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TESTIMONY

by
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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for inviting me to meet with you today. I should like to comment briefly on one simple yet essential point. It's my deep conviction that education and the economy are inextricably interlocked and if we do not begin to invest more fully in our *human* resources—most especially in our youngest children—both the economic and civic vitality of the nation will decline. As a key, long-term strategy for economic renewal, we simply must learn to focus on the problems of children that precede schooling and even precede birth itself. This fundamental fact—the absolute linkage that exists between the quality of our work force and the well being of our children—has been vigorously affirmed by every prestigious business organization in the country, from the Business Roundtable to the Council on Economic Development. It's the nation's corporate leaders who are urging us to invest more fully in our children.

I. THE CRISIS OF CHILDREN

For nearly a decade now, school renewal has been high on the national agenda. Graduation requirements have been tightened. Teaching standards have been raised, and student assessment has become a major priority for education. In recent years, a host of bold innovations—"teacher empowerment," "school-based management," "parental choice," "new schools for a new century"—have been proposed in quick succession. Most consequentially, perhaps, governors and corporate leaders have become vigorous advocates of school reform.

But in our search for excellence, *children* have somehow been forgotten. In decisions made every day we are placing them at the very bottom of the agenda with grave consequences for the future of the nation. It's simply intolerable that millions of children in this country are physically and emotionally disadvantaged in ways that restrict their capacity to learn, especially when we know what a terrible price will be paid for such neglect, not just educationally, but economically, as well.

II. THE READY-TO-LEARN GOAL

In his second State of the Union Message, President George Bush, in an unprecedented move, announced six ambitious goals for all the nation's schools—mandates quickly adopted by governors from all fifty states. By the year 2000, he declared, every child in America should start school ready to learn, school dropouts should decline, and our education system should become world class in math and science. All schools, the President declared, should be disciplined and drug free, students should be tested in core subjects, and within a decade America should achieve literacy for all adults.

Every one of these goals is consequential. Each should be vigorously pursued. But it is the President's *first* goal that stands out far above all the rest. To say that, within a decade, every single child in America will come to school "ready to learn" is a bold, hugely optimistic proposition. Still, dreams can be fulfilled only when they've been defined, and if we as a nation can ensure that every child is well prepared for school, it seems reasonable to expect that all the other education goals will, in large measure, be achieved.

To revitalize the economy, it is *children*— not just the *schools*— who must be the focus of our concern. But we have a very long way to go. Today, far too many of the nation's children come to school without a good beginning. They're shockingly restricted in their potential for learning even before their first formal lesson, "destined for school failure because of poverty, neglect, sickness, handicapping conditions, and lack of adult protection and nurturance," according to educational researcher Harold Hodgkinson.

In another sobering assessment, the Southern Regional Education Board, after evaluating the school readiness of children in that part of the country, concluded: "Today not all children are ready to begin the first grade. Too many never catch up. Unless additional steps are taken, possibly one-third of the approximately one million children projected to be entering the first grade will not be ready to do so in the year 2000."

In the summer of 1991, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching surveyed more than seven thousand kindergarten teachers to learn about the readiness of children. And frankly, I found it deeply troubling, ominous really, that 35 percent of the nation's children— more than one in three— are *not* ready for school, according to the teachers. Even more disturbing, when we asked how the readiness of last year's students compared to those who enrolled five years ago, 42 percent of the respondents said the situation is getting *worse*; only 25 percent said it's better. When asked to identify the areas in which students are most deficient, teachers overwhelmingly cited "lack of proficiency in language." In response to the question "What would most improve the school readiness of children?" the majority said, "parent education."

How can this nation live comfortably with the fact that so many of our children experience such crippling deprivations? How can we ignore the conditions that place them at such disadvantage and make their prospect for successful schooling doubtful? Surely, America has within its power the means to make the earliest years, for all children, enriching and productive. But do we have the will?

III. THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION REPORT

In a recent Carnegie Foundation report we propose a National School Readiness Campaign. It is our position that having defined a goal, we also need to *act*. It is, after all, unethical to make a promise to children and then walk away. Therefore, in response to this challenge we propose a comprehensive plan with seven essential steps. These include:

- A Healthy Start
- Empowered Parents
- Quality Preschool
- Responsive Workplace
- Television as Teacher
- Neighborhoods for Learning
- Connections Across the Generations

I'm attaching a summary of the recommendations we include within this framework. But whose responsibility is it to assure the school readiness of children? Who should take the lead in seeing to it that *every* child receives not just food, protection, and love, but also the guidance and the richness of experience they need to succeed in school and proceed, with confidence, in life?

We begin, where we must, with parents. When all is said and done, mothers and fathers are the first and most essential teachers. It's in the home that children must be clothed, fed, and loved. This is the place where life's most basic lessons will be learned. No outside program—no surrogate or substitute arrangement—however well planned or well intended, can replace a supportive family that gives the child bonding and a rich environment for learning.

Clearly, when it comes to helping children, a balance must be struck. No one imagines returning to the earlier extended family, or creating a romanticized version of the isolated, self-reliant family. Nor is it realistic to assume that a flurry of new governmental initiatives can do it all. And surely it's unrealistic to expect the nation's schools, acting on their own, to bring communities together or become a surrogate for the family.

Rather, what's needed now is a more integrated effort to bring together all the resources on behalf of children. The time has come to move beyond the tired old "family versus government" debate. It's time to create a community-wide network of support, a special blend of public and private services— a new kind of extended family that is, at once, both reliable and caring. But for this to be accomplished, we must all move beyond ourselves, recognizing that "we are in truth members of one another," as Walter Lippmann said.

In the Carnegie Report, we argue then that school readiness is *everybody's* business. It must involve a *national* campaign. However, federal leadership is crucial. Specifically, we urge that the President and Congress spell out precisely the role the federal government will play during the decade of the nineties. How can Americans be asked to support a ready-to-learn effort without leadership at the top? Certainly, the federal budget is tight and other priorities must be met. Still, the first education goal is, perhaps more than any other, inextricably linked to the nation's civic, social, and economic well-being.

IV. THE FEDERAL ROLE

Decisive action is required now and what we propose is a four point federal response.

Head Start as an Entitlement

First, if America is really serious about school readiness, quality child care must become a priority. And the place to begin is Head Start. Since 1965, this federally-supported program has provided preschool education primarily to disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds. Today, about two thousand Head Start centers serve 548,000 children. The goal is to build self-esteem, provide good nutrition, and give to every youngster the learning experiences needed to succeed in school. Each center designs its own program and involves parents, bringing families together. "The whole

point of Head Start," says Cornell University's Urie Bronfenbrenner, "is to build a sense of community."

Head Start works. Head Start children in Philadelphia were, according to a nine-year study, less frequently retained, had better attendance rates in school, and were less likely to have serious school problems. A California study found that Head Start participants scored higher on tests for verbal achievements, perceptual reasoning, and social competence. The Orangeburg, South Carolina, school district established an all-day preschool for disadvantaged four-year-olds. Test scores in the district increased as much as 200 percent in language arts, math, and reading. School officials are convinced that early intervention made the difference. Indeed, a summary of hundreds of Head Start studies concluded that children enrolled in the program make significant gains in test scores and have better health.

The widely-reported research on Head Start by David Weikart at The High/Scope Foundation's Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, concluded that every dollar invested in quality preschool education saves \$4.75 in reduced welfare benefits, reduced criminal costs, and increased earnings and tax revenues. Clearly, Head Start is an investment that pays off, educationally *and* financially, as well. The Committee for Economic Development states the case for early intervention: "Business people know that it is less expensive to prevent failure than to try to correct it later. Early intervention for poor children from conception to age five has been shown to be a highly cost-effective strategy for reducing later expenditures on a wide variety of health, developmental, and educational problems that often interfere with learning."

What's so distressing is that a quarter-century after Head Start was authorized by Congress, two-thirds of the eligible children are still not served. This is inexcusable. How can we justify denying access to a program that brings such benefit to children? It is, in a sense, like withholding a vaccine that would protect them from a dreaded disease. It is, in my opinion, Mr. Chairman, an immoral, obscene, waste of human talent that is surely a precursor to economic decline and civic sickness.

Again, if America is really serious about school readiness— if the first education goal is to be something more than an empty slogan— Head Start must be fully funded, surely by 1995. The program should be designated an "entitlement" to ensure, at last, that *all* eligible children will be served. According to our best estimates, this would increase Head Start's appropriation from \$2 billion to \$8.3 billion, an investment that would pay off handsomely in the long run. Why is it that we have entitlements for older people in the last years of life but somehow can't bring ourselves to give entitlements to our most vulnerable children whose lives are just beginning? The answer is, of course, that their cries can more easily be ignored.

Full Funding of WIC

In addition to Head Start, another crisis— poor nutrition among at-risk mothers and babies— also requires immediate attention. The reality is that if a pregnant woman does not eat well her nutritional deficiency can interfere with the fetus's development, increasing the possibility that the baby will be malformed or mentally or physically retarded. Yet, it's a disturbing fact that in the United States today, literally hundreds of thousands of expectant mothers are undernourished. It's distressing that so many babies do not have the nutritional benefits of breast-feeding and that millions of preschool children go day after day without the nutrition needed for good health and effective learning.

How should we proceed?

The federal nutrition program called WIC was signed into law in 1972 precisely to meet the health needs of poor women, infants, and children. Milk, cheese, eggs, and cereal are distributed monthly through eight thousand service centers across the country. Currently, nearly five million low-income women and their children are being served.

Again WIC is effective. The program is successful in bringing mothers into prenatal care early, in reducing infant mortality, in raising birthweights, and later, in improving the educational performance of children. WIC is a solid economic investment, too. A recent study found that every dollar invested in the program saves four dollars or more in medical costs later on.

Yet, despite WIC's record of success, only 55 percent of those eligible are served, leaving millions of mothers and babies undernourished. How can we live comfortably with the fact that millions fail to receive even the minimum food supplements required for good health and successful learning? Surely the time has come to guarantee that all of the nation's mothers and babies will be well fed. We propose, therefore, that WIC be fully funded—and appropriations increased from \$2.4 to \$4.5 billion. This is a moral imperative. As Winston Churchill once said, "There is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies."

Further, the educational component of WIC should be strengthened. According to current regulations, mothers who register for the program are eligible to receive not just good nutrition, but health instruction, too. The problem is that most WIC offices are overburdened and the teaching component is often cursory at best. Still, this is a moment to be seized—an occasion when at-risk mothers can receive essential information regarding good health and child development. We propose, therefore, that every WIC office sponsor a "parent seminar series," one that covers all dimensions of school readiness, from physical well-being to moral development. The WIC appropriation should be further increased to accommodate this program.

National Network of Ready-to-Learn Clinics

Preschool education is essential. Good nutrition for poor mothers and babies is essential. A third key factor in improving the health and learning prospects of children is ensuring that all expectant mothers have quality prenatal care. The period *before* birth is critical. A healthy fetus, by the sixth month, has already developed ten billion neurons, nearly the full number needed for total brain development, and if all children are to reach full potentiality—if every one is to be ready to learn—pregnant mothers simply must receive good health care, beginning in the first trimester.

Infants whose mothers do *not* receive adequate care during pregnancy are more likely to be physically at-risk, intellectually deficient, and restricted in their capacity to learn. Yet, one-quarter of all pregnant women in America receive belated prenatal care, or none at all. Further, the percentage of women in this country getting substandard care has been growing. Author Lisbeth B. Schorr in commenting on this crisis observed: "The United States is virtually alone among nations—and absolutely alone among Western industrial democracies—in its grudging approach to the provision of maternity care. Government in the United States has . . . never assumed responsibility for assuring that every pregnant woman gets the health care she needs to maximize the chances of a healthy birth."

The most formidable barrier is cost. Medicaid, authorized by Congress in 1965, provides health coverage for more than twenty-seven million people. Yet nine million women of reproductive age have no health insurance of any kind. In addition, even though Medicaid coverage has been expanded to include young children, there are still 1.5 million youngsters under the age of six not covered by this or any other program. Universal health insurance is essential.

But even with full coverage, millions of women and children still would remain unserved because of a chaotic *delivery* system, one that makes access to health care so shockingly uneven. In rural areas where 20 percent of Americans reside, hundreds of health clinics have closed in recent years. For many, prenatal care is miles away, or nonexistent. In Georgia, for example, ninety-two counties have no obstetrician, forty counties have no hospital, and thirteen counties have no family physician. "In many rural communities of Michigan, mothers may have to travel a hundred miles or more to get prenatal care," according to Veda Sharp of the Michigan Department of Health. Even in large cities, with sprawling medical centers and well-trained physicians, health care in the poorest neighborhoods has actually decreased in the past twenty years, leaving mothers and children with no place to go. This is inexcusable.

Basic health care for mothers and their babies must become a top national priority, a position vigorously being promoted by the National Governors' Association. In their 1990 report, the governors declared: "If steps are not taken now to build a real health-care system, too many children will continue to come to school unprepared to learn, too many adolescents will continue to face serious but preventable health problems." Therefore, we call for a national network of "one-stop shopping" health and education centers to serve all low-income mothers and children. These centers— which could be called Ready-to-Learn Clinics— would integrate health, education, and social services, building on the current system, making it more equitable and more accessible.

Creating a *national* network of Ready-to-Learn Clinics— one that builds on and extends the current, fragmented "system"— would, at first blush, appear to be a hugely complicated task. But this is something America can and must do. Let's not forget that we created, in this country, a network of public schools— eighty-three thousand of them— from Bangor, Maine, to Honolulu, Hawaii, serving forty-one million children. This was accomplished precisely because the nation's citizens shared a conviction that educating every child was far too important to be left to chance.

In the Carnegie Report we say that the time has come to create a common *health* network, modeled after the common *school*. Today, no one would tolerate a fragmented education system in which some children went off to school each morning, while others stayed home with no place to go. How, then, can we tolerate, year after year, a broken system of health care that denies access to millions of our children? After all, health is a *prerequisite* to education. Julius Richmond, the former U.S. surgeon general, states that the national movement toward school-based health care is an idea, "whose time seems to have arrived. The idea is to provide services that are comprehensive."

A Ready-to-Learn Clinic would offer prenatal and maternal care for mothers, as well as health service to children up to age five, including regular checkups, routine screening for hearing and vision problems, and testing for lead poisoning, which the American Academy of Pediatrics recently labeled an "epidemic." Protecting every child against childhood diseases through inoculation is crucial, too. Indeed, it's distressing that 20 percent of our preschool children have not been vaccinated against polio, that the

incidence of whooping cough is three times higher than it was a decade ago, and that the reported cases of measles have skyrocketed to more than twenty-six thousand in 1990. Surely, this nation can accomplish something as simple, and as essential, as protecting every child against contagious illness.

A Ready-to-Learn Clinic would build on existing services—especially county health clinics. It would serve as an education referral center and establish a collaborative relationship with WIC. Above all, the proposed clinic would work closely with Head Start and the schools, even perhaps locating the project at or near a school since health and education are so closely tied. Further, schools are found in every neighborhood. They have wide public trust and to have a health service close by would benefit both institutions, and the clients, too. Finally, an interagency advisory body might be formed to ensure that the various health and education institutions in the county work together toward common goals.

States should take the lead in creating Ready-to-Learn Clinics, just as they have led the way in building a network of public schools. To begin the process, we propose that a county-by-county Maternal and Child Health Master Plan be prepared by every state. Such a plan would include: first, an inventory of the number of low-income mothers and children in each county; second, a description of existing services; third, an analysis of what would be needed to fill the gaps; and fourth, a plan to coordinate in every county all children's health, education, and social service programs.

In communities where health clinics already exist, services might be expanded. In others, new clinics would be needed. Putting all of the state plans together would lay the foundation for a *national* network of Ready-to-Learn Clinics.

How might the Ready-to-Learn Clinics be financed? State funding will be required. But before more money is appropriated, the duplication and overlap of existing services should be eliminated. In one state, for example, we found that thirty-seven different state agencies are administering one hundred-sixty separate programs for children and youth in seven different departments. Coordinating existing health programs would, we're convinced, save literally millions of dollars, redirecting resources away from paperwork to people.

Still, more money will be needed. And the federal government should help. Currently, states receive \$530 million from the federally-funded Community and Migrant Health Centers program that supports two thousand centers, serving six million needy clients from coast to coast. Expanding this program would make it possible for Community and Migrant Health Centers to establish satellite Ready-to-Learn Clinics in unserved areas in their regions.

Another federal project—the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant program—also gives about \$500 million annually to states to help fund health services on a discretionary basis. To ensure that Ready-to-Learn Clinics are located in *every* community where needed, appropriations for this program also should be increased. However, as an important prerequisite, we recommend that states receive additional funds for these two programs *only* after the need has been clearly documented, *and* after a plan to coordinate existing resources has been developed—based on the state's county-by-county inventory.

Finding well-qualified health professionals to staff Ready-to-Learn Clinics will be a challenge. But here again, Washington can help. Since 1970, the National Health Service Corps has given scholarships and loans to about thirteen thousand

students— doctors, nurses, and other professionals— who agree to work in underserved communities, after training. Recently, due to budget cuts, participation has dramatically declined. Given the urgent need, we strongly recommend that the National Health Service Corps be expanded. We also urge that priority be given to the recruitment of nurse practitioners and professional midwives, skilled health workers who can provide quality maternal and child care.

The conclusion is clear: The first and most essential step in a national Ready-to-Learn Campaign is a healthy start. For this to be accomplished, good education, good nutrition, and access to basic health care for all mothers and babies are required. "We absolutely cannot afford to wait until the school bell rings to attend to our children's health," is the way National Health/Education Consortium put it. "We need to start thinking of immunizations, well-child care and health screenings, proper food, and prevention of health problems as being just as important to education as books and pencils and chalkboards and teachers. We need to act swiftly— and we need to act boldly. There is no time to waste."

Television as Teacher

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say a word about television and the school readiness of children. Next to parents, television is, perhaps, a child's most influential teacher. The amount of time children spend watching TV is awesome. A six-month-old infant, peering through the rails of a crib, views television, on average, about one and a half hours every day. A five-year-old watches an hour a day more. By the time the child sets foot in a kindergarten classroom, he or she is likely to have spent more than *four thousand hours* in front of this electronic teacher. All told, the nation's nineteen million preschoolers watch about fourteen *billion* hours of TV every year.

We therefore recommend in our report that parents guide the viewing habits of their children. We urge, as well, that commercial networks air at least one hour of children's programming every week, with school-readiness messages interspersed. Third, we propose that a Ready-to-Learn Cable Channel be created and, finally, that a national conference be convened to explore how television can, during the decade of the nineties, contribute to the educational enrichment of preschool children.

The Children's Television Act, landmark legislation passed by Congress in 1990, signals hope. As a condition of license renewal, the new law directs stations to provide programming specifically designed to serve children, limits the amount of advertising time, establishes procedures for public accountability, and relies heavily on citizens to monitor local stations to assure compliance. Action for Children's Television has prepared a video— "It's the Law!"— to encourage just such community involvement. PBS commentator Bill Moyers declared: "If the Children's Television Act does not make a difference, we will have lost perhaps the last opportunity to save children from mindless mass communications. . . ."

In the Carnegie Report a National Endowment for Children's Educational Television also has been created. We urge that Congress increase appropriations to the Endowment to \$20 million to fund high-quality programs, especially for preschoolers.

With a dash of optimism, I can see the nineties as a decade when television's promise to our children finally is fulfilled. What is needed now, I'm convinced, is a more coherent policy established not just by government but by concerned citizens and committed leaders in the industry itself. Specifically, we recommend in the Carnegie

Report that a National Ready-to-Learn Television Conference be convened. The proposed forum should identify issues vital to children's programming and develop strategies to improve its quality. The promise is to enrich the lives of *all* children, to give them an exciting new window to the world, with words and sounds and pictures that dramatically enhance their school readiness. Newton Minow recently said: "A new generation now has the chance to put the vision back into television, to travel from the wasteland to the promised land, and to make television a saving radiance in the sky." We could not agree more.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, I conclude where I began. The educational and economic future of the nation are inseparably connected. It is simply impossible for America to be competitive in the workplace without well-trained young people who have both the general knowledge and technical competence to be creative and productive. If we want a vital workforce for the year 2000 and beyond, this nation must begin to focus on the needs of little children, since deficiencies in the first years of life will be difficult if not impossible to compensate fully for later on. And the ready-to-learn mandate presents America with an urgent call to action.

In our hard-edged, competitive world, such a campaign on behalf of children may seem quixotic. Not only have cultural connections faded, but the very notion of community seems strikingly inapplicable to contemporary life. Absent larger loyalties in this country, we are settling for little loyalties that diminish our national unity, and widen the social separations. There's a growing feeling that the social pathologies we now confront are just too deep and that when it comes to our most glaring problems, especially those affecting children, little, if anything, can be done.

But good will runs deep in America. Throughout our history, the citizens of this country have shown their capacity to come together and organize energetically and to great effect when inspired. We have, in the past, dedicated ourselves to great causes, responding in times of crisis with vigor and an outpouring of concern. I remain confident that with the right blend of commitment and imagination America can come together once again. But again, we need leadership at the top. And if America cannot join in a ready-to-learn crusade— if we cannot commit ourselves to help children— what will bring us all together?

At the historic education summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, President Bush declared: "Let no child in America be forgotten or forsaken." This, I am convinced is not just an economic and educational imperative, it's a *moral* imperative, as well.