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The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) has announced that it will reestablish the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. First formed in 1990, the bipartisan panel released a report entitled “America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!” Recommendations made in this report led to major changes to state and federal legislation. The new commission will address the implications of the evolution of world economies that has taken place over the past decade and how it has affected education in the U.S. The U.S. faces challenges from growing economies such as China and India that offer skilled workforces willing to accept relatively low wages. The commission will recommend changes to the American educational system necessary to prevent a decline in the American standard of living. The commission, which will issue a final report in the next six months, is chaired by Charles Knapp; its members include former governors, cabinet secretaries, and senators.

FGMG to help thousands of first-generation college students

Passed by the 2006 Florida Legislature, the First Generation Matching Grant Program (FGMG) will provide financial aid to needy undergraduate students at state universities whose parents have not earned baccalaureate degrees. Higher education institutions have raised donations for individual scholarship funds, which will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the state. \$6.5 million has been appropriated to be used throughout the state under the program. Eligible students’ parents must not have earned bachelor’s degrees, applicants must be Florida residents, and applicants must be seeking degrees. According to state education officials, about 53,000 first-generation college students reside in Florida.

Spellings to hold summit in the third week of March

As part of her plan to move forward in response to the recommendations made by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings will hold a summit in Washington March 21st through 22nd. The Department of Education has sent email invitations to college groups asking them to nominate other participants for the meeting, who, according to the new under secretary, Sara Martinez Tucker, will “focus on galvanizing action and distributing leadership and accountability across all sectors.” Summit attendees will discuss issues such as increasing need-based financial aid, increasing the transparency of college costs, accreditation, and providing better educational opportunities for non-traditional students and adults.

Governor’s Business Council of Texas proposes changes to higher education system

A nonprofit organization comprised of Texas’ top business executives, the Governor’s Business Council of Texas has released a draft of a report recommending, among other things, replacing the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board with a new entity. The new Texas higher education board proposed by the council would be organized as a public corporation with greater authority, responsibility, and stature. The new board would be the top authority on choosing locations for new campuses and the establishment of new degree programs; it would also be responsible for creating a long-range financing plan to achieve the state’s educational goals. The business council’s recommendations also call for an increase in financial aid and



provisions that will allow the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University at College Station to exercise more independence, which will in turn allow them to focus on research and graduate education. The report, which is a result of a review that Governor Rick Perry requested more than a year ago, is apparently stirring controversy among lawmakers and higher education experts, especially because it includes a proposal for a new higher education entity.

“Big Bang” proposed to curb brain drain in Wisconsin

Suffering from a brain drain, the state of Wisconsin has proposed a new plan referred to as the “Big Bang.” The plan is an attempt to curb the outflow of young people from the state. The proposal will set up a system to provide students with four years of reduced or free college tuition in exchange for staying in Wisconsin for at least 10 years after graduation. Based on current rates, the recommendation will defer an estimated \$27,000 in tuition and fees over four years for each participating undergraduate Wisconsin resident at University of Wisconsin, Madison, and about \$83,000 over the same period for each participating out-of-state student. Although the high cost of the plan may make it a bust rather than a bang, there is a chance that its proposals will be put into effect, as similar proposals have been passed in other states facing similar dilemmas.