

U.S. Rep. Pocan: Leads House Democrats in Introducing Debt-Free College Act

Posted on Thursday, Mar 22, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Contact: Ron Boehmer 202-225-2906

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Representative Mark Pocan (WI-02) led 23 members of the House of Representatives in introducing the Debt-Free College Act, legislation that will reverse the growing student debt crisis in the United States. U.S. Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI) led nine members of the Senate in introducing the legislation. The bill restores a path to affordable college by providing states incentives through matching grants to increase investments in public higher education and provide students with debt-free college.

If signed into law, the Debt-Free College Act would establish a state-federal partnership that provides a dollar-for-dollar federal match to state higher education appropriations in exchange for a commitment to help students pay for the full cost of attendance without having to take on debt.

“A college education is essential for entering the middle class. However, more students than ever are graduating with crushing levels of debt, making it extremely difficult to get ahead. With the cost of college skyrocketing over the last 30 years, many Americans can no longer afford the tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and other expenses that a college education demands,” said Pocan. “We must end the reliance on debt as a way to finance a college education and the Debt-Free College Act is a strong step forward in making this a reality. It’s time for us to rethink our approach to paying for college.”

“After the recession, states cut their investment in public education while college

costs continued to rise,” Schatz said. “We’re at a point now where the full cost of college is more than twice as much as tuition, which is why solutions to the student debt crisis need to focus on the full cost to students and their families. My bill brings states back to the table and leverages federal dollars to reinvest in public education and help the people who need it most.”

“Every state in the country should offer debt-free college pathways for all students,” said Warren. “That’s why I’m glad to support the Debt-Free College Act, which leverages federal resources to give states an incentive to increase their investments in public higher education, bring down prices, and make sure students have a chance of making it through college without getting crushed by debt.”

“College costs and student loan debt are holding back an entire generation and creating a drag on economic growth for our country,” said Baldwin. “We must embrace solutions like the Debt-Free College Act to help America’s students and ensure that higher education is a path to prosperity, not a path into suffocating debt.”

Beyond tuition and fees, the total cost of attendance – room and board, books and supplies, and other expenses – has forced 44 million Americans to take on debt to cover their financial need. College debt has increased 170 percent since 2006 and now exceeds \$1.4 trillion dollars, which is second only to mortgage debt and surpasses even credit card debt.

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, student loan debt is responsible for 35 percent of the decline in homeownership since 2007. The percentage of younger people who reported owning a business was cut in half between 2010 and 2013. Pew Research Center found that about 50 percent of student borrowers say their loans increase their risk of defaulting on other bills.

The bill is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and Dick Durbin (D-IL) and by U.S. Representatives Judy Chu (D-CA), Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Joe Crowley (D-NY), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA), Keith Ellison (D-MN), Jimmy Gomez (D-CA), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Jared Huffman (D-CA), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Ro Khanna (D-CA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Gwen Moore (D-WI), Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Rick Nolan (D-MN), Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Mark Pocan (D-WI), Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Mark Takano

(D-CA), Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ), and Peter Welch (D-VT).

The bill is also endorsed by National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Demos, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), Young Invincibles, Credo Action, Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), UnidosUS, and California State Treasurer John Chiang.