



AMERICA'S FUTURE
LIES IN BRAINPOWER

■ Americans want jobs that pay well, with generous benefits and good working conditions. When workers aren't satisfied, the blame often falls on employers, who get slammed for downsizing, outsourcing and paying low wages.

Good jobs aren't a matter of good intentions. In an era of globalization, geographic and political boundaries are not economic boundaries. Workers compete in a worldwide talent pool, and they will earn according to what they can produce. Economies rich in sophisticated technology and well-trained workers foster high-wage industries. Those lagging in technology and skills are left with lesser jobs.

More than ever, the quality of the labor force determines the quality of jobs. The U.S. economy can only create good jobs if it can supply the qualified workers to fill them.

The payoff for knowledge in the United States has been on the up-

swing, giving Americans more reason than ever to learn. As individuals, we've got plenty of opportunities to improve ourselves in a nation well endowed with ways to gain knowledge.

The United States already has a highly educated workforce, but we can do better. A wide range of reforms could help U.S. schools close the educational gap with other countries, particularly for secondary school students. They might also help reach at-risk students who for whatever reason don't or can't take advantage of the educational opportunities available.

An education system facing all kinds of stresses can only do so much. The responsibility for becoming smarter workers falls just as much on us as individuals. Our attitudes and actions matter.

Remember Jack and Jill? He's never recognized the value of knowledge, so he's been disappointed in work. She developed a strong commitment

to lifetime learning, and our free enterprise economy has rewarded her for it.

Lifetime learning expands opportunities for all Americans. Unlike the physical capital that belongs largely to the rich, intellectual capital is available to everyone with enough ambition to strive for it. Where we start in life doesn't have to determine where we wind up. And coming from nothing doesn't have to mean being stuck there.

The most important tool we have to achieve the American Dream isn't the computer, the Internet or any of the other innovations sure to dazzle us in the future. It is the brain—weighing, on average, just 3 pounds. America will create more good jobs as students and workers build proficiency with this 3-pound tool.³ Its development through lifetime learning is the key to opportunity, upward mobility and rising living standards.

—W. Michael Cox and Richard Alm