

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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**CHAIRMAN HINOJOSA STATEMENT AT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING
ON “THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: HOW STUDENTS ACCESS
AND FINANCE A HIGHER EDUCATION”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Higher Education, Competitiveness, and Lifelong Learning for a subcommittee hearing on “The State of Higher Education: How Students Access and Finance A Higher Education.”*

Good Morning. Welcome to the first hearing of the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Competitiveness.

This is the first of a series of hearings that we will hold on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. I am looking forward to working with the members of the subcommittee and all of the stakeholders to develop legislation that will fulfill the promise of the Higher Education Act for the 21st century.

There is a growing concern that, as a nation, we are losing our competitive edge. We know from experience that investing in higher education is one of our primary tools for sharpening that competitive edge.

After World War II, we opened the doors of college far and wide to returning soldiers – rich, poor, black, white or Hispanic. Our nation became smarter, stronger and richer as a result of this egalitarian investment in education.

In 1965, President Johnson signed into law the Higher Education Act, which expanded our national commitment to broad access to higher education. Again, our economic prosperity and capacity for innovation grew as result of this investment.

Yesterday, the study “*Hitting Home: Quality, Cost, and Access Challenges Confronting Higher Education Today*” was released by Jobs for the Future. This quantifies the scale of our challenge in higher education. The report found that by the year 2025, just to keep pace with our international competitors, the United States would need to produce an additional 15.6 million college graduates. That translates to another 781,000 degrees per year or a 37 percent increase over current production. There are no two ways about it – that is a tall order. We have not aligned our support for higher education to reflect this reality.

We are shortchanging our next generation of college students. Hispanic and African American students will account for most of the growth in our traditional college age population. Yet, we know that nationally, only half of these students are graduating from high school on time. Only one in five is college-ready.

Many of our families do not understand financial aid or the college process. A recent survey conducted by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute found that more than half of Hispanic parents and 43 percent of young adults could not name a single source of college financial aid. Certainly, we can do better.

Overcoming these barriers of preparation and financial aid awareness is simply not enough to ensure college success. We know that cost is a major obstacle.

The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance estimates that in 2003, more than 170,000 college-qualified low-income students did not enroll in any college at all because of financial barriers.

Moreover, we know that just getting into college is not enough. The benefits of higher education come with degree completion. Too many of our students are not making it through to graduation.

The 110th Congress has already made a down payment on improving access and affordability. We have passed legislation reducing interest rates on subsidized students loans, ensuring all students have equal access to the maximum Pell grant – regardless of whether they attend low-cost institutions, and providing the first increase in over 4 years to the Pell grant, boosting the maxim grant to \$4310 – a \$260 increase!

This is real progress, but we are just getting started. Clearly, we need to expand access and success in higher education on a larger scale than ever before. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act gives us our opportunity to do that.

Our distinguished panel today will help us think about how to get this job done. Thank you for joining us. I am looking forward to your testimony.

With that, I yield to my good friend and ranking member, Ric Keller of the great state of Florida.

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