



All youth ready for college, work & life.

**TRANSCRIBED COMMENTS MADE BY BRIAN GALLAGHER,
PRESIDENT AND CEO, UNITED WAY OF AMERICA
READY BY 21 NATIONAL LAUNCH, FEBRUARY 27, 2008, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Thank you. Governor, thank you. It's a great pleasure to be here. Let me, on behalf of my colleagues and partners that are a part of this effort, say thank you to Governor Ridge and Congressman Gephardt for giving their leadership to this effort. And in saying that thank you, I want to recognize them as true public servants. Clearly, they're not only former elected officials but public servants, at least in my mind. When votes aren't at stake, they are still working on the issues that they've been passionate about their whole lives and they've given their time to be a part of this. So thank you very much for your leadership. And thank you to Karen Pittman and the Forum for being tenacious, having great vision and the courage to think differently and to try to get us to think differently. Congratulations for getting to this day. To all the partners and funders, thanks for being here.

Let me just say a couple of things about why we're here as United Way, as the United Way movement, and why we're excited about this initiative. There are 1,300 local United Ways across the U.S. There are United Way affiliates in 46 countries. We raise over \$5 billion a year. We've got millions of donors. We put, collectively, local United Ways in aggregate, over a billion dollars a year into youth programming, afterschool programs, early childhood development, mentoring, and tutoring programs. And we started seeing a real challenge to our institution and to our communities and to young people. We were seeing ourselves as a fundraising organization and not seeing enough impact in communities, enough change in communities. We came to the realization that, no longer can we define ourselves as an organization to raise money for a great group of agencies. It just wasn't having the impact that it used to have. And so we thought, "Well, where should we go?" And we actually went back over a hundred years to our beginning and redefined ourselves, six or seven years ago, as an organization that was about trying to change conditions in communities to improve people's lives. And the way that that happened, you know, the Governor said it—all these different interests would come together to collectively define the communities' issues and challenges, and design strategies and integrate the approach to make the change. That's all we did. We just went back to that model. And, we started making progress.

I was saying at the breakfast earlier, when we focused on raising money, we were losing relevance. When we focused on issues that people actually cared about, we started raising more money. But then, we stepped back again. And, okay, we're making some progress as an institution, but one out of four kids is not graduating from high school. Almost fifty percent of kids of color aren't graduating from high school. The income gap is as wide as it's been in the country since the 1920's. We don't have enough folks who have access to healthcare. So now we had to ask the question for ourselves, "Is institutional success enough?" The answer, obviously, is no when you take up as much space as we take up.

You can't have institutional success long term if there isn't community success. So we started talking to our partners and looking for partners and asking the question, "What should we be?" And what it kept coming back to again in focus groups and town hall-type meetings and surveys across the country from the American people is, "We want you to focus on

advancing the common good. We like the fact that you're not special interest oriented, that you don't focus on a certain neighborhood. We've got to advance the common good." And then we got back to our partners and decided that it really is, as it always is in my mind, about education, income and health.

Can we get kids ready for school? Can we help them achieve at grade level? Can we help them stay in school? Can we help them graduate? Can we help them get on to the next stage in their lives? And we, then, started looking for the partners that would help us do that. That's why we initially engaged and embraced America's Promise, because we saw the Alliance going back to that kind of an approach, and we, enthusiastically, kind of enlisted in the Alliance.

But as I think about Ready By 21, the Governor and Congressman have said it, but from my perspective now, having worked in local communities in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Georgia and Ohio before coming into this position, it takes a few things: First, setting the goal at a very, very high level so every institution has to change in order to meet it -- magnitude of change over a period of time. We're going to increase graduation rates in this community by 20 percent over the next five years. If we don't do that, it doesn't create the change. Second, and again it's been said before, integration. Integration, from my perspective, is when you agree on the strategies together. Not the issues, but the strategies. And importantly, you allow other institutions to influence your money. So, if you put your money into a pool that others can impact, then I think you're getting past collaboration and into integration, because you're not just controlling your stream of revenue. Finally, it has to be bold. It needs leadership. That's why the partnership, in my mind, is so important. One, no one of our institutions could do it alone. Two, politically, just to be pragmatic, we need each other. We need each other's support and air cover, if you will.

The last thing, on scale. One of the things that this initiative does is it creates a framework for how you would think about a young person's life, their whole life. And we need a framework so we can scale. We've got 1,300 local United Ways that will be out there on their own, unless we have a point of view in terms of how you would go at this. Ready By 21 gives us that.

An example, to give this reality: The United Way in Madison, Wisconsin was asked by the Mayor and the School Superintendent to be the community outreach partner in trying to deal with an issue that they had in Madison. It was the achievement gap between white kids and kids of color in the third grade. Ninety-five percent of all the white kids were achieving at state standard. Less than seventy percent of African American and Latino kids were achieving the same standards. They put a stake in the ground and said, "We're going to close that gap." They went to the teacher's union, got them to agree to change the curriculum, recruited a volunteer mentor for every third grader throughout the public school system in Madison, brought the Parent's Association together to support that effort, went to the local newspaper and said, "Instead of putting the United Way thermometer on your paper during the campaign, would you instead put the test scores, and can we track it over time?" It took them eight years, but today there's no achievement gap between white kids and kids of color in the Madison public schools because of this kind of effort. The challenge now is scaling it. How do we take the framework, get more and more local United Ways, get more and more partners, funders, business leaders and elected officials to take on that kind of effort?

I want to say a special thank you to the JC Penney Afterschool Fund. Jodie Gibson is here. They're funding our effort to test how this works for local United Ways. So in Boston, Austin and in other places, we're going to see how this works. And then, we believe it will work. It gives us that framework to push through the entire United Way system.

Finally, I think we've got to get the metrics right. You know, poverty is important, but when we start creating programs and policies that are 150% of poverty, 200% of poverty... You know, maybe we need to start thinking about different metrics: \$18,000 a year for a family of three in New York City? Minimum wage is important. It's the right debate. But can you live on minimum wage? I mean, if we keep the same metrics in terms of what we're trying to achieve, I think we start, too often, to come up with the same kind of answers. I think it's, for instance, financial stability in addition to poverty. I think it's jobs in addition to subsidies. And I think it's graduation in addition to afterschool programs. We don't need 15% more afterschool programs. We need a different way to approach graduation. We're thrilled to be here. We're very optimistic about what this can do. We, with all humility, will try to be the best partner we can. Thank you.