



Great Public Schools
for Every Student

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March 19, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Miller
Chair, Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harkin and Chairman Miller:

On behalf of the 3.2 million members of the National Education Association, we would like to express our deep appreciation for your leadership in securing inclusion of important student aid provisions in the budget reconciliation bill. We know that inclusion of these provisions was far from assured, and would not have been achieved without your considerable efforts.

We are very pleased that the reconciliation bill will provide much-needed increases in Pell Grants. These increases will make a real difference to so many students who are struggling to afford postsecondary education in today's difficult economy. When the Pell Grant program was first created, the maximum grant for the poorest students covered 77 percent of the cost of a public four-year college. Today, it covers only 35 percent.

The proposed increased investment in Pell Grants will not only augment aid that does not need to be repaid, thus decreasing the need to rely on loans, but it will also ensure that the grant level increases with inflation each year. In addition, the proposal eliminates much of the current shortfall in the Pell program, providing consistency in a time of economic uncertainty for millions of students relying on that aid.

We also strongly support the inclusion in the reconciliation package of additional funding for community colleges to support their invaluable role in economic recovery. These funds will be particularly important for unemployed workers looking to enhance their skills and prepare for new job opportunities.

Equally important is the relief these proposals provide to discretionary appropriations. As you know, failure to address the Pell Grant shortfall would decimate FY 2011 funding, since the shortfall would likely be covered by the education allocation. Your leadership was key in averting potentially dire consequences for education programs. In addition, we appreciate that you fought hard to include other important initiatives in this package, such as early childhood education and school construction. We are committed to continuing to work with you to find other means to address these critical needs.

Thank you again for your strong leadership on these issues and your continued commitment to expanding access to and affordability of postsecondary education.

Sincerely,

Dennis Van Roekel
President