



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education
News Clippings

Week of July 19, 2009



July 25, 2009

Clements: WVU Has 'Good People'

By HEATHER ZIEGLER

WHEELING - West Virginia University President James P. "Jim" Clements may be the new guy on campus, but his vision for the school makes it seem like he's been around the Mountainlair a few times.

Following a two-day retreat at Oglebay Park in Wheeling, Clements and members of the West Virginia University Board of Governors processed a laundry list of new ideas for moving the university forward. All agreed that establishing a team of key leaders for the school - including some new faces - is the way to move beyond the tough times.

Clements, 45, former provost at Towson University in Maryland, had been a faculty member there since 1989. While his early background is in teaching, he said these days he is in the process of learning.

"This two-day conference with the board of governors has been great. We've had healthy discussions. We talked about ideas for the future but I'm not ready to announce the real specifics. We need broader discussion with faculty, staff, students, alumnus, community members, elected officials ... It will take a couple of months strategically to be where we want to be," Clements said.

However, Clements said the focus so far during his presidency has been on "enhancing the image of the school, its different kinds of support structures and community partnerships."

For the 2009-10 school year, Clements believes a lot of people are feeling good about the university and want to shake off the negativity surrounding a recent scandal involving Heather Bresch, daughter of Gov. Joe Manchin, and a master's degree from WVU she did not earn.

"I think people are really looking forward to this year. I know a lot of people will be looking at me, but we have so many good people here. We are building a team with good ideas," he said.

For example, Clements said the current collaboration between WVU and Wheeling Jesuit University is a positive sign that higher education can work together in West Virginia. He said building on those relationships can only benefit students attending both schools.

One area the new president would like to see WVU move forward in is research. Whether it's the health sciences, energy, transportation, forensics or biometrics, Clements believes WVU can do more to foster those initiatives. He also said he and his team will be open to ideas and hopes to hear from the community with suggestions for improving the education process at WVU.

Board of Governors member James W. Daily II of Martinsburg said he believes the two-day meeting at Oglebay was one of the best he has ever attended because of the enthusiasm and healthy exchange of ideas.

"This was an absolutely essential and wonderful event," Daily said. "It creates a whole new beginning for the university. We discussed the strategic plan for 2010 that is about to conclude and established some parameters for planning for the 2020 plan."

He added this "new enthusiasm" about the university and the 2020 plan is exciting.

"We are looking at a whole new chapter for the university," Daily said. "The participation and camaraderie was unheralded. I think Jim Clements will take the university in a whole new direction. It will be exciting for the state and certainly for the university."

Clements said his goal is to improve the university to the point "that every year, a WVU degree will be worth more."

As for Morgantown, Clements is learning to find his way around the city and the campus.

The Daily Athenaeum

July 23, 2009

WVU's WeCar program will rent cars to students

By Aimee Smith, Staff Writer

West Virginia University will offer four cars for students to rent shortly after Aug. 1.

Students can rent cars for \$9 per hour but will not have to pay for gasoline unless it's under one-quarter of a tank of gas remains.

WVU purchased the cars from Enterprise Rent-A-Car through the WeCar program.

The total cost of the rental cars is \$60,000.

"Two cars will be located in the loop in front of Towers, and two cars will be located beside the Mountainlair on Maiden Lane," said Caitlin Shrift, the marketing coordinator of the WVU Department of Transportation and Parking.

The program will reduce parking and congestion problems in Morgantown, according to Shrift.

"People don't have to bring their cars to campus anymore. They can leave cars at home, which will reduce unneeded cars on campus," she said.

The Department of Transportation and Parking is in the process of creating a Web site for students to register to rent cars.

After filling out their names and insurance information, students will have registration code and can choose a time to rent from available time slots.

If less than a quarter tank of gas is in the car, students can purchase gas using a credit card stored in the car.

Students will be permitted to use the cars for a maximum of 15 hours or \$125 a day.

The rental cars will greatly benefit the students, said Hugh Kierig, director of Transportation and Parking at WVU.

"We certainly encourage students not to bring a car to campus," Kierig said. "Although we provide PRT and Mountain Line service, there are many times when they need an automobile. This allows them to drive when they need to and still be car free."

The rental cars are environmentally friendly too, Kierig said.

“They’re hybrid vehicles. They’ll reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is an added bonus,” he said.

WVU’s contract with Enterprise will last one year.

The program may eventually expand, depending on the number of students who rent cars.

July 21, 2009

Bresch Controversy Casualty Leaves WVU

Charleston Staff

The dean at WVU's College and Business and Economics during the Heather Bresch degree controversy has landed another job.

Texas A&M University recently announced Dr. Steve Sears has been chosen as dean of the school of business.

Sears has been a finance professor at WVU since shortly after his April 2008 resignation as dean during the Bresch scandal. Sears and then-provost Jerry Lang both resigned their positions. They were part of a decision to give Bresch a graduate degree that she never earned.

The daughter of Governor Joe Manchin and Mylan Pharmaceutical top executive still claims she earned the degree.

Dr. Sears is a native of Texas and before coming to WVU in 2005 he served as an associate dean at Texas Tech University. He was chosen at Texas A&M from among 40 candidates for the job.

MU graduate program ranked No. 1 in nation

BILL ROSENBERGER, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- The Marshall University Forensic Science graduate program is ranked number one in the country after its students scored highest overall on a national assessment test.

The ranking is directly related to five graduate students who earned the forensic science program's highest honors on the Forensic Science Assessment Test, which is a qualifying test offered by the American Board of Criminalistics.

One of Marshall's students ranked second in overall test results among students from nine other forensic science programs, including Arcadia University, Cedar Crest College, Duquesne University, Ohio University, Penn State University, Sam Houston University, University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of North Texas.

Twelve other students also graduated from the master's degree program, but they chose not to take the exam, said Terry W. Fenger, director of the program.

Most did not because students have to pay for the test, but they likely wouldn't have affected the results. Fenger said there are very few programs in the country that are Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission accredited by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences.

"We have excellent students coming in to begin with," Fenger said. "But we cover all the disciplines. We have a comprehensive program."

The master's degree program, which started in 1995, teaches students forensic biology, controlled substances, trace analysis, toxicology, latent prints, questioned documents, fire debris and firearms/tool marks -- all of which they the three-year-old national exam tests for.

Fenger said the test is useful for assessing the program's strengths and demonstrating to prospective students and the general public its ability to meet national standards. Program Coordinator Pamela Staton added that test scores are evidence of the program's stature.

"The quality of an academic program can be measured by a program's achievement of national accreditation and how well its students perform on national board examinations," she said. "(Marshall's program) has achieved both of these honorable distinctions. This translates to high quality forensic science services to law enforcement, the legal profession, and the public as graduates of this program become forensic scientists in the field."

The test is offered to students in their last semester of an academic forensic science program. While seeking their first job, recent college graduates may use their test results to demonstrate their knowledge across a broad range of forensic science disciplines.

July 23, 2009

Marshall implements new emergency alert system

by The Associated Press

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. (AP) -- Marshall University is implementing a new system to alert faculty, staff and students about emergencies.

Marshall said Thursday the new system will provide alerts by text messages, e-mail and telephone.

Senior vice president Jan Fox says the system will allow Marshall to quickly provide emergency and safety-related information through multiple channels.

Everbridge is providing the new system. Formerly known as 3n Global, Everbridge provides emergency notification services to colleges and universities, health care systems, government agencies and municipalities.



July 23, 2009

Concord University Point construction nearing completion

By CHARLES OWENS, Bluefield Daily Telegraph

ATHENS — A vision decades in the making for Concord University is nearing a long-awaited completion.

College officials provided a guided tour Wednesday of the new University Point construction project to members of the media, community officials and project supporters. University Point will incorporate the Wilkes Family Chapel, the Erickson Alumni Center and Wilkes Museum all within a new 16,118 square foot structure. College officials hope to have the new \$5.6 million University Point open by September.

Planning for a chapel on the college campus dates back to the 1930s when former Concord President J. Franklin Marsh set as a goal the establishment of an interfaith chapel at Concord. Supporters fought to keep that dream alive over the years.

As he greeted the crowd assembled on the campus for the Wednesday morning tour, Greg Quick, interim vice president for institutional advancement at CU, apologized for the noise being made by several large construction vehicles.

"I apologize for the background noise, but I shouldn't because it means we have progress on campus, and that's a good thing," Quick said.

Quick led the group on a tour of the construction site for both the Wilkes Family Chapel and the Wilkes Museum, and the future site of the Erickson Alumni Center. The chapel and museum are being named after CU alumnae Betty J. Wilkes and the late Joan Wilkes, two sisters who dedicated their lives to education, faith, the community and their college. Betty Wilkes joined in the tour. The Erickson Alumni Center is named after the late Charles O. Erickson, a well-known business and community leader, and the Erickson Foundation. His son, Charles F. Erickson and wife Laurie Erickson, continue to support the University Point initiative.

"This is a really special day for us in what we are able to see today is the vision, and as was mentioned a few minutes ago, that vision started years ago with Dr. Marsh," Joe Long, chairman of the CU Board of Governors, said. "It takes a lot of things to make a vision possible."

Long said committed and giving individuals are helping to fulfill the vision at CU.

"It takes generous people who understand the true purpose of money is not the enhancement of their own, but instead to make life better for someone else," Long said. "That is the true power of contributions, and for those of you who have done that I have only three things to say on behalf of our wonderful university. Thank you. Thank you. And thank you."

CU President Dr. Gregory F. Aloia told a story of a student who proposed to his girlfriend. He said the couple are hoping to get married in the new chapel. College officials anticipate the University Point will also serve as a setting for weddings, and other celebrations. The facility will begin booking in September for Spring 2010 wedding ceremonies and receptions.

“This is one of those rare moments in the role of a president where he gets to make a statement about changing the direction of a campus culture,” Aloia said.

Construction on University Point is scheduled for completion this fall. It is being developed by City Window and Construction of Clarksburg. The architect for the project is IKM Incorporation of Pittsburg, Pa.

“The view from here is just unequal to anyplace else,” Quick said during a press briefing in the chapel area. “I think everyone has done a wonderful job to create a vision that is unequal.”

According to a college press release, supporters who began raising money for the interfaith chapel project right after World War II raised nearly \$120,000. A group of Concord alumni and their friends established a foundation in the early 1980s with the intent of raising funds for the construction of the chapel. Momentum for the project has grown since 2003 with the addition of grants, bequests and donations. Most recently, the Wilkes family from Beckley and the Erickson Foundation, Inc., have contributed to the project.

Quick said additional naming opportunities are available at the center for chapel seating, offices, landscaping, fountains, walkways and other areas. Plaques and other permanent markers will be used to identify supporters of the project.



July 25, 2009

New GI Bill increasing opportunities

By GREG JORDAN, Bluefield Daily Telegraph

BLUEFIELD — Veterans often put their lives on hold while serving their country, and for many of them this means postponing their quest for higher education. A new GI Bill has increased veterans' educational benefits, and local institutions are preparing to help them use those benefits and get into classrooms.

A 2008 bill that increased educational benefits for veterans — the Post 9/11 GI Bill — will be implemented starting Aug. 1 this year. Area institutions are preparing for this date and already receiving inquires.

For some veterans, the new GI bill is welcome news.

"Absolutely, we've got people every day who are applying for it," said Assistant Registrar Megan Mohn of Bluefield State College. "We have veterans who are calling in, we have veterans who are walking in, and they're all excited about being eligible for the new benefits."

One part of the bill, a housing stipend, was especially good news for one veteran.

"Last week I spoke to a veteran who is actually homeless and who was not aware of this benefit," Mohn said. "He's living in a tent. I've given him the information to see one of our admissions counselors. He had sent in his application and once I reviewed his admissions, I asked 'Are you aware of this new program and the housing benefit under the new Chapter 33? There's a housing stipend that goes with it.'"

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is a revamping of the old GI Bill, Mohn said. It provides tuition assistance, books and supplies, and a housing allowance.

"We can give them some initial information, so we can serve as a point of contact," Mohn said. "The VA (Veterans Administration) is requiring us to encourage them to call 1-888-442-4551 or they can go online and get www.GIBILL.va.gov. They encourage veterans to contact them, and they have advisors who can look at their records and decide if they're eligible."

At Concord University, a new office has been created to serve the educational needs of veterans, reservists and active duty service members, university officials said. The Veterans Office counsels veterans and service members in matters ranging from enrollment to financial aid to housing. The office is affiliated with the university's Veterans Advisory Committee.

"The objective is to make is to make this campus more veteran-friendly so that veterans feel comfortable here...to increase the graduation rate for veterans," said Terry Rotenberry, committee chairperson.

Concord University President Gregory Aloia is the chairperson of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission's Veterans Task Force. The goal of the statewide initiative is to advance recruitment, retention and graduation of veterans at colleges and universities.

"We are honored at Concord University to be one of the leaders in this worthy endeavor to assist veterans and other military personnel in reaching their educational goals," Aloia said.

The university's Veterans Office, staffed by Veterans Coordinator Lisa Spencer, is currently at the Jerry L. Beasley Student Center. Plans call for relocating it to a new office at 202 Plymouth Street across from the university's main entrance.

Concord University is interested in working with veterans to utilize the benefits offered by the new GI Bill. Coursework by veterans must be undertaken on or after Aug.1 to be eligible for payment under the program, university officials said.

"We've been assisting members of the National Guard for a long time," Spencer said. "And Concord is now participating in the 'Yellow Ribbon Program' which is designed specifically to help vets who have served more recently. We provide individual counseling as well as group counseling and discussing how the GI benefits may be used at Concord."

The veterans office can be reached at 304-384-6300 or 1-888-VETS (8387).

On the Internet, the office can be contacted at veterans@concord.edu or the website [www.concord.edu>Military/Veterans](http://www.concord.edu/Military/Veterans).

The new bill is good news for everybody, Mohn said.

"I think it's really excited," she stated. "It really means a lot to our veterans and our communities as well, and they're going to come out and they're going to do something productive. We need those people back in the community."

July 21, 2009

McGraw files suit against Ohio collection agency

BY KEITH LORIA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (Legal Newsline) - West Virginia Attorney General Darrell McGraw is suing an Ohio collection agency that allegedly has been making unlawful threats to several people in the state.

The lawsuit, filed Tuesday, targets National Enterprise Systems, Inc., of Solon, Ohio, and alleges that the company's unscrupulous conduct includes strong-arming people into charging money on their credit cards with threats that they will have people arrested if their bills remained unpaid. Also, the company added unlawful collection fees to tuition owed by students to West Virginia colleges and universities, McGraw said.

"Failure to pay a debt is not a crime and companies that make such false threats have violated both state and federal debt collection law," the Democratic attorney general said.

"My office will not tolerate abuse and harassment of consumers who may be in debt through no fault of their own. The Legislature has authorized my office to enforce the laws that prohibit such conduct, and we intend to do so, particularly when the unlawful conduct is as extreme as has been alleged against National Enterprise Systems."

McGraw's office said one example of the illegal practice concerns a Braxton County woman who authorized a \$5,000 charge to her credit card because the company was threatening to have her daughter arrested at work.

The suit asks the court to order NES to cease its abusive practices, to pay civil penalties to the state and to award restitution to consumers who were victimized.

Charleston Daily Mail

DAILYMAIL.COM

July 20, 2009

Retraining of former Century Aluminum workers an uphill climb

Officials say timing of closure, disbursement of benefits, start of school factors in jobless claims

by Ry Rivard, Daily Mail staff

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Since the Century Aluminum plant near Ravenswood closed five months ago and threw 650 people out of work, the county's unemployment rate has soared and the promised placement programs have had few tangible successes.

At least 554 former Century workers have applied for unemployment benefits since the plant closed in February. State officials couldn't immediately determine how many still are drawing benefits.

When the plant was up and running, Century was the third largest employer in Jackson County. The average worker made \$51,000 annually.

Century closed its 52-year-old smelter south of Ravenswood because of the poor market for aluminum.

Since then, the number of people in Jackson looking for work has continued to increase.

Before the layoffs, the January unemployment rate was 7.6 percent in the county.

In June it was 14.3 percent, meaning at least 1,700 county residents are now without work, and that rate is much higher than the state rate of 9.4 percent.

This time last year Jackson County's rate was 4.8 percent, only slightly higher than the state average at the time. About 500 Jackson County workers were counted as unemployed in June 2008.

Records indicate few of the former Century workers have yet received or taken advantage of much of the government help they were promised as they were being laid off.

While 464 former Century workers have received some services from WorkForce West Virginia since February, including resume updating and job searching, few of those services have led to new work or caused workers to take advantage of job training benefits, including the chance to go to college.

While workshops begin this week for former Century employees who are looking to take part in a federal job-training program, the sessions come two months later than expected.

The wait for the federal program to kick in appears also to have led to little participation in the state's own career search and training programs.

Of the workers using the state's job searching system, 52 were referred to other jobs, resulting in at least 22 hires since February, according to cases tracked by the WorkForce West Virginia. The system does not track all the jobs workers find, so officials say the number is sure to be higher.

Also, few employees have received or taken advantage of money for job retraining that officials touted in a February career fair for Century employees.

About 50 former Century employees, or fewer than one in 10, have taken advantage of state support that pays for school or retraining.

Those 50 are likely going to a community college or vocation school, getting a career certification or taking specific training for jobs like truck driving or coal mining, according to WorkForce data.

Joyce Okes, the program director for the Mid-Ohio Valley Workforce Investment Board, said that typically fewer than 50 percent of people who get laid off pursue training, but the number increases with the length of time they are unemployed.

"I would tell you that within the next two months I would expect the number of Century employees seeking training assistance to increase," Okes said.

Part of the hold-up may just be timing. The workers were laid off in the middle of the spring semester at most colleges.

Another factor may be the delay in benefits from a federal program, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, which is designed to help workers who lose their jobs because of foreign trade.

Benefits from the trade assistance program are just starting to roll in. Monday is the first day of a week of sessions for former Century employees to find out about their benefits under the package, which include free tuition for college or other job training, help paying for health care and allowances for job searching and to support families while the laid-off worker takes classes.

But the federal help is coming two months later than expected.

At a career fair held in Ripley just as the plant was closing, state officials said the workers could begin receiving benefits by May, just in time for some to enroll in summer classes. But a significant increase in the benefits package by Congress delayed the application.

The changes, which were included in the massive federal stimulus package, enhanced the package and extended the length of time dislocated workers could receive help. Those extended benefits applied, however, only to groups of workers whose applications were received after May 18. This led the Century workers to hold off applying to wait for the new package to kick in.

It appears that many other groups of laid-off employees did the same. In the one-month period from April 18 through May 17, 111 groups across the country filed for benefits under the program. In the one-month period starting May 18, when the changes took effect, 1,318 groups of laid-off workers applied, according to U.S. Department of Labor.

Okes said while former Century workers were waiting for the federal package to come through, they could have used the state's program to get started in college. The differences are significant. The federal package offers \$20,000 for tuition. The state offers only about \$8,000 total. But the money might have been enough to get some employees started in summer courses.

Many long-time employees are receiving supplemental pay from Century in addition to unemployment benefits. It's not clear how significant the severance pay is, but because of it many former employees may not yet be feeling the pinch to look for new work.

Matt Turner, spokesman for Gov. Joe Manchin, said the governor remains committed to everyone who has lost their jobs and hopes they are aware of the services available. He said the job retraining is important because it's not just an unemployment check but a way to find a new living.

"If there are other ways they can pick up other skills or enhance existing skills, that has the hope that it will create additional opportunities for them and they will be made aware of other skills being sought by employers," Turner said.

He said if state officials didn't reach Century workers earlier this year he encourages them to call the governor's office or WorkForce West Virginia. But he said training isn't the same as having a steady job.

"Nothing instantly replaces a good manufacturing job, and we know that," Turner said.

HSTA gives students taste of science field

By Ben Adducchio

July 23, 2009 · More than 100 high school students from 45 schools across the state are at WVU this week to participate in the Health Sciences and Technology Academy.

Students participate in the program year-round and work closely with science and health professionals.

Walking into one of the nursing labs at West Virginia University, you will meet Wilbur, a patient suffering from nausea.

But there's one thing making Wilbur a bit different than the next patient - he's a talking robot.

The STEPS Simulation Lab is one of the stops at the Health Science and Technology Academy, or HSTA.

Students from across the state are at WVU to learn more about the industries of science and technology.

The students apply their knowledge by interacting with Wilbur, a robot mannequin used by nursing students to respond to fever symptoms.

One of the students is McKinsie Evans, an 11th grader from Welch. She enjoyed meeting Wilbur and the other robots in the lab.

"I think a lot will be taught by them," she said.

Evans wants to study chemistry at WVU after she completes high school. She says HSTA is a great doorway into the world of science.

"I really like the program itself; it gives a lot of kids the chance to go to college," she said.

"I hope that the program continues as well as it is doing."

On the floor below, WVU Pharmacology Professor Steve Graber and another professor are showing another group of students how enzymes are released during heart attacks.

His students are also simulating a new drug discovery which helps curb problems of diabetes.

"They picked a target that helps in the absorption of glucose," he said, "and are testing various substances to see if they can inhibit or slow down that absorption of sugar."

Diabetes is the theme of this year's HSTA program. HSTA curriculum coordinator Jenny Bardwell says diabetes is a large problem facing the state.

"These HSTA students go back to their families and work with their families to develop ways to prevent diabetes," she said.

Students will also visit the cadaver lab at WVU, listen to lectures, and dissect pig kidneys and chicken embryos.

Students who complete the program and maintain a three point grade average may earn a tuition waiver from any West Virginia state-run college.

July 22, 2009

Aid Bill Moves, Amid Misgivings

By Doug Lederman

WASHINGTON -- As the House of Representatives Education and Labor Committee began a long day of deliberations over a massive restructuring of the student aid programs Tuesday, there was not a shred of doubt that the legislation at hand would ultimately pass (and it did).

So most of the drama Tuesday, such as it was, revolved around the widely varying stances that higher education groups took on the legislation and the Obama administration policies it is designed to carry out. Some (the American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees) supported it outright, and a few others (like the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities) expressed major reservations about it, but the bulk of college groups, in their public statements, sought to strike a balance between expressing appreciation for the potential billions in new dollars for financial aid and other purposes, and concern about such issues as the extent to which Congress would give states the power to distribute federal money. (Note: This article has been updated from an earlier version to clarify facts.)

And more subtly -- except when they were speaking privately, when they did not hold back -- many college leaders said they had begun to feel as if the Obama administration and Congressional Democrats had engaged in a bait and switch operation. In originally proposing to end all lending through lender-based guaranteed loan program, in which a solid majority of colleges participate, the administration won the support of -- or at least stifled opposition from -- many higher education leaders by promising a "Pell Grant entitlement," the holy grail for many student aid advocates.

But as the Obama proposal has morphed into House legislation (H.R. 3221), Democratic lawmakers would direct less than half of the money that could be generated by the legislation to increasing the Pell Grant, and tens of billions of dollars would go to purposes outside higher education, including early childhood learning and reducing the federal deficit.

"When President Obama outlined his fiscal year 2010 budget proposal, he called for the elimination of the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program and recommended that almost all of the funds saved be redirected to helping low- and lower-middle income students finance higher education through the establishment of a Pell Grant entitlement," Molly Corbett Broad, president of the American Council on Education, wrote in a letter to House leaders signed by 10 college groups. "We believe that Congress should adopt the president's priorities and use a substantial majority of any savings derived from the student loan program to directly assist college students and their families."

College leaders are loathe to look either greedy or ungrateful given that the Congressional legislation would direct \$40 billion over 10 years to increase the Pell Grant, \$2.5 billion for community college facilities, and \$3.25 billion to limit student loan interest rates, and \$1.25 billion to expand the Perkins Loan Program; it also would simplify the federal financial aid form.

Resonant Rhetoric

But Republican lawmakers had no such qualms about challenging the Democrats' priorities, and they questioned the decision to use some of the \$87 billion that the government would collect by originating all loans through its direct loan program for other purposes: nearly \$8 billion over 10 years to strengthen early childhood education, for instance, and \$4.1 billion to modernize and repair school and college facilities, including those damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Though they didn't come right out and say it, Republicans on the education panel seemed eager to turn the tables on Democrats who, four years ago, accused them of a "raid on student aid" programs when they used the same "budget reconciliation" process to use student loan subsidy cuts to reduce the deficit.

"You're taking profits to the government that were coming in to student lending and using it for purposes other than students," said Rep. Mark Souder of Indiana. "I just want to be clear: You're taking what was a higher education section of funding and not using it all for higher education." Another Republican, Rep. Brett Guthrie of Kentucky, who leads his party's membership on the education panel's Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness Subcommittee, said that his alternative proposal -- which would have extended the existing, temporary structure for originating student loans through 2014 while the government studied a new approach -- would have increased Pell Grant spending more than the Democrats' bill would. (The GOP alternative was defeated along party lines.)

Democratic leaders disputed the suggestion that they were snagging student aid funds and redistributing it for other purposes, noting that the tens of billions of dollars the government would save by making all loans through direct lending is money that would, if left alone, go to lenders, not students. "Why do we need to funnel that money through a profit-making middleman?" asked Rep. Timothy Bishop of New York. "The money we are taking away is not being given to students [now]. I believe that our legislation moves us forward in a way that is most supportive of student aspirations."

The Republicans' focus on the wisdom of how the Democrats planned to spend the proceeds of the changes to the loan program reflected the fact that the philosophical argument over whether essentially ending the guaranteed loan program was for all intents and purposes over, at least in the House. (Lenders continue to insist that a different outcome could emerge in the Senate.) Some GOP members of the panel tried to tie the Democrats' loan restructuring to other Obama administration "government takeovers" of health care and banking, but given the sense of fait accompli surrounding the course of events, the rhetoric seemed half-hearted.

"The speed with which Democrats are orchestrating a full government takeover of our classrooms and communities is astonishing," said Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.), the panel's top Republican. "First, we saw a drive toward complete government takeover of our nation's health care system. Now, we see government seizing control of student

lending, forcing the private sector out and welcoming in a mountain of public debt. I'm almost afraid to ask: What part of our lives will be handed over to government next?"

Because the outcome was predetermined, Tuesday's goings-on were dull, and the five-hour deliberations over the bill produced relatively few changes to the legislation as Rep. George Miller introduced it last week. A few came in the "manager's amendment" that Miller substituted before the start of Tuesday's drafting session; among other things, it dropped a proposal from the original bill -- which college officials had warned was a deal breaker for them -- that would have ended the government's longstanding practice of paying the interest rate on federal loans for graduate students while they are still enrolled. The manager's amendment also trimmed the amount the bill would set aside for early childhood education to \$8 billion from \$10 billion.

Among amendments considered and voted on by the education panel, a small number stood out: the panel approved one, proposed by Rep. Howard P. (Buck) McKeon, that is designed to fix a flaw in the Post 9/11 GI Bill that will make it difficult for veterans in his home state of California to benefit from the new law to attend private colleges. The House committee also backed an amendment, proposed by Rep. Rob Andrews (D-N.J.), that would give for-profit colleges more short-term flexibility in complying with federal rules that require at least 10 percent of their revenues to come from sources other than federal financial aid.

The relative lack of debate over the student aid legislation could not, however, mask the deep philosophical divide that it has created or, probably more accurately, intensified within higher education. As the economy has turned down, in-fighting among the sectors of higher education -- public vs. private, two-year vs. four-year -- has stepped up almost in inverse proportion. That has occurred on the ground, at a micro level, in terms of increased battling for students and arguing over prices and value, but the tension has crystallized in the Obama administration's policy approach and the legislation introduced by its Democratic Congressional allies, despite broad support for the overall agenda of increasing college access and completion.

That's in part, of course, because the Obama administration has proposed pouring billions of dollars into the community college sector, much to the consternation of private colleges and, to a lesser extent, four-year public institutions (though the peace keepers in higher education are quick to note that some of the funds in Obama's and Miller's community college initiative would be available to four-year institutions that work with two-year colleges).

But more troubling, to some higher education officials, is the Democratic leaders' inclination to depend on states to distribute federal funds, as the student aid legislation would do in the Obama administration's proposed \$3 billion College Access and Completion Fund and a good chunk of the \$7 billion Community College Initiative. That is partly because so many states have been slashing their funding to public colleges in recent years, a trend growing during the current economic downturn, Broad of the American Council on Education wrote in the associations' letter to Miller Tuesday.

"As you know, state support for public higher education has steadily declined in recent years and is, in many places, falling precipitously this year, and in some states even need-based student aid is being slashed," she said. "We are concerned that a decision to give federal funds to states for higher education initiatives at the same time that many

of them are disinvesting in their colleges and universities may only hasten further reductions in state support of higher education."

Private colleges are most worried of all. "We are appreciative of the student aid, but concerned about the precedent of deferring national higher ed policy to state bureaucrats who may or may not have the national interest in mind," Sarah Flanagan, vice president for government relations and policy development at the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, said in an e-mail message about the House legislation. (NAICU declined to sign the ACE letter, which its officials viewed as too positive; the two community college associations sent their own letter because they wanted to more clearly endorse the House measure.)

"We also believe that for generations the federal government has had it right -- funding students over institutions, but when institutions do get aid, making funding based on whether the school can help solve a national purpose, not by whether the school is run by state bureaucrats or private boards," Flanagan added. "We have worked hard to help implement the president's higher ed goals laid out in his budget proposal, and hope to work with Congress later this summer to make the bill something that the nonprofit sector can both support and pitch in on during the next few years to help more students complete college."



July 19, 2009

Loan repayment now linked to income Program designed to reduce the burden of debt on struggling college graduates

By Tim Grant, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Students are taking on more debt than ever to pay for college and sometimes find themselves unable to make ends meet when they graduate. But thanks to a new federal student loan repayment program that went into effect this month, relief may be in sight for many.

Under the new plan, monthly payments will be based on how much borrowers make instead of how much they owe. And, after 25 years of faithful payments, any remaining balance will be canceled. The debt could even be wiped out in 10 years if the student chooses a career working for the government or a nonprofit agency.

"It's a very good plan for people experiencing financial difficulty," said Mark Kantrowitz, publisher of Finaid.org and Fastweb.com, top Web sites for student financial aid and scholarship information.

"For most borrowers, the income-based repayment will yield a monthly payment that is less than 10 percent of their monthly income, which is affordable."

How much borrowers will have to pay back depends on income, debt and the number of people in a household.

The U.S. Department of Education has created a chart that says for those who are single and earn less than \$20,000 a year, the monthly payment will be \$0. At \$20,000 a year, a single borrower would pay back \$47 a month. Someone earning \$40,000 and who has a wife and three children would pay \$87 a month.

In the first three years, any unpaid interest on Stafford Loans is covered by the federal government. After that, the interest is added to the back of the loan as part of the principal, which will be forgiven if and when the debt is canceled.

The program does demand participants do their part or lose the perks.

Borrowers on the 25-year plan, Mr. Kantrowitz said, could lose the loan forgiveness if they are more than 360 days late with a payment.

The bar is even higher for grads under the 10-year Public Service Debt Forgiveness program, according to Sandra Cronin, director of financial aid at Point Park University. She said those borrowers cannot have any late payments.

"They must have 120 monthly on-time payments for 10 years," Ms. Cronin said of students who choose teaching, social work or government careers. "Since they can't be

late, they are better off setting up an automatic debit where the payments are taken out of their bank accounts."

Making college loan repayment based on income is an idea that has been floating around higher education circles for a generation; but a large number of technical questions have always blocked its implementation, said Terry Hartle, a senior vice president at the American Council on Education in Washington, D.C.

In 2007, Congress passed the College Cost Reduction and Affordability Act, which mandated the Department of Education develop such a plan, and provided the funding to make it possible.

"The goal is to help people repay their student loans after they've been to college," said Mr. Hartle, who represents a trade association of 2,000 two-year and four-year public and private colleges and universities.

"As students have borrowed more money to go to college, a small but nonetheless growing number of them experience difficulty in repayment. These new initiatives are designed to help them and create an incentive to encourage college graduates to pursue public service careers," he said.

The new federal plan took effect on July 1.

Although loans have become the primary form of federal student aid, the federal programs still fail to provide enough aid to all students and many must resort to private loans. Private loans carry higher interest rates and do not qualify for the reduced payments or balance cancellation.

About 80 percent of all student loans are made through the federal government, Mr. Kantrowitz said, adding that last year students borrowed \$85 billion from the federal government and \$22.5 billion from private lenders

In the 2007-2008 school year, U.S. college graduates had an average student loan debt of \$23,186, according to FinAid.org, a financial-aid Web site.

The reduced income repayment program is available for only federal student loans under the Stafford, Grad Plus and federal consolidated loan programs. It applies to Perkins Loans only if they're consolidated into the federal Family Education Loan or Direct Loan programs.

Loan balances must be at least \$30,000 to qualify for the reduced payment, and student loans currently in default are not eligible for the reduced payments.

"The borrower does need to prove [he is] qualified for the reduced payment on an annual basis," Ms. Cronin said.

When students accumulate excessive debt to get an education, it impacts other life decisions, such as getting married, having children and their career choices.

But student loan debt is only part of the challenges facing today's graduates. Many also are juggling record levels of other types of debt such as credit cards, car loans and mortgages.

David Rye, author of the "Complete Idiots Guide to College Financial Aid," said the reduced income payment plan could dramatically lower the monthly payments on student debt for college graduates and will be a big relief on household budgets that are likely under pressure.

"It gives them more disposable income," he said. "It would be a good thing if they used the extra income to pay off debt rather than use it for luxury items they don't need, like a better car or a vacation.

"They need to use this opportunity to liquidate debt and not buy other debt."

July 22, 2009

Survey of Services for Veterans

By Elizabeth Redden

Colleges are preparing for an influx of student veterans, but how prepared are they? A new report from a group of five higher education associations, "From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus," represents, the authors write, the first attempt to assess the current state of programs and services nationally.

A new, much-expanded Post-9/11 GI Bill goes into effect August 1 (less than two weeks from now). In anticipation, many colleges have been stepping up their outreach to and support for veterans -- creating veterans' offices, training faculty and staff on challenges unique to student veterans, creating specialized orientation programs, expanding counseling center capacity, and, perhaps most significantly, putting extra money into institutional aid for veterans by joining the Yellow Ribbon program. The new report attaches numbers to the anecdotes.

A total of 723 institutions responded to the survey, out of 2,582, for a 28 percent response rate. Broken down by sector, 25 percent of respondents are public two-year institutions, 15 percent public four-year colleges, 36 percent private non-profit, and 23 percent for-profit. Among the findings, 57 percent of institutions said they currently provide programs and services specifically designed for service members or veterans. The report's conclusion notes a number of areas where colleges are meeting the needs of veterans, and also areas where they're not.

Where colleges are doing well, the report notes, is in recognizing prior military experience -- of those colleges that offer specialized programs for veterans and service members, 81 and 64 percent, respectively, award credit for military training and military occupational training. Also among those colleges that offer specialized services to veterans, 85 percent have counseling centers that coordinate with and refer students to off-campus facilities when needed, 79 percent have policies for refunding tuition in the case of military activations and deployments, and, financially speaking, 82 percent provide education benefits counseling.

But colleges have much more work to do in the following areas, the report notes:

- Assisting in the transition to college. Just 22 percent of colleges with services for veterans provide such assistance.
- Offering professional development to faculty and staff, on transition issues and issues specific to students with brain injuries and other disabilities.
- Easing the path to re-enrollment for service members once they return from deployments. Again, just 22 percent of colleges with services for veterans have an

expedited re-enrollment process in place (16 percent even require veterans to reapply and be readmitted to re-enroll!).

- Helping veterans connect with other veterans. Just 32 percent of colleges with services for veterans have a club (although that might be changing, given the rapid growth in Student Veterans of America chapters).

The five higher education associations that released the report are the American Council on Education, the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, NASPA -- Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators. The report is not intended to suggest, the authors note, "that creating special programs for student veterans is always necessary or even desirable. During ACE's 2008 summit 'Serving Those Who Serve: Higher Education and America's Veterans,' some student veterans stated that they preferred, whenever possible, to be integrated into mainstream campus life. They also expressed high regard for opportunities to interact with fellow student veterans and have access to campus staff who are trained and sensitized to the unique issues veterans face."