

income who would not otherwise be financially able to handle the costs of a college education or special career or technical training program.

Created in 1972, the Pell Grant originally provided significant financial support to students. In the 1976-1977 school year, the maximum Pell Grant award covered 35 percent of the average annual cost of attending a 4-year private institution, and 72 percent of the average cost of a 4-year public institution.

Today, Mr. Speaker, in spite of President Clinton's efforts over the past 3 years to boost the purchasing power of the Pell Grant, and the President deserves much credit for these efforts, but in spite of all of this, the maximum Pell Grant now pays for only one-third of the average cost of a public 4-year college, and barely one-seventh of the cost of a private college.

This sad state of affairs came about from cutbacks in Federal funding during a period of escalating college costs and tuition increases among most of the Nation's public and private colleges. I firmly believe that higher education institutions must rein in the cost of college tuition, but I am equally as firm in my belief that the Federal Government must and has to restore the value of the Federal Pell grant.

That is why I am proud to join with my colleagues, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) to introduce H.R. 959, the Affordable Education through Pell Grants Act of 1999.

This bill does one thing and one thing only: It raises the maximum Pell Grant award level to \$6,500 for the academic year 2000 to 2001. This simple action would restore the value of the Pell Grant as originally conceived. It is twice the amount of the maximum Pell Grant award proposed by President Clinton, and it is the level of funding where the Pell Grant is meant to be.

By raising the maximum award level to \$6,500, we restore the purchasing power of every Pell Grant awarded to financially needy students, and we increase the eligibility pool for Pell Grants. This has an important impact on middle-income families who face the financial burden of having more than one child in college at the same time.

Over the past 2 years, I have met many students from the Third Congressional District of Massachusetts who would not have gone to college, who would not have gone to the college of their choice, without the Federal Pell Grant program.

Bethany English, who has now graduated from Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, has stood alongside me on presentations on the importance of Pell Grants. Jamie Hoag, from a working class family in Fall River, Massachusetts, was able to graduate from Holy Cross College in Worcester because he received a Pell Grant. It is for these young people, and all the students like them, that I urge my colleagues to restore the value of the Pell Grant.

I know many of my colleagues will say that we are asking for too much, that this is too expensive a proposition. Indeed, it will require about \$11 billion more than what is currently in the President's budget for Pell Grants.

But I would say to my colleagues that education must be the Nation's number one priority. The future of our economy rests on the higher education of our children, the future of our national security rests on the higher education of our children, and the future of our communities rests on the higher education of our children, all of our children.

If we can find money in the budget to build Star Wars, then we can find the money to make stars out of our children, and to make sure that everyone with the ability to go to college can afford to go to college. If we can give billion dollar corporations special tax breaks, then we can certainly make sure that every student who has the ability to go to college gets a financial break to pay for college. If we can spend billions of dollars each year to design new nuclear weapons and new ways to make nuclear war, then we can find the money we need to increase the funding for Pell Grants.

I say to my colleagues, this is an issue of national priorities and of national interest. I urge my colleagues to join the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) and I and cosponsor H.R. 959, and restore the power of the Pell Grant program.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. SHIMKUS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

IN SUPPORT OF AN INCREASE IN THE FEDERAL PELL GRANT PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, we are a rich and powerful Nation in the midst of strong economic growth. As we approach the 21st century, we must ask ourselves, what is our next greatest challenge? How will we target our investments to become stronger as a Nation and as a people?

I have always said, and I will continue to say, Mr. Speaker, that there is no greater challenge and nothing that is more important than the education of our next generation. We do not have a person to waste. Every student in this Nation who wants to go to college, no matter how rich or poor, should have the opportunity to go. Education is a great equalizer. A good education can shine the light of hope and opportunity in every corner of our Nation,

no matter how poor, how hopeless, or how downtrodden.

For nearly 30 years Pell Grants have been the key that have unlocked the American dream. For millions of American students who had the talent, had the desire, but lacked the funds, the Pell Grant made the difference between college and a dead end job.

In the last decade, the cost for college has increased at rates of 5 to 8 percent, outpacing inflation and putting a college education further out of reach for those who can least afford it. Until recently, the size of the maximum Pell Grant stayed the same.

Two years ago, many of my colleagues and I, along with the President, fought for and won the largest increase in the Pell Grant in 20 years. That brought the maximum Pell Grant up from \$2,700 to \$3,000.

Mr. Speaker, we can even do better. Today's Pell Grant provides only 35 percent of the average cost of a 4-year State college. Too few families today can afford to write a check for \$10,000 to cover tuition for State schools, and for so many families, private education is out of the question.

Mr. Speaker, I remember growing up in rural Alabama in the forties and fifties. My family could never have afforded the college tuition at Harvard, Yale, or even the University of Georgia. For so many of us, college was a distant dream, a pipe dream. Without the help of financial aid or work study, we could never have afforded to go to college.

We have come a long way in opening the doors of college for all Americans, but we can do better. We can do more. For this reason, I am joining my colleague, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) and the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) in sponsoring legislation that will raise the maximum authorized Pell Grant to a level that reflects the rising cost of college.

I ask all of my colleagues to join me and my colleagues, the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) and the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), in making education a priority, and to ensure that in the days of economic prosperity, no one but no one is left out or left behind.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GUTKNECHT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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CONGRESS MUST DOUBLE PELL GRANT FUNDING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to join with the gentleman