



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO

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**Mayor Rahm Emanuel's Speech to the Economic Club of Chicago**

*Remarks As Prepared*

John, thank you for the introduction. Congratulations on your victory tonight. Now you have two organizations to lead: the Economic Club and Republicans for Rahm.

John, don't get your priorities out of order. I'm counting on you.

John has become the leader of an organization that has helped Chicago make the most of its challenges for more than 80 years.

But tonight is unique in the Economic Club's history. Yes, we have executives from all types of industry. Many of you have helped turn Chicago into the global city it has become.

But I also want to single out the young leaders of Chicago's future who are sitting beside you. In this room is a sample of the teachers, doctors, lawyers, ministers, and executives, who will shape Chicago in the years to come. Believe me, that future is not too far away.

It seems like five minutes ago I was a kid working for Congressman Paul Simon when he was running for Senate, and later had the honor of working for Mayor Daley. Back then I was brash, profane, competitive, and very young. Now I'm just brash, profane, and competitive.

But I don't want the young people here to get the wrong idea. Those are not the qualities you need to be Mayor, just the qualities I needed to compete with my two brothers.

When I was growing up, my brothers never would have imagined I would be here tonight, addressing the Economic Club of Chicago. And when I started out in politics, I don't think the members of the Economic Club thought I would be addressing them as Mayor.

The Economic Club has hosted Prime Minister Tony Blair, GE CEO Jack Welch and President Jimmy Carter.



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After World War Two, you invited General Omar Bradley. What made his speech remarkable was how little he spoke of his victories on the battlefield. Instead, he warned that what led to his success would not work for America in the future. He was right. The battlefield was about to change.

In the 1950s, you hosted a young Senator and future president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Then Senator Kennedy told the Economic Club that our country's ties with new nations and emerging markets would determine its future. He was right. Think about that: in the 1950s he saw over the horizon and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the global economy that we know today.

Both General Bradley and President Kennedy made the most of their time here by discussing the dangers and opportunities ahead.

We too have an opportunity tonight, not to dwell on our city's past, but to look to our future and to build a stronger Chicago.

Nobody respects the leaders in this room more than I do. So I am going to pay you the ultimate compliment: the compliment of candor and honesty.

I'm here to talk about what we must do to rebuild and re-imagine our educational system.

We have the best kids in the world, but when they emerge from the system, whether from our high schools or community colleges, they lag far behind their peers, both in this country and around the world. We are not providing them an education that allows them to live up to their full potential.

That should matter to all of us because these are Chicago's children. And whether we are from the Northside, Westside, Southside, or downtown, we are one Chicago. We have one future.

The task is enormous but the equation is simple: the future of Chicago hinges on the future of our school system. That is the equation that drives me every day.

We all know this: education is the great equalizer. If you provide people an education, a city and a country will succeed.

I know I'm not the first politician to point that out, or say that changes in education are urgently needed. Some elected officials have said that early childhood is the key – and they are right. Others have stressed strong high schools, and math and science -- and they are right.

But when it comes to investing in education, it can't be multiple-choice. It must be all of the above.

From the cradle to the career, from kindergarten to college—that is where we must invest our resources and our time.

When you look at the educational debate of the past 30 years, there has been a great deal of focus on the early years, the high school years, and our four-year institutions.



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What has not been a focus since the creation of the GI Bill is our community colleges, despite the fact that community colleges are where a majority of America's students go for post-secondary education or training. By overlooking these critical centers of learning, we are missing an important opportunity. And our economy is now showing the strains of these years of neglect.

When employers can't find skilled workers during one of the deepest recessions in American history, that should tell us something: we have a tool in our arsenal that is not doing all it can for our students. It must be modernized for the new economy.

Our community colleges were a linchpin of America's post war boom and they are just as critical today.

They are as important to our economic growth and potential as a city as any other part of our educational system. Modernizing them is how we will continue to attract industries and make the most of our strengths. Think about this: there are more students in our City Colleges, 127,000, than in all of Chicago's four-year institutions combined.

Now don't get me wrong, Chicago and the state of Illinois have great institutions of higher learning. We know them: Northwestern, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, Depaul, Columbia College, Loyola, Roosevelt, UIC.

We have two of the top five business schools in the country in Booth and Kellogg. We have great law schools. In technology we have IIT, Fermi, Argonne labs, and U of I.

Chicago is also the destination of choice for graduates from the Big Ten States, be they from Madison, Columbus, Ann Arbor, Iowa City, East Lansing, Minneapolis / Saint Paul, Indianapolis, or South Bend.

What we have overlooked in the development of our workforce is the preparation of our own children. We have not developed the educational system that helps our economy grow.

We can no longer allow the practices of the past to sabotage our hopes for the future.

When I talk to CEO's I hear a regular message from them about their workforce and the skills they need. Whether that's Pat Woertz at ADM, Glenn Tilton at United, Glen Tullman at Allscripts, Randall Stephenson at AT&T, Jamie Dimon at at JP Morgan, Vikram Pandit at Citibank, or some of you in this room. You all tell me the same thing: from welders, to code-writers, to workers in healthcare and IT services, you need more skilled employees.

We need skilled workers to rebuild our infrastructure, we need them to care for the sick; we need them to welcome the millions who visit Chicago each year in our hospitality industry; we need them to make the products people want to buy; and to write the code that powers new technologies.



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But employers can't find skilled workers and workers can't find jobs. Like the rest of the country, Chicago has a skills gap.

And we can't say we haven't been warned. I want to give you a set of headlines, literally, from just the last four weeks:

From *The Wall Street Journal*, November 16th: quote -- Study finds US workers under pressure to improve skills, but need more support. -- unquote

In *The Wall Street Journal* on November 25<sup>th</sup>: quote – In an unexpected twist some skilled jobs go begging – unquote

From *Crain's* on December 2<sup>nd</sup> in an article, *Closing the tech-skills gap* -- quote -- More than 60% of small businesses are struggling to find skilled applicants. – unquote

From the *Chicago Tribune*, a week ago, on December 6<sup>th</sup>: quote - Jobs go unfilled as skills fall flat. – unquote

But I don't need to read about the skills gap in *The Wall Street Journal* or the *Tribune* or *Crain's*. I see it and hear about it everyday.

Riding the El six weeks ago, I met a young man who was commuting from Harold Washington Community College where he studies business and computers to his job at a Target warehouse.

That young man is doing everything right. He's studying, he's holding down a job. He is doing everything we can ask of him to give himself a better shot at a future.

So when he puts Harold Washington on his resume, that should mean something to his employer. It should have economic value to him.

The basic agreement is you take responsibility, and we'll provide you opportunity. That young man is taking responsibility but we are not living up to our side of the bargain.

Can we honestly say to ourselves that we are doing everything we can for him, that he is getting the best from us?

When he walks into a job interview, and it says Harold Washington or Malcolm X College on his resume, his hard work should pay-off. If we work together, starting tonight, it will.

Because the young man looking for opportunity and the CEO in the corporate suite, looking for skilled workers, are looking for the same thing.



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The community college is the link our employees and employers need, but it has been missing in action.

Companies need workers who make the products, design the products, wire the products, move the products and sell the products – and community colleges can provide them.

As Mayor, I cannot read the headlines about a skills gap, I can't see it everyday in our city, and say that it's not my problem.

It is my problem -- because it's unconscionable to me that we can have more than 100,000 job openings, and close to a 10% unemployment rate.

It is because I know that we have exactly what we need to answer the challenge, both for employees and employers, and it is right here under our nose: our community college system.

Let's be candid: most community colleges offer students what they should have learned in high school. Too often, they provide remedial learning to compensate for gaps in their education. That is not why our community college system was established.

Community colleges were the catapult for the World War II generation coming home from the battlefield, the generation of Americans who became the most productive and economically expansive in American history. They can serve that same function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a high school education was a necessity for the industrial economy. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two years of quality post-secondary education are equally essential.

That's especially true here in Chicago when you look at our engines of growth: transportation and logistics, healthcare sciences, IT, conventions and tourism, professional services, and high-end manufacturing.

We need our community colleges linked up to those growth sectors. And to do that, we need our industry leaders linked up to those schools.

Because of our central location, we are a transportation and logistics juggernaut, but we cannot rest on our location alone.

The question is: will we train the skilled workers we need to capitalize on the advantages we have?



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Because of our private sector leadership with Abbott Labs, Walgreens, Baxter, and Allscripts, and our hospitals, like Rush, Stroger, Northwestern and University of Chicago, we are becoming a global healthcare sciences hub.

The question is: Will we train for it?

Because of McCormick Place and O'Hare, we continue to be a world-leader in tourism and conventions.

The question is: Will we train for it?

Because of Navistar, Ford, and ArcelorMittal steel, we can serve as a national center for high-end manufacturing.

The question is: Will we train for it?

Because of Motorola Solutions, Molex, and GroupOn, we can be the nation's next hot spot for technology and innovation.

The question is: Will we train for it?

Because we are home to great global businesses like Aon, Boeing and United, and we are home to great law firms, and great consulting firms like Accenture, and great accounting firms like Ernst and Young, we are the professional services center of the Midwest.

The question is: Will we train for it?

Because we are about to launch the largest infrastructure investment for a city, not just for our water but for our roads, and soon for our mass transit, we will need a strong partnership with labor. We will need workers in skilled trades.

The question is: will we train for it?

And tonight, here in this room, we answer that fundamental question.

Tonight, we charge our community colleges with a new mission: to train the workforce of today for the jobs of tomorrow; to give our students the ability to achieve a middle class standard of living; to provide our companies with the skilled workers they need.



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Cities like Miami and Louisville have tried something similar -- but in a single industry, with a single school. Miami matched a community college to train students in the healthcare sciences. Louisville has linked a community college with UPS to be a leader in logistics.

But this is Chicago. We need something bigger, more ambitious, and more comprehensive, something to match the diversity and depth of our economy, which is one of our strengths.

So tonight, I am announcing that we will tailor six of our community colleges to train students in a specific sector, where we know we can dominate the future.

We are announcing our first two schools and their partners tonight.

Malcolm X College will be the school that drives Chicago's leadership in the healthcare sciences.

Rush Medical Center, Stroger and Northwestern Hospitals, Advocate Healthcare, Baxter, Walgreens and Allscripts have agreed to partner with Malcolm X College, to develop their curriculum and train the faculty.

Olive Harvey College will be our center for excellence in transportation, distribution, and logistics. They will work with UPS, Canadian National Railway, AAR, and BNSF, among others. They will be Olive Harvey's partners in modernizing their programs and providing the training students need to compete in the transportation and logistics field.

As Mayor of Chicago, I can't protect our city from a global or national recession. But I can address a skills gap -- so that no employer, in the middle of a deep recession, is without the employees they must have -- so that no worker is without the skills they need to find a job.

We have a dynamic Chancellor of our community college system, Cheryl Hyman, and I've appointed each of the six new City College presidents to oversee this modernization. But this reinvention, and the investments required to make our school-system world class, is something that all of us must be a part of.

Reinvention is nothing new to our city. Chicago went from a remote trading post to a center of global industry. From the cinders of the great fire, our city became a showcase for the world in its architecture.

Chicago did not reinvent itself by itself. Our growth was forged by those who were willing to make the tough choices and the right investments, by people who were not afraid to see the future, with all its challenges, as an opportunity.

Today, we must be those people.



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And tonight, I ask you, to be a partner in the transformation of our community colleges.

Every year we will modernize two new schools and match them with partners in the private sector, to train the workers for our factories, for our offices, for our hospitals, for our hotel industry and for our infrastructure.

We are going to remake our community college system into a skills-based, vocational-based educational system.

In the same way that you help Booth and Kellogg prepare their graduates for careers in management and finance, we need you to partner with our community colleges -- so that their curriculums meet the needs of the sectors that power the Chicago economy.

I'm not talking about hiring one person or even a partnership. It's more than that. This is about ensuring that the curriculum taught at community colleges provides the skills you need at your place of employment.

By making a diploma from our community colleges into a ticket to the workforce, we will make them a first option for job training and not a last resort.

I do not expect you to do this alone. Our community college leaders will be right there with you. And whatever you invest in our schools, you will get back many times over in the skills of your employees and your ability to grow.

There is no greater investment we can make in the life of our city, than the one we make in the lives of our students.

And I can also tell you, there is no greater reward.

Meeting young people on the campaign trail or in my visits to schools as Mayor, that's something I've learned over and over again.

Every day our students wake up optimistic about their future. They believe they can achieve great things and so many of them do, sometimes against great odds.

If our students have the strength to turn obstacles into opportunities, surely, the adults do as well.

Some say that a comprehensive investment in all levels of education, in all our communities, is impossible. Today's fiscal challenges make it more difficult.

Yes we have to set priorities. Yes, we have to make tough choices. And that's what we're doing tonight.

But to those who say that we can't afford to confront these challenges, I say, we can't afford not to.



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And let me tell you something: we're already doing it in K through 12.

Four new charter-schools opened this year, serving 2,000 more students. Five more will come on line next year. 2,300 more kids attend magnet schools of excellence this year. 6,000 more children have full-day kindergarten.

And this year, at my urging 13 Chicago public schools are offering a full school day. An additional 36 charter schools serving 17,000 students citywide will join them and transition to a full school day next month.

We've begun the largest turnaround of our neighborhood schools. Next year ten schools will be staffed by new principals and new teachers, many trained by AUSL, which has a proven record of success.

Beginning next year, every public school student in Chicago will have an additional 250 hours of time on task learning the fundamentals.

At Howe School in Chicago, that means 55 more hours on task for more Math. That's 55 more hours in reading and writing. That's 55 more hours on task for our students to study science.

But a full day won't matter unless we're willing and able to make the most of it. We need to strengthen the three pillars behind every student's success: a principle who is accountable, a teacher who is motivated, and a parent who is engaged.

That is the combination that can unlock achievement for all our students, in all our communities.

And if we make those investments in accountability and opportunity, we can ensure that when students arrive at a four-year institution or community college, that they are ready for the next level, to compete and win.

When it comes to modernizing our public education system and community colleges, I will not take no for an answer.

Any business that stands pat as the world changes is a business that's doomed to failure. And our city has no more important business than educating our students.

Change is always difficult. The status quo is more comfortable.

In seven months in this job, I have come to the conclusion that people hate the status quo ... and they are not too excited about change either.

But when the status quo is failing, then change is inevitable. We can resolve to help shape the future or allow ourselves to be shaped by it.



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The people in this room tonight are leaders and not followers. And I'm not just talking about the members of the Economic Club. I'm talking about the young people who have joined us.

This is the future of Chicago. For the kids in this room, and the students throughout Chicago, we must resolve to do everything we can to make sure they are successful.

I firmly believe that we can overcome any obstacle if we are willing to confront our challenges with vision and determination. That's why I ran for the job of Mayor and I believe that's why the people of Chicago elected me. In the past months we have started the fight for change and, with your help, we will continue it. We can ensure that the future of our city and every student will be unlimited.

We can be sure that our children and grandchildren can be as proud to call Chicago their home as we are today.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless Chicago.

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