

OFFICE OF U.S. SENATOR SHERROD BROWN

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's Prepared Remarks at the Second Annual Ohio College and University Presidents' Conference April 1, 2009

In February's address to a joint session of Congress, President Obama sent the nation a powerful message about the role education plays in keeping us economically vital and competitive on the world stage.

He essentially said that in today's knowledge-based economy, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a pre-requisite.

All of you here today know this better than anyone. You work in the college communities every day, instilling this critically important message in the hundreds of thousands of students whose lives you touch in education.

As you know, today, 2/3 of high-growth jobs require a college degree – health care, green energy, technology -- but only 1/3 of Americans have one.

In a single generation, we have fallen from 2nd to 11th place in the percentage of students completing college.

President's Goal: Highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

There is new money available under the economic stimulus package—more than \$100 billion in additional funding for the next two years.

Under ARRA, Ohio will receive approximately \$2.7 billion, including close to \$1.8 billion in State Fiscal Stabilization Funds.

The law includes stabilization funds to save and create jobs. In Ohio and all across the nation, universities and community colleges have had to make catastrophic budget cuts—eliminating faculty and staff positions and decreasing financial aid.

In tough economic times, we have to tighten our belts—but not at the expense of our children's future. The stimulus money will help continue critical programs for students and save education jobs. It will also provide resources for things like upgrading classroom technology, providing students with tutors, and expanding support labs.

Across the country this fall, nearly every student who already receives a Pell Grant will get a bigger one. Students who participate in the Federal Work Study program will receive larger awards and more of their peers will benefit. In addition, President

Obama's proposed budget calls for a significant investment to make college more accessible and affordable and to help more students succeed once they get there.

The budget provides guaranteed funding for Pell Grants, indexes the grant above ordinary inflation, and changes the education tax credit to provide relief to more families struggling to pay for college.

The budget would insulate student loans from financial turmoil, making the program more reliable, stable and efficient; would restructure and expand the Perkins Program so all colleges could participate, and establish college completion grants for states aimed at boosting graduation rates.

I would also like to remind you of the authority that your financial aid administrators have under the Higher Education Act to make adjustments, on a documented case-by-case basis, to address circumstances not reflected in a student's original federal financial aid application.

This authority is especially important for families who may be struggling during these difficult economic times. When families face layoffs, house foreclosures, or unexpected, costly medical expenses, they are likely to feel vulnerable and unsupported.

Your administrators can reach out to students whose family circumstances may have changed to make sure that they know there may be ways that you can help.

To increase access to higher education, we must eliminate not only financial barriers, but also academic and technical barriers.

*We must rise above the academic obstacles—low standards
We need to boost standards. Too many people graduate from high school but need remedial education in college. Remediation costs you more money*

Overcome technical difficulties:

Complicated FAFSA form; should be simpler

Challenges for immigrants: I will work with the Administration, Congress, and other federal agencies to ensure all youth can attend college, regardless of their national origin. (DREAM Act)

Community colleges are also vital to our postsecondary education system—serving 40 percent of U.S. college students—and part of the solution for keeping a college degree within reach of every person who aspires to higher education.

Community colleges are going to be an extremely important part of restoring the economy over the next few years and ensuring that our students can compete not just with their neighbors down the block, but also with their peers in China and India. As

new industries are created, community colleges can help workers get the skills they need for jobs of the future in areas like health care and “green energy.”

The new American Opportunity Tax Credit will benefit students by making average tuition/fees at community colleges virtually free. The credit covers up to \$2,500.

There’s one other thing we need to restore American education and promote long-term economic security:

We need great teachers in every classroom. Ohio’s teacher colleges can help by preparing our young people for careers in education.

We need great teachers to work in inner-cities and rural communities.

We need to help the next generation break the cycle of poverty, stay in school and succeed.

We need more teachers trained to serve English language learners.

I commend you for doing a good job in preparing students to become teachers.

Ohio has been leading the nation in student accountability and doing well in the preparation of a quality teaching force for the past several years.

Quality Counts 2008 report by Education Week rated Ohio a grade of “A” on Standards and Accountability, among the top seven states in the nation

Same report card gave Ohio a “B minus” overall on the state’s role in attracting, developing, deploying, and keeping the very best education workforce. Ohio rated 6th overall in its push for school improvement

Thank you for providing opportunities to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to participate in our country’s outstanding postsecondary educational system.