



students. Between 2008 and now, the number of students receiving Pell Grants has increased by more than three million.

The Great Recession that started in 2008 was a major factor contributing to this growth. People who have lost their jobs and incomes are going back to college to acquire new skills for the economy recovery. That's exactly what we hope people would do – take advantage of opportunity to retool their skills for the jobs of the 21st century.

The question for our Subcommittee and the Congress is: Do we say to these new students, we cannot afford Pell Grants for you? Do we cut Pell Grants for everyone to try to offset the growth in the number of students eligible? That's the approach the majority took in H.R. 1, which passed the House last month. Their legislation cuts the Pell Grant by \$845 for almost every student in the program.

That cut is particularly serious because Pell Grants have barely kept up with the cost of going to college, even with the increase enacted a couple of years ago in the Recovery Act. At last Thursday's hearing, I asked Secretary Duncan and his budget director what H.R.1 would mean for the average percentage of college costs covered by Pell Grants. They replied that the percentage would fall to its lowest level in 38 years.

I hope that the House will change its mind about cutting Pell Grants, and that we can find ways to keep this commitment to students.

The President's budget rightly places a high priority on maintaining this foundation of college student aid. It proposes some changes to other student aid programs to produce savings that could be applied to Pell. It also proposes a change to the Pell program to eliminate the "year-round Pell" option that has turned out to be much more expensive than originally expected. I look forward to learning more about these proposals.

Fundamentally, we need everyone in this country to be able to afford to go to college, if they have the gumption and the talent to do so and if they are willing to work hard at their studies. College cannot be just for people whose families have enough money to afford the cost. Broad access to college is important for raising people's job prospects and incomes. It is vital to the future of our economy, since the industries that will keep us competitive require people with high

knowledge and skills. And it is crucial for the continuing functioning and flourishing of our democracy.

Remember, it was not that long ago that education was only the purview of the rich. We in Congress have worked hard to change this. That is the fundamental power of the institution – to help make opportunity possible for middle-class and working families. By doing so, we have further expanded the middle-class in this country.

According to the US Census, the average college graduate makes almost \$22,000 more a year than the average worker with only a high-school degree. Over the course of a lifetime, that adds up to close to a million dollars in earnings.

Senator Claiborne Pell understood the importance of education to maintaining American prosperity. As he said, “the strength of the United States is not the gold at Fort Knox or the weapons of mass destruction that we have, but the sum total of the education and the character of our people.”

That is what at stake here – the very strength of our nation. We do not hear China or our other international competitors say “Oh, we’re spending too much on higher education, we need to cut back”. Neither should we. We should find a way to keep our commitment to Pell strong, so that millions of students can continue to take their futures in their own hands.

Thank you.

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