



Business Roundtable™

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CONTACT: Tim Horst
(713) 235-3822

**BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE INITIATIVE TRAINS 8,500 GULF
COAST WORKERS WITH GOAL OF 20,000 ACCORDING TO ROUNDTABLE
PRESIDENT JOHN J. CASTELLANI**

*Testimony Before U.S. House Homeland Security Committee on Roundtable's
Construction Training and Disaster Response Programs*

Washington, D.C. – More than 8,500 Gulf Coast residents have participated in a new program to provide training for construction jobs to help rebuild the Gulf Coast region following the devastating hurricanes in 2005, Business Roundtable President John J. Castellani today told the U.S. House Homeland Security Committee. The hearing on Gulf Coast rebuilding and recovery efforts came shortly before the June 1 beginning of the 2007 hurricane season.

Castellani provided an update for the Committee on the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Initiative, a Roundtable-led program launched late last summer with the goal of recruiting and training 20,000 new construction craft workers by the end of 2009.

“By the end of April, the Initiative has trained more than 5,000 workers in needed construction skills. In addition, another 3,500 are currently enrolled in programs in Mississippi, Louisiana and recently established courses in Texas,” Castellani said.

Member companies of the Roundtable, an association of 160 chief executive officers of the largest companies in the nation, and affiliated partners are committing up to \$5 million over four years to fund the Initiative. The construction training classes also receive money from the federal government and state programs.

“This initiative for positive action in the Gulf Coast is a true partnership involving federal, state and local government agencies, businesses, community organizations, educational institutions, and construction trade groups and associations,” Castellani said.

He noted that the U.S. Department of Labor has been an important partner, as both Louisiana and Mississippi have received funding through the U.S. Department of Labor's Pathways to Construction program and National Emergency Grants. The project has also worked closely with the Office of the Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding, state legislatures, governors' offices, and numerous state agencies in Louisiana and Mississippi.

In addition, Castellani said that the success of the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Initiative is due to the support of a large number of active partners from the public and private sectors.

Partners also include colleges, contractors, labor unions, businesses and a large number of other groups. Initiative partners have been seeking to assist those who complete their training in the securing of construction jobs.

“We know that training is only the first step, and the Initiative has been working hard to reach out to local contractors in the Gulf Region to assist with job placement for the trainees when they finish the program,” Castellani testified. “I am pleased to tell you that state agencies in Louisiana and Mississippi are reporting an average job placement rate of 80 percent for Initiative trained graduates.”

The Initiative has developed the **Gulf Rebuild: Education, Advancement & Training (GREAT)** campaign to raise awareness of the training and recruit participants. Marketing has included print ads, billboards, job fairs, community events and radio advertisements. In addition, the campaign has a website (www.imgreat.org) and a 24-7 toll free call center (1-888-52-GREAT) for detailed information and assistance in signing up for upcoming training classes.

“It is exciting to see that the training and career opportunities provided by the Initiative have positively impacted the lives of many Gulf Coast residents by giving them jobs – and hope,” he said. “Working together – business, labor, government, education and many others – we will help the Gulf Coast region’s structures, economy and spirit.”

In his testimony, Castellani also discussed the Business Roundtable Partnership for Disaster Response Task Force, which is working to improve and coordinate the private sector response to catastrophes. The Roundtable launched the effort in May of 2005 following the tsunami in Indonesia, and the Partnership for Disaster Response was activated immediately following Hurricane Katrina.

As soon as Katrina struck, the Partnership began facilitating communications about critical on-the-ground needs and urged Roundtable member companies to contribute to the relief effort. Recognizing the important role of the private sector, the Partnership has developed a protocol for response to large scale disasters, and created a clearinghouse of information and resources, www.respondtodisaster.org, for companies planning and communication during disasters.

The Partnership for Disaster Response Task Force continues to identify opportunities for the private sector to strengthen preparedness for disasters, expand partnerships with nonprofit relief organizations and foster communication among businesses and the federal government.

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Business Roundtable (www.businessroundtable.org) is an association of chief executive officers of leading U.S. companies with \$4.5 trillion in annual revenues and more than 10 million employees. Member companies comprise nearly a third of the total value of the U.S. stock markets and represent over 40 percent of all corporate income taxes paid. Collectively, they returned \$112 billion in dividends to shareholders and the economy in 2005.

Roundtable companies give more than \$7 billion a year in combined charitable contributions, representing nearly 60 percent of total corporate giving. They are technology innovation leaders, with \$90 billion in annual research and development spending - nearly half of the total private R&D spending in the U.S.