



American Council on Education
Office of the President

March 29, 2006

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
U.S. House of Representatives
2351 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I write on behalf of the higher education associations listed below to share our views regarding H.R. 609, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005, which will come before the House for consideration today. This bill has been under development for more than three years and it reflects the tremendous amount of hard work and vigorous debate that has gone into the lengthy reauthorization process.

This bill is markedly different than the one that was originally introduced. The initial bill was a source of great concern to our members, and over the journey from its initial introduction to the present, it has been improved substantially. We recognize and appreciate the efforts you have made to accommodate the concerns we have raised. For example, the manager's amendment moves in a welcome direction on the college cost reporting provisions. Additional language in the bill would prohibit a state that gains recognition as an accreditor from forcing any public or private institution of higher education to use its accreditation services. The proposed changes in the formula for distributing campus-based student aid—an issue of great concern to many of our schools—has been deleted in favor of a study by the Government Accountability Office, which we believe is a reasonable alternative to the unintended consequences that a formula change could entail. While these and other changes may not be entirely satisfactory to various parts of the higher education community, we all recognize that progress has been made from the original bill to the one that will be debated today.

However, there are also a number of issues on which little headway has been made. Foremost among them is the fact that H.R. 609 does not do as much as we hoped it would to expand access to college for low-income students. We strongly support the improvements in the bill that would simplify the financial aid application, but we are disappointed that the bill fails to enhance and strengthen the Pell Grant program, and restore the value of this essential need-based aid by providing a more generous increase in the maximum award level. Second, in spite of the positive changes to the college cost index that have been made in the manager's amendment, our members believe further modifications are necessary. Third, we are also extremely concerned that the bill will open the door to a new era of fraud and abuse in the student aid programs.

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As H.R. 609 comes to the House floor for debate today, we are troubled by a number of the amendments that will be offered to the bill. For example, an amendment being offered by Rep. Dan Burton represents a sweeping expansion of higher education reporting requirements. Alone or in combination, these amendments could, if passed, create dozens of new reporting requirements on our colleges and universities. As the author of FED UP, we know that you understand the relationship between the proliferation of these compliance burdens and the rising cost of college. We would like to work with you to contain or eliminate as many of these as possible.

I recognize that it is a difficult feat to satisfy the diverse views that compete for your attention in developing legislation as comprehensive and complex as the Higher Education Act. All in all, I can assure you that the higher education community believes you have heard our concerns and have made a concerted effort to address them. We look forward to continuing to work with you as H.R. 609 moves forward.

Sincerely,



David Ward
President

DW/cms

On behalf of:

American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
Association of American Universities
Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council of Graduate Schools
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
United Negro College Fund