

Commission on the American Workforce

Goal

The goals for this session are for members: (1) to learn about the [Commission on the American Workforce](#), an initiative of the [Bipartisan Policy Center](#) (BPC), as it prepares to release its final report on March 11 and (2) to talk with BPC's CEO and former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings about preparing American students for workforce success and NAEP's role in doing so.

Overview

Secretary Spellings will take 15-20 minutes to describe the guiding principles and work of the Commission. The remainder of the time is reserved for Q&A and discussion.

Background

In late 2024, the Bipartisan Policy Center launched the 20-member Commission which met through 2025 to develop a national, bipartisan strategy to strengthen the workforce, expand economic opportunity, and ensure the United States remains competitive.

BPC also convened four workgroups with more than 40 additional business leaders, educators, and experts, focusing on K-12 and postsecondary pathways, workforce, and worker supports. Each work group focused on a key question.

- **Elementary and Secondary Education**
 - How does the K-12 education system need to change to provide every American child with access to a high-quality education?
- **Postsecondary Pathways**
 - How can the American postsecondary education system better position students for success?
- **Workers and Workforce**
 - Will the U.S. have enough workers, and can they meet the needs of and succeed in the modern economy?
- **Worker Supports**

- How do we ensure workers maintain ties to the labor force through supports such as childcare, paid family leave, education benefits, and retirement security?



Commission on the American Workforce Guiding Principles

America was built on a shared belief in opportunity: the idea that every person, no matter their background, deserves a fair shot at the American dream. Today, that promise is slipping out of reach for too many.

Automation, artificial intelligence, and global competition are reshaping industries and redefining the skills required to succeed. Every American community holds untapped talent – talent that we need to compete as a nation – but trust in the institutions that enable opportunity is eroding. Families face a child care crisis. Public schools and higher education institutions are failing too many students, leaving them disengaged, indebted, and unprepared for a rapidly changing world. Employers are desperate for capable, adaptable workers, yet millions of Americans remain sidelined — unemployed, underemployed, or locked out of the skills they need to get ahead. Our workforce is aging, shrinking, and evolving too slowly to meet the demands of the world economy.

These are not future concerns. They are urgent, present-day challenges threatening our economic strength and global competitiveness. Across the country, people are yearning for a government that rises to meet the moment and forecasts the coming shifts — one that puts solutions ahead of politics and delivers meaningful change.

We have been here before. When leaders prioritize progress over partisanship, government can be a powerful force for expanding opportunity. The GI Bill, Pell Grants, and the Elementary & Secondary Education Act were all landmark legislative accomplishments forged by compromise that sparked decades of improvements for American veterans, students, workers, and families. These were national responses to urgent needs – not meant to solve every issue but rather to empower our citizens. We must act with that same resolve today.

To support the upward mobility of every American everywhere, we need nimble education and workforce systems that are responsive to a competitive future and enable active citizenship. That starts with a modern federal role that reflects our shared values and adapts to today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities – and extends directly to states, which now more than ever must step up to lead. Our federal and state systems must equip people with the skills and credentials the economy demands, while also nurturing the uniquely human qualities that cannot be automated. And we must uplift and support the families, educators, and professionals whose efforts are essential to our collective success. While education is a vital path to economic opportunity—it is more than that. It is the cornerstone of strong communities and an engaged, informed citizenry.

The Commission on the American Workforce is outlining a new vision to advance the skills, knowledge, and experiences of our people, supported by a reimagined federal role that is grounded in the following principles:

- **America needs a future-focused talent strategy.** To meet both the current moment and a future where the government can respond quickly and effectively to evolving needs, tinkering around the edges of existing systems is not enough. Talent systems must be adaptable to the evolving needs of individuals and the economy. Rigid, one-size-fits-all systems are ill-suited to a dynamic labor market and a diverse population. Policy should encourage flexible state and local approaches that reflect the varied life circumstances of students and workers—whether they are transitioning careers, upskilling while parenting, or reentering the workforce.
- **The federal government safeguards fairness and opportunity as a complement to state leadership.** The distribution of power is a hallmark of American democracy. States and localities rightly have autonomy to innovate and set their own education and workforce policies and must embrace this impetus to lead. At the same time, a strong and clear federal role ensures foundational conditions for state success and the advancement of national priorities. Chief among these priorities is upholding civil rights protections in the public education system – long considered the great equalizer – and developing a competitive workforce to expand economic opportunity.
- **The nation needs a clear and consistent federal policy and data framework.** A cohesive human capital framework should define the support students, families, and workers receive from early childhood education and care through K-12, post-secondary, and workplace opportunities. Any changes to federal structures must streamline and improve experiences for the intended beneficiaries, not stymie and complicate them, so that states can lead more successful local efforts.
- **Federal solutions must be fiscally responsible and backed by accountability structures.** Efficient allocation of taxpayer dollars is essential in a time of growing constraints, as expanding deficits strain federal, state, and local resources and the broader economy. Public expenditures in education and the workforce must come with accountability to demonstrate the return for taxpayers in the form of outcomes for students, workers, and the nation’s economy. Federal investments must also be accompanied by comprehensive and coordinated data collection and a commitment to disaggregating data to identify disproportionate impacts on groups of Americans.
- **Research powers policy by revealing what works.** Policymakers need access to reliable and transparent evidence to guide decisions, so federal investments can address underperformance and support scaling successful initiatives for students, workers, and employers. Federally funded research is a critical component of the evidence base that policymakers at all levels rely upon for this decision-making.
- **Government can’t, and shouldn’t, do it all.** The private, non-profit, philanthropic, higher education, and advocacy sectors play critical roles in advancing and sustaining successful policy. It is incumbent upon every actor to do their part in supporting individual and collective opportunity at the federal, state, and local levels.

Margaret Spellings

President & CEO

Bipartisan Policy Center

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Margaret Spellings serves as President and CEO of the Bipartisan Policy Center, bringing her knowledge and experience developed over an exceptional career in public service at both the state and national level. Most recently, she served as President and CEO of Texas 2036, a nonpartisan think tank addressing the most pressing issues facing Texans in advance of the state's bicentennial.

Spellings served as President of the 17-institution University of North Carolina System, leading the state's public university into a new period of performance, affordability, and growth with a focus on improving economic mobility, ensuring accountability, and advancing the public good. Spellings served as President of the George W. Bush Presidential Center where she oversaw programs on economic opportunity, education reform, global health, and special initiatives on women's leadership and military service. Her work included the 2014 launch of the Presidential Leadership Scholars program, a one-of-a-kind leadership program born out of the first-ever partnership of multiple Presidential Centers.

From 2005 to 2009, Spellings served as U.S. Secretary of Education, leading the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, a bipartisan initiative to provide greater accountability for the education of 50 million U.S. public school students. She also launched the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, a plan to address challenges of access, affordability, quality, and accountability in our nation's colleges and universities. Prior to serving as Secretary, Spellings served as White House Domestic Policy Advisor from 2001 to 2005 and oversaw the development of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the development of a comprehensive immigration plan to ensure long-term economic stability and to secure U.S. borders, and numerous other initiatives on health and human services, transportation, labor, justice, and housing.