

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**CONTACT:** Laura Capps/ Melissa Wagoner  
(202) 224-2633

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION  
ACCESS ACT OF 2007**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

The most important single thing we can do to improve college access and completion in this country is to increase grant aid for our neediest students.

We know that the cost of college has tripled in the last 20 years.

While the costs of going to college have skyrocketed, grant aid has not kept up.

Twenty years ago, the maximum Pell Grant covered 55 percent of costs at a public four-year college. Today, it covers only a third of those costs.

The gap between the maximum Pell grant and cost of attendance at 4-year public colleges has increased almost \$3,500 since 2001-2002. Today the gap is \$8,746.

Under years of Republican control, the Pell grant maximum has been stuck near \$4,000. Earlier this year, Democrats increased the maximum grant to \$4,310. But that is not enough.

Increasing costs and stagnant grant aid are closing the doors to college for many middle-income and low-income students and families.

The lowest income students on average have an unmet need of \$5,800. Each year, 400,000 students don't attend a 4-year college because they can't afford to do so.

It's shameful that today low-income students – even those who have worked hard and done well in high school – are less likely to attend and complete college than high-income students.

Less than half of low-income eighth grade students will graduate from high school ready to attend college. Compare this to the nearly 90 percent of high-income students who will be college qualified when they complete high school.

The outlook is even bleaker for low-income students to earn a Bachelor's degree. Just one fifth of low-income eighth graders will graduate from college. But 68 percent of high-income students will do so.

That's unacceptable.

To help close these gaps, this bill increases the maximum Pell grant immediately next year to \$5,100 and by 2011, it will be \$5,400.

Who will this bill help? It will help students like Sara, who was a first-generation college student. She graduated from Norfolk State University and earned her Master's degree with the help of Pell and other aid programs. Sara says that Pell helped her family know that a better day was coming for them.

This bill will help students like Natalie, from my home state of Massachusetts, is a single mother enrolled in college for the first time. She says that without Pell grants, she "would be stuck in this way of life, with no 'light' to look forward to...knowledge is power and education is key."

Over 5 million students rely on the Pell grant – 5 million. This bill recognizes just how important this aid is to students and families across the nation.

Our Senate proposal provides the biggest boost to student aid since the passage of the G.I. Bill – providing \$14 billion in additional grant aid to students and \$3 billion in debt relief – \$17 billion in college aid overall.

This bill provides the support and aid that millions of Americans need in order to access and afford a college education. This increase in aid is long overdue.

But we need not stop there. We should allocate all available funds to continue adding to need-based aid – beyond the increases we make in the next five years.

The amendment we will vote on this morning would allow us to do that. It allocates billions of additional dollars to extend the maximum need-based grant between 2014 and 2017 – continuing our promise to help millions of needy students pay for college.

What a reversal this will be from the last five years, prior to this Congress, when the Administration broke its promise to increase the maximum Pell Grant year after year. What a commitment to our students for years to come.

We know what the stakes are when students are not able to afford college. And we know that years of stagnant grant aid has made the problem worse and worse.

With this amendment, we can reverse those troubling trends and make serious progress in helping millions of American students.

I thank my colleagues on the education committee for all their efforts on this legislation, and I urge my colleagues to support this amendment to provide hope and opportunity to millions of middle-income and low-income students and families.

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