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Rep. Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX) Statement at the Hearing on “*Keeping College Within Reach: Discussing Ways Institutions Can Reduce Tuition*”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX) for the Subcommittee On Early Childhood, Elementary, And Secondary Education of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce hearing on “Keeping College Within Reach: Discussing Ways Institutions Can Reduce Tuition”

Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx.

I would also like to welcome and thank our distinguished witnesses for joining us today. Today's hearing is an opportunity for this committee to reaffirm its commitment to affordability, accessibility, equity, and student success in higher education.

As we look for innovative strategies to reduce college costs, and bolster college completion, it's vitally important that we do not create new obstacles for low-income, first-generation college, non-traditional, and minority students. These student populations are entering our colleges and universities in record numbers and must have the opportunity to go to college and succeed.

As Ranking member of this subcommittee, I am deeply concerned that college costs have risen dramatically in the last decade. According to the College Board, between the 2010-11 and 2011-2012 school years, in-state tuition at public four-year institutions rose by 8.3 percent, and two-year institutions experienced a sharp increase of 8.7 percent.

In a recent national bi-partisan poll conducted by the Young Invincibles, The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS), and Demos, 84 percent of the young adults surveyed said that making college more affordable should be a priority for Congress.

Today, thousands of students find themselves incurring an inordinate amount of debt to finance their education. College seniors who graduated in 2010, for example, had an average of \$25,250 in student loan debt, according to TICAS.

These trends are especially troubling given that the jobs of tomorrow will require students to have at least two years of postsecondary education and states are slashing their education budgets.

In the past several years, Democrats have taken historic steps to make a quality higher education more accessible and affordable for greater numbers of students.

The passage of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (SAFRA), enacted as part of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (HCERA), made the largest investment in student financial aid since the GI bill.

In the 111th Congress, Democrats ended the taxpayer-subsidized, federally guaranteed Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) and replaced it with the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (DL), making federal college loans more stable and efficient at no cost to taxpayers. By transitioning to the Direct Loan program, Congress was able to reinvest \$68 billion dollars in federal student aid.

SAFRA increased the maximum Pell Grant award, enhanced the capacity of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and Community Colleges, strengthened the Income-based repayment, and made other investments to federal programs.

The bi-partisan passed Higher Education and Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) increased transparency and investments in federal student aid.

Under HEOA, the U.S. Department of Education is required to collect and publish lists of tuition and fees at all U.S. postsecondary institutions, holding colleges accountable for rising fees and tuition.

Those institutions with the largest percentage increases in prices must submit a detailed description to the Department outlining the reason for the increased costs. HEOA also encourages the use of innovative strategies to reduce costs such as need-based grant aid incentives.

While Democrats have made great strides in tackling this issue through federal investments in Pell Grants, direct loans, the American Opportunity Tax Credit, and the enactment of HEOA, and SAFRA, I agree with Education Secretary Arne Duncan that we must do more to rein in college costs and reduce individual student debt.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how we can continue to address affordability, accessibility and student success and provide all students with a high quality education.

Thank you.

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