

won't be able to single-handedly solve this serious economic crisis in rural America before we go home for the year. But, we shouldn't wait to address this important issue and offer some assistance. We should act soon and in a bipartisan fashion. We should explore short-term fixes, like lifting the cap on marketing loans, as well as long-term solutions, like tax fairness and expanded trade opportunities. We should stand up for the men and women in rural America and let them know that Congress and the Administration will work with them to help alleviate some of the economic pain and uncertainty they face.

To do anything less would be a disservice to our farmers and American agriculture.●

#### SOMERSET COUNTY RED RIBBON CAMPAIGN

● Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, Communities across our nation are being plagued by the numerous problems associated with drug and alcohol abuse, and this disease is playing an increasing role in the lives of our children. I rise today to commend Somerset County in Pennsylvania for its efforts to raise awareness and show our children that by choosing a drug-free lifestyle, they can reach their full potential.

The Somerset County Red Ribbon Committee is sponsoring its annual Red Ribbon Campaign, which offers citizens throughout Pennsylvania the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to a drug-free lifestyle. The Committee has designated October 23-31 Red Ribbon Week. Businesses, schools, churches and community organizations across the state will play an active role by participating in drug education and prevention activities throughout the week.

Our children are the future of our country. By joining together to fight the war on drugs we are investing in that future. I commend Somerset County for their efforts in confronting this difficult challenge. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join Pennsylvania in recognizing Red Ribbon Week so that all of our children's futures may be promising, healthy and drug-free.●

#### CONFERENCE REPORT ON THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1998

● Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise to express my strong support for the Higher Education Act Amendments of 1998.

The Higher Education Act has been of enormous benefit to millions of students over the past three decades in providing more affordable access to institutions of post-secondary education. Many of these students simply would not have gone to college or vocational school without the assistance provided through such programs as Pell Grants, student loans, and work study.

With the increased competition faced by workers in the global economy, the importance of these programs is even greater today, not only for students, but also for our nation's economy. The Higher Education Act programs account for 68 percent of all financial aid available to students. In FY 1999, the student aid programs authorized under the Higher Education Reauthorization Act will provide \$50 billion of aid to over 8.8 million students.

The cost of a college education continues to grow far faster than inflation, leaving more and more students with a large debt once they finish. Last fall, the College Board released a nationwide survey of tuition costs, finding that tuition and fees would rise about 5 percent for the fifth year in a row.

In contrast, inflation in the overall economy has been held under control during these years, hovering at, or below 2 percent.

As costs have increased, student borrowing has expanded to make up the difference. Student loans now comprise about 60 percent of all financial aid, whereas in the 1980-81 school year, loans were just over 40 percent of the total.

Given the increased reliance on borrowing, it is notable that this reauthorization legislation provides for a reduction in interest rates on new student loans from 8.25 percent to 7.46 percent, saving \$11 billion for students over the life of their loans. The typical borrower at a 4-year college, who graduates with \$13,000 in debt, will save about \$700 over a ten-year repayment period. This is a major educational milestone, allowing student borrowers the lowest interest rate in 17 years.

Nearly 84 percent of South Dakota students receive financial aid in some form, with an average annual award of \$5,400 to students who receive aid at the six public universities. Approximately 16,000 students in South Dakota receive Pell Grants, accounting for \$28 million in federal assistance.

I am pleased that this bill gradually increases the size of the maximum Pell Grant to \$5,800 in academic years 2003-4. In the 1970s, Pell Grants covered three-quarters of the costs of attending a four-year public school. Today, these grants cover only one-third of the cost. I realize that finding the budget resources to fund this maximum grant fully will be a struggle, however Pell Grants are the most effective program we have for helping low-income students afford post-secondary education.

This legislation also continues the essential Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) program. This program alone has enabled forty million Americans to attend college over the past thirty years. Although direct lending by the federal government has consumed a portion of the overall student loan volume, all of the colleges and universities in my state of South Dakota continue to use the FFEL program and remain satisfied with the services they receive. Accordingly, I

have been skeptical of efforts that might destroy the balance that has existed between direct lending and the FFEL program. Federal policy should not be changed in ways to either favor direct lending or undermine the financial viability of lending by the private sector.

There are some lesser-noticed provisions of this bill of which I am particularly proud. Promoting the availability and affordability of child care has been one of my highest priorities in the Senate. That is why I am so pleased that legislation I cosponsored earlier this year, the CAMPUS Act, has been incorporated into this bill. CAMPUS stands for Child Care Access Means Parents in School. This provision will establish a grant program to assist colleges with the costs of establishing child care centers to provide campus-based child care for low-income parents attending college.

The obvious benefit of easy access to child care is that students with young children will have a much greater probability of staying in school and completing their degree. More and more students today are non-traditional students, and the need for campus-based child care is greater than ever before.

Additionally, this bill establishes an innovative new program to offer student loan forgiveness for those who earn a degree in early childhood education and become full-time child care workers in a child care facility. Child care, unfortunately, is one of the lowest-paying professions that one can find, and this low level of pay is completely incommensurate with the value of those who are caring for young children. Not surprisingly, turnover in this field is very high, as workers find better paying jobs elsewhere.

It is especially tragic when highly-trained graduates, those who have earned a degree in early childhood education, are forced to leave the child care profession because they cannot pay their student loans. We still need to do all we can to raise wages for child care workers, but helping with student loan repayment is a remarkable step forward. This concept was included in child care legislation I cosponsored last year, and I am very pleased that it has been included in this bill.

I am pleased this bill develops new distance education partnership models through the Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnership (LAAP) program. This creative initiative provides partnerships grants between schools and other entities to assist in the expansion of student achievement in distance education. LAAP, combined with the expansion of student aid for distance learners, will allow more non-traditional students to obtain higher education, including full-time workers, parents, people in rural areas, or individuals with disabilities.

In addition to meeting the needs of rural America through distance learning, the Higher Education Act speaks to an equally important population of