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**SENATE, HOUSE DEMOCRATS RELEASE REPORT DETAILING BUSH
ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION BUDGET CUTS,
SHRINKING ACCESSIBILITY TO COLLEGE**

*Higher tuition could close the doors to college for 110,000 students;
Bush's student aid budget would serve 375,000 fewer low-income students*

Washington, D.C. -- Senate and House Democrats today released a tough critique of the effects the Bush Administration budget priorities have had on access to college for Americans. The report, titled "Slamming Shut the Doors to College," details the impact of Bush education budget cuts, as well as state budget shortfalls, and how those factors have limited access to college for low- and middle-income students.

The report, which is a product of the Democratic staffs of five separate committees, shows that the slow economic recovery has not caught up with state budgets, and as a result, states are slashing higher education budgets. These cuts keep students from attending college by raising tuition and cutting student financial aid funding.

"A college education opens the doors of opportunity and prosperity for millions of Americans," said Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee. "Unfortunately, as a result of state budget cuts, students are facing the largest tuition hikes in recent history. At the same time, the Bush Administration has shortchanged Pell grants and other programs to help low and middle income students afford college. We should be doing more to help families pay for college, not less."

"My home state of California has long been a leader in ensuring access to higher education," said Rep. George Miller (D-CA), a co-author of the report and senior Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee. "But this year, even California is struggling. Our report shows that the cost of college is spiraling out of control while federal support for students and their families is severely lagging. Rather than meeting this challenge, the Bush Administration has turned a blind eye to college affordability."

State budget crunches have led to deep cuts in education spending, which have in turn led to tuition increases that disproportionately affect the neediest students. Nationwide, states already plan to cut \$5.5 billion from higher education over two years. Shrinking budgets coupled with increasing tuition could close the doors to college for 110,000 students.

"Budget cuts for higher education proposed by our states and the President could not come at a worse time and will erode the opportunity for our neediest students to attend college," said Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), Vice Chairman of the Joint Economic Committee. "A well educated, well-trained work force is the way in which we will ensure the economic strength of our nation. The

Bush Administration is endangering our future economically and socially by shortchanging education spending,” added Reed.

“Most people believe that providing all Americans with college access, opportunity and affordability helps our nation’s economic security and builds long-term prosperity,” said Congressman David Obey (D-WI), ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee. “That is why, with our states facing a major budget squeeze, we need to do everything we can to strengthen the federal commitment to higher education.”

President Bush's FY2003 education budget cuts \$1.3 billion from current education services. Specific programs that help low-income students are level funded and even cut. Under the Bush budget:

- The Administration’s student aid budget would serve 375,000 fewer low-income students.
- The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the President's request would actually cut the maximum Pell award to \$3,900, \$300 below the level needed just to offset the effects of higher education inflation. Pell grants, the cornerstone of need-based federal aid, help the neediest students. The buying power of the Pell grant has not kept up with the cost of attending college. In 1979, the maximum Pell grant covered 77% of the cost of attending a 4-year public college. Today, the maximum Pell grant only covers 39% of the cost of attending that same public college.
- Campus-based programs, TRIO, and GEAR UP, receive no new funds. These programs - including College Work Study, Supplemental Education opportunity Grants and Perkins Loans - receive only \$3 billion, which is \$201 million below a current service level.
- Proposed changes in the federal student loan program would force students to pay variable interest rates, adding up to \$6,000 to the average student debt.

The report also shows that with a record 16 million students projected to enroll in 2003, college is, today, more important than ever.

- The demand for workers with postsecondary education training is growing rapidly, and college graduates have average incomes twice that of high school graduates.
- The already high cost of college is keeping academically qualified low-income students from going to college at the rates of their wealthier peers.
- Current levels of federal financial aid fall far short of making college affordable for all.

Today, leaders from the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Joint Economic Committee, as well as local and national education leaders, students and teachers held a rally in Washington, D.C. to call on the Bush Administration to stop proposed cuts in funding and put the welfare of students first.