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## **COMBATING POVERTY THROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP: ACCT'S 2008 COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP CONGRESS**

### *Community Colleges Surface as 'Recession Insurance' in Economic Downturn; Gates, Ford Foundation Leaders Speak Out In Support of Two-Year Schools*

WASHINGTON, DC—November 5, 2008— More than 2,000 community college trustees, presidents and leaders participated in the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Community College Leadership Congress. The event was held at the Marriott Marquis Times Square in New York from October 29 through November 1, 2008.

The annual event featured six keynote speakers: Ford Foundation Higher Education Policy Program Officer **Gregory M. Anderson**; Ford Foundation Vice President, Knowledge, Creativity & Freedom Program **Alison R. Bernstein**; Berry Block and Bernstein Managing Principal and City University of New York Board of Trustees Vice Chairman **Philip A. Berry**; College Board President and Former Governor of West Virginia **Gaston Caperton**; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Commissioner **Stuart J. Ishimaru**; and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Director of Special Initiatives, U.S. Programs **Hilary Pennington**.

The Big Apple served as a symbol of opportunity for generations of Americans as speakers shared their insights about the ways in which community college leaders can affect the nation's poverty, with attention to the current economic downturn.

"One of the things for which community colleges are recognized," said ACCT Board Chair and Orange County Community College (N.Y.) Trustee **Arthur Anthonisen**, "is our contribution to the workforce—for the practical skills we build—but we also wonder: can we help create jobs that are not already there? We can and we do."

Anthonisen continued, "throughout America, community colleges are developing innovative programs to create new jobs by addressing future needs, not just current ones."

At the start of the Congress, ACCT President and CEO **J. Noah Brown** issued a Call to Action. "Community colleges serve as economic engines," said Brown, "strengthening the fabric that binds our communities together—jobs."

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“In these difficult times, each and every ACCT member must educate their local, state and national business and political leaders so they understand that our institutions—which are within reach of every community in America—are preparing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workers who will recreate the vibrant economy that America so desperately needs.”

Brown went on to state, “Now more than ever before, we must convince local, state, and federal officials to resist the urge to slash our budgets and instead, invest in community colleges and the aging infrastructure of our institutions in all 50 states. We also must convince more local, state, and national businesses to follow the lead of Wal-Mart, which has pledged \$2 million to community colleges to educate its future workers, and to invest in large and small ways in our institutions. We must drive home to all Americans the message that community and technical colleges can play a critical role in our nation’s economic recovery.”

A print version of Brown’s Call for Action, including specific actions that community college leaders can take, was disseminated among Congress participants.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Pennington reinforced the message of ACCT’s Call to Action: “One thing we know is that community colleges are vital institutions in the United States. They’re essential to providing a path to the economic dream, and essential to combating poverty through education... ACCT and Bill and Melinda [Gates] share the same perspective on why education is so important,” Pennington said. “[It] remains the surest way to help people develop the skills and confidence to be active members of thriving communities.”

The economic downturn was threaded throughout Congress speeches and discussions. Immediate Past ACCT Chair and Brunswick Community College Board Chair **Lynda Stanley** said, “None of us predicted the current financial crisis. The downturn in the economy is not isolated to the United States—it’s a world-wide economic crisis with long-term implications that have yet to be discerned. It’s more imperative as leaders, as trustees, to consider the effects of families at the bottom of the income level.”

Caperton urged community college trustees and other leaders to follow ACCT’s Call to Action. “You have a very difficult job ahead [as trustees],” said Caperton. “The resources are going to be more difficult to find, and the demands on your services are going to be greater...I think you really have to think in a new, out-of-the-box way about how you’re going to finance those students to come to our institutions who don’t have money. The need, and your ability to handle it effectively, will be the thing that people never forget.”

“Our job is to communicate,” said Berry. “[Lawmakers] need to know when they invest in community colleges, they are investing in national recession insurance. They need to know community colleges are key to this country’s future—economically, socially and psychosocially.”

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In addition to the focus on poverty and the current economy, pre-Congress sessions addressed ongoing needs, including effective governance, CEO contracts, and the popular Governance Leadership Institute, attendees experienced many opportunities to review fundamental skills and enhance their seasoned expertise.

Congress attendees had the opportunity to attend over 80 sessions on best practices for their college, fundamental and advanced trustee training, a special town hall meeting focusing on the critical role that community colleges play in combating poverty through educational opportunities while also addressing social issues including the growing economic gap, the digital divide, the missing minority male, and the growing need for remedial education.

ACCT's Board of Directors elected new officers to its executive committee: **Arthur Anthonisen**, Chair, Orange County Community College, N.Y.; **Thomas M. Bennett**, Chair Elect, Parkland College, IL; **Peter E. Sercer, Sr.**, Vice Chair, Midlands Technical College, S.C.; **Kathy Sellers-Johnson**, Secretary-Treasurer, Louisiana Community and Technical College System, La.; and **Lynda Stanley**, Immediate Past Chair, Brunswick Community College, N.C.

Newly and re-elected Regional Chairs: **Jean Torgeson** (Central), North Iowa Area Community College, Iowa; **James R. Perry** (Northeast), Union County College, N.J.; **Roberto Uranga** (Pacific), Long Beach Community College District, Ca.; **Greg Schuckman** (Southern), Northern Virginia Community College; and **M. Thomas Perkins** (Western), Western Nebraska Community College, Neb.

Newly elected Regional Directors: **Thomas M. Bennett (Central)**, Parkland College, Ill.; **James R. Perry (Northeast)**, Union County College, N.J.; **Rebecca Garcia (Pacific)**, Cabrillo College, Calif.; **Peter E. Sercer, Sr. (Southern)**, Midlands Technical College, S.C.; and **Diane Olmos Guzman (Western)**, Houston Community College, Tex.

**Denise Chachere**, St. Louis Community College, Mo.; **James K. Polk**, Illinois Central College, Ill.; and **Carmie Lynn Toulouse**, Central New Mexico Community College, N.M., were elected Directors-at-Large during ACCT's Senate Meeting on Friday, October 31. ACCT Diversity Committee Chair Ron Winthers, Burlington County College, N.J., was also appointed to the Board of Directors.

### **About the Association of Community College Trustees**

The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) is a non-profit educational organization of governing boards, representing more than 6,500 elected and appointed trustees who govern over 1,200 community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States, Canada, and England. For more information, go to [www.acct.org](http://www.acct.org).

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