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National Summit on America's "Silent Epidemic" To Highlight America's Response to the Dropout Crisis

MTV, TIME, the National Governors Association, Civic Enterprises and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Host May 9th Summit in Washington, D.C.

Washington, DC – On May 9th, policymakers, non-profits, media and business leaders will participate in the "National Summit on America's Silent Epidemic" at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C. The day-long event will be spearheaded by Civic Enterprises, the National Governors Association (NGA), MTV, TIME, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

More than 1 million American high school students drop out every year. That's about one every 29 seconds or 6,000 who drop out every school day. Dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, in prison, on public assistance, and single parents with children who also drop out of high school.

The landmark summit will bring experts and innovators together with elected officials, policymakers, educators and students to identify concrete steps for local, state and federal policymakers to help more students finish high school prepared for college and the workforce. Participants will examine current research about the causes of the dropout problem and effective interventions to increase the number of students who graduate ready for college, career and life. The summit also will unveil a major new study about the perspectives and roles of parents in addressing the dropout crisis.

"There is a high school dropout epidemic in America. The public is now aware that almost one third of all public high school students – and about one half of minority students – fail to graduate from high school with their class," said John Bridgeland, CEO

of Civic Enterprises. “Now it is time for the nation to answer this wake-up call and do something significant about it.”

This summit builds on the work of NGA and governors throughout the country, including an aggressive *Action Agenda for Improving America’s High Schools* and a 50-state compact to ensure a common definition for graduation rates. These efforts were spurred two years ago by Bill Gates’ speech at the National Education Summit on High Schools in which he declared America’s high schools “obsolete.”

“The nation’s governors have moved aggressively to improve college and work readiness rates,” according to NGA Executive Director Raymond C. Scheppach. “They continue to build on the high school redesign effort launched two years ago, as exemplified by the success of the Honor States grant program – a governor-led initiative to help greater numbers of students graduate in 26 states. This summit will be another important step toward reducing the number of dropouts.”

MTV News will provide a digital broadcast of highlight from the summit, providing America’s youth the opportunity to view and comment on the summit’s proceedings and to offer their own perspectives about the issue. In addition, THINK: MTV, an MTV initiative geared to informing young people about key issues affecting their lives, including education, has launched “Be the Voice,” a nationwide contest providing current and former students the opportunity to share the challenges they have faced in trying to graduate from high school and prepare for college or the workplace. The young person who submits the most compelling story at www.think.mtv.com by March 16 will win a **\$10,000 college scholarship** and address summit participants.

“We are doing the youth of our country a grave disservice by failing to prepare them for college or employment, let alone the proper tools to even graduate from high school,” said Christina Norman, President of MTV. “This is a situation that can be corrected and we are proud to join our partners in a summit to further build awareness of the challenges and solutions to this national crisis.”

During the summit, THINK MTV also will introduce the *Dropout Chronicles*, a new documentary capturing the compelling stories of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who face the prospect of not graduating from high school. The documentary will depict how young people from similar backgrounds make different choices about their education and how varied interventions by parents, schools and other factors can impact the outcome of those choices.

Last March, Civic Enterprises joined with Peter Hart Research Associates to develop *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, one of the most extensive surveys of American dropouts, in which most said they could have finished high school if only they had had more challenging coursework, engaging classroom experiences, and access to extra help. The report recommended a number of approaches to address the problem, including providing at-risk students with additional support, replicating innovative dropout prevention efforts, engaging parents, creating “early

warning systems” for at-risk students, establishing more accurate tracking of dropouts, and considering raising the state compulsory school age to 18. The May Summit is designed to provide a more in-depth discussion about how stakeholders can work together to address these issues.

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Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** works to reduce inequities and improve lives around the world. In developing countries, it focuses on improving health, reducing extreme poverty, and increasing access to technology in public libraries. In the United States, the foundation seeks to ensure that all people have access to a great education and to technology in public libraries. In its local region, it focuses on improving the lives of low-income families. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Patty Stonesifer and Co-chairs William H. Gates Sr., Bill Gates, and Melinda French Gates. More information is available at www.gatesfoundation.org. Contact: media@gatesfoundation.org; 206-709-3400.

Founded in 1908, the **National Governors Association** (NGA) is the collective voice of the nation's governors and one of Washington, D.C.'s most respected public policy organizations. Its members are the governors of the 50 states, three territories and two commonwealths. NGA provides governors and their senior staff members with services that range from representing states on Capitol Hill and before the Administration on key federal issues to developing and implementing innovative solutions to public policy challenges through the NGA Center for Best Practices. For more information, visit www.nga.org. Contact: Jay Hyde, 202-624-5334, jhyde@nga.org.

MTV and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have joined in an ongoing effort aimed at using MTV's reach and credibility with young people, particularly low-income and minority youth, to provide them the tools, resources and media platform to graduate from high school prepared for college and the workforce. The campaign consists of long-form documentaries such as THINK OVER YOUR SCHOOL, PSAs featuring high school students talking candidly about their aspirations for college and beyond; MTV News reports on young people and their educational aspirations; and online tools at <http://think.mtv.com>, including resources to prepare themselves for graduation, college, and the workplace. **MTV Networks**, a unit of Viacom (NYSE: VIA, VIA.B), is one of the world's leading creators of programming and content across all media platforms. Contact: David French, 212-258-6406, david.french@mtvstaff.com.

TIME magazine is the world's largest weekly newsmagazine with a domestic audience of more than 20 million and a global audience of more than 27 million. TIME is a global multimedia brand that also includes TIME.com, TIME Style & Design, TIME for Kids and Timeforkids.com. TIME's worldwide editions include TIME U.S., TIME Canada,

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