



The STAR Act Revisited



The Student Aid Reward Act (known as STAR) made its debut nearly two years ago when it was introduced by Republican Representative Tom Petri and Democrat George Miller. At that time, the STAR Act did not reach voting status. During a recent news conference, STAR was reintroduced.

The purpose of the Student Aid Reward Act is to make more financial assistance available to students without raising the costs for taxpayers. If the act is approved, it will help Wisconsin college students statewide. In Tom Petri's district, STAR would add roughly \$1.2 million in student aid. Throughout the entire state of Wisconsin, it could add about \$15.5 million.

In a phone interview with the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Petri said that the Democratic shift in the House may allow the bill to move further along. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that the bill could save the government \$13 billion and that at least \$10 billion of that could be new financial aid.

Both parties agree that higher education is a priority. "Higher Education is a key to a better future," said State Senator Gordon Smith, a Republican from Oregon, "and we have to look for every new way to make college more affordable."

Currently, there are two similar programs for student loans that supply the same loans and interest rates to students, but both have been criticized. For example, one program forces students to borrow directly from banks.

Petri claims that, if passed, the STAR Act could generate billions in savings by offering educational institutions a more affordable option for their students. Colleges and universities could hang on to a lot of the money saved by the federal government in the form of Pell Grants.

One Wisconsin student, currently a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point lobbied for the STAR Act, saying, "If the loan program is passed in this session, there'll be more Pell money and I'll be able to get a grant."

The crisis of affordability is something that is not exclusive to any single state; it is a problem that is increasing yearly throughout the nation. The cost of college goes beyond the expenses of tuition and books. Being a full-time student normally does not allow an individual to have a full-time job, and the smallest cost-of-living expenses can add up quite quickly without a steady income.