

October 4, 2010

MEMORANDUM TO PRESIDENT OBAMA

FROM: PERAB Subcommittee on Education and Training

RE: SKILLS FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

**Overview**

The PERAB subcommittee on Education and Training was charged with reaching out to private sector employers, labor leaders, philanthropy organizations, and policy leaders within the Administration to solicit views on workforce development challenges, publicly-financed programs, and more effective public/private partnerships.

Over the past year, the subcommittee convened a series of meetings with leaders organized into the following groups: Technology, Service/Retail, Manufacturing/Construction, Health Care, Financial Services, Small Business, and Energy/Utilities.

Throughout the subcommittee meetings, employers highlighted the valuable role that community colleges play in the U.S. post-secondary system while also noting areas of weakness. Furthermore, public/private partnerships were identified as one of the most effective ways to improve the skills and credentials of American workers and students. A number of effective partnerships were highlighted, which include many innovative programs and partnerships ripe for replication.

At the conclusion of those meetings, it was clear that private sector employers are eager to work with the Administration and other partners on a national action plan that would make American workers more competitive and meet employers' needs for more skilled workers.

Based on our efforts to date, we have two recommendations:

- Maintain this Administration's strong focus on improving community colleges, including successful implementation of the President's American Graduation Initiative.
- Call on private sector leaders and labor leaders to join together in a *Skills for America's Future* initiative to dramatically improve and increase the number of industry partnerships with community colleges and other training providers.

**Preparing Today's Workers for Tomorrow's Jobs**

In an increasingly competitive global economy, America's economic strength depends on the education and skills of its workers. As part of your American Graduation Initiative, you have called for an additional 5 million community college degrees and certificates by 2020. Your leadership has made a difference: making more than \$2 billion in competitive funds available to community colleges over the next four years.

Importantly, as you know, the business community must be an integral part of efforts to strengthen post-secondary education and training to ensure that workers are being trained for the jobs of tomorrow and not just the jobs of today. Given the success of the “Educate to Innovate” campaign to increase science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning, it is clear that a broad national movement, a core group of private sector leaders, and an organization that can help coordinate and focus the efforts of stakeholders would help ensure success. We recommend creating an initiative, *Skills for America’s Future*, which promotes partnerships between businesses and community colleges and other training providers, and that it become part of the Economic Opportunities Program (EOP) at The Aspen Institute, led by an Executive Director.

Based on conversations with major foundations and key private sector leaders, we have learned there is substantial interest in the launching of this initiative.

### **Skills for America’s Future**

There are a number of roles we believe *Skills for America’s Future* can play and partnerships it can facilitate:

- Provide a national voice on the effectiveness of public/private partnerships in improving the skills, industry-recognized credentials, and employment outcomes of American workers and students.
- Develop a “certification” for best-in-class partnerships.
- Recruit additional private sector leaders to seed breakthrough innovations such as in accelerated learning and credentialing.
- Develop a national network of partnerships between employers, labor unions, community colleges and other training providers with a commitment to scaling meaningful and measurable solutions.
- Convene members, partners and interested stakeholders to affirm, align, and announce commitments.
- Facilitate and measure the impact of members’ commitments.
- Share knowledge and lessons learned at the community, state, and national levels.

Initial goals for *Skills for America’s Future* include:

- Ensure that every state has at least one high-impact partnership between industry and community colleges or other training providers.
- Partner with community colleges and other training providers to help achieve your goal of an additional 5 million community college degrees and certificates by 2020.

### **Not Wasting Any Time**

In this economy, we cannot start soon enough. *Skills for America’s Future* already has the commitment of leaders, such as Penny Pritzker (Chairman/CEO, Pritzker Realty Group) and Walter Isaacson (CEO, Aspen Institute), to advance this effort. In addition, leading companies, including PG&E, Gap Inc, McDonald’s, UTC and Accenture, are ready to be part of *Skills for America’s Future* and expand their efforts.

We recommend that you (1) announce *Skills for America's Future* and call on additional industry leaders ,community colleges and other training providers to get involved, and (2) create a task force to coordinate federal efforts so that the private sector is best poised to work with and leverage federal reform efforts.

In conclusion, our subcommittee believes that putting resources into the training and development of workers is one of the very best investments we can make. *Skills for America's Future* brings together government, the private sector, community colleges and other training providers, and labor to make that happen.