

The Bethune Council House, declared a National Historic Site by Congress in 1982, was acquired by the National Park Service (NPS) in 1994. The Bethune Council House, a historic house museum, features original furniture, photographs and facsimiles of historic documents from the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). This legislation is needed for two reasons. First, the Bethune House is not handicap accessible, and as a historic building, it would be impossible to alter the house in any way without endangering its historic nature. This bill would extend the current boundary of the Bethune House by authorizing the NPS to acquire the abutting property to allow handicapped accessibility. Second, the bill provides space for administrative offices for the NPS to conduct duties related to the Bethune Council House.

This legislation is needed to carry out the important mission of the Bethune Council House. The Bethune legacy is carried forward today by the nation's most prominent civil rights leader, Dr. Dorothy Height, Chair and President Emerita of the NCNW, who recently received the Congressional Gold Medal of here in the Congress. Consequently, this bill honors both of these heroes of our country by assuring that the first home of the organization to which they dedicated their lives is accessible to all Americans. I ask that the House pass this bill promptly.

#### TRIBUTE TO MS. ESTHER WRIGHT

##### HON. DONALD M. PAYNE

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, Ms. Esther Dolores Wright has dedicated her life to the service of others as an educator for over 40 years. She began her teaching career in Newark, N.J. in 1964, and over the years, she has literally touched thousands of lives in a positive way. Ms. Wright received her Masters of Arts in Education with a concentration in Administration and Supervision from the University of Virginia in May, 1976. She has served the students, parents, and teachers of Maple Avenue School as an Administrator for over 15 years.

During her tenure as Principal of Maple Avenue School, she has presided over many important changes to the school facility and programs, including complete renovations to the school auditorium, gymnasium, and playground area, as well as the establishment of a state of the art science lab and the creation of a computer network, which provides internet access to all of Maple Avenue School's primary and middle school students. They have implemented a distance learning program in conjunction with the New Jersey State Department of Education, which recognized Maple Avenue School with a 'Best Practices' award. She has continued to provide support for innovative programs to encourage student achievement such as the Morning, After School, and Saturday Academy enrichment programs; character development programs such as Best Friends for girls and Best Men for boys; the Afternoon and Evening After School Youth Development Programs, which serve the student and community populations; and Project ACCEL, which reduces high school drop out rates and retention rates for students.

In addition, under Ms. Wright's guidance and direction, Maple Avenue School and students have been at the forefront of a number of innovative initiatives such as Law Day, Career Day, Instrumental and Choral Music programs, the Talented and Gifted Program, and a school wide Science Fair. Maple Avenue School students have represented the school in the district Science Fair, Math Fair, and Technology Fair, and have consistently won local and regional Art awards. In addition, their debate team has been City Champion for several consecutive years and their basketball team played in the 2003 District Championship finals.

During Ms. Wright's time as Principal, Maple Avenue School has also been recognized by the district for achievements in Literacy, Science, and Math. Based upon 8th grade GEPA scores for the past two years, Maple Avenue School has been cited as one of the top 5 schools and one of the top 10 schools, respectively, in the district in Literacy. During the same time period, Maple Avenue School has been recognized as one of the most improved schools and as one of the top 10 schools in the district in Science. During the 2001-2002 school year, Maple Avenue School has been one of the top 10 most improved schools in Math, according to ESPA scores, and has been a past winner of the Math Olympics and most recently went to the district semi-finals.

Maple Avenue graduates are accepted into the Newark Public School's Magnet High School Programs; Arts High; Science High; University, Technology, and Essex County Vocational High School; as well as area Private and Catholic High Schools at a rate of 30 percent. Many more participate in Magnet Career Academies, which provide transition into skilled career opportunities after High School.

I salute Ms. Wright for her dedication to the students, parents, and teachers in our community, and I am proud to have her in my district. Mr. Speaker, please join me in extending my thanks to Ms. Wright for her lifetime of public service, and I invite my colleagues to join me in recognizing the achievements of the Maple Avenue School.

#### IN SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL VISION STRATEGY

##### HON. PATRICK J. TIBERI

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Mr. TIBERI. Mr. Speaker, as a founding member of the Congressional Vision Caucus, I rise to recognize May as Healthy Vision Month, and to discuss the important recommendations of the Vision Problems Action Plan, A National Public Health Strategy as a way to prevent blindness and vision loss.

Good vision is critical to conducting activities of daily living, is a portal for language, and affects developmental learning, communicating, working, health and quality of life.

Unfortunately, far too many people are at risk for losing their eyesight. More than 80 million Americans have a potentially blinding eye disease, 3 million have low vision, 1.1 million are legally blind, and an additional 200,000 are more severely visually impaired. Despite the fact that half of all blindness can be pre-

vented, far too many people do not access the care they need. If nothing is done, the number of blind and visually impaired individuals will double by 2030.

That is why awareness, early diagnosis and prevention are so important. Healthy Vision Month, a component of Healthy People 2010, is a national eye health campaign to raise awareness about the various conditions that can affect eyesight and cause vision loss.

Additionally, a coalition of leading eye health experts, including Prevent Blindness America, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Lighthouse International, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology, just this week have released the Vision Problems Action Plan, A National Public Health Strategy, to provide our nation with a framework for preventing vision loss.

This groundbreaking study recommends that, in order to reduce the occurrence of vision loss and its accompanying disabilities, our nation must concentrate our efforts in three priority areas: prevention/public health, access to care and treatment including rehabilitation, and research.

Our public health and prevention campaign must ensure that vision programs at the National Eye Institute (NEI) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have the resources they need to improve communication and education campaigns, increase surveillance, epidemiology and prevention research; and implement appropriate programs, policies and systems changes.

In order to ensure access to and availability of treatment and rehabilitation services for individuals with vision loss, we must support programs at the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that remove barriers and improve access to services covered under Medicare.

Finally, we must bolster our research efforts to improve our understanding of the eye and visual system in health and disease, as well as developing the most appropriate and effective means of prevention, and access to treatment and rehabilitation.

This report provides the roadmap we need to raise awareness about vision loss, give individuals the tools they need to prevent it, and give hope to the millions already suffering from vision loss that better treatments can be found.

I would like to thank all of the organizations involved in crafting this report, including the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Optometric Association, the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, Lighthouse International, the National Alliance For Eye and Vision Research, the National Eye Institute (NEI) and most importantly, Prevent Blindness America. Prevent Blindness America should be commended for spearheading this effort, for bringing together these various groups, and for its almost century-long tradition of preventing vision loss.

#### INTRODUCTION OF THE COLLEGE ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY ACT

##### HON. JOHN A. BOEHNER

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, May 5, 2004*

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, in 1965, Higher Education Act was established to assist low

and middle income students striving for a higher education. It was as simple as that; the law was put into place to ensure college access for those who might not otherwise be able to afford it.

In the last two years, I and other members of the Committee on Education & the Workforce have worked tirelessly to craft higher education legislation that will live up to that original mission. Our number one priority is, and must be, expanding college access for current and future students.

Today's introduction of the College Access & Opportunity Act represents the culmination of those efforts. We are pleased to be offering a bill that ensures students are priority number one, and are proud to have worked closely with the stakeholders of America's higher education system to have produced legislation that meets our principles of access, affordability, accountability, and quality; abiding by these principles has produced a measure that will ultimately ensure fairness for low and middle income students.

The College Access & Opportunity Act includes comprehensive reforms that will strengthen Pell Grants, student aid, college access, and Minority Serving Institutions. The bill will reduce loan costs and fees for students, and eliminate red tape for students and graduates. The College Access & Opportunity Act also includes steps to remove barriers for non-traditional students, and importantly, will empower consumers through increased sunshine and transparency in college costs and accreditation.

The bill will benefit students in numerous ways; in fact, there are far too many student benefits for me to list individually today. However, I'd like to describe some of the highlights of the bill that will show just a few of the many ways the College Access & Opportunity Act will expand college access for current and future students aspiring for the dream of a college education.

The College Access & Opportunity Act strengthens college access programs, particularly those serving students who may struggle to enter higher education. The bill enhances TRIO and GEAR UP programs targeted to first-generation, non-traditional and minority students, and ensures low-income working adults can also receive the valuable services provided through these access programs.

In Pell Grants, which are the cornerstone of federal need-based student aid, the bill includes an initiative we call "Pell Grants Plus" to provide additional Pell Grant aid to needy students who have completed a rigorous high school curriculum through the State Scholars program. The proposal, similar to one offered by President Bush in his FY 2005 budget request, would not only provide up to \$1000 of additional Pell Grant assistance to Pell-eligible students, but would also serve as an incentive for more states to participate in the State Scholars program and prepare more students to excel in higher education.

The bill also repeals the unfair limit on Pell Grants called "tuition sensitivity," which punishes very low cost schools and the students who attend those schools by reducing their Pell Grant aid they can receive. In addition, the College Access & Opportunity Act would permit year-round Pell Grants to allow students to accelerate their studies and graduate sooner.

Because Minority Serving Institutions play an important role for expanding college access, the bill makes a number of reforms designed to strengthen these institutions and allow them to better serve their students. For instance, the bill would make it easier for these schools to use technology to improve education, and would reduce red tape that creates unnecessary burdens as they apply for grants.

Importantly, the bill would make the student aid funding provided through the campus-based aid programs more fair and equitable. By phasing out unfair advantages given to older, more well-established schools, the College Access & Opportunity Act would ensure these funds are targeted to the students who need them the most.

Chief among our principles for reforming higher education was the need to increase accountability, and the College Access & Opportunity Act includes a number of steps that will accomplish that goal. By empowering the consumers of higher education—students and parents—with information, we will ensure they can fully exercise their power in the marketplace of higher education. Be it adding transparency to college costs or adding sunshine to the accreditation process, the bill will give consumers access to significant new information to help them make their own best decisions about higher education.

The College Access & Opportunity Act also includes a number of significant reforms to the multi-billion dollar federal student loan programs, with major steps to realign resources in order to better serve low and middle income students striving for a higher education.

Federal student loans provide access to low-cost funding that many students need to finance their higher education. The College Access & Opportunity Act will expand access to this important resource in a responsible manner that will not allow students to be burdened by unmanageable debt levels.

The bill will update loan limits for first and second year students, ensuring more money is available at the beginning of students' studies when loan limits are significantly lower and students may struggle with college costs. However, the bill will not increase the aggregate borrowing limits, ensuring students are not saddled with higher overall debt levels. The bill also reduces origination fees for students, an important step that will ensure students have access to more of the money they borrow.

In order to make these positive reforms that provide students with greater access to student loan resources, the bill includes significant realignment of federal resources within the loan program. The bill would limit excess subsidy payments made to lenders, changing provisions in current law and requiring lenders to return excess income that can be better used to expand student access.

The bill will eliminate the anti-consumer "single-holder" rule, which needlessly limits consumers' ability to shop around for the best deal on a consolidation loan by requiring borrowers to consolidate with their current lender if that lender holds all their loans. The bill will also ensure consolidation loans are provided under the current variable interest rate structure provided for other federal student loans, eliminating unfair treatment of borrowers

based simply on the date the loans are consolidated. The variable interest rates for consolidation loans will ensure all consolidation borrowers have access to low rates while being protected from interest rates that rise too high through an interest rate cap.

In addition to ensuring consolidation loans are provided under the current successful variable rate structure, the bill will also prevent other student loans from moving to a fixed rate as they would in 2006 unless we take action to prevent that change. Without preserving the current variable rate structure for these loans, borrowers would be forced to pay 6.8 percent interest rates on all loans. With borrowers today paying 2.82 percent in school and 3.42 percent in repayment, it would be shameful to impose an arbitrary fixed interest rate that would double the rate available to borrowers today.

While strengthening the loan programs to better serve borrowers, the College Access & Opportunity Act will also protect the credit history borrowers earn while repaying these loans. The bill will require lenders to report federal student loan information to all national credit bureaus, ensuring borrowers are given the positive credit history they earn by repaying their student loans.

Recognizing that the face of America's higher education system has changed significantly in recent years—both the students and the institutions that serve them—the bill will ensure all colleges and universities are treated fairly as they seek to better serve students. The bill will repeal the unfair 90–10 rule, a requirement imposed only on proprietary schools. The 90–10 rule was implemented as a safeguard, yet there is no evidence it reduces fraud and abuse and significant evidence that it may reduce access for the neediest students by forcing schools to raise tuition or move out of inner cities where many students are receiving full federal funding.

The bill also recognizes the importance of distance education at the forefront of technological advancements that can give students new opportunities to learn. By eliminating the 50 percent rule, which restricts the number of students that can be enrolled in distance education and the number of courses an institution may offer via distance education, the College Access & Opportunity Act will increase access to quality higher education through alternate channels. The bill would maintain and even enhance safeguards to ensure the integrity of these programs, while removing restrictions that prevent innovation and expanded use of new technology for student learning.

Finally the bill will no longer include separate definitions of institution of higher education, placing all eligible schools on an even playing field as they work to provide higher education to their students.

The College Access & Opportunity Act is important legislation that will help fulfill the original mission of the Higher Education Act—expanding college access. By placing students as our first priority, we are bringing forward a bill that I am proud to say will significantly improve higher education in America. I am pleased to be offering this legislation with my good friend Rep. McKeon, and am eager to move forward with these important reforms to ensure access, affordability, accountability, and quality.