

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

FAST TIMES at CAPITOL HIGH

FAST TIMES at CAPITOL HIGH	1
WHAT'S AT STAKE	1
FAFSA: It's NOT JUST A FORM	1 & 2
TIMING IS EVERYTHING	2
SPEAKING OF GRATITUDE	2

I'm midway through my fourth decade in the business of higher education financing and I cannot remember a time as exciting and confusing as the here and now. It could be a function of my eroding memory and that old adage that the memory of serious pain wanes, but I don't think so. When our nation's economy and workforce have been significantly challenged our country has historically looked to education as a key in the process of rebuilding, reengineer, reinventing and reinvigorating that economy. This time it is our education system itself that must be rebuilt, reengineered, reinvented and reinvigorated.



This is **the most important congressional recess you may ever see** to make the significant effort of visiting with your federal congressional representatives and your state legislatures to educate, thank and ask for direct support of LEAP and the College Access Challenge Grant. Further, if these programs are going to be efficient, fair and accessible to your citizens, then the plans to simplify the financial aid application process MUST include a "smart" electronic FAFSA which includes questions and embedded data elements that are needed for state student aid programs.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

The weakened economy has resulted in significant increases in applications for college financial aid across the country. Most states and colleges are struggling to keep up with the processing and many have seen their average grants to needy students erode. Yet the Administration's, Senate Committee's and the House's FY2010 budget proposals seek only level funding of the LEAP program (\$63m) despite the anticipated need for full funding with the implementation of the new GAP. While some might say good job - at least the Administration didn't propose elimination of the program - we must hope that the next opportunity under reconciliation of mandatory funding legislation (HR 3221) will result in no less than the authorized level of \$200m as HR 3221 proposes. Level funding is just not good enough to enable states to help the President reach his goal of leading the world in the percentage of adults holding a college degree by 2020. **YES!! Let's get behind these proposals with enthusiasm.**



The Federal Relations Committee, FAFSA Technical Forms Committee, and your executive committee have spent an enormous amount of time on the Press Release and Information Packet you will receive very soon, if you haven't already. Please don't wait. Make your appointments today to visit with your representatives and state executives to discuss how they can support **LEAP, CACG and a FAFSA-ON-THE-WEB** that will serve your citizens well.

The **39th Annual NASSGAP Survey** has the information you need to let your representatives know how all of your states contribute to the financing of higher education. You'll find it on the NASSGAP website (www.nassgap.org).

To find your representatives based on address go to: <http://www.visi.com/juan/congress/>

Or, if you know who your representatives are and want to access their web pages from government web sites use:

http://senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/

DON'T FORGET TO TAKE A STUDENT !!

When you visit, take a student along. A thank you from a student goes a long, long way!!

FAFSA: IT'S NOT JUST A FORM

States' reliance on the FAFSA grew out of the states' commitment to maximizing student access to higher education through financial aid systems that work. As a result, states became increasingly dependent upon the federal form and the federal methodology. This has served our students well. However, the public continues to view the FAFSA as too complicated for many families and a barrier to accessing higher education for some. NASSGAP understands and shares the concern. However, if the form and the formula change too drastically too fast, states' commitment to the FAFSA as the state application of choice could erode and create more iterative and complicated steps for students to apply for state aid. *(Continued on the next page)*

FAFSA: IT'S NOT JUST A FORM *(continued)*

There are two messages that **MUST** be carried:

1. The FAFSA needs to include a direct question of a student's legal state of residency, and
2. The "state" questions and applicants responses must be embedded in the FAFSA form and continue to be part of the ISIR record

These two matters will further the cause of simplification without forcing states into supplemental applications. NASSGAP prefers this option over earlier proposals to just "link" students to state web sites. Such "links" will not be smart enough and could require many states to develop application systems that will be duplicative, expensive, and in the end, more complicated for students. Don't let Congress be convinced that the state programs don't matter enough to keep the partnership alive.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Now is the time to make contact. Did I say that already? Can't say it enough.

During the fall conference (October 4-7, St. Petersburg, Florida) you'll have the opportunity to learn the status of these proposals, new regulations and what you must do next. We expect a leading official from US Department of Education to speak to the administration's legislative proposals. Money and simplification are just the beginning. We also plan to have sessions on how to best interact with the policy makers and legislatures about what is most important to your agency.

SPEAKING OF GRATITUDE

Maureen Laffey and Sherry Fox have done yeomen's work in staying on top of all matters FAFSA.

Chas Treadwell continues to analyze and advise your executive committee on all things federal, be it money, law or regulations. He's got the juice.

Julia Leeper and her program committee should be making the really big bucks to keep pulling off the conferences they do for you. Can't wait for St. Pete!!

The annual survey (Mike Solomon) and the FAFSA simplification report (Cheryl Maplethorpe and Jamie Dushin) are vital tools to our success this year and in the future.

Lee Andes may have set a record for calls, letters, and emails. His leadership, management, and wisdom has helped all of us "keep our heads" when they easily might have imploded. When I think of Lee I always think of that guy on the Ed Sullivan Show who kept a dozen or so china plates spinning on the tips of some pretty flimsy sticks. He had nothin' on Lee.

More than ever the families in your states rely on you and the financial aid professionals across our nation to get to college. You've been doing a tough job for a long time. But, the work is harder and you're needed more than ever before. Thanks for all you do.

Now, inhale...exhale...inhale...exhale...the next few months may be the most difficult and fruitful of your career to date.

Marie

Marie Bennett
Director, NASSGAP
Washington, DC
202-776-2599
marie@nassgap.org

