

Washington, DC - Congressman Charlie Gonzalez (TX-20) today joined an overwhelming bipartisan majority in the House of Representatives to approve legislation that would address the soaring price of college tuition and remove other obstacles that make it harder for qualified students to go to college.

By a vote of 380-49, the House approved the Higher Education Opportunity 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 legislation builds on Congressional efforts 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.

The Senate is also expected to take a final vote on the legislation this week; if passed the bill would then be sent to the President's desk for his signature.

"A sound investment in education, especially one that results in lower costs and greater access to educational opportunities, serves the best interests of American families, students, and our economy," said Congressman Gonzalez. "This legislation represents exactly the type of commitment to education we need in our country, and it is one that will create a talented and diverse workforce that can lead our economy in the future," he added.

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 Texas, tuition and fees at public four-year institutions grew by 8 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, providing students and families with consumer friendly information on college pricing and the factors driving tuition increases, and streamlining the federal student financial aid application process.

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.

"The safeguards included in this bill, particularly those aimed at protecting student loans, take necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that families continue to have uninterrupted access to resources for higher education," said Congressman Gonzalez.

In addition, the Higher Education Opportunity Act would:

- 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. If enacted, this would be the first time the Higher Education Act was reauthorized since 1998. The current law expired in 2003.

For more information on the Higher Education Opportunity Act, [click here](#).

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