

Special Student Engagement Project



In Partnership with the University of Denver's Institute for Public Policy Studies



UNIVERSITY OF
DENVER
1864

Special Student Engagement Project -- Denver

An integral part of The Concord Coalition's mission is to educate young people around the country about the fiscal policies that shape their future and, in many cases, put it at risk. We encourage young people to become more vocal in the national debates over those policies.

So as part of the Fiscal Stewardship Project, Concord partnered with the University of Denver's Institute for Public Policy Studies on a series of events over two days in October on the university campus. Richard Caldwell, institute director, explains why he believes young people should become more informed on federal budget policies and their consequences:

What will life actually be like when interest rates double and debt service is the only salient economic fact? How will the average 25-year-old react when it becomes clear that American sovereignty itself—and the freedom of action that goes with it—can no longer be assumed? How will the heavily indebted college student cope with the fact that genuine equity, usually the by-product of sustained professional achievement, will be less and less the outcome of a well-managed career, replaced by dependency on a massive, but fundamentally insolvent, government?

The project in October sought to encourage students to consider such questions. The project's components:

- “Paying for America: A Fiscal Summit.” This was a day-long event attended by undergraduate and graduate students from across the state of Colorado. The students heard from many of the nation's leading experts on the scale of America's fiscal problems, the consequences of inaction, a range of potential solutions and how young people could have an impact on these issues during their academic years and beyond. Nearly 300 students participated in the summit.
- A “Fiscal Wake-Up Tour” program. With support from the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, the Concord Coalition has presented this program in 30 states to help Americans better understand the fiscal and economic challenges ahead. The evening program at the University of Denver was open to students as well as the general public.
- The following day, at the institute's “Great Issues Forum,” graduate students met with Robert L. Bixby, Concord's executive director; Diane Lim Rogers, Concord's chief economist, and Isabel V. Sawhill, a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution who also participated in the earlier programs.

A follow-up survey of several dozen students found that 83% of them thought they learned a great deal about the country's fiscal status, and 87% indicated that they were concerned or very concerned about it. Four out of five students said it was important or very important to discuss fiscal policy in their classes. More than nine out of ten students said they were willing to take personal action or attend a future program on this subject.

In addition to helping educate hundreds of young people, these events supported Concord's goal of fostering more grassroots activism in communities throughout the United States that can help bring pressure on elected officials to pursue more responsible policies. Concord had found substantial interest in these issues in the past in Colorado, where a previous Wake-Up Tour program was warmly received in late 2006. We believe the October programs provide a solid foundation for further Concord work in Colorado.

The student summit and other activities at the University of Denver are the subject of the following report by Professor Caldwell. As his report notes, the summit "is a prototype for future events and community outreach."

Caldwell also recommends that the central ideas that were featured in the summit should be embedded in the course of study for students. The event, he says, demonstrated that some students "are ready for change and eager to take meaningful action."

The Concord Coalition believes these programs, and the subsequent outreach efforts, can serve as a model for the future. By working with other institutions, we can encourage grassroots efforts in communities throughout the nation and help more young Americans to become involved in critical policy debates.

The University of Denver, in the following report, chronicles the steps that were taken to make the programs there an enormous success.

Paying for America: A Fiscal Summit
Presented By:
The Institute for Public Policy Studies
The University of Denver
October 22, 2009

Report to The Concord Coalition
Submitted By: Richard A. Caldwell
Director
The Institute for Public Policy Studies &
The Graduate and Undergraduate Programs in Public Policy
The University of Denver

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Paying for America Partnership

Paying for America: A Fiscal Summit, was the highly successful result of an agreement between the Institute for Public Policy Studies (IPPS) at the University of Denver, an independent, private university, established in 1864, and the Concord Coalition, a well-established, nonpartisan organization, based in Washington, D.C., which promotes fiscal responsibility.

Beginning in August 2009—and with the full and enthusiastic support of **Robert D. Coombe**, Chancellor of the University of Denver and **Robert Bixby**, Executive Director of the Concord Coalition—a unique and ambitious program was developed by the Institute for Public Policy Studies, in close consultation with the Concord Coalition. With generous financial support of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation and the vital assistance of Concord Coalition staff, the project was designed, directed and coordinated by **Richard A. Caldwell**, Director of IPPS.

Paying for America Goals

Still one more thing, fellow citizens—a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

President Thomas Jefferson
First Inaugural Address (1801)

The goals of the *Paying for America Summit* were complex. The *first* objective was to create and market an all day program for undergraduate and graduate college students, featuring many of the nation’s leading experts on fiscal and economic policy, thus giving students a first-hand opportunity to learn about the budgetary challenges facing the United States. The *second* objective was to develop and market an evening presentation of The Concord Coalition’s *Fiscal Wake-Up Tour*, featuring **Hon. David Walker**, President of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation and former Comptroller General of the United States.

Paying for America Execution

The fundamental purpose of the Paying for America Summit was to alert the college audience to the impending fiscal disaster posed by too much spending and unsustainable debt.

Since the New Deal, the United States has wagered on a vibrant economy and counted on a secure financial future—and *won*, often with the active support and intervention of government. But our many triumphs have had a price tag. Now, entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare, which have benefitted millions of people, dominate the federal budget—and threaten our nation’s fiscal integrity.

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Our “unfunded liabilities”—truly, chain letters to the future—now total over \$60 trillion. Our economy barely survived last year’s financial implosion on Wall Street, partly by printing money and selling Treasury bonds to foreign competitors—resulting in the addition of trillions of dollars to the federal debt. The federal budget has exploded, through stimulus spending and bailouts. Federal spending vastly exceeds federal revenue, with no end in sight.

Accomplishing the goals of the *Summit*, to truly educate students in a sophisticated way and create a vivid sense of fiscal awareness, requires much more than a short program, or a single presentation. It was agreed that the *Summit* would be conceptualized from the beginning as a “total emersion” experience, one that would call on students to exert themselves over the course of a full day, thereby, “raising the bar” significantly, in terms of building understanding of the financial and economic dangers that threaten America.

Accordingly, the issues that defined the *Paying for America Summit* were organized into four logical parts—**(1) Causes; (2) Consequences; (3) Cures; and (4) Moving the Debate Ahead: The Challenge to the Next Generation of Leaders.**

(1) Session One: The Causes (9:00-10:15 A.M.)

Presentations:

Robert Bixby

Executive Director The Concord Coalition

Joseph Minarik

Director of Research The Committee for Economic Development

Brian Riedl

Grover Hermann Fellow in Federal Budgetary Affairs The Heritage Foundation

Isabel Sawhill

Director, Budgeting for National Priorities The Brookings Institution

Moderator:

Richard D. Lamm

University Professor

The University of Denver

Former Three-term Governor, State of Colorado

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(2) Session Two: The Consequences (10:30-11:45 A.M.)

Presentations:

William Gale

Co-Director Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center The Brookings Institution

Donald Marron

President, Marron Economics, LLC

Visiting Professor

Georgetown University Public Policy Institute

Diane Lim Rogers

Chef Economist The Concord Coalition

(3) Session Three: The Cures (12:00 Noon – 2:00 P.M.)

Plenary Address:

(Luncheon)

Honorable David Walker

President and CEO

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation

Former Comptroller General of the United States

Interactive Budget Simulation

Conducted by:

Joshua Gordon

Policy Director

The Concord Coalition

(4) Session Four: Moving the Debate Ahead: The Challenge to America's Next Generation of Leaders (2:15 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.)

Presentations:

David Burstein

Executive Director

“18 in 08”

Independent Filmmaker

Patrick Creadon

Writer/Director “I.O.U.S.A.” and “I.O.U.S.A. — Solutions”

Heidi Gantwerk

Vice President Viewpoint Learning

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Martin Serna
Co-Founder and Executive Director
Concerned Youth of America

Attendance Goals

The venue for the *Paying for America Summit* was the Cable Center, a state of the art facility, located on the University of Denver campus.

The key concept behind the *Paying for America Summit*—educating college students about fiscal policy in a concentrated manner—was ambitious. Attendance goals were set high and were exceeded by a substantial margin. Marketing efforts designed to make the *Paying for America Summit* a success were focused primarily on students at the University of Denver and surrounding colleges, including the University of Colorado at Denver, the University of Colorado at Boulder, Colorado College, Regis University, and the Colorado School of Mines. Originally, a goal of 200 students was set for the full day program. However, well over **300** students registered—and **285** students actually attended—the full day program.

Marketing Paying for America

The *Paying for America Summit* presented an extraordinarily complex array of material and asked a great deal from students, in terms of concentration and involvement. A variety of marketing strategies were employed, including traditional advertising, flyers, grassroots contact, and social networking. Significantly, a special website with a unique URL was developed—www.payingforamerica.org—which provided information about the program and a simple registration form. This website continues in operation and will provide an informational venue for future development.

The commitment level of students who registered was high—well over 90% of the registrants actually *attended* the event. Notably, all aspects of the *Paying for America Summit* were offered at no charge, including registration materials and handouts, the luncheon and refreshments.

Additionally, an intense effort was conducted by our event staff to spread the word on the University of Denver campus. A series of “email blasts” were directed to faculty and students, beginning approximately three weeks before the *Summit*, tailored to specific departments and majors.

Gratifyingly, a number of University of Denver faculty strongly recommended the program to their students, urged them to attend the entire event, and in some cases, provided the opportunity for students to attend the *Summit*, *in lieu* of a scheduled class. Along with traditional departments, contacts were made with faculty and students at the Daniels College of Business, the Sturm College of Law, and the Korbel School of International Studies. An enthusiastic group of undergraduate majors in Public Policy at DU volunteered their time to speak with various student organizations.

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Results

Without question, the *Paying for America Summit* demonstrated the vitality and viability of an intensive, well-planned and well-executed program, designed to awaken the current generation of students to our fiscal challenges and mobilize them to demand action by our political leaders. This was a unique and adventurous programming experiment that put both the University of Denver and the Concord Coalition in the spotlight.

Enthusiasm was high for the *Summit* from the beginning and student reaction was universally supportive. Indeed, it was proposed during *Session Four: Moving the Debate Ahead*, that students “ask their profs,” and request them to include materials in their courses relevant to fiscal solvency and stability—and not simply assume that the current “redistributional” model of ever-increasing transfer payments and massive entitlements, was a permanent, immutable feature of modern government.

Toward a New Dynamic

Paying for America: A Fiscal Summit, is a prototype for future events and community outreach. The key, however, is to *build* on the success of the *Summit* concept and create a groundswell of demand for fiscal accountability, especially with respect to today’s college students—America’s next generation of decision-makers.

How might this be done? Based on our experience with *Paying for America: A Fiscal Summit*, it is essential to create a new and transferable paradigm for fiscal awareness and accountability. Certainly, more events like the *Paying for America Summit* can—and should—be held on influential campuses. But the next steps should also involve *embedding* the core ideas explored in the *Summit* into the course of study of our newly aware college students—the kind of students that our event proved are ready for change and eager to take meaningful action.

The Fiscal Wake-Up Tour (7:00 – 9:00 P.M.)

A significant *second* component of the agreement between the Institute for Public Policy Studies at the University of Denver and the Concord Coalition was the *Fiscal Wake-Up Tour*, which was presented to a large community audience on the evening of October 22, 2009, following the *Paying for America Summit*. This event was marketed to the general public and featured **Hon. David Walker; Isabel Sawhill; Brian Riedl; and Robert Bixby**—all of whom had made extensive presentations earlier in the day to the student audience.

A diverse audience of over **400** people filled the Great Hall at the Cable Center and listened attentively to a variety of presentations by the panel members, which were designed to create a broad understanding of America’s fiscal condition. An intensive question and answer session followed the presentations and demonstrated the increasing anxiety, which exists in the general public concerning America’s deteriorating fiscal condition. While some of the questions were more emotionally based than they were factually based, the audience paid rapt attention and the session could have easily continued beyond the designated hour. Certainly, the *Fiscal Wake-Up Tour* segment of the program simultaneously offered information to the general public and an opportunity for sampling grassroots sentiment close-up.

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Clearly, this event was also tremendously successful. For example, On October 26, 2009, a thoughtful lead editorial in *The Denver Post*, “Overburdened by Nation’s Debt,” was based on the perspectives advanced in the *Fiscal Wake-Up Tour* and validated our message of concern about ever-increasing deficit spending.

Marketing for the *Fiscal Wake-Up Tour* segment of the event involved advertising in *The Denver Post*, promotional spots on National Public Radio, and a series of targeted email “blasts” to several thousand University of Denver event supporters. In addition, members of various civic organizations received emails, including Rotary International, the Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce, the Women’s Chamber of Commerce, the Colorado Forum, and the Colorado Council on Economic Education.

Expenditure Metrics

Venue rental, event parking, audio visual, webcasting, and catering: approximately **60%** of total expenditures

Event staffing: approximately **30%** of total expenditures

Advertising and marketing: approximately **8%** of total expenditures

General supplies, handouts, copying costs: approximately **2%** of total expenditures

Paying for America Staffing

The program success and high attendance of both the *Paying for America Summit* and the *Fiscal Wake-Up Tour* were due to the dedicated work of a number of key individuals. A special team was assembled at the Institute for Public Policy Studies, specifically to execute these events and included: **Eric Butz**; **Meredith Henry**; **Ingrid Serio**; and **Chloé McNeill**, Program Manager of the Institute for Public Policy Studies, along with numerous student volunteers. The **Special Community Programs Office** at the University of Denver and the **Office of Communications**, along with staff at the **Cable Center**, provided logistical support. **Jeffrey Thiebert**, National Grassroots Director of the **Concord Coalition**, provided a vital linkage to the *Paying for America* team at the University of Denver.

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Further Information

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Webcast

The entire program of *Paying for America: A Fiscal Summit*, is available on the **Concord Coalition** website at:

www.concordcoalition.org.