



July 21, 2009

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Education & Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable John Kline
Ranking Member
Education & Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Kline:

We are writing on behalf of the State Higher Education Executive Officers to urge passage of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act introduced by Representative Miller.

Over the past decade state higher education leaders have increasingly recognized that improvements in postsecondary education are necessary to assure the future competitiveness and prosperity of our people. One year ago we submitted an open letter to presidential candidates Senators McCain and Obama urging them to lead a national movement to restore the United States to the top rank we long enjoyed in the percentage of our people with postsecondary education. Earlier this year we shared the attached four-page document, "A Federal State Partnership," with the Obama administration and Congressional leaders to outline a specific plan for achieving this national goal.

The proposed Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act incorporates nearly all of the key federal actions we have recommended. While some provisions of the legislation might be refined and improved a bit as the bill moves through Congress, the act as a whole is a strong step toward addressing an urgent national priority.

Although improvements at the federal level are indispensable, they will be inadequate without matching action from the states. We especially applaud the proposed State Innovation and Completion Grants in Title I of the bill for the grants' potential role in launching and reinforcing state initiatives and promoting their effectiveness. All states need to become engaged in increasing postsecondary participation and success. While every state receiving grants should be required to demonstrate commitment to the goals and self-discipline of this bill, every state should be encouraged and assisted to develop competitive programs, just as they have been for the educational provisions of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. We believe a state's assurances that it will meet appropriate conditions for receipt of an initial grant should suffice.

The 1972 Amendments to the Higher Education Act created "1202" Commissions to help the states expand the nation's higher education system to educate the baby-boom generation. Title I of this bill has the potential to galvanize state strategies to yield the more widespread participation and success in postsecondary education required in the 21st century.

We also specifically endorse Title V, the Community College Initiative. Just as the 1972 Amendments to the Higher Education Act fostered the widespread expansion of America's community colleges, these provisions will help these institutions realize fully their potential as an engine of educational achievement and economic prosperity for all Americans.

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Thank you for your leadership and commitment to educational quality and opportunity in the United States. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the important legislation before the Congress, and we are fully and enthusiastically prepared to do our part as state leaders to achieve these national goals.

Sincerely,



Paul E. Lingenfelter
President



Reginald L. Robinson
Chair
Executive Committee
President and CEO
Kansas Board of Regents



David E. Skaggs
Chair
Federal Relations Committee
Executive Director
Colorado Department of Higher Education

cc: Members of the SHEEO Executive Committee
Members of the SHEEO Federal Relations Committee