

**OrlandoSentinel.com**

**OTHER VIEWS My WORD**

## **Keller: A great day for college students**

Ric Keller

Special to the Sentinel

September 27, 2007

While the national spotlight and media scrutiny are focused on Iraq, few have noticed President George W. Bush is signing into law today one of the most important pieces of legislation addressing the cost of a college education since the 1944 GI Bill.

Members of Congress showed refreshing bipartisan agreement in passing The College Cost Reduction Act. The Senate approved the measure 79-12. The House followed suit by a margin of 292-97.

There are two major reasons for those big numbers.

First, the legislation cuts student-loan rates from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent over a four-year period. Second, we're making an historic investment in Pell Grants, money that we give to children from low- and moderate-income families that helps them go to college. I would not have been able to go to college if it wasn't for Pell Grants.

Many pieces of legislation become watered-down when they go to a conference committee, barely resembling the bill that was introduced in the first place. This one actually became better.

When Democratic leadership attempted to move their bill through the U.S. House, they invested only \$5.85 billion in new funding for Pell Grants. Instead, they spent far too much money creating new entitlement programs.

Since I'm the ranking member for the House Higher Education subcommittee, I had the opportunity to serve as a conferee and argue my case. I vehemently objected to the low amount of spending on Pell Grants and the high amount of spending on new entitlements.

Fortunately, the conferees agreed with this approach. Pell Grant spending was boosted from \$5.85 billion to \$11.4 billion new dollars while leaders trimmed back plans for new entitlements.

What does that mean for young people going to college? The maximum annual award for Pell Grant recipients will rise from \$4,310 to \$5,400, phased in over time. The

benchmark is significant. Back when I first ran for Congress in 2000, I called for Pell Grants to top \$5,100 a year. Had conferees not agreed to the approach I suggested, the maximum Pell Grant would have risen to only \$4,810 in 2012.

Now some of my Republican friends question whether investing several billion dollars in Pell Grants is a wise use of money. The fact is Pell Grant increases pay for themselves.

The nonpartisan advisory committee on Student Financial Assistance said by investing \$13 billion in Pell Grants, it helps yield up to \$85 billion in additional tax revenue. The reason is the average college graduate earns 75 percent more than the average high-school graduate.

Pell Grants are good for the Treasury, good for our young people and good for employment rates in this country.

Just don't look to read about them on the front page.

*Congressman Ric Keller, an Orlando Republican, is chairman of the House Pell Grant Caucus.*

Copyright © 2007, Orlando Sentinel