

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) yesterday helped the House pass legislation to address the soaring price of college tuition and remove other obstacles that make it harder for qualified students to go to college. The House approved the College Opportunity and Affordability Act, which would reform and strengthen the nation's higher education programs to ensure that they operate in the best interests of students and families. The legislation is the second major step that the new Democratic Congress has taken to make college more affordable and accessible for all qualified students. Last year, Congress enacted into law a \$20 billion increase in college financial aid over the next five years, the largest increase in student aid since the G.I. Bill of 1944.

"At the same time a college education continues to become more important for Americans to succeed in the global economy, the financial burden of achieving such an education is unfairly becoming greater and greater," Hinchey said. "As the father of a child currently in college, I know full well all of the various costs associated with obtaining a higher education degree and how daunting those costs can be. From tuition, to room and board, to the cost of books, going to college is financially challenging for many people. The bill we passed in the House today helps relieve that burden so that students can focus more on their education rather than their bills."

An October 2007 report from the College Board showed that, over the previous five years, tuition and fees had increased across the board, at public and private colleges and at two-year and four-year colleges. In New York, tuition and fees at private institutions grew by 7 percent between 2006-07 and 2007-8. The bill would address these rising prices by encouraging colleges to rein in price increases, ensuring that states maintain their commitments to higher education funding, and providing students and families with consumer friendly information on college pricing and the factors driving tuition increases.

The legislation also strengthens provisions previously approved by the House to avoid conflicts of interest in the student loan programs. The bill's new provisions include requiring better consumer disclosures and protections on private student loans.

In addition, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act would:

- \* Streamline the federal student financial aid application process

- \* Make textbook costs more manageable for students by, among other things, helping them plan for textbook expenses in advance of each semester
  
- \* Allow students to receive year-round Pell Grant scholarships
  
- \* Strengthen college readiness and support programs for minority and low-income students
  
- \* Increase college aid and support programs for veterans and military families
  
- \* Improve safety on college campuses and help schools recover and rebuild after a disaster
  
- \* Ensure equal college opportunities and fair learning environments for students with disabilities
  
- \* Strengthen our nation's workforce and economic competitiveness by boosting science, technology, and foreign language educational opportunities

"This bill helps open the door of opportunity for more Americans to go to college and achieve the American Dream," Hinchey said.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act is a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the primary federal law aimed at expanding college access for low- and middle-income students. The bill is supported by a broad coalition of students, colleges and universities, consumer rights advocacy groups, minority organizations, and more.