

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing on “America’s Black Colleges and Universities: Models of Excellence and Challenges for the Future”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “America’s Black Colleges and Universities: Models of Excellence and Challenges for the Future.”*

Good morning. Welcome to our hearing on “America’s Black Colleges and Universities: Models of Excellence and Challenges for the Future.”

One of the primary focuses of this Committee has been to make college more affordable and accessible, so that every qualified student has the opportunity to go to college.

We began last year by enacting a \$20 billion increase in additional federal college aid over the next five years.

In addition to providing low- and middle-income students with some much-needed financial relief when paying for college, this new law also makes an historic investment of more than a half billion dollars in Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and other minority-serving schools.

HBCUs provide critical higher education opportunities for African-American, low-income, and educationally disadvantaged Americans. Historically, HBCUs have played an especially significant role in opening the doors of college to African-American students. During times of slavery and segregation, HBCUs were the only institutions that would admit African-American students.

Today, these colleges and universities are playing an increasing role in helping students succeed in college and in strengthening our workforce. The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education released a new report just today showing the significant strides that black colleges are making to increase access to higher education and to boost our nation’s global competitiveness.

In 1994, slightly fewer than one million African-American students were enrolled at either two-year or four-year undergraduate institutions – making up just over nine percent of all college students. By 2004, African-American student enrollment had more than doubled – comprising about 13 percent of all college students.

Over the past decade, enrollment rates at HBCUs have grown at a much faster rate than enrollment rates among all college students.

Although HBCUs represent only three percent of all colleges and universities, they enroll close to a third of all African-American students. They serve a disproportionate number of all African-American students pursuing careers that are critical to our competitiveness: Forty percent of their students pursue four-year degrees in science, technology, engineering and math, and about half of all African-Americans students in teaching fields attend HBCUs.

But despite this progress, these institutions continue to face a unique set of challenges, including limited resources and budgets. HBCUs tend to have smaller endowments than other comparable institutions. Another recent study by the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education found that, during the 2004-2005 school year, not a single HBCU ranked among the top 120 endowments in the country.

Sadly, President Bush's recently released fiscal year 2009 budget proposes harmful cuts in funding for HBCUs and other minority serving schools, which would only worsen the financial challenges these schools face.

In addition, many HBCUs are in significant need of repair and renovation, especially those that are still feeling the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina.

And some disparities still persist between students attending HBCUs and students at other comparable schools – part of the reason the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education has pursued compact agreements with several states to root out discrimination that minority students may face.

Clearly, there remains a great deal of work ahead to ensure that students at HBCUs and other minority serving schools have the same opportunities as students at other colleges.

I am pleased to say that this Congress and this Committee have taken some important steps to address these challenges. In addition to our newly passed student aid law, the House also recently passed the College Opportunity and Affordability Act, H.R. 4137, which increases the amount of funding HBCUs could receive for capital projects, such as repairs.

It also expands funding eligibility for graduate student programs at HBCUs and other minority serving institutions and addresses the challenges of starting and growing endowments at these schools.

Today, we will examine the tremendous accomplishments of private and public HBCUs and learn more about the obstacles they continue to face. We will also hear more about the purpose of compact agreements – and whether or not the Office of Civil Rights is doing enough to protect the interests of students attending HBCUs.

I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today, many of whom are in town for the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education's annual conference.

Providing all Americans with equal educational opportunities is at the center of our nation's civil rights history and shared values. It's a core part of our efforts to give everyone the chance to pursue the American Dream.

Thank you.

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