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Rep. Barrow Working to Make College More Affordable; Boost High School Graduation Rates

Georgia Congressman pushes legislation to increase Pell Grant funding; fund "early college high schools" that help reach high school dropouts and economically disadvantaged students

Washington, DC – 12th District Congressman John Barrow today introduced two pieces of legislation that will help more young Americans face the challenges and rising costs of a college education. At a hearing of the Education and Workforce Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, on which he serves as a member, Barrow urged his colleagues to support his measures to boost the value of federal Pell Grants and to help finance early college high schools – small schools that help at-risk and low income students finish high school and prepare for college.

Early College High Schools:

Statistics from the education and workforce partnership *Jobs for the Future* show that over half of those qualified to get into college are not able to get a degree. In fact, one-third never even make it to their sophomore year. The disparity among minority students is even more alarming. While 28% of white students complete a four-year degree by age 29, only 16 percent of African Americans and just 11 percent of Hispanics complete a four-year college degree by age 29.

To help fix this problem, Barrow proposed a six year federal initiative to expand the nation's early college high schools. The schools are specifically geared towards helping low-income students and former high school dropouts achieve a high school diploma and get a head start on college by earning two years of college credit. Currently, there are 46 early college high schools serving 8,030 students in 19 states, including Georgia.

"The nation's Head Start program offers millions of disadvantaged students the help they need at the beginning of their educational career," Barrow said "This amendment, a 'head start on college,' provides students with the tools they need to get on track and stay the course in college."

To help ensure that early college high schools succeed in their goal of improving access to college, the Secretary of Education will be required to report to Congress on the success of this demonstration project 18 months after the enactment of this program. The Department is also required to review the merits of each institution annually.

After Barrow outlined the details of his early college high schools proposal, Republican Subcommittee Chairman Buck McKeon agreed to consider including the initiative in the final version of the Higher Education Authorization Bill scheduled to be debated next week.

Pell Grants:

“Pell Grants are more than just an investment in the future of our nation’s workforce,” Barrow said. “For millions of Americans, Pell Grants can make the difference between attending and not attending college.”

In the past twenty years, college tuitions have shot up dramatically. However, during the same period, the maximum value of the Pell Grant has been cut in half. For those working families who are struggling to make ends meet, the decreased value in the Pell Grant makes a college education that much less affordable.

“Members of Congress like to talk about tax relief for working families,” Barrow continued. “And while it’s critically important that we continue to provide tax relief in America, I believe it’s time Congress provided tuition relief for working families.”

According to the Congressional Research Service, an estimated 45% of dependent Pell Grant recipients had a total parental income below \$20,000 a year and over 90% had a total annual income of less than \$40,000. The U.S. Department of Education has also shown that minority students are 19% more likely than white students to have student loans and 26% more likely to have borrowed more than \$20,000 to help finance their college education.

The Kildee-Van Hollen-Barrow amendment would restore the value of Pell Grants back to the value they were at during the 1970’s, when they paid 85% of the tuition and fees at a typical four-year public college. If approved by the committee, the measure would increase the maximum authorized Pell Grant amount over the next five years – raising it from \$6,600 for the ’06 -’07 academic year to \$8,200 for the ’11 - ’12 academic year.

For more information in the early college high schools, log on to: <http://www.earlycolleges.org/>. For more information the federal Pell Grant program, go to: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/fpg/index.html>.

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