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Barrow Votes to Address Rising College Prices and Remove Other Barriers to College Enrollment

Washington, DC – Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) today voted for legislation to lower the soaring cost of college tuition, and to remove other obstacles that make it harder for qualified students to go to college.

By an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 354 to 58, the House of Representatives approved the College Opportunity and Affordability Act (H.R. 4137), which would reform and strengthen the nation's higher education programs to ensure that they operate in the best interests of students and families. The bill is the second major step that Congress has taken to make college more affordable and accessible for all qualified students. Last year, Congress enacted into law a \$20 billion increase in college financial aid over the next five years, the largest increase in student aid since the G.I. Bill of 1944.

“A college education isn't a luxury anymore. It's a necessity,” said Barrow. “Over the course of a career, a college graduate will earn almost twice the salary of a high school graduate, close to a million dollars. A college degree is worth an average of \$14,000 a year more than a high-school graduate can expect to make. We need to make that kind of income available to every qualified student, not just the ones who can afford it.”

An October 2007 report from the College Board showed that, over the previous five years, tuition and fees had increased across the board at public and private colleges and at two-year and four-year colleges. In Georgia, tuition and fees at a public four year university grew by 9 percent between 2006-07 and 2007-08. The bill would address these rising prices by encouraging colleges to rein in price increases, ensuring that states maintain their commitments to higher education funding, and providing students and families with consumer friendly information on college pricing and the factors driving tuition increases.

The legislation also strengthens provisions previously approved by the House to avoid conflicts of interest in the student loan programs. The bill's new provisions include requiring better consumer disclosures and protections on private student loans.

“Together these protections form a Bill of Rights for college consumers,” said Barrow.

In addition, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act would:

- Streamline the federal student financial aid application process;
- Make textbook costs more manageable for students by, among other things, helping them plan for textbook expenses in advance of each semester;
- Allow students to receive year-round Pell Grant scholarships;
- Strengthen college readiness and support programs for minority and low-income students;
- Increase college aid and support programs for veterans and military families;
- Improve safety on college campuses and help schools recover and rebuild after a disaster;
- Ensure equal college opportunities and fair learning environments for students with disabilities; and
- Strengthen our nation's workforce and economic competitiveness by boosting science, technology, and foreign language educational opportunities.

H.R. 4137 is a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the primary federal law aimed at expanding college access for low- and middle-income students. The bill is supported by a broad coalition of students, colleges and universities, consumer rights advocacy groups, minority organizations, and more.

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