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From the Chair

Historic Challenges, Historic Triumphs



THIS MARCH, I EXPERIENCED A VERY PROUD MOMENT as a community college trustee and Chair of the ACCT Board of Directors. Sitting in the front row of a Northern Virginia Community College auditorium, I watched one of our own — NOVA English instructor and U.S. Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden — introduce President Barack Obama. And then I watched with pride as the President of the United States of America signed the truly historic Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010.

Yes, I know that emotion ran high on both sides of the health care legislation, but let's not overlook the education piece that reflects the passion that all of us have invested in our advocacy efforts over the

past two years, spearheaded by the vision and persistence of ACCT President J. Noah Brown and Director of Public Policy Jee Hang Lee.

The signing of this act means that the voices of community college advocates have been heard loud and clear. At the signing, President Obama said, "We need to invest in our community colleges. We need to invest in the future of this country." He then announced that "because community colleges like NOVA are so essential to a competitive workforce, I've asked your outstanding professor, Dr. Jill Biden to host a summit on community colleges at the White House this fall, to share innovative ideas about how we can better prepare America's workforce and America's workers to succeed in the 21st century."

Thinking back, have our colleges ever been so publicly lauded for helping students and workers succeed? Not in my memory. But that is exactly what we do, and because we have been so dedicated to communicating this message, it has finally been heard and related to the rest of the world by none other than the President of the United States.

This makes all of the challenges we have faced worth it. As most of you know, the National Legislative Summit had to be postponed due to two historic snowstorms this winter. But we persevered and convened in March, and many of us met with our legislators and insisted they support community colleges, as you'll read in the pages of this magazine. I marvel at how the ACCT staff pulled off a second NLS program just one month after the original, but then I remember that it is the nature of those of us in the community college sector. We're flexible, adaptable, and know how to get things done that at times seem almost impossible.

I want to personally thank all of you who attended the NLS, as well as those who encouraged your Members of Congress to support legislation that benefits community colleges. I also want to strongly encourage you to attend the 2010 ACCT Leadership Congress this October 20-23 in Toronto, Canada. This annual meeting is essential to maintaining the national voice of community college leaders, and it offers invaluable opportunities to share ideas with your peers and — for many — to be recognized publicly for your incredible achievements. As community college leaders, we're in a unique position to make an important difference in the lives of our students and in our communities. Keep up the great work! Together, we can accomplish much.

THOMAS M. BENNETT
PARKLAND COLLEGE, ILLINOIS