

Ryan Prepared Opening Statement/ Dept. of Education

March 11, 2009

- *Thank Spratt, Welcome Secretary Duncan and congratulate him on his recent confirmation.*
- First, I want to commend President Obama for his emphasis on personal responsibility and accountability when it comes to our children's education...for his reminder that *we parents* are the biggest factor in ensuring our children's academic success -- and that often means turning off the tv and computer games, and helping with homework.
- I also commend Secretary Duncan for advocating such reforms as opening more charter schools, and introducing merit pay for teachers. I believe these types of innovations would go a long way toward increasing student achievement.
- But while I find these statements encouraging, what really matters is how that talk gets translated into policies. And recent actions by the President and Congress seem to be at direct odds with the rhetoric.
- The omnibus appropriations bill, for example, will effectively terminate the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program – taking away the opportunity for a better life for 1,700 disadvantaged kids and forcing them back in to failing schools.
- I support the Pell Grant program – but I am disappointed by the President's choice to move this program to the mandatory side of the ledger – effectively making it into another auto-pilot entitlement, immune from Congressional oversight at precisely the time when we should be reforming existing entitlements, not adding new ones to the mix.

- The budget also calls for the creation of a new “College Access and Completion Innovation Fund” – *also to be added to the mandatory spending side of the ledger.*
- I’ll note that this new program would duplicate two programs created just last year – the “College Persistence and Access” and “Project GRAD” programs -- both of which are also intended to help increase college graduation.
- I’ll also note that the budget only funds this new program for 5 years -- after which time its funding is zeroed out.
- So we’ll be interested in exploring, first – why the Administration would use such tight resources on a duplicative program; and second -- whether it is truly their intent both to create – then eliminate -- a new entitlement program in the span of 5 years.
- Finally, I want to share my concern with the budget’s proposed government takeover of *all* federal student loans. I want to hear if – and how -- the Department has prepared to take on this volume of student loans, and I also look forward to a serious discussion of the risks all this extra borrowing and spending will present to our already strained Treasury.
- Now, we’ve long known that higher spending alone doesn't automatically equal better schools, or higher student achievement.
- And we can all agree that – particularly in times such as this -- we’ve got to be sure we’re making the wisest, most fiscally responsible choices possible. For the education budget, that means ensuring we’re directing dollars toward only those programs that truly work; demanding accountability from administrators for higher test scores; and injecting real competition into the public school system
- From this focus, combined with transparency and accountability, I believe will come the gains in education we all seek. And I look forward to our discussion today on how we might better achieve those ends.