

April 5, 2006

Mr. Fred Hiatt, Editorial Page Editor
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Editor:

We read with interest, articles in the Washington Post (12/16/06 - U. S. Adult Literacy Rate Reported Unchanged and 12/25/06 - Literacy of College Graduates Is On Decline) concerning the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL).

After the release of the National Adult Literacy Survey in 1992, we were among several Members of Congress who sought to address the problem of functional illiteracy in the United States through enactment of the National Literacy Act. We were, therefore, disappointed to see the extent to which the problem continues to exist more than ten years later.

To learn that 93 million Americans lack the skills they need to reach their full potential is unacceptable and should set off alarm bells in all segments of society.

Certainly, the implications for our economy are bleak. According to the National Association of Manufacturers, each year businesses lose billions of dollars in productivity due to employees' basic skills deficiencies. These losses do not position the US as a competitor in a global economy. Replacing workers with low skills is not an option, nor is continuing to send jobs overseas. Only two percent of adults entering the workforce each year come from the pool of recent high school graduates. The rest are adults who are already employed or immigrants.

Efforts must be made to improve the literacy skills of the current workforce and to help new immigrants contribute fully to the US economy. This must be balanced with efforts to ensure that high school graduates have the literacy skills they need to enter the workforce or to continue their education.

Today, according to the NAAL, millions of individuals do not have the skills they need to work in our information driven and high technology society. Add to this the number of adults who are ill-prepared to help their children succeed in school, and new immigrants who are struggling to learn English, and we have a recipe for disaster.

We must face this challenge head on with increased investment in adult and family literacy programs to help adults gain the skills they need to succeed at home, in their communities, and in the workplace. If we do not act now, we face losing the competitive edge that has kept us a world leader.



Bill Goodling
Former Member of Congress



Tom Sawyer
Former Member of Congress

Bill Goodling served as a Member of Congress for 26 years and as Former Chairman of the Education and Workforce from 1995-2000. He is Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at Penn State University.

Tom Sawyer served as a Member of Congress for 16 years, and is a former teacher and school administrator. He served on the Education and Labor Committee from 1987-1996 and was a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. He also served as the former Mayor of Akron, OH.