

Democrats Committed to Making Higher Education More Accessible, Affordable

Today marks the two-year anniversary of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act being signed into law by President Obama. This law, passed by a Democratic-led Congress, makes higher education more accessible and affordable:

- Increased the maximum Pell Grant from \$5,350 to \$5,550, and will increase the maximum award to \$5,975 in 2017 to help cover the costs of education as state budget cuts have made higher education less affordable.
- Strengthened the Income-Based Repayment program by lowering the discretionary income cap from 15% to 10% and offering loan forgiveness after 20 years instead of 25 years. Last year, the President accelerated changes to the program to make it available sooner.
- Ended wasteful taxpayer subsidies to big banks and directed the savings to helping students instead.
- Invested in community colleges and historically black colleges and universities, and minority-serving institutions.

In addition to this historic legislation, Democrats have continued to make higher education a priority investment in our [Make It In America](#) jobs plan so that every American has the opportunity to attain the education and skills needed to find work.

Unfortunately, the budget House Republicans passed yesterday stands in stark contrast to these efforts. [Their budget reduces Pell Grants by more than \\$1,000 for 9.6 million students in 2014 and could eliminate Pell Grants for over one million students over the next decade.](#) Their budget also reduces work-study funding, meaning almost [37,000 students could lose access to college work-study opportunities in 2013, and more than 166,000 students could be affected each year over the next decade.](#) Republicans also don't have a plan for preventing student loan interest rates from doubling on July 1st.

The drastic cuts to education in the GOP budget harm our ability to out-educate our competitors and build a competitive workforce:

- [The Institute for College Access & Success](#): “With an educated workforce more crucial than ever to our nation’s future, now is clearly the time to do more, not less, to make college affordable. Slashing need-based grant aid while making student loans more costly and harder to repay will do unnecessary harm both to students and the economy.”
- [Rachel Gragg, National Skills Coalition](#): “Chairman Ryan’s FY 2013 budget resolution appears to nearly eliminate funding for federal job training programs that help U.S. workers and employers obtain critical workforce skills... while also proposing major funding cuts to Pell Grants for low-income students. These proposed cuts simply could not come at a worse time for our nation’s economic growth and competitiveness.”
- [Lynn Jennings, The Education Trust](#): “[The Ryan Budget] would further limit access to higher education for low-income and working-class students — opening wider the divide between haves and have-nots. And that’s clearly not a sustainable path for our economy or our democracy.”
- [Julie Margetta Morgan, Center for American Progress](#): “It’s alarming that Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) of the House Budget Committee, by slashing the Pell Grant program, would deprive thousands of Americans access to college based on a misunderstanding of academic scholarship. The higher education section of Rep. Ryan’s new budget proposal would earn an ‘F’ for poor research at any American college... Solving the college affordability crisis first requires accurately understanding its specific causes. Cherry-picking and misinterpreting statistics for partisan gain is irresponsible. Worse, it has the very real potential to hurt students and deprive the economy of a more educated and more mobile workforce.”

The Republican budget makes the wrong choices and places the burden of deficit reduction on working families while giving tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. Democrats made historic investments in education through the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, and will continue to oppose any efforts that undermine our ability to out-educate our competitors and ensure more students can succeed.