SIGN ON LETTER TO IOWA CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

DRAFT * August 2013

Dear Senator/Representative:

We know you share our concern over the future we leave for our children and the skills with which we equip them to take on their responsibilities as the next generation of leaders. Children are one-quarter of the U.S. population—and 100 percent of our future. Society, and therefore government, has no greater responsibility than to the youngest.

For the first time in our country’s history, however, we face the prospect that U.S. children will grow up less healthy, live shorter lives, and be less equipped to compete and lead in a world economy than their parents.

Unless we act.

We believe that this requires much greater investment in our youngest children. In 1990, President George H. Bush and then-Gov. Bill Clinton established the first national educational goal, “that all children start school ready to learn.” In his 2002 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush reiterated the need for investing in young children: “There’s more to do. We need to develop our children to read and succeed in school with improved Head Start and early childhood development programs.”

In this year’s State of the Union address, President Barack Obama also called for action: “Study after study shows that the sooner a child begins learning, the better he or she does down the road. ... I propose working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every child in America.”

Achieving the goal that all children start school healthy and equipped for success requires more than high-quality preschool, of course, although that is one component of such a strategy. Aside from the specifics of the president’s proposal, we believe that our country is at the point where we must invest more in the health and development of our youngest children.

A new, annual $10 billion investment in young children (about 3/10 of 1 percent of the federal budget) is certainly the least we can do to secure a future for them. The next generation is busy growing and developing, and they should not have to wait for Congress to lead in providing them the opportunities they deserve.

We urge you and your colleagues on both sides of the political aisle, in recognition of the universal needs of children, to begin the task of ensuring the success of the next generation by making this down payment on their future. As Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman and many other economists, brain researchers and health experts have noted, this is the period when investment makes the most difference.

Please commit to addressing the needs of America’s youngest and place them high and prominent on the agenda as you work on the many issues facing America. It is not whether we can afford to invest in young children; it is whether we can afford not to.