



# *Reach Higher, AMERICA*

## OVERCOMING CRISIS IN THE U.S. WORKFORCE

### PRESS RELEASE

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### **ALMOST 90 MILLION AMERICAN ADULTS ILL-EQUIPPED TO MEET 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY WORKPLACE NEEDS, NATIONAL COMMISSION ON ADULT LITERACY FINDS**

***“Reach Higher, America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce”  
shows more than half of our nation’s workforce requires more education and skills training to  
maintain America’s quality of life and keep pace with global economy***

#### ***Congressman Kennedy to introduce legislation***

June 26, 2008 - Washington D.C. – The National Commission on Adult Literacy (The Commission) released today its final report, *Reach Higher, America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce*, revealing that between 88 and 90 million adults aren’t prepared to meet the demands of today’s global economy or secure a family-sustaining wage job. Of the 88 to 90 million adults who have at least one educational barrier to economic success, 18 million Americans don’t have a high school diploma, 51 million haven’t gone to college, and 18 million aren’t proficient in their English language and literacy skills.

“Already beyond the reach of schools and lacking the adequate education and skills to obtain a good paying job, our nation’s 25 to 34 year-olds are the first generation in U.S. history to be less educated than their parents and unless we do something about it, they face the prospect of a lower standard of living,” Commission Chairman David Perdue said at the report’s release during an event on Capitol Hill.

To help address these challenges, the Commission recommends enacting a comprehensive new Adult Education and Economic Growth Act, a new domestic “Marshall Plan” that would overhaul and expand adult education and workforce skills training.

As a first step, Congressman Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) announced his intention to introduce legislation to bring about the called-for change, “The National Commission on Adult Literacy’s report should serve as a wake-up call for those who do not see a lack of basic skills, education, and job readiness as a major problem and a barrier to our national economic success,” said Congressman Kennedy. “I intend to introduce legislation that responds to the specific concerns raised by the Commission and look forward to working with other leaders on this issue to bring appropriate attention to this large and growing problem.”

As reported in *Reach Higher, America*, 24 of the 30 fastest-growing occupations will require workers who possess postsecondary education or training. About 40% of job openings over the next decade will be “middle skill” jobs – or jobs that require more than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year degree.

During this morning’s briefing, the Commission, comprised of leaders in business, education, government, and labor– including Bob Bickerton, Senior Associate Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of

Massachusetts; Morton Bahr, President Emeritus, Communications Workers of America; The Honorable Gerald Baliles, Former Governor of Virginia; Sharon Darling, President and Founder, National Center for Family Literacy; Thomas Donohue, President and CEO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Honorary Commissioner; Samuel Halperin, Founder and Senior Fellow, American Youth Policy Forum; The Honorable Ray Marshall, Former U.S. Secretary of Labor; and David Perdue, Former Chairman and CEO, Dollar General Corporation, recommended:

- Transforming current programs for adults into a comprehensive, integrated Adult Education and Workforce Skills System that can effectively serve 20 million American adults annually by the year 2020.
- Resetting the mission of this new System to attaining readiness for postsecondary and workforce training.
- Increasing public investments in the new System reaching \$20 billion by 2020 plus additional support and involvement from philanthropy and business.
- Calling for strong bold leadership from state government, especially governors, and business.

Current adult education services reach only 3 million adults annually and were designed for a different time and different challenges. Existing programs cannot meet the urgent national need with our nation's changing demographics. According to *Reach Higher, America*, 1.2 million young people drop out of high school each year; one in five children live in poverty; one in every 100 adults 16 years and older is in prison or jail; and 50% of entering immigrants haven't completed high school and don't have adequate English language skills.

"If we can make it possible for even 4 million dropouts to earn a high school diploma by 2020, the net fiscal benefit to federal, state and local governments would exceed \$25 billion annually," says Cheryl King, Commission Study Director. "The potential is there to put less stress on our healthcare system with increased health literacy, improve our children's learning through better educated parents, reduce crime and incarceration, increase voter participation, and help all adults in America reach higher."

For a complete list of Commissioners, more information on the details of the Commission's findings, recommendations, and projections, and to get the full report in PDF or hard copy, please reference [www.nationalcommissiononadulthoodliteracy.org](http://www.nationalcommissiononadulthoodliteracy.org).

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*The National Commission on Adult Literacy is an independent panel of leaders from labor, business, government, education, literacy, and philanthropy. The Commission is managed by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL), which works to increase business and philanthropic engagement in adult education and literacy, improve federal and state policy, and raise public awareness of the critical importance of the adult learning system to America's future. The Commission's work has been funded by Dollar General Corporation (lead funder at \$1 million), the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the McGraw-Hill Companies, Harold W. McGraw, Jr., the Ford Foundation, and The Joyce Foundation.*