CED PRESIDENT CHARLES KOLB APPEARS BEFORE SENATE HELP COMMITTEE HEARING ON AMERICAN EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

March 9, 2012 – Washington, D.C. CED President Charles Kolb testified before United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) on March 8, 2012. The hearing focused on the role of education in preparing American workers for success in today’s economy, as well as on the global competitiveness of the United States. Several important postsecondary education issues were highlighted, including the importance of quality of early childhood programs and K-12 education reform.

The HELP Committee invited Mr. Kolb to present testimony because of CED’s 70-year commitment to education reform. In light of his past service in the U.S. Department of Education, Mr. Kolb was able to provide an insider view of education policy, as well as the business perspective. “Achieving the 21st century version of the American Dream will require a much more educated citizenry and workforce. We are now a knowledge-based and skills-oriented economy, and our education investments need to be focused laser-like on programs, strategies, and partnerships that can address this constantly changing national and international dynamic. Our workers face a competitive environment in which their skills must be constantly evolving and increasing if we are to have a dynamic and efficient workforce,” Mr. Kolb said.

Focusing on the America’s investment in postsecondary education, Mr. Kolb said, “Until fairly recently, however, America’s postsecondary education sector has managed to avoid the types of accountability questions that have characterized K-12 education policy discussions. For much of the last 30 years, postsecondary education’s public policy debates have primarily concerned important questions relating to access and financing but relatively few questions about “access to what?” – about the quality of that American postsecondary-education experience and what our young people should know and be able to do as a result of their postsecondary-education experience.”

Mr. Kolb ended his remarks with a call to action for America’s business leaders, “…it is vitally important that business play a role in shaping postsecondary education policy. There’s the obvious reason of self-interest: most CEOs with whom I speak are concerned about the future skills of the American workforce. These business leaders are also on the frontline when it comes to appreciating the skills that are needed in the workforce. And I would add that business leaders can be powerful change agents because they have all faced similar challenges and competition over the last 20 years in their own activities. They understand change, have had to embrace – not fear – it, and can help make change happen.”

CED has launched Business Champions for Postsecondary Student Success, a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-funded initiative that seeks to engage business leaders in identifying and promoting strategies to improve the skills of all students, and to increase the number who obtain postsecondary degrees or certificates that are valuable – to both individuals and employers – in the marketplace. CED will release a major report on improving American postsecondary education in late April 2012.

-more-
Three other experts on education testified: Jennifer Mann, Vice President, Human Resources, SAS Institute, Cary, North Carolina; Eric A. Hanushek, Ph.D., Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, California, and Richard Murnane, Ph.D., Juliana W. and William Foss Thompson Professor of Education and Society, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

A discussion with the panel followed the expert testimony. Senators Michael Enzi (WY), Jeff Bingaman (NM), Kay Hagan (NC), Sheldon Whitehouse (RI), and Al Franken (MN) all took part in the hearing.

Watch the complete hearing at this U.S. Senate HELP Committee »
The hearing starts at 24:50; Charles Kolb’s prepared statement can be found at 42:18 to 48:30. Mr. Kolb takes part at several points in the question and answer period, which begins at 63:00.

Read the Charles Kolb’s testimony before the U.S. Senate HELP Committee.

For more on CED’s postsecondary education work go to: http://www.ced.org/programs/postsecondary-education

About CED:
CED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of more than 200 business leaders and university presidents. Since 1942, its research and policy programs have addressed many of the nation’s most pressing economic and social issues, including education reform, workforce competitiveness, campaign finance, health care, and global trade and finance. CED promotes policies to produce increased productivity and living standards, greater and more equal opportunity for every citizen, and an improved quality of life for all. www.ced.org