

I have ever seen them—literally radiating happiness. My own view and theirs is that this country has seized its last chance. I am fond of quoting Winston Churchill to the effect that “America always does the right thing—after it has exhausted all the alternatives.” This election, more than anything else in my experience, proves his point.

The subject we were discussing was what you and Bill should do now about education, training, and labor market policy. Following that meeting, I chaired another in Washington on the same topic. Those present at the second meeting included Tim Barnicle, Dave Barram, Mike Cohen, David Hombeck, Hillary Pennington, Andy Plattner, Lauren Resnick, Betsy Brown Ruzzi, Bob Schwartz, Mike Smith, and Bill Spring. Shirley Malcom, Ray Marshall, and Susan McGuire were also invited. Though these three were not able to be present at last week’s meeting, they have all contributed by telephone to the ideas that follow. Ira Magaziner was also invited to this meeting.

Our purpose in these meetings was to propose concrete actions that the Clinton administration could take—between now and the inauguration, in the first 100 days and beyond. The result, from where I sit, was really exciting. We took a very large leap forward in terms of how to advance the agenda on which you and we have all been working—a practical plan for putting all the major components of the system in place within four years, by the time Bill has to run again.

I take personal responsibility for what follows. Though I believe everyone involved in the planning effort is in broad agreement, they may not all agree on the details. You should also be aware that, although the plan comes from a group closely associated with the National Center of Education and the Economy, there was no practical way to poll our whole Board on this plan in the time available. It represents, then, not a proposal from our Center, but the best thinking of the Group I have named.

We think the great opportunity you have is to remold the entire American System for human resources development, almost all of the current components of which were put in place before World War II. The danger is that each of the ideas that Bill advanced in the campaign in the area of education and training could be translated individually in the ordinary course of governing into a legislative proposal and enacted as a program. This is the plan of least resistance. But it will lead to these programs being grafted onto the present system, not to a new system, and the opportunity will have been lost. If this sense of time and place is correct, it is essential that the administration’s efforts be guided by a consistent vision of what it were to accomplish in the field of human resource development, with respect both to choice of key officials and the program.

What follows comes in three places:

First, a vision of the kind of national—not federal—human resources development system the nation could have. This is interwoven with a new approach to governing that should inform that vision. What is essential is that we create a seamless web of opportunities, to develop one’s skills that literally extends from cradle to grave and is the same system for everyone—young and old, poor and rich, worker and full-time student. It needs to be a system driven by client needs (not agency regulations or the needs of the organization providing the services), guided by clear standards that define the stages of the system for the people who progress through it, and regulated on the basis of outcomes that providers produce for their clients, not inputs into the system.

Second, a proposed legislative agenda you can use to implement this vision. We propose

four high priority packages that will enable you to move quickly on the campaign promises:

1. The first would use your proposal for an apprenticeship system as the keystone of a strategy for putting a whole new postsecondary training system in place. That system would incorporate your proposal for reforming postsecondary education finance. It contains what we think is a powerful idea for rolling out and scaling up the whole new human resources system nationwide over the next four years, using the (renamed) apprenticeship ideas as the entering wedge.

2. The second would combine initiatives on dislocated workers, a rebuilt employment service and a new system of labor market boards to offer the Clinton administration’s employment security program, built on the best practices anywhere in the world. This is the backbone of a system for assuring adult workers in our society that they need never again watch with dismay as their jobs disappear and their chances of ever getting a good job again go with them.

3. The third would concentrate on the overwhelming problems of our inner cities, combining elements of the first and second packages into a special program to greatly raise the work-related skills of the people trapped in the core of our great cities.

4. The fourth would enable you to take advantage of legislation on which Congress has already been working to advance the elementary and secondary reform agenda.

The other major proposal we offer has to do with government organization for the human resources agenda. While we share your reservations about the hazards involved in bringing reorganization proposals to the Congress, we believe that the one we have come up with minimizes those drawbacks while creating an opportunity for the new administration to move like lightning to implement its human resources development proposals. We hope you can consider the merits of this idea quickly, because, if you decide to go with it or something like it, it will greatly affect the nature of the offers you make to prospective cabinet members.

THE VISION

We take the proposals Bill put before the country in the campaign to be utterly consistent with the ideas advanced in America’s Choice, the school restructuring agenda first stated in *A Nation Prepared*, and later incorporated in the work of the National Alliance for Restructuring Education, and the elaboration of this view that Ray and I tried to capture in our book, *Thinking for a Living*. Taken together, we think these ideas constitute a consistent vision for a new human resources development system for the United States. I have tried to capture the essence of that vision below.

AN ECONOMIC STRATEGY BASED ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The economy’s strength is derived from a whole population as skilled as any in the world, working in workplaces organized to take maximum advantage of the skills those people have to offer.

A seamless system of unending skill development that begins in the home with the very young and continues through school, postsecondary education and the workplace.

THE SCHOOLS

Clear national standards of performance in general education (the knowledge and skills that everyone is expected to hold in common) are set to the level of the best achieving nations in the world for students of 16, and public schools are expected to bring all but the most severely handicapped up to that standard. Students get a certificate when they meet this standard, allowing

them to go on to the next stage of their education. Though the standards are set to international benchmarks, they are distinctly American, reflecting our needs and values.

We have a national system of education in which curriculum, pedagogy, examinations, and teacher education and licensure systems are all linked to the national standards, but which provides for substantial variance among states, districts, and schools on these matters. This new system of linked standards, curriculum, and pedagogy will abandon the American tracking system, combing high academic standards with the ability to apply what one knows to real world problems, and qualifying all students to a lifetime of learning in the postsecondary system and at work.

We have a system that rewards students who meet the national standards with further education and good jobs, providing them a strong incentive to work hard in school.

Our public school systems are reorganized to free up school professionals to make the key decisions about how to use all the available resources to bring students up to the standards. Most of the federal, state, district, and union rules and regulations that now restrict school professional ability to make these decisions are swept away, though strong measures are in place to make sure that vulnerable populations get the help they need. School professionals are paid at a level comparable to that of other professionals, but they are expected to put in a full year, to spend whatever time it takes to do the job and to be fully accountable for the results of their work. The federal, state, and local governments provide the time, staff development resources, technology, and other support needed for them to do the job. Nothing less than a wholly restructured school system can possibly bring all of our students up to the standards only a few have been expected to meet up to now.

There is a real—aggressive—program of public choice in our schools, rather than the flaccid version that is widespread now.

All students are guaranteed that they will have a fair shot at reaching the standards: that is, that whether they make it or not depends on the effort they are willing to make, and nothing else. “School delivery standards” are in place to make sure this happens. These standards have the same status in the system as the new student performance standards, assuring that the quality of instruction is high everywhere, but they are fashioned so as not to constitute a new bureaucratic nightmare.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND WORK SKILLS

All students who meet the new national standards for general education are entitled to the equivalent of three more years of free additional education. We would have the federal and state governments match funds to guarantee one free year of college education to everyone who meets the new national standards for general education. So a student who meets the standard at 16 would be entitled to two free years of high school and one of college. Loans, which can be forgiven for public service, are available for additional education beyond that. National standards for sub-baccalaureate college-level professional and technical degrees and certificates will be established with the participation of employers, labor, and higher education. These programs will include both academic study and structured on-the-job training. Eighty percent or more of American high school graduates will be expected to get some form of college degree, though most of them less than a baccalaureate. These new professional and technical certificates and degrees typically are won within