

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 19, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

In your 2011 State of the Union Address, you emphasized that for the country to remain globally competitive “higher education must be within the reach of every American.” We write to urge you to stay committed to that goal by rejecting any deficit-reduction proposals that require reducing the Pell Grant maximum award below \$5,550, making harmful changes to Pell’s eligibility requirements, or reducing the in-school interest subsidy. Any such changes will effectively close the door of opportunity on millions of low- to moderate-income Americans seeking a college education.

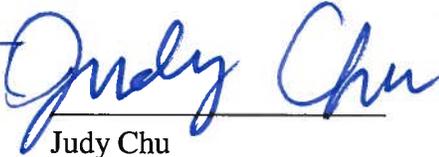
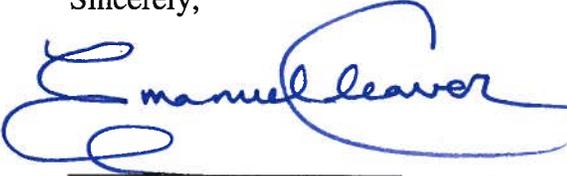
Today, more than 9 million Americans rely on Pell grants. Those students comprise the core of our future economic workforce, a labor force that some experts project will be short by as many as 3 million workers with college degrees by 2018. If we as a nation are going to support and compete in the rapid-growth industries of the future, we need to ensure that Americans at all income levels—not just those who are well off—have access to education beyond high school.

The Pell Grant program makes higher education possible for low- and moderate-income students. Dramatic increases in the cost of college—increases that are nearly double those of health care and four times the rate of inflation—have had a severe impact on these students because their earnings have *decreased* over the last 30 years. As recently as the 1980s, the maximum Pell Grant covered more than half the cost of attending a four-year public college. Today, *even after the recent increases*, a Pell Grant covers only about one-third of college costs. On average, Pell Grant recipients already incur nearly \$25,000 in student debt. Reducing the maximum award or the in-school interest subsidy would dramatically increase the cost of higher education for low-income students by thousands of dollars. If Pell Grants are reduced in any way, attending and completing college will be beyond the financial reach of the vast majority of low-income students; students who’ve played by the rules, who’ve taken the classes, and earned the grades that they need to attend college. Reductions in Pell will hit communities of color especially hard, because while 63 percent of Pell recipients are white, nearly half of African-American undergraduates, 36 percent of Asian-American/Pacific Islander undergraduates and 40 percent of Latino undergraduates support their studies with Pell assistance.

We appreciate the need to find savings in our federal budget. In fact, low- and moderate-income students have already made significant contributions to deficit reduction. The elimination of Summer Pell *cost* students and *saved* the federal government about \$8 billion earlier this year. Additional cuts to the Pell program or cost-saving constrictions in eligibility requirements or in-school interest subsidies must be off the negotiating table. We cannot sacrifice the futures of students who are trying to improve their lives through education. Their future is key to our nation's future economic success and prosperity.

We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Emanuel Cleaver

Chair

Congressional Black Caucus

Judy Chu

Chair

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus



Charles A. Gonzalez

Chair

Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Danny K. Davis

Chair

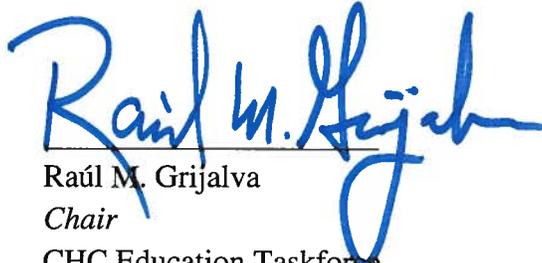
CBC Education and Labor Taskforce



David Wu

Chair

CAPAC Education Taskforce



Raúl M. Grijalva

Chair

CHC Education Taskforce

Co-Chair

Congressional Progressive Caucus



Keith Ellison

Co-Chair

Congressional Progressive Caucus