



For Immediate Release – February 29, 2008
Contact: Zach Lowe (Feingold) – (202) 224-8657
Kevin Kelley (Collins) – (202) 224-2523
Melissa Wagoner (Kennedy) – (202) 224-4543
Leroy Coleman (Coleman) – (202) 224-5641

Senators Continue BIPARTISAN Effort to MAKE COLLEGE A REALITY FOR MORE AMERICANS

Bipartisan Group Urges Increase in Maximum Pell Grant Award

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI), Susan Collins (R-ME), Ted Kennedy (D-MA), and Norm Coleman (R-MN) are continuing their effort to strengthen the Pell Grant program to help more students attend college. The bipartisan group of senators is urging the Senate Budget Committee to include the highest fiscally responsible increase in the maximum Pell Grant award in the 2009 Fiscal Year Budget. Over 30 years ago, the maximum Pell Grant award covered approximately 80 percent of the cost attending a four-year public college. Currently, the maximum Pell Grant award covers approximately 33 percent of those costs.

“While the costs of a college education continue to rise, the maximum Pell Grant award is not keeping pace, forcing more and more students to borrow money to pay for higher education,” Feingold said. “Access to higher education should be based on a student’s desire to gain knowledge and skills, not on their financial resources. There is broad bipartisan support for increasing the Pell maximum award and increasing funding for Pell would send a strong message to students that Congress supports them as they pursue a higher education.”

“Our system of higher education is, in many ways, the envy of the world, but its benefits have not been equally available. Unfortunately, family income still largely determines whether many students will pursue higher education. Increasing the maximum Pell grant award would help open the doors to higher education to all students and would represent a sound investment in our country’s economic future and competitiveness in the global economy,” said Senator Collins.

“As a college degree becomes more and more important for success in today’s economy, students are relying heavily on Pell grants to protect their futures and obtain the education they need. This year Congress delivered a long-overdue and unprecedented increase in the Pell grant, but it’s only begun to reverse the damage done by long neglect. We need to keep the Pell grant strong, so that all students, regardless of their economic situation, have access to college and the American dream,” Kennedy said.

“As tuition rates continue to rise, I am concerned that more and more potential students may opt out of a college education because it is simply financially unfeasible for them to attend,” said Coleman. “A college education is critical for an individual to thrive in the increasingly crowded global marketplace. By increasing the maximum Pell Grant award, more young people will be able to accomplish their career goals and contribute to society in a way they could never have dreamed without the helping hand Pell Grants offer.”

In their letter, the senators also advocated support for other need-based aid programs like the Leveraging Education Assistance Partnership program, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant program, and the Perkins Loan program. The senators want to ensure that Congress continues to increase funding for Pell Grants and other need-based aid programs so hard-working students can take advantage of all the opportunities that access to a higher education offers.

“Pell Grants currently provide need-based aid to over five million undergraduate students and have helped open the doors of higher education to millions of student who otherwise might not have been able to attend college because of financial constraints,” the senators wrote.