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A NATIONAL DIALOGUE:

The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHY

Gaston Caperton

President
College Board

Gaston Caperton, a former two-term governor of West Virginia, is the eighth president of the College Board, a not-for-profit membership association founded in 1900 that consists of 5,000 of the nation's leading schools, colleges, and universities. Among its best-known programs are the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®) and the SAT®.

Since his appointment in 1999, Caperton has transformed the College Board into a resolutely mission-driven, values-oriented organization that takes bold steps to connect greater numbers of students to college success and opportunity while raising educational standards. In his successful effort to expand equity within programs that foster academic excellence, he has more than doubled the size of the College Board's staff, modernized its management structure, and established collegeboard.com, the nation's predominant comprehensive Web site serving nearly 4 million students a year as they plan their paths to college.

Under Caperton's leadership, the College Board dramatically changed the SAT, the nation's premier college admissions test. Most significantly, it added a new writing section that has begun to elevate the importance of writing on the nation's education agenda. Addressing concerns over the writing skills of high school graduates, Caperton made the new section a required part of the test, saying, "Good writing is not optional." Higher-level math was added and more critical reading passages were introduced to replace analogies. According to *Time* magazine: "[I]n a historical sense, Caperton's ambitious agenda for the big test is appropriate: 77 years ago, the exam began life as a tool of social change." *Time* called the new SAT "another great social experiment," adding: "This time, the idea is that the test's rigorous new curricular demands will lift all boats—that all schools will improve because they want their students to do well on the test." Caperton also deeply believes that the high standards found within the College Board's Advanced Placement Program courses transform schools and change lives. Soon after his arrival at the College Board, *USA Today*, featured him as the "Education Crusader" and quoted him as saying, "The single most un-American aspect of our great society is the lack of truly equal educational opportunity." *USA Today* added, "Caperton thinks he can help change that. That's why he crisscrossed the USA in the spring, trying to get the board's Advanced Placement courses into more schools."

Fueled by Caperton's philosophy, the College Board launched ambitious AP teacher training programs and Pre-AP® courses in middle schools. During his six years as president, the number of low-income students taking AP courses tripled. The rigor of the AP Exams has held steady, yet student performance has improved. Today, students taking AP Exams are demonstrating ability levels equal to and higher than any previous generation of AP students. Caperton envisions another important role for the AP Program, that of catalyst for a greater appreciation of globalization's influence on education in the United States. His campaign to initiate

a new series of AP world language and culture courses has launched with the development of AP Chinese, Italian, Japanese, and Russian. These join AP World History, Human Geography, and Comparative Government as a series of offerings to prepare students to participate in a global community.

In September 2004, Caperton initiated the creation of College Board Schools, laboratories of learning aimed at preparing underserved middle and high school students to get into college and graduate. The first two schools debuted in New York City's public school system, with the support of the Gates Foundation and the Dell Foundation. Plans for other College Board Schools in low-income neighborhoods are under way. Caperton believes that by participating in College Board academic programs that are led by well-trained teachers, students can achieve academic success no matter what their personal circumstances.

Improving education is not new for Caperton. As governor of West Virginia from 1988 to 1996, he developed a comprehensive plan that emphasized the use of computers and technology in the public schools, beginning with kindergarten through sixth grade, and later expanding to include grades 7 through 12. His aggressive school building program resulted in \$800 million in investments that benefited two-thirds of West Virginia's students. He raised teachers' salaries to thirty-first in the nation from forty-ninth and had more than 19,000 educators trained through a statewide Center for Professional Development.

As the state's thirty-first governor, Caperton brought West Virginia back from the brink of bankruptcy with more than \$500 million in debts, and transformed it into a state that could boast of a \$100 million surplus. Under his leadership, West Virginia's unemployment rate dropped from 9.8 percent to a low of 6.2 percent. This was accomplished by creating more than 86,000 jobs. The sound financial management approach that he initiated led *Financial World* magazine to call West Virginia the most improved state in the nation.

Leaving the statehouse, Caperton spent the spring of 1997 teaching as a fellow at the John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics at Harvard University. He then taught at Columbia University, where he founded and managed the Institute on Education and Government. Caperton began his career as a businessman in his home state. After graduating from the University of North Carolina, he went to work for a small insurance agency in Charleston, West Virginia. He soon became the company's principal owner. Under his leadership, the company grew into the tenth-largest privately owned insurance brokerage firm in the nation.

Gaston Caperton has received numerous state and national awards and special recognition, including eight honorary doctoral degrees. He was chair of the Democratic Governors' Association and served on the National Governors Association Executive Committee. He also served as chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Southern Regional Education Board, and the Southern Growth Policies Board.