

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 23, 2009

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Budget
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Judd Gregg
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Budget
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Conrad and Ranking Member Gregg:

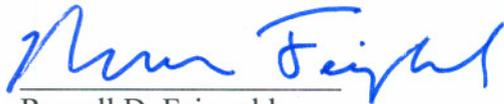
We write in strong support of the highest possible fiscally responsible increase in the maximum Pell grant award for fiscal year 2010 and ask you to provide such an increase in your budget assumptions for fiscal year 2010.

Pell grants currently provide need-based grant aid to over five million undergraduate students and have helped open the doors of higher education to millions of students who otherwise might not have been able to attend college because of financial constraints. Strengthening the Pell grant program has continually received strong bipartisan support in Congress and including additional funding for the Pell program in the FY2010 budget is critical if Congress is going to continue to help guarantee that our nation's neediest students have access to higher education. Access to and completion of postsecondary education is increasingly necessary because many of the nation's future jobs will require a postsecondary degree and therefore, it is vital that the doors of postsecondary education remain open to all students, regardless of their financial background.

While recent legislative achievements took important steps to strengthen the Pell grant program, much more needs to be done to make sure the Pell grant program continues to grow in years to come. One step we can take now is to provide a sizable increase in funding for the program, in order to raise the maximum Pell grant award for 2010-2011. Increased funding for Pell grants will also help stop the erosion in the ability of Pell grants to cover the cost of attending college. In 1975, the maximum Pell grant award represented approximately 80% of the cost of attending a four-year public institution, but in 2001-2002, it covered only 42% of those costs, and by 2005-06, it covered just 33% of those costs. As a result of this erosion, large numbers of students have been forced to obtain student loans or forgo attending college all together. In these challenging economic times, Congress needs to do all it can to help ensure that our nation's students are not forced to acquire large amounts of debt as they seek to complete their postsecondary education and join the nation's workforce. In addition, increased funding for the Pell grant program can help make certain that the United States continues to work towards meeting two very important goals - that our nation's students can compete for the jobs of the twenty-first century and that the American workforce remains globally competitive in these rapidly changing economic times.

Congress must continue to support increased funding for Pell grants and other need-based aid programs so that hard-working students can take advantage of the wide range of opportunities that higher education offers. In order to help our students prepare for their futures and reach their full potential, we request that you include the highest possible fiscally responsible increase in the maximum Pell grant award in your budget assumptions for Fiscal Year 2010. Thank you for your attention to our request.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold
United States Senate



Susan M. Collins
United States Senate