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EDITED TRANSCRIPT

Thank you so much. It's really an honor to be here, and before I begin just a couple things. To Chairman Darvin Winick....Please give him a round of applause. Thanks so much for the leadership. To Mary Crovo, the Interim Executive Director, thank you so much. And Secretary Riley is here....Please stand up.

Let me just take a moment before I begin, but Secretary Riley, Secretary Spellings, Secretary Paige, and Secretary Bennett have been not just professionally, but personally unbelievably supportive of me. And I have the highest esteem and regard for them. I was lucky enough to pick Secretary Riley's brains a couple of months ago and write down about five pages...of do's and dont's', and I'm thinking if I should go back and check those notes. Am I still doing them or have I blown anything yet? But this work is bigger than all of us, and the leadership that they provided and the chance to follow in their footsteps is just an extraordinary opportunity. So I just want you to know, Secretary [Riley], how much I appreciate the extraordinary example, not just of [your] work but [of] how you treated people. And I've heard those stories of how much you valued everybody. That means a lot to me and thank you so much for that.

Then you go back to where this began over twenty years ago with now Secretary of State Clinton and now Senator Alexander – their leadership. So the journey has been on and the level of talent and caliber of commitment have been pretty remarkable. And where we are today...is of great credit to all of you. I want to thank you for the extraordinary leadership and for putting out great assessments that told the truth. And I want to talk about why that's so important.

This is obviously an extraordinary time to be working on public education in this country, and it's a time, as everyone here knows, of great, economic crisis. Unfortunately, things haven't been tougher for decades. I've been arguing it's a time of education crisis. I don't think any of us here in this room are happy or satisfied or content with what far too many of our children are receiving or not receiving around the country. And despite those challenges, it's a time of unprecedented opportunity. And yes, it's been a busy couple weeks, but it's been an extraordinary couple weeks. And we have an opportunity to do something that is unprecedented. I think it's incumbent on all of us to work as hard as we can, as smart as we can, to make the biggest difference we can in our students' lives. To have that opportunity, I'm so thankful for it.

It's a momentous time. And we have what...is the perfect storm for reform. It's sort of a confluence of a set of things happening that gives us the room and space and the opportunity to drive the agenda that I think our country so desperately needs.

You have a President and First Lady who are who they are because they had great educations. Neither came from silver spoon homes. Both came from very humble backgrounds, but because they had a great education, because they had great teachers, they're now leading the free world. It's amazing. And when the first lady, Michelle Obama, came to our office, the first thing she said to the staff was "I'm who I am because of what you guys did for me." And it was just such a humbling and interesting way to open. She just came and just said, "Thanks you." There are so many Michelle Obamas out there whom we need to make sure have those kinds of opportunities and continue to grow. The bully pulpit that they have, the Vice President gets this. His wife, Jill Biden, is still teaching today, which is amazing, in the community college now. She came by the office and was very, very supportive. You have a set of leaders who absolutely get this. You have leadership on Capitol Hill, Congress and Senate, who know we need to get a lot better. And if there's any issue we can agree upon—bipartisan, whatever different wings, as a country—we have to do better for our children. And so there's been remarkable bipartisan support for really pushing a reform agenda and for trying to get dramatically better.

Today, I think, probably much more so than 5, 10, 15 years ago—we know what works. We have extraordinary schools; we have extraordinary districts. We have great non-profits. We have charter schools. We have—even in our toughest inner city schools and urban communities and our most isolated rural communities – we have extraordinary examples of success. And I think many more, an exponential number of additional success stories than we had just a short time ago. And so our huge opportunity, our chance, is to take those things to scale and to make a huge difference. And so to top it all off, we have leadership that gets it. We've got a Congress that gets it; we've got great examples. And guess what? We have a few dollars to work with. It's a staggering opportunity. And money matters. Money is not the answer, we know that. There are places that have money that still don't have great schools. But money is a huge, huge opportunity.

I just want to take a minute and talk about the stimulus package. Again, it's a historic opportunity. Over \$100 billion and there are three priorities that the President and I have tried to set from the start. First and foremost was to protect children. Secondly, to save and create jobs. And third, to drive a reform agenda. Now I think we absolutely have a chance to do that. We have a chance to save, I don't know how many hundreds of thousands, we're getting those numbers. We're worried about as many as 600,000 teaching jobs being lost around the country: teachers, counselors and social workers. And the idea of class sizes sky rocketing is terrifying. We're at a point that we have to avert that catastrophe. Not only avert that, we have to continue to get dramatically better. So having the resources to do that is hugely important. And we want to drive, not just invest in the status quo but try to get dramatically better. And a chance to drive reforms with both transparency and what we're calling our race to the top-fund.

And I want to talk about the reforms that we want to do. We're talking about college-ready, career-ready, internationally benchmarked standards, that the idea of 50 different states doing their own thing doesn't quite make sense. And we have to continue to raise the bar. And there's an amazing confluence, whether it's the state school chiefs, whether it's business leaders, whether it's the president of the AFT, the NEA, the National Governor's Association. More and more people are starting to talk about the idea of us all doing our own thing in isolation is not fair to our children. And they're not competing down the block in the district or state; they're competing with India and China. And if we don't give them the opportunity to know what those benchmarks are and where they need to go, we're not going to get there. We need great assessments behind that so we can tell a fifth, a sixth, an eighth grader, you're on track to go to college or you're not. Here are your strengths and here are your weaknesses, and we have to help you get where you need to go.

We have to have great data systems. And in some places this works well, in some places this is absolutely impossible. And we need to be able to track those students longitudinally, all the way from the time they're 3 years old to the time they're 23, and really understand how much they're learning, how much they're gaining each year. We need to be able to track students to teachers, and we know what a huge difference great teaching makes in the lives of our students. We want to be able to track teachers back to their schools of education, see which schools of education are doing a great job of producing that next generation of talent, and where do we need to challenge schools of education, quite frankly, to do more and to help us.

We want to really talk about teacher quality, and I'll keep coming back to this. Teacher quality matters tremendously. Don't tell me that poor kids can't learn. Don't tell me that minority kids can't learn or inner city, urban, or rural. We have all lived and seen children from very, very difficult situations go on to do extraordinary things because they had great adults in their lives who cared about them. What we haven't done enough is create an incentive for that great talent to go where we need it. So how do we incent the best and brightest to go to the heart of the inner city? How do we incent them to go to rural areas? How do we incent more teachers to go into math and science and special ed. and areas where we're short? And how do we award that excellence? How do we put a spotlight on those teachers who are making a Herculean difference in our students every single year?

And then we want to think about how we turn around those schools that are at the bottom. The vast majority of our schools are getting better. But where they're not, and where we don't challenge the status quo during those handful of situations, I think we, as educators, we perpetuate poverty, and we perpetuate social failure. And we have a moral obligation to challenge that status quo and start to do it systemically. See, the idea is not to save one child or two children. How do we save an entire community? How do we save hundreds of families, at the same time to really challenge the status quo when we're not getting better and we're not improving?

We have a \$5 billion *Race to the Top* fund – part of this \$100 billion stimulus package. To really work with a small number of states who are going to lead the way in all of these efforts: great data systems, great standards, great assessments, rewarding teachers in interesting and creative and innovative ways, and really challenging the status quo in areas that aren't getting better, and rewarding excellence in those places that are making a huge difference. We want to work with a set of states that will lead that national conversation around college-ready, career-ready international benchmarked standards. And there are many states that are working in those areas that just don't have the resources. Five billion dollars is a lot of money. We can put hundreds of millions of dollars into a number--8, 10, 12, 15, whatever the number of states are – and really do something dramatically different there that can help us drive the entire national conversation. So just a huge, huge opportunity that we want to be very, very smart about. So a great, great chance, great resources, lots of activity.

But you have to sort of stop and say to what end. Why are we doing this? What is the end goal? And I think it's pretty simple: that we have to dramatically increase our graduation rates and we have to dramatically increase our college graduation rates. And again, everyone here knows those numbers. About 25 percent of our high school students drop out. There used to be an acceptable drop-out rate. You used to be able to get a job without a high school diploma. Those days are long gone – distant memory from a bygone era. Those students that drop out today are basically condemned to social failure. There's nothing out there for them.

So how do we systemically challenge that? I've met with all the governors, I've met with all the state school chiefs, and I've asked them, "Is there one state in the room that is satisfied with their graduation rate that thinks they have this problem licked?" Not one hand went up. So this is a collective national problem. Very tough but we have to be open and honest about it and challenge each other to get better. Of those that do graduate, of the 75 percent that do graduate only about two-thirds of those go to college. So those numbers drop and those that go to universities, to four year universities, only about half of those graduate. So again, at every step along that ladder we have to get dramatically better. At the end of the day, we want to be held accountable for really driving up those rates. I always talk about third grade test scores. Yes, they're important. But if all of your third graders are doing great and you're still dropping out half your kids, you're not changing lives. You might look good in the newspaper but you're not fundamentally changing the lives of children that need the most help. So really challenging that. So those have to be the most ultimate goals.

How do we get there? A couple of huge strategies. We have to dramatically expand access to college, access and opportunity. And again in the stimulus package, over \$30 billion to significantly increase Pell grants, to significantly increase Perkin loans. Something that hasn't been talked about quite enough yet is that we put \$500 million in there a year, \$2.5 billion over the next 5 years to really help states think about how they will help more students not just go to college but graduate. And we haven't created enough incentives around that so I worry a lot about students who are first generation going to college, students where English is a second language, students

coming from the minority community. Some schools do a great job of this, some states, others don't. So how do we really incent them to change their behavior? So really thinking about college access and opportunity.

Secondly, teacher quality, as I talked about earlier, matters tremendously. And how do we continue to reward, incent, recognize the best and brightest? I've said publicly often that one of the best things that Secretary Spellings did for me in my prior job in Chicago is through the teacher incentive fund grant, she put a sizeable pool of money on the table that enabled us to reward excellence in Chicago. But because there was money we were able to do something that we would have been talking about for 30 years if there wasn't money. Money, people pay attention to money. And it forces us to do things; it might stretch our comfort level a few inches outside our limits. And so how we continue to get the best and the brightest teaching in the areas where we need it most? And I worry so much about the talent mismatch. Today there are a lot of disincentives and very few incentives for the best and brightest to take on the toughest of assignments. We can put, again, significant innovation, and creativity, and significant resources on the table to dramatically change that.

So first, college access and affordability. Second, teacher quality. And third, higher standards. And this is where I think NAGB, and NAEP has fundamentally changed the conversation in this country. And I just want to give this group so much credit for staying the course for 20 years now. And if it were not for this, we would have states continuing to do their own thing willy nilly. But when you see states where 80, 85 percent, 90 percent of students are meeting their state standards, you have the NAEP scores, they're at 15, 18, 20 percent, something's wrong. And so you guys have been the truth tellers. And sometimes that's good; sometimes it's bad; sometimes it's a little ugly. But it's been the truth. And so I'm just so, so appreciative.

What I think No Child Left Behind did, for strengths, weaknesses, what No Child Left Behind did is it put the spotlight on the achievement gap, and it sort of forever swept out from underneath the rug the differences between the minority population and white students and really talked about disaggregating data. What I think NAEP has done is expose the state-by-state differential, the state-by-state gap and that it doesn't make sense and that it's not fair for children. And I would go so far to say that we've lied to children and families historically. And that I really think that after twenty years, we're really at a crossroads. Are we going to continue to deceive, are we going to continue to take the easy road or are we going to start to tell kids the truth?

And I just want to close with a story, just one anecdote, and I'm sure we all have them but why this is so personal to me. I took a year off from college between my junior and senior year to work full-time at my mother's inner city tutoring program. Most of my friends were becoming investment bankers, and I didn't quite think that was for me and I needed to figure out what road I wanted to take. I was working with a lot of students in her program. But one particular young man came up to me who was the star of a local high school basketball team. Great kid, junior in high school whose team went on to win

the state championship, and he wanted me to help tutor him to get him prepared to take the ACT, to do well. So I said no problem at all.

We sat down, and he had, you know, gone to school every day and was actually on the B honor roll, had done well, and I said let's get to work. And I'll never forget the first day we started to work: he was functionally illiterate. He could not put together two sentences. And it was absolutely heart-breaking. I was thinking I was getting him ready for Illinois or Ohio State or the Big Ten and that just wasn't. My five-year-old now reads better than what this sixteen-year-old did. And what killed me is this is a young man who had done everything right. He had played by all the rules. He had stayed in his school. It was a horribly violent neighborhood. He had stayed away from the gangs, stayed out of the violence, done everything we told him. But we had never told him the truth, and the fact that we had lied to him basically condemned him to academic failure. And that one story, I think, is a microcosm of what we've been doing around the country. And I think we have to have a mutual commitment and a mutual courage and reinforce each other enough so that those days have to stop.

The days in which we tell children – when you tell a child they're meeting a state standard, when you tell a parent that – the only, the only response that makes sense is they think they're ok. They think they're on the path to something positive. When you say they're meeting a standard, they think they're in good shape when in fact far too many places around the country when you tell them they're meeting a standard, they are barely prepared, if prepared, to graduate from high school and absolutely unprepared to go to college and graduate. And so those days have to stop. And so what this leadership, what the leadership of NAEP has done and the NAGB board is to force a conversation and bring us to a crossroads where again there's a confluence of folks. Unions, business leaders, Department of Education, states, school districts, governors, who are saying we have to do something fundamentally different. And we would not be at that point as a country having this conversation were it not for NAEP.

So I think we have to continue to get better. We have to continue to honestly admit the facts about education in America. We have to continue to drive this conversation. And we have to show the inequities and talk about those huge challenges we face. The path to real reform begins with facing the truth and continuing to face that truth and keep facing it and finding the answers until every single classroom in this country, every single classroom, has a great teacher and every child has an education that prepares him for success in college, in the world of work, and in life. And I thank you for generating that conversation over the past twenty years and bringing us to a point where we have a chance to make a historic breakthrough.

Thank you so much for having me.