



All youth ready for college, work & life.

**TRANSCRIBED COMMENTS MADE BY KAREN PITTMAN,
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My name is Karen Pittman. I'm the co-founder and executive director of the Forum for Youth Investment. We are delighted to have you here. This is actually part two in a multi-part day. We just had a wonderful breakfast with our funders, partners and board, in which we talked about these issues. And we're delighted to come in from that breakfast to share with you several things.

First, this really is the tenth anniversary of a long journey for the Forum. Inside your packet you have a little brochure. It says we're ten years old this year. It's a journey that started when Merita Irby and I, who have been together for 14 years and counting—from the day we were working at the International Youth Foundation and had the opportunity to work with General Powell to get the America's Promise Alliance started. With that came a real opportunity to begin to work with communities across the country that really wanted to take on those five promises.

We spent the last ten years working with states and communities to figure out what it takes to help people bring precision to their passion, and at this point we believe that we have the partners; the places that have really rolled up their sleeves and are showing us how to do business differently; and the beginning of a set of powerful products, conceptual and practical tools that help communities and states change the way they do business.

And so we're delighted to have you all here to get us started and launch the second half of our journey in which our hope is that over the next five years—with our partners, with the places that are already working on this—we can make sure that there are community leaders in every state across this country who are doing business differently, who have learned how to focus and prioritize differently, to step back and look at the big picture so they can set big picture goals that don't fragment our children. They can be big tent partners, who figure out how to come to the table with their self-interest and their resources, so that we can have a big impact and change the odds for children and youth. This really is about how we change the way we do business.

This afternoon at this symposium we are going to take you all through some of the tools and exercises and share with you more of the research behind the urgency of this. I just want to kick this off by saying that, as I approach 60, and think back to when I went off to college 40 years ago, the phrase "changing the odds" does mean something to me, personally.

I grew up here in Washington, D.C. in Northwest, in a low-income neighborhood and single-parent family. I went off to college pretty well-prepared and people were always surprised. They would come up to me and say, "Wow, you seem so normal. Well, here you are, a poor, black, inner city kid. But you're at an elite college and you seem to be doing well. What was it? What's special about you?" I thought about that and I couldn't figure out what was special about me, because somehow in my community—between family, neighbors, the church, and the one youth organization that I was in

which was the D.C. Youth Orchestra—it wasn't that I had been singled out as a young person with promise, or that people rallied around me to help me personally beat the odds. It was that even though it was a low income community, I was growing up in an environment in which the odds had been changed for me and for my peers.

And so the idea is that we can't get where we need to go as a country by selecting promising young people one at a time and helping them beat the odds. We have to, as adults, do business differently with young people as leaders to change the odds.

The American Dream is that every young person will be ready for college, work and life, that every family and community will be supported, and that every leader will be effective. The American reality, however, is quite different. Only four in ten young people are ready for college, work and life, according to research. The America's Promise *Every Child, Every Promise Survey* tells us that only one-third of young people have those promises, those fundamental nutrients that they need to succeed. Two-thirds don't have what they need to succeed as children, as youth, as young adults. And while we don't have a specific number on how many leaders are effective, those first two numbers give us a good clue that while we may be working hard, we're not working effectively. We have to figure out a different way to do business and that's why we're here.

We're also here today to really celebrate the national partners that have joined us so far on this journey and we hope to add in a couple more. But our goal is not to have hundreds of national partners. Our goal has been, very deliberately, to identify the national organizations whose members play a critical role in states and communities. If they're not sitting around the table doing business differently; if they haven't figured out how to be big tent partners; if they haven't figured out how to find the things that they are passionate about in that larger picture of what needs to happen to help young people succeed; and, as Brian Gallagher will tell us in a minute, if they're not willing to actually sit at the table and put resources on the table and integrate their work into other people's work, we're not going to achieve our goal.

We've learned along the way that we could inspire people to do business differently, but that actually helping people do business differently, bringing different ways of thinking and acting and prioritizing into their daily work, into their daily decision making -- that takes on-the-ground support. It takes on-the-ground effort. And it takes tools and nomenclature and things that really help communities come together. And that's been the work that the Forum has been doing more and more over the past five years as we were challenged by our Board to get grounded, get focused and get results. As we did this work in communities, we found out that you couldn't tell who the leader was going to be. In one community, it was United Way. In another, it was an excited school superintendent. In another, it was a legislator who was passionate about issues and not only moved them at the state level but moved them in their community. In another, it was a nonprofit that brought a network together and decided that together they were going to change the community landscape for young people. In others, it was a coalition that had started out with a single issue, like teen pregnancy, and recognized that point-by-point they were rebuilding young people's lives in ways that not only impacted teen pregnancy but impacted their overall success and likelihood that they were ready for college, work and life. We found that whatever door we came in, business leaders, elected officials, educators, parents, young people, nonprofit organizations were looking for ways to come together, and that's really what the Ready By 21 Challenge is: to figure out how we can accelerate that path, how we can help those people who were ready to think differently, ready to act differently, ready to act together.

How we can help them think and act with more precision and with more power.

The partnerships that we're going to introduce to you today are powerful partnerships. We didn't have room up on the stage for all of our partners. But our partners are extremely important to us and they're here with us today. You have profiles of the partners in your packets. Our signature partner is United Way of America. We have to have a delivery system and we have to have a passionate, competent delivery system. And so, we're delighted that we're able to announce that United Way of America is committed to joining forces with us as they work on their commitment to make sure that communities have the tools and United Ways have the focus—on education, on health and on financial stability—that the tools we have been developing and the work we've been doing with local United Ways can be used to power this forward.

The American Association of School Administrators is here with us as an equally important partner. We can't do this work without working with schools. We can't work around schools. We can't work in spite of schools. We have to work with schools and too often nonprofit organizations have tried to figure out what to do around the edges. This partnership is incredibly important to us and we're delighted to have the American Association of School Administrators as a partner with us.

Corporate Voices for Working Families, a leading organization bringing together some of the largest companies in this country that are committed to working families and improving the lives of working families, has been a valuable partner with us for three years.

We're delighted that we will be having a panel of the partners after the press conference.

We have the National Conference of State Legislatures. I'm not sure if Charles Hitchew is here yet from America's Promise Alliance—but America's Promise Alliance is also a partner with us.

All of us, including the National Collaboration for Youth, are members of the America's Promise Alliance which has over a hundred and fifty partners.

We're really focused on how we bring these tools down to the state and local level. You're going to hear more about the challenge today, but understand that this really is about doing what it takes to bring precision to our passion.

One of the things that I'll say briefly before I hand this over is about this idea of precision, of helping people collect and use information differently. This allows us to see a different reality. It allows us to see the reality that's there. I'll try out one really quick example on you of what we mean by doing business differently. We talk a lot about—and it doesn't take much to understand—the need for young people to be in school. We need young people to be in structured voluntary activities outside of school, which can be community-based organizations, national youth development affiliates, summer jobs, things like that. We need them to have productive ways to spend their time. Basically, the formula is the more young people participate in schools and in activities that are good for them and develop them, the better the outcomes. We've worked on that rough formula for a long time and every organization in this room is doing something that fits into that basic big box. The challenge is that we really don't have precision tools to understand what young people are participating in, how much they're participating, what things they're participating in, how they add up, whether they're equally available

in neighborhoods, and most importantly, whether they're of equal following. We'll come back and talk about this more at a later date.

We're also excited to announce that The Forum for Youth Investment has joined with the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation to create The Center for Youth Program Quality because it's so important that we get inside of the black boxes where young people spend their time, and not just count the hours that they spend in school or the hours that they spend in organizations. We need to understand whether those boxes are delivering the nutrients or delivering the promises, delivering the supports that they need. And so we're delighted to be able to have even more precision tools to bring into this conversation, and you'll be hearing more about that later on.

The challenge that we're putting out there over the next five years is going to require partners and more partners, which is why we have you in the room. The challenge is going to require that the Forum continue to work with organizations like High/Scope, like The Finance Project, like Child Trends, to make sure that communities have the information, the knowledge, the tools, the resources that they need to have.

The challenge is obviously also going to require funding. Funding that seeds communities to be able to do business differently, funding that brings them the technology, the tools, the training to do business differently—not necessarily funding for new programs. We can find that. But what we need is funding to get over the hurdle of doing business differently, funding to take the time to learn—not to just coordinate or collaborate, but to sit at the table, to build the trust, to integrate the work together.

And so, with this press conference, we're also putting on the table the commitment to build the Ready By 21 Challenge Fund. We've made a start toward that fund. We have a model out there now thanks to contributions from Robert Wood Johnson and Atlantic Philanthropies. We have seven communities and five states that are working with modest amounts of money and steady technical assistance to do business differently, to map the landscape of their community programs, to assess the quality of those programs, to figure out how to extend the reach of those programs so that more young people are getting the supports that they need. The partners that you'll see up on the stage are working in every one of those states or localities. So over the last several years, we've built national partnerships one at a time and learned who their members are and learned to work with their members. We've now, this year, brought those partners together. We're connecting those partners with real places that have made commitments: to do business differently; to make sure that in every one of those places the superintendents, the business community, the United Ways, the national nonprofits are all involved. The legislators and mayors are also engaged in knowing what's going on and figuring out how to contribute maximally to this.

So, as we're bringing the pieces together, we're delighted to be able to share with you some of that work over the course of the day. We're delighted to tell you that we think we have a good start towards making sure that, as communities decide to do this, we have the partners, we have the products, we have the resources to help them do it with the announcement of the Challenge Fund. Our co-chairs for Ready By 21, Congressman Gephardt and Governor Ridge, have agreed to not only co-chair this event today with us, but to bring us back together with corporate and private funders to make that commitment, to put on the table a clearer vision of what communities can look like and to help us move toward that Fund.

So we are just delighted to be able to move into the next ten years with what we think is the package that we need to be able to get to the goal of having leaders in every community across this country doing business differently for young people. And with that I'd like to introduce our two co-chairs.

Congressman Gephardt joined us when we first put this idea out publicly in 2005. Congressman Gephardt joined us at a board dinner with some of our early partners and acknowledged the importance of this, acknowledged how it fit in with the work that he had done for years in Congress. So we're delighted that he, one, agreed to stay with us and work on this and guide us and share this throughout its tenure. And two, that he also recognized the importance of having a leader from the other side of the aisle and found the perfect leader in former Governor Tom Ridge. So with both of them working with us, we know that we have the big star power we need to not only do the work in the trenches, but to get the national attention that we need to have to move this forward, to find the corporate and private sponsors to move this forward, and to let the country know that there really is hope for doing business differently.

Because the dilemma really isn't that we have, in some communities, half of our young people not graduating from high school. That's a tragedy. That's an embarrassment. That's something that shouldn't be happening. The dilemma is that too often we don't seem to care that we have the resources, we have the horsepower, we have the potential to significantly change the way we do business, to increase the success for young people in communities, and we're tinkering around the edges when we have the capacity to do much more. So the American dilemma is really a leadership dilemma, and the Ready by 21 Challenge is a challenge to state and local leaders to do business differently.

I'm delighted now to ask Congressman Gephardt to come up and tell us how this connects to what he has done, how it connects to what he is doing and how he's going to help us move this forward.