

Washington, DC - Congressman Charlie Gonzalez (TX-20) today joined a bipartisan majority in the U.S. House of Representatives to pass legislation that ensures the turmoil in the U.S. financial markets does not keep students from accessing the federal student loans they need to pay for college. The Ensuring Continued Access to Federal Student Loans Act of 2008 (H.R. 5715) was passed by a vote of 383-27.

The legislation would provide new protections, in addition to those already existing under current law, to ensure that families continue to have timely, uninterrupted access to federal college loans. The bill would specifically protect families in the event that stress in the credit markets leads lenders to reduce their activity in the federally guaranteed student loan program. Congressman Gonzalez issued the following statement on the bill:

"In the midst of these tough economic times, we must make sure that American families continue to have access to federal funds for college. Resources that increase access to higher education will ensure a skilled and capable workforce drives the American economy in the future. This is a clear and sound economic investment for our country, and we must make sure that this investment isn't interrupted on account of the stress currently facing the credit market. The Ensuring Continued Access to Federal Student Loans Act of 2008 accomplishes this goal."

Specifically, the Ensuring Continued Access to Federal Student Loans Act of 2008 (H.R. 5715) would:

- Reduce borrowers' reliance on costlier private college loans by increasing the annual loan limits on federal college loans by \$2,000 for undergraduate students, and by increasing the aggregate (the total loan limit over the course of a student's education) loan limits to \$31,000 for dependent undergraduates and \$57,500 for independent undergraduates;

- Give parent borrowers more time to begin paying off their federal PLUS loans by providing them with the option to defer repayment until up to six months after their children leave school - giving families more flexibility in hard economic times.

- Help struggling homeowners pay for college by making sure that short-term delinquencies in mortgage payments don't prohibit otherwise eligible parents from being able to borrow parent PLUS loans. Under current law, parents with an adverse credit history are ineligible to receive a parent PLUS loan, except under extenuating circumstances. The legislation would temporarily classify as an extenuating circumstance delinquencies on home mortgages of up to 180 days, therefore making it possible for parents who are being strained by the current housing market to secure loans for their children;

- Clarify that existing law gives the U.S. Education Secretary the authority to advance federal funds to guaranty agencies in the event that they do not have sufficient capital to originate new loans, and allow guaranty agencies to carry out the functions of lender of last resort on a school-wide basis. Under the Higher Education Act, these guaranty agencies are obligated to serve as a nationwide network of lenders of last resort if requested to do so by the Education Secretary; and

- Give the U.S. Education Secretary the temporary authority to purchase loans from lenders in the federal guaranteed loan program, ensuring that lenders continue to have access to capital to originate new loans. The Education Department would be authorized to purchase loans only if doing so would not result in a net cost for the federal government.

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