



State Higher Education Executive Officers

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July 11, 2007

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
House Education and Labor Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6100

Dear Chairman Miller:

We write on behalf of the members of the national association of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) to thank you for your leadership in providing greatly needed increases in federal student assistance through the *College Cost Reduction Act of 2007* (H.R. 2669).

We have attached a brief statement endorsed by the members of SHEEO in 2002, when discussions were just beginning on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. While much has changed in the past five years, it is remarkable how relevant this statement remains to the work facing the states and the federal government in meeting the needs of our people for higher education.

In that statement our first three priorities for the federal government are to:

- Assure sufficient support for federal financial assistance programs so that low and middle income students are enabled and encouraged to participate in higher education.
- Simplify federal student aid programs to increase their operating efficiency and to reduce obstacles to students in need.
- Expand the federal financial commitment to programs, such as Gear Up and TRIO, that demonstrate results in encouraging and enabling students to prepare for success in college.

We vigorously applaud the progress toward these goals represented by recent initiatives in the Congress, and we pledge our continuing efforts to implement complementary actions in the states that will result in more successful participation in higher education and greater levels of authentic educational attainment.

In the 2002 SHEEO statement we outlined the following as essential national priorities:

- More opportunities for students to participate in postsecondary education
- Widespread, affordable access to high quality programs
- Higher levels of student learning
- More students who complete degrees and certificates,
- More capable teachers, and
- More high quality research.

All of these priorities require complementary state and federal action, and we look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the Senate as budget reconciliation legislation and other legislation relevant to higher education and our work with K-12 education and teacher quality moves forward in the Congress.

Because of our role in state higher education and the information at our disposal we feel an obligation to comment on Section 132 of H.R. 2669, the requirement for the states to maintain effort in their support of higher education. SHEEO has done a long term analysis of state appropriations for higher education in the context of these maintenance of effort provisions.

Since 1985 appropriations for higher education in 30 of the 50 states would have fallen below this threshold in one or more years. The average over a 22 year period is for 3.7 states to fall below the threshold each year, but the number ranges from 0 to 11. Only in four years, FY 1993, FY 2003, FY 2004, and FY 2005 have more than 6 states fallen below the threshold. In FY 2006 the number returned to 4, and preliminary indications for FY 2007 indicate the recovery of FY 2006 is continuing. In this 22 year period state appropriations collectively (for the nation as a whole) have *never* fallen below the average for the previous five years.

We believe the maintenance of state effort in supporting higher education is a critical national priority, but we have some reservations about the appropriateness and effectiveness of this provision.

We want to close by again expressing our thanks for your leadership in the enormous progress represented by H.R. 2669. We stand ready to be of assistance wherever we might be helpful as this and other legislation moves forward.

Sincerely,



Paul E. Lingenfelter
President
State Higher Education Executive
Officers (SHEEO)



Robert T. Perry
Chair, SHEEO Executive Committee
Executive Director
South Dakota Board of Regents