

**Testimony before the Secretary of Education's
Commission on the Future of Higher Education
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Testifying on behalf of the
National Education Association
Boston, Massachusetts
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Good afternoon. My name is Catherine Boudreau, president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, which represents more than 100,000 public education employees, preK-graduate school, and 27 out of 28 public higher education institutions in Massachusetts. Today I am testifying on behalf of MTA and our national union, the National Education Association, which represents 2.8 million education employees.

NEA represents over 125,000 employees who work in every aspect of higher education at two-year and four-year public and private institutions nationwide. Our members include full-time tenured and tenure track faculty, contingent (part-time and temporary) faculty, staff (academic noninstructional professionals and Education Support Professionals), and graduate students.

We appreciate this opportunity to share our vision of the future of higher education in the United States. In addition, NEA will be submitting written material that deals with the issues I will be covering and the recommendations I will be making.

To quote an excerpt from an earlier commission deliberating the role of higher education in the United States. The 1947 report by the Truman Commission on Higher Education stated:

[E]ducation is the making of the future. Its role in a democratic society is that of critic and leader as well as servant; its task is not merely to meet the demands of the present but to alter those demands if necessary, so as to keep them always suited to democratic ideals. Perhaps its most important role is to serve as an instrument of social transition and its responsibilities are defined in terms of the kind of civilization society hopes to build....

Mindful of that role in society as critic and leader, we make the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. *Revive and support the concept of higher education as a public good, not just an individual benefit.*

We all benefit from the nonmarket public effects of education. Members of an educated society are more likely to vote, raise healthier children, volunteer, and provide skills to the community. Higher education should not be reduced only to *just* career training or to *just* responding to the workforce demands of industry.

2. *Ensure that higher education is accessible and affordable.*

Higher education has never been more important. Yet, at a time when more and more worthwhile jobs require post-secondary education only about 25 percent of our adult population has Bachelor degrees, and only 60 percent of high school graduates go to some form of higher education.

We need to increase the government's role in the funding of higher education. Low-income families have been losing economic ground and have found it increasingly difficult to send their children to college. Student grant aid has not kept up with the increasing price of attendance.

One important financial aid resource for the poorest students has been the Pell Grant program. When the program was created the maximum grant covered 84 percent of the cost of a public four-year college; today, it covers 39 percent.

The president's budget for FY07 freezes the Pell Grant maximum at the current \$4,050 level for the fifth year in a row.

The budget also makes the largest dollar cut to federal education funding in the history of the Education Department.

These trends need to be reversed.

As our society becomes increasingly diverse, we need to make sure that opportunities for higher education are available to *not just* high school graduates, but to *all citizens* from *all segments* of our society. If we are not willing to keep colleges affordable for the new populations seeking a higher education, both these students and society will suffer.

I do not have to tell you that higher education is of crucial importance to our nation. According to "Shaping the Future: The Economic Impact of Public Universities," by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, "the average return on every \$1 of state money invested in a state university or land grant college is \$5 and every \$100 spent by an institution generates another \$138 in additional individual spending." A 1988 Congressional report concluded that the rate of return on the GI bill "exceeded the government investment in the program by a factor of between 5 and 12 to 1."

3. *Prevent for-profit companies from misleading or defrauding students and their families.*

NEA opposes for-profit entities getting greater access to federal higher education dollars and other related federal funding. It is mandatory that there be strict safeguards in place so students will be assured of receiving quality learning if they put their faith and money in a for-profit higher education company.

4. *Respect and value the employees who work in higher education institutions and the unions that represent them.*

Employees in U.S. colleges and universities need to be properly compensated for their contributions to quality education. From contingent faculty, who earn a fraction of what permanent faculty earn to do the same teaching, to support professionals who may need to turn to public assistance programs for extra help, higher education employees deserve decent and just wages. Collective bargaining agreements must be honored where negotiated. In places where higher education employees are considering union representation, administration must not interfere in any way in employees' rights to organize, petition and vote.

5. *Protect academic freedom and faculty control of curriculum.*

We must resist pressures and intimidation tactics designed to prevent faculty from raising controversial issues in their classrooms. We must also ensure that control of curriculum remains with faculty. Accreditation bodies and state legislatures should not dictate what faculty can or cannot teach. Student grievances can continue to be addressed through existing, effective institutional policies and procedures.

On behalf of the National Education Association, I thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to ongoing dialogue and collaboration as we work to build a stronger, more accessible higher education system.