

Congresswoman Betty McCollum

National Association for College Admissions Counseling

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Thank you for the warm introduction. It is an honor to be with you today to receive this special award.

As a former teacher, as a mother of two college graduates, as a “non-traditional college student” myself—I am proud to be an advocate for your work and the students we all serve. And, as a member of the House Education Committee it is my passion to advocate for higher education—and for you!

Thank you all for the work you do—you and your colleagues are the real friends of access to college for millions. I would like to give a special welcome to my Minnesota friends.

I don't need to tell you that this is a tough environment for education. Congress has prioritized deficit spending and corporate tax giveaways over education. The President's Fiscal Year 2007 budget once again slashes education. The President's budget is fiscally reckless and morally irresponsible. This budget:

- **Makes the biggest cut to education investments in ten years** including FY 07 funding for education cuts education funding by more than \$2 billion below the FY 2006 enacted level, which is below the FY 2005 enacted level – the largest percentage cuts since the Republican cuts in FY 1996.
- **Freezes the maximum Pell Grant for the fifth year in a row.** The Bush budget freezes the maximum Pell Grant at \$4,050, for the fourth straight year – despite campaign promises to college students to increase Pell, despite soaring tuition, despite the fact that the maximum Pell Grant is worth \$900 less now than it was 30 years ago.
- **Eliminates three critical programs that boost college opportunities and access – GEAR-UP, TRIO Upward Bound, and TRIO Talent Search.** As a result, more than 1 million students – 70 percent of whom are minorities – will lose the support they need to make it to college.
- **Denies more than 460,000 students low-cost loans due to cuts to the Perkins Loan Program.** Fails to cut excessive lender subsidies. At the same time that the President's budget is slashing education funding, it protects special interests – failing to cut wasteful, excessive federal subsidies to lenders.

And, with this budget-- the President will underfund the *No Child Left Behind Act* by more than \$55 billion—eliminating important programs—including:

- Elementary and Secondary School Counseling
- Safe and Drug-Free Schools
- School Drop-Out Prevention-
- and of course the TRIO programs I mentioned earlier.

These cuts are coming at a time when my own state of Minnesota has one of the worst counselor-to-student ratios in the country. Congress can't afford to continue to deny students the benefits of school counseling- especially when Washington continues to slash the critical services we know ensure successes for students.

Counseling programs, including TRIO, have celebrated years of success—creating access for those students who have traditionally been forced to stand on the sidelines of educational opportunity. Instead of building on these successes, the President and his Republican Congress have decided to cut the very programs serving students. Let's speak the truth—Republicans have decided to cut education in this increasingly competitive and global marketplace. This is incomprehensibly stupid.

The President's budget should be an opportunity to make education and workforce preparation a priority— and the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act should be an opportunity to make college more affordable. Instead, the Republicans have decided to use the reauthorization to open up the possibility of fraud and abuse in higher education. That is why I offered an amendment during subcommittee markup of HR 609—the Republican bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act—that requires a study of fraud and abuse in student aid programs. I'll be watching to make sure that provision is included in final bill language.

But when they couldn't pass their Higher Education bill, with provisions that have real potential to allow fraud and abuse—they inserted language—in fine print—in their dangerous Budget Reconciliation bill --that will open up fraud and abuse. In addition to cutting \$12 billion from the student loan program in their Budget Bill, Republicans included a provision that outright eliminates the 50 percent rule—a measure to reduce fraud and abuse using online education—with no added safeguards.

Members from both sides of the aisle believe that the safeguards can help to curb abuses in federal financial aid. The 50 percent rule- was created specifically to combat fraud and abuse in higher education—to protect students and taxpayers. The 50 percent rule, along with the 90/10 (“ninety ten”) rule, were in direct response to fraudulent behavior during the 1980s and 1990s. These rules have curbed the abuses and have saved not only federal dollars—but the hard earned dollars of students and their families.

I believe in innovation. I believe in distance education and online learning as ways to promote access. But the outright elimination of the 50 percent rule does not open the door to innovation and access—instead it opens the door to fraud and abuse. Unfortunately, the outright elimination of the 50 percent rule without any safeguards was inserted by Republicans in the middle of the night.

This Congress and this Administration have misplaced our nation's priorities at the expense of our nation's youth. They have run up the Nation's largest deficit ever. Our students are paying for a mismanaged budget now, and they and their children will pay for this enormous debt well into the future.

I will continue to fight for higher education. I will continue to fight for you and the students you serve. We can do better. We must do better. Thank you.