

Congressman Childers Supports Landmark Higher Education Legislation

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Legislation Addresses Skyrocketing College Tuition Prices, Creates a More Consumer-Friendly Higher Education System

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Washington, DC – Congressman Travis Childers (D-MS) today voted in favor of legislation to address the soaring price of college tuition and remove other obstacles that make it difficult for qualified students to go to college. The Higher Education Opportunity Act (H.R. 4137) would reform and strengthen the nation’s higher education programs to ensure that they operate in the best interests of students and families. The bill won overwhelming bipartisan approval in the House by a vote of 380-49.

“North Mississippi is home to many of the state’s junior colleges, community colleges, and state and private educational institutions. But, skyrocketing tuition costs are making it increasingly difficult for qualified students to receive a higher education.” said Congressman Childers. “I’m proud to support The Higher Education Opportunity Act to improve access to quality education and increase opportunity for North Mississippians.”

H.R. 4137 builds on previous efforts to make college more affordable and accessible for all qualified students. Last year, Congress enacted into law a \$20 billion increase in college financial aid over the next five years, the largest increase in student aid since the 1944 G.I. Bill.

An October 2007 report from the College Board showed that, over the previous five years, tuition and fees had increased across the board, at public and private colleges and at two-year and four-year colleges. In Mississippi, tuition and fees at public four-year colleges increased by eight percent between 2006-07 and 2007-08. H.R. 4137 would address these rising prices by encouraging colleges to rein in price increases, ensuring that states maintain their commitments to higher education funding, providing students and families with consumer friendly information on college pricing and the factors driving tuition increases, and streamlining the federal student financial aid application process.

The legislation also strengthens provisions previously approved by the House to avoid conflicts of interest in the student loan programs. The bill’s new provisions include requiring better consumer disclosures and protections on private student loans. Together these protections form a Bill of Rights for college consumers, said Congressman Childers.

In addition, the Higher Education Opportunity Act would:

- Make textbook costs more manageable for students by, among other things, helping them plan for textbook expenses in advance of each semester;

- Allow students to receive year-round Pell Grant scholarships;

- Strengthen college readiness and support programs for minority and low-income students;

- Increase college aid and support programs for veterans and military families;

- Improve safety on college campuses and help schools recover and rebuild after a disaster;

- Ensure equal college opportunities and fair learning environments for students with disabilities; and

- Strengthen our nation's workforce and economic competitiveness by boosting science, technology, and foreign language educational opportunities.

H.R. 4137 is a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the primary federal law aimed at expanding college access for low- and middle-income students. If enacted, this would be the first time the Higher Education Act was reauthorized since 1998. The current law expired in 2003.

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