STABLE FAMILIES. BUT INSTEAD WE SEEM TO BE MOVING TOWARD A SOCIAL CLIMATE IN WHICH ECONOMIC INCENTIVES WORK AGAINST THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF YOUNG FAMILIES FOR A VERY LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE,

WHAT BETTER PROOF THAN THE FACT THAT THE PROPORTION OF YOUNG MEN WHO DID NOT EARN ENOUGH TO KEEP A FAMILY OF THREE OUT OF POVERTY INCREASED 18 PERCENTAGE POINTS DURING THE PAST DECADE, IT STARTED OUT AT 42 PERCENT, IT ENDED UP AT 60 PERCENT.

THIS NATION PRIDES
ITSELF ON THE EFFORT IT MAKES IN BEHALF OF ITS
COLLEGE-BOUND YOUNG PEOPLE. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO
NON-COLLEGE BOUND YOUNGSTERS, WE DO VERY LITTLE AT
ALL, WE SIMPLY ASSUME THEY CAN MAKE IT ON THEIR OWN,

FOR LARGE NUMBERS, THAT SIMPLY IS NOT THE CASE, NOT
EVEN CLOSE TO IT.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

FOR STARTERS, WE RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT THE FACT THAT OUR NON-COLLEGE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE BEING SHORTCHANGED BY OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM AND OUR POLITICAL PRIORITIES.

WE SAY WE HAVE A SYSTEM OF OPPORTUNITY BASED ON EQUITY, BUT IN POINT OF FACT, WE HAVE A SYSTEM THAT REWARDS THOSE WHO GO TO COLLEGE AND LARGELY IGNORES THOSE WHO DO NOT. COLLEGE IS EQUATED WITH SUCCESS. NOT GOING TO COLLEGE IS EQUATED WITH FAILURE OR LESS THAN SUCCESS.

IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL
COMPETITIVENESS IN WHICH OUR GOAL IS TO DEVELOP A
HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY, NOT JUST ONE IN
WHICH EVERYONE HAS A JOB, WE CANNOT AFFORD SUCH A
MONUMENTAL WASTE OF RESOURCES,

I AM NOT ARGUING FOR A REDUCTION IN THE SUPPORT WE
CURRENTLY OFFER COLLEGE STUDENTS, I HOPE WE REACH
OUT TO MORE PEOPLE, ENCOURAGE THEM TO GO TO COLLEGE,
AND MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO DO THIS,

BUT IN CONJUNCTION WITH THAT, LET'S DEVELOP SOME
POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE
WHO DO NOT WANT TO ATTEND COLLEGE BUT STILL WANT AND
NEED TO PURSUE THEIR EDUCATION.

EACH STUDENT IN AN
INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING, FOR INSTANCE, CAN
EXPECT TO RECEIVE A SUBSIDY OF \$5,000 PER ACADEMIC
YEAR THROUGH A COMBINATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE
GRANTS, LOANS AND SUBSIDIES TO INDIVIDUALS OR
INSTITUTIONS.

AMONG OUR NON-COLLEGE YOUTH, THOUGH, ONLY FIVE
PERCENT OF THOSE ELIGIBLE FOR FEDERALLY-SUPPORTED JOB
TRAINING ACTUALLY RECEIVE THIS SUPPORT, WHEN THEY
DO, IT LASTS ONLY FOUR MONTHS AND TOTALS ONLY \$1,800
TO \$2,300 PER STUDENT.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT RECEIVES
\$20,000 WORTH OF SUPPORT WHILE THE AMERICAN NON-COLLEGE
STUDENT RECEIVES \$2,300 WORTH OF SUPPORT.

THE PRIMARY PROBLEM

DOES NOT LIE WITH THE YOUTHS. IT LIES WITH THE ECONOMY AND THE PATHS LEADING INTO THAT ECONOMY.

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DO NOT ATTEND COLLEGE NEED A BETTER FIRST CHANCE. THEY NEED MORE CAREER-ORIENTED OPPORTUNITIES WITH BETTER PAY. THEY NEED MORE CHANCES, BOTH IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF SCHOOL, TO UPGRADE AND ENHANCE THEIR SKILLS.

THEY NEED MORE ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL SCHOOLING AND GREATER ACCESS TO LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMS. THESE WORK WELL FOR ADULTS WITH SOME COLLEGE UNDER THEIR BELTS, BUT THEY HAVE LARGELY BYPASSED THE UNEMPLOYED, THE UNDEREMPLOYED AND THE BLUE COLLAR WORKERS IN GREATEST NEED OF THIS TRAINING.

ECONOMIST LESTER THUROW, FOR INSTANCE, HAS PROPOSED A LIFETIME EDUCATIONAL CREDIT THAT EACH PERSON COULD USE AS HE OR SHE SAW FIT, OTHER IDEAS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS, AND A NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM, ADMINISTERED BY THE STATES, DESIGNED TO INCREASE ACCESS TO VARIOUS NEW FORMS OF POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION,

NOBODY DISPUTES THE VALUE OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION, BUT A COLLEGE EDUCATION IS NOT FOR EVERYBODY, AND NOT EVERYBODY WANTS A COLLEGE EDUCATION,

TRYING TO PUT ALL OUR
YOUNG PEOPLE INTO ONE MOLD, AND THEN JUDGING THEM IN
TERMS OF WHETHER THEY FIT THIS MOLD THAT SOMEONE
ELSE HAS CHOSEN FOR THEM, IS A TERRIBLE ERROR,
YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN IN DIFFERENT WAYS, AT DIFFERENT
PACES, IN DIFFERENT PATTERNS, LET'S BUILD A SYSTEM
OF POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION THAT RESPECTS AND
BUILDS ON THOSE DIFFERENCES.

IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY, WHERE FREE CHOICE IS ONE OF
OUR MOST CHERISHED VALUES, THE QUESTION OF HOW TO
MATCH THE CONCERNS AND INTERESTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH
THE ECONOMIC REQUIREMENTS OF A CHANGING MARKET ALWAYS
WILL PRESENT PROBLEMS.

BUT IF WE WANT THE
LARGEST NUMBER TO SUCCEED IN LIFE, WE MUST PROVIDE
YOUNG PEOPLE WITH MORE THAN JUST A SINGLE PATHWAY TO
SUCCESS.

ONCE AGAIN, LET ME COMMEND YOU FOR THE EFFORT YOU
HAVE UNDERTAKEN HERE TODAY,

THERE IS NOT MUCH PRECEDENT IN THIS COUNTRY FOR A BROAD-BASED EFFORT THAT PREPARES PEOPLE FOR A CHANGING LABOR MARKET IN AN ECONOMY THAT IS ITSELF UNDERGOING DRAMATIC CHANGES. THERE IS PRECEDENT IN OTHER COUNTRIES, THOUGH. BOTH WEST GERMANY AND JAPAN HAVE ELABORATE APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR TEACHING TECHNICAL SKILLS TO YOUNG PEOPLE NOT HEADED FOR COLLEGE, WE ARE UNIQUE IN WESTERN WORLD FOR LACK OF SUPPORT FOR NON-COLLEGE BOUND. PUTTING TO ONE SIDE THE ETHICS AND FAIRNESS ISSUES, IN ECONOMIC TERMS CANNOT AFFORD SUCH A MONUMENTAL WASTE OF HUMAN RESOURCES.

THIS NATION CANNOT AFFORD TO CONTINUE WRITING OFF
HUGE CHUNKS OF ITS POPULATION AND STILL COMPETE
EFFECTIVELY WITH COUNTRIES THAT USE 100 PERCENT OF
THEIRS.

