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Notes from the San Diego conference

January 24, 1991

Hillary Clinton's Remarks on America's Choice

Well, I hope everybody has seen the report and if you have not please let me know and we will take care of it. Because I think it is very important that the members of the Alliance be familiar with the report and its recommendations, because it really does try to describe the intersection between the educational and economic challenges facing us. And I think it helps to provide a framework to talk about a lot of these issues, about restructuring education that go beyond just what has to be done in schools. And I think that's a critical component of all of our discussions as members of the Alliance. I think many of us are finding that despite our efforts, (I think Cathy hit this very well in her remarks) despite our efforts to talk about what needs to be done in our view to improve our childrens' educations so that we can be competitive. Many of our people whether they are patrons of our school systems, or they're business people, whether they are policy makers or even whether they are educators don't really see the problem that many of us see and find in the country. And certainly the sort of effort that you have to put in to explaining that is made easier by the work of this Commission, because the commission members did a superb job laying out particular challenges we're confronting. But once you read it, you're sort of overwhelmed by the task that it sets forth because in effect it calls for rethinking of the whole enterprise of educating our

young people and then providing a system which we've never had for creating entries in to the job market, where by we link those skills of the young people supposedly required through education systems with the needs that employers have in order to produce a higher performance in the economic sector in this country. And there are so many implicit assumptions in the Commissions report about how we need to do things differently. We have a considerable task in front of us in trying to implement the the recommedations. But our very first task is to persuade a critical mass of decision makers that there truly is the problem the Commission has described and then after persuading them that there is this problem that we can actually do something about it. It is not one of those problems that we all shake our heads at, like oh my gosh,you know we have all of these poor children and in fact many of them are getting poorer and we just don't know that to do about that. Well we don't want to end up a year from now saying oh my gosh, when we raised public awareness, we have these terrible skills gap, we didn't know we had it before but oh my gosh its just getting worse. So, we first have to try to figure out in our implementation strategy how to increase the numbers of people who really appreciate what the challenge is. And we're going to try to do that in a variety of ways. Certainly prior to anything were going to commence now, Marc and the Commissioners have done a terrific job in taking the message out there and in talking to a lot of different groups in describing the problem and describing the recommendations the commission has made. But we want, we need to get beyond that and really start trying to find places, primarily states and localities, but also trying to move a federal agenda forward to lay the ground work to actually begin to implement some of the recommendations.

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Now there are five major recommendations and all kinds of subsidiary issues that each one of those encompass but in general the first one in effect calls for the establishment of an internationally benchmark of educational performance standard that would be evidence by our children achieving a what is called in the report a certificate of initial mastery that gives evidence their ability to meet this standard. Now this is, in various ways going to be discussed tomorrow here in this meeting. I intend to discuss the National Center Board, many of you have seen the publicity about the grants which enrapture the National Center and Laura Resnick's educational research group has received trying to get a think through what this standard would look like and how we would create assessment measures to determine whether our children have achieved it. I think this is an enormous task. However we define it and wherever the alliance comes out on what individual states and localities need to do, I think its critical that the Commissions appreciation for how this underlying standard really drives everything else we try to do. It has to be conveyed to a broad part of our decision making policy making apparatus in this country because, going back to David Hornbeck's point, if we don't know where we are going, we will never know if we get there and a lot of the talk about restructuring has been so process oriented in the last several years and I think that's been important because we have to open people up to new ways of doing things. But when push comes to shove, what is it we are restructuring the processes to do? What do we want our kids to know? How will we know if they know it? And one of our big problems is we don't know what we don't know a lot of times in the educational establishment. And so if we don't begin to

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unpack all the underlying issues about where we're heading with this whole enterprise and begin to take the risk of describing the standards, we will never in my view, and I think that's the implicit message of this commission report, make any progress in restructuring education, in restructuring the economy, in trying to marry those two. So this whole question about a national exam is really to me, a part of a much bigger set of issues. What is this whole enterprise of public education aimed at the accomplishments or a foreseeable future, and how are we going to determine whether we have achieved it even if we can describe it?

Now the second recommendation that the Commission made is that it's not enough however merely to say we want a certificate of initial mastery and even assuming that we can come up with such a standard by which those certificates will mean the standard has been achieved by our kids, we all have to be very conscience of all the related ethnic conditions and what the Grant Commission calls the "forgotten path of kids" who very often get lost in the shuffle. If we just come up with another standard no matter how effective it might be in describing where we want to go, we have to be conscience of the fact that we need to move along all of our kids as far as we are able to move. That is going to be a very tough issue also, because there is a constituency as we all know, in the country that basically think we just have to push our high achievers more because we are never going to be able to move the rest of the kids all that far anyway. Well, the Commission doesn't believe that. It doesn't believe that for two reasons: one, an assessment reason, which we think more kids can learn more than there expected to learn now and secondly, the sort of hard fact of demographic we need all kids to learn more than most kids are learning now. So to that end the

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Commission recommends the state has to take the responsibility for insuring in so far as it is possible, that all of our kids will be able to meet this standard and achieve the level of mastery. And to that end, we need to set up a system to capture those kids. Of course, San Diego has really in many ways set an example for that with the drop out alternative remedial kind of approach that you've demonstrated here. We're going to try to see what we can do to encourage states and localities to take this responsibility and to set up what the Board calls "youth centers", what Gov. Cuomo has called "opportunity" skills centers. And some legislation that he has introduced, which is to try to centralize the responsibility for dropouts, but not just for dropouts, i would argue also for underachieving graduates in the foreseeable future which right now are nobodys responsibility. schools don't want them, the public security departments don't want them, the employers don't want them, nobody wants these people who have either dropped out or gotten through the system with very little to show for it.

Thirdly in order to set up a match between what we hope youngsters, young people and even older workers will be able to do and what employers need, we have to start getting them, employers, to unpack what their real skilled needs are. One of the things that the Commission found is that most employers are just grateful that they got employees who show up and have some minimal work ethic, because they really don't expect all that much more and need times. And the other side of that, is that more sophisticated employers are beginning to cream, you know, they are now only interviewing college graduates, I think, one of the first messages that Marc just said to us is that college degree is really a signal that you've got the ability to at least stay in school for a certain number of years which suggests than you have a better work habit

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than other people. Not that you know more, but you've been willing to put up with more for longer and least (garbled with laughter). So what we want to do is create technical and professional certification where industry and education are partners in trying to describe what we really need besides the ability to show up. And not a substitute, which is a college degree for those skills but real skills, because frankly a lot of the real skills don't require what we are now offering up in two and four year institutions. But we don't know that because nobody is really willing to sit down and describe accurately what kinds of skills are required. And one of the things the Commission is going to try to do is create some processes where businesses and industries begin to do that.

Now the next recommendation is one that goes to this whole issue about training and development and it's really tied in to the dilemma that the schools are facing. How do we convince the employers to give incentive and (coughing) to employees to invest in their further education and training. What is it that we have to do as a society to persuade our employers on all levels and sectors of the economy to make the kinds of investments that Xerox made when it was confronted with Japanese competition. or that a Motorola and some of the other high performance work organizations have made. Right now, based on the Commission's work, very few employers really feel that pressure. And the three sectors of the economy that feel the pressure least of all are education, health care and government because they have yet to figure out what they have to be measured by anyway. So to invest in staff development, to create a new kind of staff person to do whatever it is that needs to be done is not on the agenda, it's too expensive and their not sure what they would get for it. So when we

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talk about all the employers we're not talking about just private sector but also about the public sector. If you're not going to get to the high performance work organization neither are the public or the private sector. We don't have a sense of where were going, if we don't have standards that are met. if we don't convince the employers to make that investment. now. Other countries do it by basically a tax that's devoted to paying in development. We don't know if we will be able to convince anybody in these times to do that, but we're going to try to come up with some other recommendations about how we can demonstrate (garbled)how it pays off.

And then finally we need a system of employment and training boards as they're called in the Commission's report that are established by the federal and state governments together with local leadership from the private sector from labor etc. to organize and oversee the new school board transition and these training systems. In effect what we are trying to do is to begin the process of creating a system that this country has never had before. (Gloria questioned this part) If you read some of the work like lilly julius wilson and others, it's very clear that the actions of such a system was seen first and most dramatically in our inner cities because. We've always had, we've used to have, an informal system of how school to work transition that people sort of stumbled into. You know, if their father was in a certain line of work then at least the kid might have a chance to get on there, or maybe an uncle or maybe somebody else would refer. But we have had a kind of network of job referrals and when we had manufacturing jobs that provided a decent living for people there was in effect an informal system. Well, that has broken down for many reasons that the commission describes,. so in effect we don't have a system that helps people make this transition.

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Now, what are we going to do about this. Because as i said in the beginning, it's a monumental task even to get people to read the report let alone appreciate (laughter). We are going to try to have a federal and a state strategy and i think it's very important to those of you in the alliance who see the connection between the Commission's report and real work to help us on this .There are some where between 10-15 governors who have an interest in this now I've hung around a lot of governors in my time(laughter) translate and interest in the big question because governors are notoriously interested in everything. (laughter) So moving beyond my interest in this,it sounds great good job yea I'd like the theory it sounds new part of what were trying to determine.(garbled). It's very important to us that you have a lot of governors' involved because many of these decision will require thinking through differently how we organize what little bit of a training and development system we now have so its more effective And also trying to come up with a better way of capturing our dropouts to get them into whatever system they have. So to that end we will have some meetings with the national governors association which is coming up next weekend and we'll begin a process of listing gubernatorial support. And also though,note that we'll also have to have the best that were able, a federal agenda for this report. And to that end we are looking to not only obtain whatever support we can from the Administration and Congress but also national groups, national education groups, national business groups, national labor groups any groups ,saying you were involved in, that you'd think would be interested and would like to know about. We've gotten very good reception to the report and the ideas and now what is particularly a problem is a lot of people value the analysis more than anything because it puts into place a lot of what they've been thinking, but can't or haven't ever really been able to describe what has

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gone wrong and why we have to discuss these issues. And we've gotten as I've said a very good response from a lot of the national organizations. Now one thing that I think will be very helpful to the Commission's implementation effort is for us to do the best job we can to keep members of the Alliance informed and for you as members of the Alliance, to let us know where there might be openings or opportunities for us to work together. One of the areas that we're particularly interested in trying to get going in a lot of state and regional settings is working with the business community in trying to define these job skills. We think there is some real opportunity for school systems right off the bat here to try to be either partners in that process or to help bring it about because the more that you can build those relationships and know what they are looking for, the better opportunity you'll have to make some of the arguments you'll need to keep the restructuring going and to give some impetus because you've got some outside support as opposed to just internal support to what we are trying to achieve.

(Gloria questioned this also) So that's what we are going to try to do I think it's a very a daunting task as is everything we're trying to do around this table. Ironically, and this is the, very, it's a comment certainly subject to lots of second guessing ironically I think what is going on in the Middle East may actually turn out to help us. And I say that because, the fact, the nation with high tech warfare may actually give us an opportunity to talk about how much more demanding the world is of us and have people understand it then they did before. And so I'm always someone who's looking to find a glass half full when it's half empty, but in the conversations that I've been having with the legislature in Arkansas. and with others one of the things in the last week that has

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really scored some points is for me to say, you know the kind of system they are running those weapons ,that you're looking at on the tv every night demand a level of sophistication , training skills, commitment, education that is not so far removed from what we need across the board in order to have a competitive economy. And beside the fact that I've made this speech for 5, or 6 or 10 or 50 or 100 years it feels like about., the changing economy and the demands of it for the first time I feel a lot of life going on that never went on before because it's so different to sit there and see this old laser people and computers and their noses.(end of tape)

NY - NCEE
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Notes from the San Diego conference

January 24, 1991

Hillary Clinton's Remarks on America's Choice

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