

## **Joint Statement from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Education Association**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Education Association urge states and the Federal Government to give a fair trial to the education recommendations made in the landmark 2006 report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. Each of us does not necessarily agree with every detail of the recommendations in the report\*, but the case it makes for revolutionary change is compelling and urgent, and the proposals it offers deserve serious attention.

The National Center on Education and the Economy, sponsor of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, is assembling a consortium of states interested in implementing key aspects of *Tough Choices*. Six states—Arizona, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Utah—have already committed to using the framework provided in *Tough Choices* as the basis of their own reform plans. These states intend to demonstrate that we can leapfrog from where we are to complete, powerful instructional systems that can vault the U.S. to the top of international rankings in a relatively short time.

The critically important economic recovery legislation passed by the Congress and signed by the President includes \$5 billion for a Race to the Top program in the US Department of Education. Consortia of states will compete for funds to design and implement bold new approaches to the development of internationally benchmarked, common standards, and the assessments needed to assure that those standards are being met.

While other ideas for transforming state public education systems should also be developed and tried out, all of us will urge our members to look hard at the *Tough Choices* proposals and to work with elected and appointed state officials to frame their own version of a plan based on the agreed upon *Tough Choices* principles. We are prepared to help in that effort in any way we can. We encourage states to consider joining the five states now part of the *Tough Choices* consortium and to work together to compete for the Department of Education's Race to the Top grants.

There will be some who will be surprised that the nation's leading business organizations and the nation's largest teachers union have agreed on a set of proposals for education reform that many have described as radical. All of us view this as a critical moment. *Tough Choices* calls for rethinking education in the U.S. so that the country can have a much higher quality education system while spending its education dollars more wisely. The touchstone of the report is its insistence that we can no longer treat our teachers as we have in the past. Every country at the top of the international education rankings is recruiting its teachers from the top third of their college graduates. To reach that goal—and we can do no less if we want top performance—it is imperative to create a true profession of teaching in the United States, on a par with architecture, the law, medicine and engineering, with comparable compensation, status and working conditions. That will require important changes in the rules under which teachers work. That is a revolutionary message—but one to which all of us can subscribe.

Each of our groups will continue to advocate for our policies and work with other state-based transformation efforts. But we have committed ourselves to support the *Tough Choices* agenda and to continue to talk with one another about the future of public education in the United States and the concrete steps we can take to make sure that the United States once again has the best educated workforce in the world.

*\*For example, the NEA has a particular objection to the proposed elimination of defined benefit pension plans*