



MAP Plus To Help Middle-Class

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Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich signed Senate Bill 2225, creating the first-ever grant program to assist middle-class students pay for college. The MAP Plus program will offer \$500 grants to Illinois college students whose family income is below \$200,000 and who are not under the existing MAP program-which provides grants to students from low-income families. Administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), funding for the new program will come from restructuring or selling part of the student loan portfolio held by the Commission. The total number of students who will benefit from the additional MAP funding and the MAP Plus programs is expected to be 225,000.

College Presidents Have Discussions

The first of several planned meetings of Missouri university presidents took place in Columbia to unearth ways to increase funding for student aid, primarily for needy students. President Elson Floyd of University of Missouri system met with Truman State University President Barbara Dixon, Southeast Missouri State University President Kenneth Dobbins, and Missouri State University President Michael Nietzel, while also conferencing with other university presidents. The meet criticized the \$1,000 "Access Missouri" scholarship legislation, which failed to reach Governor Matt Blunt. The Bill would have provided some state funds as scholarship programs for colleges. The presidents have set up a task force of financial aid officers from public and private institutions to find ways to develop a more simplified financial aid system and to look at options for increasing aid.

Tax Deduction For Higher Education Expenses

Higher education got a boost when the House of Representatives passed H.R. 5970, a legislation that includes granting taxpayers a deduction of up to \$4,000 for higher education expenses, in lieu of claiming the Hope or Lifetime Learning tax credits. According to the Bill, the deduction can be claimed whether or not the individual taxpayer itemizes. The stipulation is effective for two years. The provision also allows teachers a deduction of up to \$250 for money spent on books and classroom equipment.

Apart from the education sector, the legislation includes a provision for an increase in the federal minimum wage rate, tax relief in estate and gift tax matters, alteration of the New Markets Tax Credit, and providing defense personnel an option to include combat pay in the earned income credit calculation.

NM Colleges Lose Funds

A good economy generally boosts employment rates, but historically it is seen to adversely affect colleges by lowering enrollment. New Mexico's booming economy is making colleges face the unique situation where they are also losing a proportionate amount of state funding. Financial aid is appropriated to institutions of higher education on the basis of admission figures, essentially



the number of semester credit hours. Lower enrollment means reduced funding. Clovis Community College has witnessed a slip of 10% in its enrollment in 2005-06 as compared to the previous year. Most of the state's 26 public two- and four-year colleges in the state have experienced a reduction in enrollment in the past fiscal year. With state funding done for the year, the decline in admissions this year would affect 2007-2008 college and university budgets. However, colleges are hoping for a possible change in appropriation of funding in the January 2007 legislative session.

Community Colleges Seek Modifications

Asking for modification in regulations for the Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACG) program, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) urged the U.S. Department of Education for an extension of eligibility to students in certificate programs. The ACG, formed in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, has just started functioning and, if not disputed, may do away with grants for a number of community colleges throughout the U.S. AACC President and CEO George Boggs said that the policy would hurt thousands of students enrolled in the certificate programs. Some students may join other long-term programs, while some may be high achievers making significant contributions to the nation's economy. The Association asserts that the law making the new grants program already includes biotechnology, aerospace manufacturing technology, electronics engineering, and renewable energies programs, along with other certificate programs.