

June 11, 2007

Member of Congress,

On behalf of the undersigned groups, representing millions of students across the country, we urge you to support federal higher education reform that increases grant aid, lowers the burden of student debt and ensures that higher education is affordable and accessible for all Americans. Lack of funding and growing college costs have endangered the promise embedded in the Higher Education Act of 1965: that all students regardless of financial capacity to pay should have access to affordable higher education.

Over the past decade state governments have significantly cut higher education funding. To account for budget shortfalls, colleges and universities have passed more of the cost of college onto students. Meanwhile, the purchasing power of critical need based federal grant programs, such as the Pell grant have declined precipitously. Facing the daunting price tag, hundreds of thousands of qualified high school graduates choose not to pursue higher education every year.

For those students who do decide to pursue a degree, they must take on excessive student loan debt to afford it. Less than one third of four year public college graduates carried loan debt in the early nineties; now, over two thirds graduate with debt. For some, this debt will create serious financial challenges, and for some it will affect the careers they pursue, when they can start a family or purchase a home.

In short, our nation's college students face dual challenges to pay for college, the first a barrier to accessing a college education and the second a crisis of affordability.

This summer Congress will address student aid policies both through the Higher Education Act reauthorization and the annual appropriations process. We urge you to support legislation and demand policies that accomplish the following goals:

- Increase our support for need-based grant aid, especially the Pell Grant program, our nation's most successful higher education program.
- Address the debt burden facing college students by both lowering the cost of borrowing and reforming the system to ensure students repay their debt according to their ability to pay.

Reforming the student loan system by eliminating unnecessary and excessive subsidies to private lenders can pay for some of these policies. We endorse decreasing these subsidies as an appropriate reallocation of education tax dollars as an investment in our nation's higher education system.

We urge you to support legislation that helps make college more accessible and affordable for students, and to restore the promise of the federal financial aid programs.

Sincerely,

*United States Student Association  
The State PIRG's Higher Education Project*