

March 29, 2006 - Rep. Leadership Stifles Debate on Major Education Bill

Republican Leadership Stifles Debate on Major Education Bill, Your Children to Pay the Price
Rule Violates Open Process Tradition on Eve of Reform Hearings

Washington, DC - This evening, a mere 14 hours before the House Rules Committee is scheduled to host its third hearing on Ethics and Lobby Reform in the House, the Rules Committee Republicans heavily restricted debate and consideration on H.R. 609, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005 (Higher Education Act reauthorization).

This maneuver to restrict democracy on the House Floor is in violation of recent House tradition on this issue of great importance to the American people.

The two most recent bills to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, in 1998 and 1992, were considered under rules that allowed any amendment to be offered if it was in compliance with House rules and was printed in the Congressional Record. Sadly the rules for H.R. 609 have broken that tradition by blocking nearly 100 worthy amendments from both sides of the aisle. Nearly 120 total amendments were submitted to the Rules Committee on this bill, 89 by Democrats, 14 by Republicans and 15 bipartisan amendments. The first rule allowed 15 amendments. This rule allows only 7. A motion to consider the bill under an open rule process was rejected by the Rules Committee majority.

"Education is just too important an issue to allow the Republicans to restrict debate and consideration of ideas just to ensure they get their way. They are gambling with the future of our children," remarked Rep. Slaughter after the meeting.

"This kind of strong arm behavior calls into the question just how serious this Republican Leadership is about reforming the legislative process in the House. This win at all costs mentality of this leadership, which motivates them to restrict debate and consideration of opposing ideas, corrupts our entire legislative process, results in bad legislation that hurts the American people, and shuts out the voices of millions of Americans from their own government.

The rule blocks 86 Democratic amendments including the following which were all blocked in the Rules Committee on straight party-line votes of 4-8:

Bishop (NY) #37- to extend the recently expired Tuition Deduction for Higher Education through 12/31/2011.

Emanuel #19-to restore the \$12 billion to student aid programs that the Deficit Reduction Act cut.

Grijalva #60- to provide loan forgiveness for teachers who work in rural schools located in low-income communities who complete five years of service.

Inslee #25-would help retain Head Start and Early Head Start teachers by including them in the loan forgiveness program and by increasing the level of loan forgiveness from \$5,000 to \$17,500

Kind /Holt #31-to provide institutions of higher education with grants to institute creative and innovative ways of encouraging students to study and enter into careers focused on math, science, engineering, and technology.

Petri /Miller (CA) #27- adds the Student Aid Reward (STAR) Act to the bill to encourage colleges to utilize the less expensive direct-student-loan program and by doing so provide billions of additional college scholarships to low and middle income students at no additional cost to taxpayers.

Scott (GA)/Drake (VA)/Weiner (NY)#69-to establish a student loan repayment program within the Department of Education for borrowers who agree to remain employed, for at least three years, as public attorneys who are: (1) State or local criminal prosecutors; or (2) State, Local, or Federal public defenders in criminal cases. The repayment under this program will be limited to \$6000 per calendar year and \$40,000 total.

Wu (OR)/McGovern (MA)#10-to increases the Pell Grant award to \$8,000 through the use of mandatory funds over a period of 5 years.