

**Hamilton Project—Training America’s Workforce for the Future:
Senator Patty Murray**

“Thank you so much Roger for that introduction. I want to thank Michael Greenstone and the entire staff at the Hamilton Project for this invitation today. And I want to recognize Steve VanAusdle, President of Walla Walla Community College.

“I’m glad you’re all getting the chance to know what we in Washington state have known for some time—that Steve and Walla Walla are stars in our nation’s education and training system. Their innovative work is one reason why Walla Walla Community College is one of 10 finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. Steve, I’ll be keeping my fingers crossed.

My work on the Joint Select Committee

“We are here today to talk about how we make sure our workers are getting the skills and training they need to fill the jobs of the 21st century economy. And there are few issues more critical than this one for the future of the middle class in America.

“But before I speak to this directly, I want to briefly discuss the work I’ve been doing over the last few months on the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. Because I believe the choices that committee faced are very much connected to other choices we need to make as a nation—and the challenges we faced in getting a bipartisan deal are not going away.

“I accepted the job of co-chairing the committee at a time when, as we all know—the middle class in America is struggling. Over the past three months, I’ve heard first-hand from families in my home state of Washington that were fighting to stay in their homes. I talked to workers who were unemployed for far too long and were desperate to get back on the job. I met with small business owners who were losing money every month and didn’t know how they were going to keep their doors open much longer. And again and again, I heard from moms and dads who were truly afraid about the kind of country they were leaving for their children.

“Everywhere I went, I heard from people who simply wanted their government to work. They were tired of the partisan rancor that seems to dominate this city. They were sick of the gridlock that seemed to prevent any progress from being made on critical issues. And they were desperate for their representatives in government to come together to solve the deep problems facing our country.

“They were frustrated—because everyday Americans understand our shared values. Democrat, Republican, or independent—they understand there is so much more than unites us than divides us. You at the Hamilton Project understand that too—you’ve built a fantastic organization around it! But unfortunately, these common values don’t always translate into bipartisan action here in our nation’s capital.

“From the moment I joined the committee, my priorities were clear, and I believe they were shared by all of the committee Democrats. I wanted to help demonstrate to our fellow citizens

that our democracy could work for them; And I wanted to make sure any deal this committee made was fair and balanced—that it called for the sacrifices to be shared with those who could afford it most, and that it did not simply push the burden onto the middle class and most vulnerable Americans.

“My fellow Democrats and I were willing to make deep compromises and painful concessions to get to a fair, balanced, and bipartisan deal.

“We were not willing to allow Medicare or the safety net that families and children rely on be privatized or dismantled—but we put serious offers on the table to reduce spending and strengthen entitlements while reducing their costs over the long run. In fact, one proposal I made to my co-chair matched the Republicans’ offer on the spending AND entitlement side dollar-for-dollar, if not policy for policy.

“However, again, Democrats were not willing to allow the deficit to be reduced solely on the backs of seniors, the middle class, and the most vulnerable Americans. We were willing to make compromises, but we would only make these concessions in the context of a balanced plan. And we were in good company—every bipartisan group that has examined this issue has concluded that there needs to be a balanced approach that tackles both spending and revenue.

“We felt very strongly the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations should share in the sacrifice and bear some of the burden of reducing our deficit and debt. In fact, we think this is so obvious it shouldn’t have even been up for debate! When our country faces serious problems, every American should be expected to step up and help.

“So while so many Americans were struggling, we thought it was more than fair to ask the richest Americans to pay a little bit more—especially after they have been benefitting for years from the lowest tax rates in generations.

“While we were scouring federal programs that families rely on for any hint of fat to trim—we thought it would be more than fair to scour the tax code in just the same way and eliminate the egregious loopholes the wealthiest Americans use to reduce their tax bill.

“At a time when some of the biggest and most profitable corporations use shelters and loopholes to bring their taxes down to literally nothing in many cases—we thought it was only fair to ask them to contribute.

“And while oil and gas companies are making record profits—we believe it made sense to end the handouts they get from taxpayers.

“I think I’m with the vast majority of the American people in saying that’s just fair.

“But unfortunately, Republicans weren’t willing to put this kind of tax revenue on the table to get to a bipartisan deal. Again and again, they insisted that the wealthiest Americans be protected from paying a penny more in taxes. They wanted deficit reduction to simply be about cutting

spending and slashing entitlements, and they had no interest in making sure the sacrifices were shared.

“And to be clear, this is where the negotiation broke down. This was the sticking point. Democrats were willing to put serious compromises on the table when it came to the programs we cared about, but Republicans were absolutely unwilling to allow the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations to pay any more in taxes.

“To me, this was about choices and priorities. Do we ask seniors to pay more for health care before calling on the richest Americans to pay their fair share? Do we slash housing assistance for low-income families without ending loopholes for the biggest corporations? Do we cut training and education programs and not end handouts for big oil and gas companies? To me, the answer to each of these questions is ‘absolutely not.’

“I was brought up to believe our government can be a force for good in our great country. Strong government programs were there for my family when we were struggling and needed the support. In fact, when I was young and my dad got too sick to work—my mom was able to go back to school for retraining using federal grants—and she got the skills she needed to get a job and support our large family.

“Programs like these have been there for millions of families across America over the generations—and I have fought every day in the Senate to make sure they are there for generations to come.

Investing in our workers

“And that brings me to today’s topic: the choice we need to make as a nation to invest in our workers and make sure they are prepared to fill the 21st century jobs our country needs to create. Because as any business owner will tell you—and as I’m sure Roger and Eric can confirm—you can’t simply slash your way to success. You have to invest in the assets you’re going to need. And for our nation, there is no asset more important than our workers.

“A skilled and educated workforce has been the force behind the greatest economy—and the most robust middle class—the world has ever known. More families have been able to propel themselves upward in America than anywhere else—and much of that can be traced back to the education and training our workers have been empowered with.

“But unfortunately, as you all know—our middle class is facing challenges like never before. Our workers are still the best in the world— but unfortunately, our education and skills training system is no longer meeting their needs in our rapidly changing economy.

“As chair of the Senate subcommittee overseeing worker training, I’ve been working on this issue for years—and I know many of you in this room have as well.

“So I’m going to run through some key principles I believe need to underpin our nation’s education and training systems and policies. And underlying them all is this basic idea: we need to start engaging our workers early—and we need to keep going.

“We need to work with our young people to make sure they start off on the right path, and we need to continue investing in their skills into adulthood and throughout their careers.

“So first of all, we need effective early childhood education. This is critical.

“Then we need students in middle and high schools to pick up the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in local growing industries.

“And we need to make sure by the time students finish high school, they are on a path toward a career, a post-secondary education—or both.

“Once in the workforce, we have to make timely, efficient, and effective retraining opportunities available that combine the ability to earn and learn at the same time—that integrate classroom and work-based learning—and that can respond to and help shape regional economic development and growth strategies.

“We also need to push for coordination. For instance, programs in each state should work together to develop unified plans to make sure they are effectively meeting the needs of local workers and employers and supporting local economic development goals.

“And finally, we need to continually analyze and identify programs and strategies that work best using common performance metrics—and be willing to close down those that don’t.

“Because our employers, industries, and the economy are dynamic—and our education and training programs must be able to grow and change with them.

This is going to take a real investment

“Those are the principles I believe need to guide us in this area. But it’s going to take more than principles—it’s going to take a real commitment and a serious investment. We can’t train our workers on the cheap. And we can’t continue choking off funding for the programs so many depend on.

“Last year’s proposed budget from the Republicans would have: Eliminated workforce development programs; Closed thousands of one-stop career centers; Shut down job corps centers; And slashed funding for Pell Grants.

“We killed that bad idea in the Senate—but these proposals keep coming back, and we need to keep fighting them off. Because although we need to cut spending and reduce the deficit—trust me, I spent the last three months working on this—we can’t afford to do that on the backs of our workers and the future of our economy.

“And because I care deeply about the effectiveness of our worker training programs—I believe we need to keep pushing them to improve and serve workers, businesses, and communities even better.

Looking Forward—We need your help

“And that’s where I believe all of you are going to play such a critical role. I’m going to keep fighting for these issues in the Senate—and I think we are going to win some of these battles because the American people are behind us. But it’s not going to be easy. And we are not going to always move as quickly as those of us here in this room would like.

“Which is why the work being done outside Congress is going to be absolutely essential.

“Hamilton is bringing together some of the leading thinkers to discuss how to restart our economy, rebuild the skill base of our workforce, and put America back to work.

“And I was pleased to see the papers presented here today work well with policies and bills I’ve introduced recently.

“But if we can’t always get the other side to work with us on getting this right, then it is going to be even more important for Hamilton, Georgetown, Aspen, Walla Walla, Siemens, and others to step up and fill some of that void.

“To make sure we have the policies, systems and programs in place at every level to meet our emerging needs. That we are getting the most out of—and delivering the most to—employers, educational institutions, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and the public sector. And that we have the financing mechanisms in place to meet our needs in times of growth as well as during recessions.

“It’s going to take smart policies, a long-term focus, collective commitment, and setting aside politics as usual—which all happen to be things that The Hamilton Project is good at!

“So I am going to keep working with you—and I’m confident you’re going to keep stepping up. Because you know what I know: the future of the middle class in America depends on us getting this issue right.

Conclusion—this is about choices

“And because finally, once again—this is about choices. That’s really what budgets are about—it’s what all government is about when you get down to it. We need to make some choices as a nation about what we want our country to look like ten years from now—twenty years from now—fifty years from now.

“We need to decide: Are we going to make the choices required to leave our children and grandchildren a better country than the one we were left by our parents and grandparents—or are we going to drop the ball? Are we going to share the sacrifices that this moment calls for—or are

we going to allow middle class families and the most vulnerable Americans to sacrifice on their own?

“My view on this is clear—and I know I share it with many of you in this room: We need policies that boost the economy, create jobs, and ensure prosperity is shared with the middle class families and workers who power our nation forward.

“Investing in our worker education and training is a big part of that. And so is making sure our fiscal house is put in order in a fair and balanced way.

“You know, when the supercommittee wrapped up without a final product I was deeply disappointed. I worked really hard to get a balanced and bipartisan deal—and I wanted to meet our deadline with a good and fair result.

“But to me, this wasn’t the end of the process—it was just the beginning. I am going to keep fighting to reduce the deficit and debt, and to enact policies that work for middle class families.

“This week in the Senate we are going to be voting on a bill that would extend the payroll tax cuts for middle class families— and I truly hope every member who was so concerned about preserving tax cuts for the richest Americans is now ready to support them for working families.

“This choice should be easy—but I know there are going to be many more choices and battles in the years ahead. And I am very glad to have people like you fighting by my side.

“Before I end, I want to note that one of the national leaders in worker training has been Siemens, which employs more than 62,000 workers in the U.S., including 1,100 in my home state of Washington,

“Siemens has thousands of job openings around the country and is aggressively working to fill those positions through the use of apprenticeships, career pathways, and close partnerships with education and training providers.

“If I didn’t have to get back to a meeting, I’d grab a seat in the audience and listen to Roger and Eric Spiegel, the President and CEO of Siemens Corporation here in the United States, moderate this next discussion.

“But I’m going to have to ask my staff to brief me on all the great ideas I’m sure will come up.

“So thank you once again for inviting me to speak. Enjoy the rest of the day.”

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