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MAYOR EMANUEL TO U.S. MAYORS: MODERNIZE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CHICAGO – Mayor Rahm Emanuel delivered a speech at the winter meeting of the United States Conference of Mayors today where he outlined his vision to modernize Chicago's City Colleges by creating partnerships with specific industries to focus on training that addresses the country's skills gap, and urged other mayors to do the same.

“If we modernize our training programs to match the needs of our high-growth industries, our community college system can catapult millions of people into employment and into the middle class, as it has done for generations of Americans,” Mayor Emanuel said to conference attendees. “There is no greater investment we can make in the life of our cities than the one we make in the lives of our students.”

The partnerships at Chicago City Colleges will initially focus on two fields: healthcare and transportation, distribution and logistics. Over time, partnerships will grow to include programs in other high-demand sectors. The first schools and companies that have forged these partnerships are Malcolm X College and Olive Harvey College.

Malcolm X College will work with Rush Medical Center, Stroger and Northwestern Hospitals, Advocate Healthcare, Baxter, Walgreens and Allscripts to develop their curriculum, train faculty, and drive Chicago's leadership in the healthcare sciences.

Olive Harvey College will focus on transportation, distribution, and logistics. They will work with UPS, Canadian National Railway, AAR, BNSF, and Chicago-based Coyote Logistics, the fastest growing logistics company in America.

This innovative approach will help address the skills gap facing companies nation-wide and keep Chicago's workforce competitive.

“Every year, we will modernize two new schools and match them with partners in the private sector, to train the workers for our factories, for our offices, for our hospitals, for our hotel industry and for our infrastructure,” said Mayor Emanuel.

The full text of Mayor Emanuel’s remarks to the Conference of Mayors is below.

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Remarks as prepared

Mayor Emanuel Addresses the U.S. Conference of Mayors

January 20, 2012

Washington, DC

I have worked with many of you and with the US Conference of Mayors for more than two decades – ever since I had the honor of working for Mayor Daley. Consider how much has changed since then: back then I was brash, profane, competitive, and very young. Now I’m brash, profane, competitive – and not very young.

I’m not saying those are qualities you need to be Mayor of Chicago, just what I needed to compete with my two brothers.

Growing up on the North Side, if my parents knew that I would one day be Mayor of Chicago, my Mom would have been amazed. And my Dad would have been shocked.

It is nice to visit Washington again. It is even better having a ticket for a return flight to Chicago in my pocket.

Despite the biggest financial crash and worst downturn since Great Depression, America has experienced 22 straight months of private sector job growth. To date, we have added more jobs than in the 8 years of the previous administration. But, we have more, much more to do.

Many of my former colleagues are working hard to solve the jobs crisis in America. But, as every mayor in this room knows, we have a skills crisis too.

Despite stubborn unemployment, we have companies offering well-paying jobs that have to go begging for skilled applicants. At a time when unemployment lines are long, good jobs sit empty: employers cannot find enough applicants with the right skills. That is unacceptable. It is also fixable.

Many of you are applying exciting solutions to close the America’s skills gap and to reform the way we educate America’s future workforce.

Some experts stress early childhood education as the key – and they are right. That is why just this week in Chicago we are putting forward a whole new system for the way that early childhood education programs are evaluated and funded. Others stress turning around primary and secondary education with a focus on math and science-- and they are right too. That is why we fought for and won a full school day for Chicago Public Schools. That is why we are making the difficult decisions to raise standards, hold teachers accountable, and improve student performance in schools across Chicago.

But for too long, too few of us have stressed the importance of a major asset in America's academic arsenal: our community colleges. And, yet, community colleges are where a majority of America's students go for post-secondary education or training.

By overlooking these critical centers of learning, we are missing an important opportunity. And we are paying the price for it.

The Chicago area has around 10% unemployment, but more than 100,000 available jobs. 14 million people cannot find work in America while employers have 3.4 million job openings.

That is because the community college system that was once the linchpin of America's post-war boom has not kept pace with today's job market. Consequently, in a 21st century economy, our workers still have 20th century skills.

As I like say to my staff, "Denial is not a long term strategy." Like most problems, this one will get worse the longer we ignore it as our economy depends increasingly on higher-skill jobs.

In the next 10 years, the Chicago area will need 9,000 additional computer-science workers; 20,000 new transportation workers; and 43,000 new health-care workers, including 15,000 nurses.

In order to meet this job growth, we need to modernize our community colleges so that Americans don't think of community colleges as a last ditch effort for a remedial education, but as their first choice for high-skill job training.

Consider this: there are more students in Chicago's City Colleges, 127,000, than in all of Chicago's four-year institutions combined.

Don't get me wrong; Chicago and the state of Illinois have great institutions of higher learning. You probably know them: Northwestern, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, Depaul, Columbia College, Loyola, Roosevelt, UIC.

We have two of the top five business schools in the country in Booth and Kellogg. We have great law schools. In technology we have IIT, Fermi, Argonne labs, and University of Illinois.

I love poaching the best and brightest from your cities and bringing them to Chicago. We are a magnet for all the Big Ten States, be they from Madison, Columbus, Ann Arbor, Iowa City, East Lansing, Minneapolis / Saint Paul, Indianapolis, or South Bend.

Chicago is making tough choices to reform primary and secondary education so that as many of Chicago's students have a shot at attending these great universities. But many more require advanced technical training to move directly to middle-class careers.

If we modernize our training programs to match the needs of our high-growth industries, our community college system can catapult millions of people into employment and into the middle class, as it has done for generations of Americans.

When I talk to CEO's I hear the same refrain about their workforce and what they need. Because whether it's Pat Woertz at ADM, Glenn Tilton at United, Glen Tullman at Allscripts, Randall Stephenson at AT&T, Jamie Dimon at JP Morgan, or Vikram Pandit at Citibank, they tell me they need skilled workers to make the products, move the products, and wire the products.

It is unacceptable that at a time when too many people can't find work, 80% of manufacturers say they can't find skilled workers to hire.

The irony is that you hear the same thing from both CEO's and job-seekers: community college training is the missing link to close the skills gap.

On a public transit platform a few months ago, I met a young man who was commuting from Harold Washington Community College where he studies business and computers to his job at a Target warehouse on the Southside.

That young man is doing everything right. He's studying, he's holding down a job. He is doing everything he should for a shot at a better future.

He should be worrying about his studies, not whether the skills he learns will matter in the job market. When he puts the name of his school on his resume, and tells an interviewer what he studied, that should mean something. His diploma should have economic value.

Let's be candid: most community colleges offer students what they should have learned in high school. Too often, they provide remedial learning to compensate for gaps in their education. That is not why our community college system was established.

Community colleges were the catapult for the World War II generation coming home from the battlefield, the generation of Americans who became the most economically productive in American history. They can serve that same function in the 21st century.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a high school education was a necessity for the industrial economy. At the beginning of the 21st century, two years of quality post-secondary education are equally essential.

That's true for all of our cities but especially true when you look at Chicago's engines of growth: transportation and logistics, healthcare sciences, IT, conventions and tourism, professional services, and high-end manufacturing.

Now, I know I'm biased, but Chicago is more blessed than most cities. Some of you are frequent visitors and you probably know as much, but can't say so openly. I understand.

The point is that each of our cities has unique economic strengths and appeal. We need our community colleges linked up to our growth sectors. And to do that, we need our industry leaders linked up to our schools.

In all of our cities, community colleges can train the workforce of today for the jobs of tomorrow; to give our students the ability to achieve a middle class standard of living.

We have announced some of the first schools and companies that have forged these partnerships. Malcolm X College in the Chicago Loop will be the school that drives Chicago's leadership in the healthcare sciences.

Rush Medical Center, Stroger and Northwestern Hospitals, Advocate Healthcare, Baxter, Walgreens and Allscripts have agreed to partner with Malcolm X College, to develop their curriculum and train the faculty.

Olive Harvey College will be our center for excellence in transportation, distribution, and logistics. They will work with UPS, Canadian National Railway, AAR, and BNSF, among others.

And Olive Harvey College is not just partnering with older, established companies. Chicago-based Coyote Logistics, the fastest growing logistics company in America, only a few years old with less than 1,000 employees, has also agreed to be a partner.

Employers won't need to search for the skilled workers they need to invest and expand. They will have confidence in their future work-force because they were a partner in shaping it.

AAR Corp. will have a pipeline of trained workers to fill those 600 open jobs. Allscripts will have a reliable talent pool to fill the 300 jobs it is adding in Chicago. Northwestern Memorial Hospital and Rush University Medical Center will have the specialists they need for their large expansion projects.

As Mayors, we know that we can't totally protect our cities from a global or national recession. But we can address a skills gap – so that no employer, in the middle of a deep recession, is without the employees they must have – so that no worker is without the skills they need to find a job.

Every year we will modernize two new schools and match them with partners in the private sector, to train the workers for our factories, for our offices, for our hospitals, for our hotel industry and for our infrastructure.

In the same way that business leaders in Chicago help Booth and Kellogg prepare their graduates for careers in management and finance, we are having them partner with our community colleges -- so that their curriculums meet the needs of the sectors that power Chicago's economy.

There is no greater investment we can make in the life of our cities, than the one we make in the lives of our students.

But I can also tell you, there is no greater reward.

And to those who say that we can't afford to confront these challenges, I say, we can't afford not to, not just as individual cities, but as a country.

Any business that stands still as the world moves ahead is a business that's doomed to failure. And our cities have no more important business than educating our students.

Change is always difficult. The status quo is more comfortable. In eight months as a Mayor, I have come to the conclusion that people hate the status quo ... and they are not too excited about change either.

But when the status quo is failing, then change is inevitable. We can resolve to help shape the future or allow ourselves to be shaped by it. I truly believe that if we strengthen our community colleges in each of our cities, they can become the ticket into employment and the middle-class for millions of hard-working Americans.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless America.

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