

Third Extension for the HEA

By Charisse Dengler



With the current Higher Education Extension Act (HEA) about to run out on September 30, Ric Keller, Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, proposed the year's third extension on September 22. Keller's bill, formally known as H.R. 6138, extended the Higher Education Act and its programs through the end of June 2007.

As planned, the House passed the bill on September 28, and the Senate followed suit the next day. President Bush finalized the matter by signing the extension into law on October 1.

Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) is Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. Even though Enzi supported the president's signing of the extension, he said it's time to move forward with the HEA legislation.

"Congress needs to move forward with comprehensive reauthorization legislation. As Chairman of the HELP Committee, I have worked with members on both sides of the aisle to achieve three primary goals for higher education: improving access, lowering costs, and increasing accountability," Enzi said. "Simply extending HEA provisions on an annual basis is not an effective means of achieving these goals-we need a long-term solution."

The new extension act made some changes to the HEA. For example, the act placed restrictions on the Federal Family Education Loans (FFELs) that can be made by colleges and universities. Also, the new bill forgave all student debt for survivors of victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and it did away with the two-year waiting period and 50-percent requirement as they applied to The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). This means that Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) will no longer have to remain in holding patterns during the two-year period between funding cycles, and they also won't have to meet a 50-percent requirement for low-income Hispanic students.

"The HACU family of more than 450 member institutions, especially the 240 HSIs, and countless supporters are pleased that the U.S. Congress removed two provisions harmful to HSIs and Hispanics from the Higher Education Act of 1965," said Antonio Flores, President of the HACU, in a September 30 press release. "This action by Congress frees HSIs from unnecessary and onerous provisions that affect their ability to serve their students, especially those of Hispanic descent. We are grateful to our friends in Congress and will continue to work together with them to increase educational opportunity in the nation."

The HACU thanked Senators Enzi, Bill Frist, Harry Reid, Edward Kennedy, Kay Bailey Hutchison, and Jeff Bingaman specifically for helping pass the bill in its favor.

“The two-year wait-out period has been harmful to HSI programs and has been a detriment for these institutions to fully serve their students to the best of their ability,” said Congressman Rubén Hinojosa, Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Education Taskforce, in the September 30 press release. “While I clearly wish that we could have reauthorized the Higher Education Act for another five years, I am pleased that we are moving forward to remove these barriers.”