

## Congress Cuts Out Early

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Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) and Majority Whip Mitch McConnell (R-KY) have decided that Congress will begin its recess on or by September 27.

This negates earlier plans to keep both houses in session through early October. The decision was made as part of an effort to assist Republican incumbents who must return to their home states to campaign for re-election.

According to Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call, the early adjournment gives right-wing incumbents the advantage in the upcoming election. Still, many wonder how much of a difference the few extra days will make.

### Student Aid Reward Program

Rep. Tom Petri's (R-WI) is building momentum for his "Student Aid Reward Act."

This bill proposes that the federal government "encourage institutions of higher education to participate in the student loan program...that is most cost-effective for taxpayers," according to the text of the bill itself.

If enacted, the bill will allow schools to receive a Student Aid Reward Payment for participating in federal student loan programs. The exact amount would be "not less than 50 percent of the savings to the Federal Government generated by the institution of higher education's participation in the student loan program."

These proceeds would then be used by the institution to fund supplemental grant programs for graduate and undergraduate students.

### NJ Tuition Capped

For the 2006-2007 academic year, New Jersey colleges not be allowed to raise tuition by more than 8 percent. Even so, state support for higher-education programs has decreased by around 17 percent this year, according to state budgets.

Although Gov. Jon Corzine proposed cutting \$300 million in support, around \$170 million was taken away from the state's colleges and universities in the recently released plan.

Darryl Greer, executive director of NJASCU, told the Gloucester County Times, "This is the worst budget for higher education in the history of the state. It's very disappointing."



### **Student Debt Relief Act**

On June 28, the Student Debt Relief Act was introduced in the Senate by a group including Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Hillary Clinton (D-NY), Chris Dodd (D-CT), Tom Harkin (D-IA), Joe Lieberman (D-VT) and Chuck Schumer (D-NY).

The bill proposes to ease the debt burden of student-loan borrowers' by lowering the interest rates for student loans, increasing maximum grant amounts, relax the requirements for loan forgiveness, and other measures included in the 12-point plan.

“The debt incurred through student loans while in college follows a student long after they’ve graduated,” Dodd said in a recent press release.

“Today, the young men and women graduating from college may not be able to go into their chosen profession or buy a car or a home because the burden of their student loans is too great.”

### **National Merit Awards Announced**

National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) has announced the names of more than 2,100 winners of its annual Merit Scholarship. These awards, financed by colleges and universities, were also given to around 2,400 other recipients announced in May.

Winners were chosen by officials of each sponsor college from among the National Merit Scholarship Program finalists who have chosen to attend their institution. The scholarships provide between \$500 and \$2,000 annually for up to four years of undergraduate study at the selected institution.

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) is a not-for-profit organization that conducts academic competitions for recognition and undergraduate scholarships.

The National Merit Scholarship Program, the larger and older competition which was initiated in 1955 when NMSC was established. Around 55,000 high school students annually are honored through the programs, and around 10,500 participants annually receive scholarships worth a total of \$50 million.