



News Release

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New Federal Higher Ed Law Singles Out Rural Colleges

PIERRE, S.D. – Congressional reauthorization of a law governing most federal college programs for the next five years includes three unique grant programs for colleges and universities in rural states like South Dakota. In a letter to the state’s congressional delegation, the South Dakota Board of Regents thanked Sen. Tim Johnson, Sen. John Thune, and Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin for their strong support of the legislation.

When Congress passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act July 31, and President Bush signed it into law Aug. 14, the law included new provisions supported by a rural coalition of college presidents.

“For the first time, the federal government has specifically recognized the unique challenges faced by rural-serving institutions of higher education,” said Dakota State University President Douglas Knowlton, who helped champion this recognition of rural issues in Congress, along with other college presidents representing the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

“The new legislation authorizes three grant programs that address college access, economic development, and quality of life issues in rural America,” Knowlton said. He said data show nearly 30 percent of all public four-year colleges and universities are located in rural or geographically remote communities. And, he noted that enrollment rates for people ages 18 to 29 in those rural locales are generally lower than in all other geographic areas.

Knowlton said the next step, now that the act is signed, is to redouble efforts to ensure funding of the new programs. The federal grants are intended to support rural education by increasing enrollment and graduation rates at rural-serving institutions. Rural colleges and universities may use the funds to provide counseling and outreach to students in rural high schools, increase enrollment of non-traditional students from rural areas, and strengthen their academic programs.

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