

**STATEMENT OF JAMES A. BOYLE  
PRESIDENT, COLLEGE PARENTS OF AMERICA**

*Before the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and  
Competitiveness of the Committee on Education and Labor, May 1, 2007*

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Jim Boyle, and I am the president of College Parents of America, the only national membership organization for current and future college parents.

Our group's mission is to empower parents to best support their children on the path to and through college. Much as AARP does for seniors, we fulfill that mission by providing a three-pronged mix of advocacy, timely information and access to discounts, in our case on college-related spending.

College Parents of America is still relatively young, established in July 2003, but the topics you are examining today – barriers and solutions to paying for a college education – have been on the minds of parents since the first meaningful number of tuition checks were dropped in the mail nearly two centuries ago.

For decades, of course, the barriers and solutions to paying for college were relatively simple – the only students who went to college were those whose parents could afford to pay for it. That is not an era that any of us would like to revisit.

As college-going rates increased, and schools – both public and private – multiplied, the issue of paying for college got a bit more complicated, and various solutions rose forth. Academic grants, athletic scholarships, and support from local businesses or community groups all became ways to help young people attend the college or university of their choice.

Since there is little time for a complete history of paying for college in America, I'll jump to the 1970s, when the foundation for student aid that still exists today was put in place. For some period of years, perhaps a decade, it was possible for a student to achieve a

college degree with support from a mix of Pell Grant, institutional aid, federal student loans, some work-study and compensation from a summer job. As a 1979 graduate of Northwestern University, I benefited from those programs myself.

There were challenges to paying for college, to be sure, but they did not seem as insurmountable as the barriers for students and their families appear today. And whether those barriers are real – or just perceived – either the reality *or* the perception can have a damping down effect on college-going rates, and college success rates too, as it becomes more difficult for families to meet – or think they can meet – the cost of all four years of higher education.

Parents of today's college students have seen their child, in many instances, break through the gauntlet of competitive college admissions, only to arrive anxiously on campus where there is no rest for the weary, with attrition levels in the double digits. Given this scenario, parents are naturally concerned about the status of their own college investment, and whether the money spent is supporting their child's academic success in a safe, healthy learning environment.

The sticker price to attend college continues to go up at a much faster rate than the consumer price index, and that causes great angst – and bewilderment – for parents across the country. Let me give you a couple of examples of parent reactions.

On our [collegeparents.org](http://collegeparents.org) Web site, we offer a blog called “Hoverings,” with its playful title meant to be a tongue-in-cheek reference to the term “helicopter parents,” which seems to have taken hold in the media as a way of describing today's college moms and dads. The blog covers some serious issues, however, and in one of our topic areas we asked parents to comment on how the cost of college affects their family.

One posting, from Lena, began this way: “The fetal position: that is what I revert to you every year for three days as I have to fill out FAFSA forms and loan applications for the next year. How will I ever get out of debt? I feel that question in the pit of my stomach

as I know that I am just digging myself deeper and deeper into a hole. I'm so far in now, I just have to keep going and hope that the investment in my three children pays in the end."

Another parent, named Anne, wrote: "I thought we had done pretty well saving for college in a 529 for our son who is to be a freshman this fall. What an eye-opener that FAFSA was! Turns out that we are expected to pay, freshman year only, every penny we have saved, an amount equal to 40 percent of our yearly income. I guess parents are supposed to stop saving for retirement, eat Ramen noodles and turn the thermostat down 10 degrees in order to meet the cost of college."

The bottom line is that college costs are a barrier for the vast majority of parents and students because the dollars required to meet a school's financial expectations are often far above and beyond what is available in a family's monthly budget.

Since this is a hearing on both barriers and solutions, I won't spend any more time now bemoaning the situation in which we as a nation find ourselves. We should be turning to solutions and today's conversation can be a significant step in that direction.

There is every reason to get started ASAP. There is overwhelming evidence that a college education helps to create a more productive workforce and a more informed and active citizenry. It may seem obvious, but I think it is always worth pointing out the nation's economy and security depends on increasing the ability of future generations of students to obtain a college degree.

So what are the paying-for-college solutions that should be congressional priorities? The three legs of the stool – aid, loans and tax policies – should each play a part in the crafting of those solutions. Not all are within the purview of this committee, or this committee alone, but each can play an important role in helping families to meet the high cost of college.

College Parents of America believes that the three principal ways that Congress can put college within more reasonable reach are by:

- 1) placing more federal dollars into grant aid, in particular by raising the maximum level for a Pell Grant;
- 2) making the federal student loan program more family-friendly by, for example, increasing the limits on the amount that may be borrowed via a federal student loan and by increasing the subsidies directed toward both student and parent loans; and
- 3) making permanent the now-precarious ability for families to deduct a portion of college-related expenses and, while doing so, raising that deduction from its extremely modest \$4,000 figure to a more reasonable amount of \$12,000.

I think a fair question to ask is how can student aid account for less than one percent of the federal budget when more than 80 percent of the jobs that will be created in the next 10 years will require a postsecondary education?

Maybe not a fair question, at least for this committee, relates to the provisions in the tax code on tuition tax deductibility, as compared to some other federal tax deductions. And that question would be: if the tax code is supposed to reflect our society's values, how can we look ourselves in the mirror when a \$100,000 luxury SUV can be deducted if used for business purposes, yet only \$4,000 of college expenses are available for deduction?

Since there is a decidedly mixed message when it comes to state funding for higher education, we face a potentially massive college access crisis without a substantial investment in student aid. Student aid is more essential than ever as a means of ensuring that all of America's young people have a chance to achieve their potential.

At College Parents of America, we are attempting to do our small part to educate parents about the various options for financing college, so that no doors of educational opportunity are closed due to real or perceived lack of funding choices. Here in the

United States Congress, you can act to push those doors wide open, and I encourage to work together, in a bi-partisan fashion, to begin to make that happen.

Before I close, and join with my fellow panelists in taking your questions, I want to say a few words about the recent student loan scandals, which I know that you examined in detail last week in a hearing with Attorney General Cuomo and which you will be pursuing some more next week in your planned session with Secretary Spellings.

There is plenty of blame to go around in the whole sordid affair, and it is truly a shame because I believe nearly all of the individuals who serve as financial aid administrators, and who work for student loan companies, do so because they are genuinely committed to helping to make it possible for young men and women to attend college.

While further investigation may prove otherwise, I believe that a few bad actors have taken a system that, for the most part, works well, and made it look woefully inadequate and unfair to student and their families.

Amidst all the clouds, however, there is a bit of a silver lining as I believe that the scandal will accelerate an inevitable “consumerization” of the student loan business, helping to set a more desirable stage where students and their parents are in the driver’s seat when it comes to loan choices.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I know that various pieces of legislation have been introduced, on both sides of the aisle, which are intended to break down barriers and provide solutions for students and families who are struggling to pay for college. In my limited time, I chose not to address any single one of those bills, but instead to broadly address the topic at hand. As we continue our discussion today and in the months ahead, I am pleased to offer my views on pending legislation, and to join with you, as appropriate, in communicating progress on those bills to current and future college parents across the country. I look forward to working with you.