

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement today following a meeting where the Maryland Congressional Delegation heard from several Maryland educational leaders who gave an overview of higher education issues, such as affordable access to postsecondary education, in the State of Maryland.

"The federal government has long recognized the importance of helping students address barriers to higher education. In today's knowledge-based economy, post-secondary education -- whether a four-year school, two-year community college, or vocational training -- is an absolute necessity.

"Across the country, state budget crises are forcing major cuts in funding for public colleges and universities. Unfortunately, when state budgets are doing badly, higher education tends to suffer disproportionately.

"These budget cuts and tuition increases, seen here in Maryland too, are happening at a time when the number of students enrolling in college is booming, making resources even more scarce. Enrollments are projected to grow each year this decade, culminating in the 2009 high school graduating class - expected to be the largest in the nation's history.

"On the federal level, we are also facing budget woes. The maximum Pell Grant was frozen last year and as a result, the Pell Grant as a percentage of the cost of attending college is expected to fall to about 30-32 percent in 2005 - a far cry from the 84 percent of college costs met when the Pell Grant Program was first established. This coupled with the other student assistance programs that have been either cut or frozen in the House Republican budget creates a steep burden for students attempting to afford a college education.

"Democrats want to improve access to postsecondary education for all students, and make it more affordable. We have proposed increasing the maximum Pell Grant this year to \$4,500, which would increase the "buying power" of the Pell Grant for thousands of Maryland students. Democrats would also invest more in campus- and state-based student financial aid so that more low- and middle-income college students would receive financial aid."

Appearing before the delegation were: Chancellor Brit Kirwan, University of Maryland System; President C. Dan Mote, University of Maryland-College Park; President David Ramsey,

Maryland Delegation Receives Overview on

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University of Maryland -Baltimore; Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Steve Knapp, Johns Hopkins University; President Earl Richardson, Morgan State University; President Maggie O'Brien, St. Mary's College; President Mary Pat Seurkamp, College of Notre Dame; President Sandy Unger, Goucher College; Rev. Harold Ridley, S.J., President, Loyola College; and Tina Bjarekull, President, Maryland Independent College and University Association.

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