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FACT: "School-to-Work" Is Alive and Well!

By Michael J. Chapman

For several years, EdWatch (formerly, The Maple River Education Coalition) has been warning of a coming state planned and managed economy by means of the Federal "School-to-Work (STW) System." We've explained how the federal agenda was driven into all 50 states by three federal bills passed piecemeal under the Clinton administration (Goals 2000, STW, and the Workforce Investment Act).

On July 19, 2004, the federal House Education & the Workforce Committee posted a "fact sheet" denying that School- to -Work was involved in the pending Vocational Education funding bill (H.R. 4496), as the Edwatch alert of July 17th points out (<http://www.edwatch.org/updates/071704.htm>). The Committee's statement goes so far as to say that H.R. 4496, along with "No Child Left Behind," puts "another nail in the coffin of the so-called STW initiative."¹

Unfortunately, their coffin contains "STW" in **name only!** Call it what you will, but this month, Minnesota's Governor's Workforce Development Council (GWDC), a *mandatory creation* of the Federal Workforce Investment Act, released a series of reports demonstrating **the agenda to replace the free-market economy is alive and well.**

Minnesota's GWDC report,² dated three days prior to the posting of the Committee "fact sheet," recommends that Minnesota's governor adopt the next phase of the "**seamless system**" of **education, workforce preparation, and economic development** (i.e. The School-to-Work System)!

The next phase actually tightens the grip on education by turning our high schools into job-training centers, sometimes called "*smaller learning communities*," (see <http://www.edwatch.org/updates/102203.htm>).

Minnesota recently rejected the Goals 2000 education standards, locally called "The Profile of Learning," and replaced them with more "knowledge-based" standards. These new standards posed an obstacle to the federal STW plan and were the primary reason the radical left **refused to confirm the appointment of Minnesota's education commissioner!**

Don't take my word for it. According to Minnesota's GWDC report, the "issues, which *negatively affect* Minnesota's ability to develop its emerging workforce," include these:

- "Minnesota has increased its *emphasis on core academic skills* at the *expense of workplace skills*."³
- "*Elementary* and *secondary* aged students oftentimes do not realize the need for...career exploration experiences and are not fully utilizing the resources available for career exploration. Career exploration...helps emerging workers prepare for a career that matches the individual's interests and abilities"⁴
- "Emerging workers are entering the workforce without the skills they need to be successful... If students have only received training in the core academic areas during their elementary and secondary educational experiences, they must learn many of the workplace skills from another source."⁵

Since the GWDC views an "emphasis on core academics" as a problem, what do you suppose their solution is? Their answer is more adherence to **federal standards to counteract the negative "knowledge-based" academic standards!** For example, they propose the following for elementary and secondary schools:

- “Meeting federal No Child Left Behind Standards for core academics.”⁶ [Our critics continually insist that NCLB has no particular standards, when, in fact, this statement acknowledges that the national standards consist of a de facto federal curriculum.]
- “Begin to hone a specific skill set for future employment through work-based learning...”⁷ [Work based learning is frequently mentioned in the vocational education reauthorization, HR 4496.]
- “Work with the Minnesota State Legislature to increase the funding available for [schools] to hire more [career, not academic] counselors.”⁸
- “Incorporate aspects of career exploration into the classroom more frequently. ...integrate career exploration into the curriculum. ...require teachers to have career experiences outside the field of teaching...with an outside business for licensure renewal.”⁹
- “Require the Minnesota Department of Education to integrate career exploration into the graduation standards. ...Also, careers will be linked to outcome expectations.”¹⁰

These recommendations reflect the Clinton “School-to-Work” plan! They also reflect a continuation of the plan laid out by Marc Tucker in his 1994 “Dear Hillary” letter (see <http://www.edwatch.org/downloads.htm>).

MANAGING THE LABOR-SUPPLY CHAIN

The GWDC recommendations reflect Tucker’s dream in that they require school districts to work with local Workforce Centers to “*create connections between economic development, education, and workforce development for the emerging workforce within their region.*”¹¹

What it means is that a government-devised economic development plan based on perceived future workforce needs will guide school curriculum toward narrow specific job training. The GWDC, in its “Emerging Workforce” committee report, stated its goal this way: “*Expand secondary educational programs that are oriented to specific occupational areas...utilize regional/statewide articulation agreements among educational institutions, and connect businesses to education.*”¹² Called “life-long learning,” what this really means is, **limited-learning for life-long labor!**

According to the report, “the Department of Education and the Workforce Center System [should] work together at the state level to define what *their goals* and roles are for providing career exploration opportunities for emerging workers at the local level.”¹³ In other words, state goals will drive the local plans.

Contrary to the federal “fact sheet” on H.R. 4496 claiming it does away with STW, it in fact requires that the workforce center system be merged with public schools for the same purpose.

The coordinating function between schools and the workforce centers will be carried out by appointed labor boards called “**Youth Councils**” whose job will be to “**implement a local strategy for providing career exploration to meet local needs.**”¹⁴ In other words, if your son or daughter wants to be a cartoonist - you’d better move to Los Angeles before the 9th grade where the “local need” includes many opportunities for cartoonists. If you happen to live in the Iron Range of Minnesota, mining will be one of your few “choices.”

Corporate America is buying into this scheme as a way to “save” the cost of on-the-job training and to assure a steady stream of “work-ready” youth. Unfortunately, by turning our schools into job training centers, the taxpayers are forced to pick up the tab for training corporate employees and our youth will be ill-prepared if the economic planners turn out to be wrong.

MANAGING THE “NEW ECONOMY”

“Education” (i.e. job-training) is considered the “supply-side” of the “new economy.” What it really amounts to is a state-run labor supply pipeline. Unfortunately, the demand side is also determined by government! The GWDC recommendations also include “**state investment objectives**” which pick the winners and losers in “targeted industries.”

For example, “Investment Objective I” states: “Focus education, workforce, and economic development resources to meet market demand in at least three key business sectors statewide: health care, manufacturing, and biosciences. Other priority sectors may also be pursued by regional leaders.”¹⁵

Not coincidentally, the term “free-market” is not used. Instead of the free market determining future supply and demand, government “focuses education and resources” to meet *market demand*, within the “key business sectors.” Who do you suppose picks the “key business sectors? Government picks them!

In Minnesota, the government has determined that health care, manufacturing, and biosciences, shall be the “targeted industries” for state-wide focus. According to “Objective 1” above, other government officials (i.e. appointed “regional leaders”) *may “pursue”* other sectors according to “local business needs.” In other words, since Los Angeles needs cartoonists and the Minnesota Iron Range needs miners, regional leaders may (with proper state-approval) pursue those sectors as well.

Interestingly, the Minnesota GWDC, working in lock-step with the newly created “Department of Employment and Economic Development” (DEED), recommends the Governor put them in charge of the entire system! Their report explains: “the GWDC (either directly or through other appropriate entities) will serve as convener and coordinator of sector-specific activity.”¹⁶

The report explains that “other appropriate entities” include the “MN Job Skills Partnership Board, Local Workforce Councils, and *other key stakeholders* to develop a **regular mechanism** for reviewing and identifying **future sector priorities**.”¹⁷ Notice, that the “mechanism” to determine “future sector priorities” is **not** the free market. Rather, it is “appropriate [government] entities.”

When government determines “demand” by choosing the “future [business] sector priorities,” and then determines “supply” by limiting educational choices to their own priorities, we are clearly entering the realm of a state-controlled economy.

Coupled with so-called “tax-free” zones, which will determine the *individual business* winners and losers within an industry sector (see <http://www.edwatch.org/updates/042603.htm>), the GWDC is clearly pushing the Minnesota Governor another step closer to a state-planned and managed economy.

Edwatch recommends that the Governor reject the entire set of recommendations and allow the free-market to determine winners and losers.

Edwatch also recommends that states reject federal vocational education funds via H.R. 4496 (Watch for further Edwatch analysis of H.R. 4496)

¹ House Education & the Workforce Committee “Fact Sheet:” *GOP Vocational Education Bill Leaves “School-to-Work” Behind*, <http://edworkforce.house.gov/issues/108th/education/voced/factsheet071904.htm>.

² GWDC report, INVESTMENT ADVISORY; Leadership Priorities, Budget Recommendations, and Actions for Minnesota’s Workforce Investment Portfolio; prepared for Governor Tim Pawlenty, July 2004

³ GWDC report, “Developing the Emerging Worker Committee Report and Recommendations on Advancing the Emerging Workforce”, final draft, 7-16-04, pg. 1.

⁴ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 2.

⁵ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 2.

⁶ Investment Advisory, p. 11

⁷ Investment Advisory, p. 11.

⁸ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 3.

⁹ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p.3-4.

¹⁰ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 4.

¹¹ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 4.

¹² Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 4.

¹³ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 4.

¹⁴ Emerging Worker Committee Report, p. 3

¹⁵ Investment Advisory; Recommended Leadership Priorities, Budget, Action Items, para III, p. 15.

¹⁶ Investment Advisory; p. 15.

¹⁷ Investment Advisory; p. 15.

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