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March 10, 2004

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As a follow-up to our letter of March 9 outlining the National Education Association's views on the fiscal year 2005 budget resolution (S. Con. Res. 95), we would like to urge your support for a series of amendments that would increase access to higher education. Votes associated with these issues may be included in the NEA Legislative Report Card for the 108th Congress.

Access to higher education allows individuals to succeed in jobs with career potential and upward mobility. It is estimated that a person with a college degree will earn 50 percent more over his or her lifetime than someone with a high school degree. Expanding postsecondary education opportunities at our nation's universities and community and technical colleges also helps ensure the well-educated workforce our nation needs to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ensuring and expanding access to higher education is particularly important given the continued rise in college tuition and the increasing difficulty for low-income families to afford postsecondary education.

NEA believes the proposed budget resolution does not adequately meet the needs of students seeking higher education. Therefore, we urge your support for the following amendments:

- ✓ **Kennedy Pell Grant amendment.** Since their inception 40 years ago, Pell Grants have enabled millions of disadvantaged students, most of them first generation college students, to attend postsecondary institutions and earn degrees. Unfortunately, while tuition at institutions of higher education have continued to rise far faster than the cost of living, the maximum Pell Grant level has remained virtually constant, thus forcing many qualified students to postpone or cancel their dreams of a college degree, or to incur significant debt in the form of loans. The proposed budget resolution would freeze the Pell Grant maximum award at \$4,050, the second consecutive freeze. The Kennedy amendment would increase the maximum Pell Grant award from the current \$4,050 to \$5,100, thereby helping lower income students continue in postsecondary education by covering more of their expenses.
  
- ✓ **Reed student aid amendment.** Student aid plays a critical role in expanding postsecondary opportunities to lower-income students. Too many of today's students rely on loans in order to afford higher education. The resulting debt burden often limits career choices and prevents many talented students from pursuing careers in public service. The Reed amendment would increase funding for several critical programs, including the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG), Perkins Loans, Federal Work-Study, and Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships (LEAP) that help students pay for college without building unmanageable debt. The Reed amendment would also increase funding for the TRIO and GEAR UP programs, which help lower-income students prepare for and succeed in college.

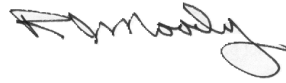
- ✓ **Mikulski Hope Scholarship amendment.** The Hope Scholarship helps lower- and middle-income families pay for college by providing a two-year \$1,500 tax credit. The Mikulski amendment would increase the Hope tax credit to \$4,000 and expand it to four years, thereby helping make a full four-year postsecondary education more affordable. In addition, the amendment would make the tax credit refundable, extending its reach to lower income families struggling to pay for postsecondary education.

We urge your support for these critical amendments.

Sincerely,



Diane Shust  
Director of Government Relations



Randall Moody  
Manager of Federal Policy and Politics