

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of the College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2007. I would like to thank Chairman

GEORGE MILLER

, Ranking Member

MCKEON

, Chairman

HINOJOSA

, and Ranking Member

KELLER

for their work on this bill, which goes a long way toward making higher education attainable for all.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2007 contains several helpful provisions for students. First, the bill increases the authorized maximum Pell Grant award from \$5,800 to \$9,000. In addition, the bill further decreases student interest rates. The bill also includes a feasibility study on giving students more flexibility in refinancing their loans by making student loans more like home mortgages, in which borrowers can switch back and forth from variable rates to fixed rates as the market's conditions change.

H.R. 4137 increases support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions.

This bill also helps schools affected by a disaster. An Education Disaster and Emergency Relief Loan Program is created to provide emergency loan funds to schools after a Federal declared major disaster or emergency, including those schools affected by the 2005 Gulf Hurricanes. Additionally, the bill requires the Secretary to create a disaster relief plan for schools and LEAs adversely affected by disasters.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2007 also addresses several additional critical issues. The bill provides loan forgiveness for areas of national need, including early childhood educators, child welfare workers, school counselors, and mental health professionals. In addition, the bill creates a grant program, to help nonprofit organizations, in collaboration with higher education institutions and their students, that seek to promote cultural diversity in the entertainment media industry. Finally, the bill creates a new competitive grant program to

strengthen and develop college-level programs in the rapidly growing field of modeling and simulation.

I am pleased that the bill also includes a study to be performed by GAO on whether any race, ethnicity, or gender biases are present in the design of standardized tests used for admission to institutions of higher learning. This language should enable GAO to acquire data from the testing companies because of the link between the tests and the federal money that the schools receive who use these admissions tests.

H.R. 4137 also seeks to make campuses more safe by creating a National Center for Campus Public Safety to train campus public safety agencies, encourage research to strengthen college safety and security, and serve as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of relevant campus public safety information. The bill also requires the Department of Education to conform hate crime reporting requirements to FBI guidelines to more accurately report incidents of hate crimes on our campuses.

Finally, the bill includes several positive changes to the TRIO programs, which provide assistance to low-income and first generation college-going students. The bill eliminates unreasonable evaluation requirements imposed on Upward Bound programs by the Department of Education without requiring a recompetition. In addition, the bill creates an appeals process for TRIO programs to ensure that the grantmaking process is fair and equitable.

One item not addressed in H.R. 4137 is the provision under current law that prohibits students who are convicted of certain drug offenses from receiving federal student financial aid. This provision unfairly targets poor and minority students, increases long-term costs to society, creates double jeopardy for students who have already paid their debt to society, and lacks evidence of effectiveness. For these reasons and others, I hope that we can address this critical access issue as this bill moves through the legislative process.

For the foregoing reasons, I support the bill and urge my colleagues to support it.