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2ND DISTRICT, IOWA

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Congress of the United States
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November 19, 2014

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

As you work to draft your Fiscal Year 2016 budget request for the Department of Education, I urge you to reevaluate the choice to do away with year-round Pell Grants. As someone who was raised in poverty and could not have attended college without the help of student aid programs, I firmly believe that we must maintain and improve access to the Pell Grants that make it possible for millions of students to go to college every year.

In the 110th Congress, I included a provision in the Higher Education Opportunity Act (PL 110-315) to create the year-round or summer Pell program. Before year-round Pell, part-time students were able to receive their Pell Grants year round. However, they could not get more than the total maximum grant for the year. Depending on their circumstances (whether they attend full-time part of the year, the cost of attendance where they are enrolled, living costs, etc.) many students exhausted their maximum Pell grant before the summer session started.

The provision I included in the bill allowed students to use up to two Pell Grants during an award year so that they could accelerate their progress toward their degree objectives. This allowed students to get the education and training they needed more quickly and with less debt. Unfortunately, after only two years, the year-round Pell program was eliminated by the Department of Education. Tough choices had to be made to get our nation's fiscal house in order, but cutting funding to Pell Grants, or limiting their availability, puts our country at a competitive disadvantage by making it harder for students to afford a quality education and get the skills they need to succeed in the 21st Century economy.

While their time was short lived, year-round Pell Grants showed a lot of promise on the ground. As reported by the Chronicle for Higher Education, more than 800,000 students accessed a

second grant to accelerate their progress, and community colleges reported that summer enrollment increased by 15%.¹

I have visited schools throughout my district and heard directly from Iowa students how critical Pell Grants are to their education and to their futures. Many times, I hear from them and their school officials that they would be better able to complete their college careers were they able to access the additional Pell Grant in the summer session. According Dr. Mick Starceвич, President of Kirkwood Community College:

“The summer Pell legislation had a very positive impact on our students. In the short time we were allowed to take advantage of this change in awarding, summer fulltime enrollment increased by 41%.

Students progressed toward their degrees at a faster pace, we were able to take advantage of increased class scheduling in the summer, making the college more efficient. We believe that the year-round Pell will do what it was designed to do: advance students to their degrees faster, and get them into the workforce.

Eliminating this provision will mean that students who are already attending full time in the fall and spring semesters will not have the advantage of additional Pell grants to attend summer school, thus delaying their progress toward graduation,”

I know first-hand what a difference education can make in a person’s life, and I strongly believe that Pell Grants should be available to students year-round. I urge you to include a restoration of year-round Pell in your FY 2016 budget request.

Sincerely,



Dave Loeb sack
Iowa’s Second District

¹ Derek Quizon, “End of Year-Round Pell Grants Could Lead Many Nontraditional Students to Drop Out,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 14, 2011, accessed November 18, 2014, http://www.intered.com/storage/deptofed/CHE_EndYearRoundPell.pdf.