Dear AACC Board Members:

February may be the shortest month, but it proved to be extraordinarily productive for AACC and its member colleges. Following are the major activities since I last wrote:

1. The acquisition of new resources has been especially welcome and includes the following:
   - Support for the 21st-Century Initiative and our listening tour in the amount of $500,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation;
   - Contribution of $150,000 from the Kresge Foundation for phase II of the 21st-Century Initiative;
   - Commitments from ACT and ETS to support key elements of the 21st-Century Initiative;
   - A $1.3 million gift from Kresge Foundation to advance the association’s sustainability work through SEED (Sustainability Education and Economic Development).

2. We continue to receive excellent feedback from our listening tour, with four regional sessions now completed in Austin, Texas, Detroit, Michigan, a combined Maryland/Virginia, and DC meeting, and Tallahassee, Florida. Although each meeting has had unique characteristics, common themes are starting to emerge, and we have elicited a number of “big ideas” with great potential. Our findings will be summarized in a report to the AACC Board at our April meeting in New Orleans and later shared with members of the new national commission to be announced at the convention’s closing plenary.

3. The listening tour and the feedback we are getting was a major topic of conversation during a meeting Norma Kent and I had with senior editorial staff of The Chronicle of Higher Education on February 22 at their offices. They were also very interested in our perceptions of their coverage.

4. Within the context of issues raised our November meeting and subsequent conversations I have had with board member Anna Solley and others, I have decided to make a significant change in AACC’s relationship with its Affiliated Councils. With continued economic uncertainty, several of our councils are struggling financially, so AACC has decided to forego the annual dues the councils pay to help them sustain their operations. We will be making a number of other changes such as discounted booths at AACC Convention and additional steps that will give them greater visibility.
5. Meeting with existing and future supporters is a major emphasis, as we pursue the goal of identifying more resources for member colleges and AACC. I had early discussions with Josh Wyner who was recently selected to head up the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. Josh noted that Aspen expects to narrow finalists for the prize by April, and we will monitor that effort closely. Norma Kent and I met via telephone with the Kellogg Foundation’s Dr. Angelo Williams and staff, along with former AACC Board Chair Bernie Luskin, to finalize contents for Legacy of Leadership, a book Bernie has edited on the last four AACC presidents and the continuing support the foundation has provided for leadership programs at major universities. The book will be introduced at a special reception at the AACC Convention, so look for your invitation to that event.

6. The Achieving the Dream Strategy Institute continues to grow, and this year I brought greetings from AACC to a rousing group of 1,400 participants. I took advantage of my time in Indianapolis to meet with Lumina Foundation CEO Jamie Merisotis and program officers Sam Cargile and James Applegate.

7. This year’s National Legislative Summit also had very robust attendance here in Washington, D.C., and was attended by the AACC Executive Committee and a number of our board members. A combined meeting of the executive committees of both AACC and the Association of Community College Trustees continued an ongoing dialogue on shared priorities such as the Voluntary Framework of Accountability and funding for our colleges.

8. Former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and I met over lunch February 11 to discuss progress on the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Initiative, which now includes five AACC member colleges: LaGuardia Community College, Long Beach Community College District, Los Angeles City College, Delgado Community College and Houston Community College. The initiative has generated tremendous enthusiasm and will be the focus of a special spotlight session at the AACC Convention. Secretary Spellings is expected to participate in that session and other parts of our meeting.

9. ACCT’s Noah Brown and I had an initial meeting with staff of the National Governors Association to discuss possible future coordination of such pressing issues as governance of higher education, the AACC/ACCT VFA initiative and declining state support for community colleges.

10. At the invitation of Houston Community College System Chancellor Mary Spangler, I made a presentation on AACC priorities and leadership to the HCCS executive team. I was also delighted to be Mary’s guest at a black-tie gala to celebrate Black History Month. Julian Bond delivered very moving remarks to the more than 1,000 people in attendance.

11. This week, I participated in various events of the annual meeting of the American Council on Education (ACE), held here in D.C. We were pleased to congratulate Miami-Dade’s Eduardo Padron, as he begins service as chair of the ACE Board.

12. Two prospective Corporate Program participants met with staff and me here at One Dupont Circle: Michael Mouron, president of Capstone Companies, a highly successful group that specializes in
construction of student residential facilities, and Michael Glubke, president of Dynamic Campus, a firm that provides integrated IT solutions for colleges.

13. I continue to gain insights about the broader higher education community through standing meetings of leadership groups. Most recently, these included:

-The Secretariat of Higher Education, where new NCAA CEO Mark Emmert spoke. Mark and I are old friends from our days together in Louisiana, and he expressed high interest in forging a stronger relationship with AACC, including helping to address concerns related to community college athletic transfers to universities.

-The Big Six with David Baime, where we continued a dialogue on pressing legislative concerns that include:

- H.R. 1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 funding legislation passed by the House of Representatives, would cut the Pell Grant maximum for the upcoming award year by $845, to $4,705, and would mark a major reversal for our students. We are fighting in the Senate to preserve current funding. The House legislation would also eliminate any further funding for the Workforce Investment Act programs in FY 2011.

- President Obama’s FY 2012 budget was largely good news for community colleges, though the current maximum Pell Grant of $5,500 would be maintained only by eliminating the “year-round” Pell Grant that was implemented for the first time last summer. Many of our colleges are deeply concerned about this proposal.

- AACC worked closely with the American Council on Education in developing March 2 correspondence to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan concerning the state authorization regulations that will be implemented on July 1 of this year absent executive branch or legislative action. This regulation could have a chilling aspect on some community college distance education programs.

- Also on the regulatory front, AACC is closely monitoring the work of the Department of Education’s Committee on Measures of Student Success, which is charged with recommending to Secretary of Education Duncan alternative ways of defining completion at two-year institutions of higher education. The committee met February 9 and 10 in Washington and has strong community college representation.

- AACC is closely tracking the proposed extension of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act, since the House of Representatives moved in February to use $238 million of FY 2014 Community College and Career Training Program (CCCTP) funding for that purpose. The legislation was later withdrawn but remains a threat.