

**NEA-National Business Groups Urge 'Fair Trial' for
'Tough Choices' Education Reform Initiative**
Leaders Say Proposal Deserves Serious Attention

Washington, D.C.—Two of the nation's leading business groups today joined with the nation's largest education employees union to announce they "urge states and the federal government to give a fair trial" to the education reform framework presented in "*Tough Choices or Tough Times*," the report of the *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce* (www.skillscommission.org). The announcement brings the National Education Association together with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.

"The case '*Tough Choices*' makes for revolutionary change is compelling and urgent," the NEA and the business groups stated. Three states (Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Utah) committed to implement the reform agenda late last year and three more (Arizona, Delaware and New Mexico) also signed on today.

"There will be some who will be surprised business groups and a union representing teachers and other education employees are together but these are not normal times. All of us view this as a critical moment. None of us can afford to participate in the educational reform debate holding on to all of the positions we have held sacred for years, because that is the route to stasis, and the country cannot afford stasis," says Marc Tucker, Co-Chair of Implementation, *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*.

Tucker notes that "*Tough Choices*" is a roadmap for change that multiple sides can closely examine. He says, "It includes the use of choice and market forces, often advocated by the business community, but, at the same time, it calls for greatly increased resources for teacher compensation, disadvantaged children and early childhood education, goals embraced by the NEA for a long time. It calls for tough accountability, but it also calls for more help for families in economic stress."

"NEA believes it is important to implement state based initiatives to transform education. Elements of '*Tough Choices*' tackle issues we're working hard to address, not only with this unique partnership, but through various projects. We will support any NEA state affiliate that decides to work with its state leaders to develop a plan to implement '*Tough Choices*.' We welcome the involvement of the partners in the business community," says John Wilson, executive director, NEA.

"We urge our members to look hard at the '*Tough Choices*' proposals and strongly consider working with the state officials to frame their own version of a plan based on these principles," says John Engler, President and CEO, National Association of Manufacturers, and the former governor of Michigan and a Commission member. "The touchstone of the report is its insistence that we must recruit teachers from the top third of college graduates as other leading countries do right now."

"This plan deserves a hard look from all sides. We'll 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 country once again has the best educated workforce in the world," says Arthur Rothkopf, Senior Vice-President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce who is responsible for education and

workforce matters.

The recently approved economic recovery legislation includes a Race to the Top program, to be administered by the U.S. Department of Education, which would provide funds to states interested in joining together to design and implement bold new approaches to the development of high, common standards, and the assessments needed to assure that those standards are being met.

NEA and the business groups stated: “We encourage states to consider joining the six 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. 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.”

Additional “*Tough Choices*” recommendations include: revamping the high school-college transition; reallocating funds to high priority strategies for improving system performance; redesigning how schools are funded and managed; and other needed improvements.

“*Tough Choices or Tough Times*,” which was the focus of a 2006 *TIME* magazine cover story, is supporting each state as it zeroes in on the part of the agenda that best fits its needs right now.

“I applaud the leaders of all these organizations who realize we can accomplish a lot when we look for the common interests we share. Number one on that list is working to educate our students right the first time to meet world competition. Nothing is more important and business people and educators recognize the imperative of that mission with this announcement,” says Former U.S. Labor Secretary and Senator William Brock, Co-chair of Implementation, *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*.

###

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation representing 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations. More than 96% of U.S. Chamber members are small businesses with 100 employees or fewer.

The National Association of Manufacturers' mission is to advocate on behalf of its members to enhance the competitiveness of manufacturers by shaping a legislative and regulatory environment conducive to U.S. economic growth and to increase understanding among policymakers, the media and the general public about the vital role of manufacturing in America's economic and national security for today and in the future.