

**Remarks of the Honorable George Miller
Chairman, House Education and Labor Committee
Statement at Committee Markup of H.R. 4137
The College Opportunity and Affordability Act
Wednesday, November 14, 2007**

Today I am pleased to join my colleagues in marking up The College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2007. This legislation strengthens and reauthorizes our nation's higher education programs.

One of the key priorities for the Committee this year has been to make college more affordable and accessible for all qualified students.

We have already taken a tremendous step towards this goal by providing more than \$20 billion in financial aid for students and families over the next five years.

But we know there is still work to do to ensure that the doors of college are truly open to all qualified students.

Over the past year, our Committee has closely examined the state of our nation's higher education system and its effectiveness in serving America's families. We know that students and families face a number of challenges when trying to attain a college degree.

In addition to skyrocketing college prices, other roadblocks on the path to college include:

- ✓ student loan programs that have been mired in scandal; and
- ✓ a federal student aid application process that could confuse even the most experienced tax experts.

More than 40 years ago, the Higher Education Act was enacted to help all students, especially low-income and disadvantaged students, gain access to a college education.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act will help restore the promise of this law by re-shaping our higher education system to make it more fair and easy-to-navigate.

Our bill will ensure that our higher education programs once again operate in the best interests of students and their families.

Both Mr. McKeon and I have said that one of our primary focuses for this reauthorization would be to address rising college prices.

Building on proposals that have been put forth by Mr. McKeon and Mr. Tierney, this bill would help colleges rein in these price increases by providing them with incentives, such as additional need-based aid for students, to hold down their costs.

Institutions that raise their prices above the Higher Education Price Index would be required to report their reasons for these price hikes and their plans for lowering costs.

In addition, the bill would ensure that states hold up their end of the bargain in funding higher education by establishing a state maintenance-of-effort requirement.

And to provide consumers with better information, this legislation would create a user-friendly website for families with data on college pricing and the factors driving tuition increases. We heard much about this idea just a few weeks ago during this committee's hearing on college costs.

This bill would also restore trust and accountability to the student loan programs.

The legislation includes the provisions of the Student Loan Sunshine Act, which would clean up the corruption in the student loan industry, require lenders to fully disclose student loan terms and conditions, and protect students from aggressive lender marketing practices.

To further safeguard students, the bill would provide new regulations on private student loans. It would provide students with full and fair information about the terms and conditions of private loans, enhance financial literacy and education for students and parents, and require the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on private educational loans. I was especially glad to work with Chairman Barney

Frank on this issue, and look forward to continuing to work with him and his committee as we move forward.

In addition, the bill would simplify the federal student financial aid application process by streamlining the FAFSA form and by providing students and families with extra time to plan for their expected college expenses. I especially want to thank Rep. Rahm Emanuel for his commitment to ensuring a more streamlined application process for all students who are eligible for federal student aid.

The legislation would make textbook costs more manageable for students by providing students with advance information on textbook pricing so they can plan for their textbook expenses before each semester, and by helping college faculty purchase their textbooks in a more cost-effective way. Addressing textbook costs has been a top priority for Mr. Wu for years, and I am glad to see his hard work reflected in our bill.

The bill expands college access for low-income and minority students by increasing the maximum authorization level of the Pell Grant scholarship to \$9,000 per year and allowing students to receive Pell Grant scholarship aid year-round.

In addition, the bill strengthens the TRIO and GEAR-UP college readiness and support programs that we know are critical to helping low-income and minority students stay in school and graduate, and expands funding for graduate programs at

Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions.

The bill increases college aid and support programs for veterans and military families by creating new scholarship and support programs for active duty military personnel, military family members, and veterans. Earlier this week, we honored the sacrifice and service of our nation's veterans and men and women in uniform. I can think of no better way to support and honor our troops than by helping them pursue their dreams when they return home.

The bill would make college campuses safer for students and faculty by helping all campuses develop and implement safety and disaster preparedness plans, and by creating a new disaster relief loan program to help schools recover and rebuild in the event of an emergency.

The bill would ensure equal college opportunities and fair learning environments for students with disabilities.

Finally, the legislation helps strengthen our nation's workforce and economic competitiveness. Our bill includes a special focus on bolstering students' interest in math, science, technology, and critical foreign languages through partnerships with businesses and other stakeholders. It puts an emphasis on improving teacher

training and development so we place an excellent teacher in every classroom.

And it expands on our efforts to encourage students to enter vital public service fields by authorizing up to \$10,000 in loan forgiveness for public service members. I want to recognize the efforts of Mr. Holt and Mr. Hinojosa, who have been long-time advocates for enhancing the science, technology and math fields.

I am confident that this bill will help ensure that every qualified student has the opportunity to get an affordable, world-class college education. And I believe that this bill will help drive the innovation our nation needs to maintain its competitive edge.

I would like to thank my colleagues on this committee for helping us craft this bill and, in particular, Mr. Hinojosa for his leadership as chairman of the subcommittee on higher education, lifelong learning, and competitiveness, and Mr. Keller, the subcommittee's senior Republican.

I especially want to acknowledge Mr. McKeon and Mr. Tierney's commitment to addressing college pricing – an issue that they have been interested in for quite some time.

Our committee has a great legacy of working in a bipartisan way to improve the lives of American families, and I hope we can continue to work together to pass this bill out of committee today with strong support.

I also want to thank the students who have been our true partners in this effort. The College Opportunity and Affordability Act is about helping America's students – the future of our country – achieve their dreams.

I would now like to recognize our Committee's Senior Republican, Mr. McKeon, for his opening statement.

Thank you.