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**Heller, Warner, Kaine, Gardner Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Empower Student Loan Borrowers**

**Washington D.C.** – U.S. Sens. Dean Heller (R-NV), Mark R. Warner (D-VA), Tim Kaine (D-VA), and Cory Gardner (R-CO) introduced bipartisan legislation to help students make smarter decisions in the financing of their higher education. The Empowering Students Through Enhanced Financial Counseling Act would promote financial literacy by providing students who are recipients of federal financial aid with comprehensive counseling services.

Nationwide, Americans owe more than $1.45 trillion in student loan debt, outstripping credit cards and auto loans as the country's leading source of non-housing debt.

“This legislation empowers Nevada’s students and Americans throughout the country with the tools needed to make well-informed, sound financial decisions related to their college and education,” **said Sen. Heller.** “It’s a positive step toward addressing student debt and preparing young students for a successful future, and I encourage my colleagues to support it.”

“More than 60% of Virginia's college students will graduate with some form of student loan debt, and average debt in the Commonwealth tops $29,000 per graduate. I would not have had the opportunity to be so successful in business had I graduated with such a financial burden,” **said Sen. Warner.** “We would be empowering students to make smarter choices about their financial future. This legislation aims to provide a full picture on the loans they are receiving, allowing them to take full advantage of the opportunities available to them.”

“Too many families in Virginia are weighed down by massive student loan debt, sometimes because they lacked services and information that could've helped them make a better-informed decision on a loan,” **said Sen. Kaine.** “I'm proud to once again join Senators Warner, Gardner and Heller on this simple but important bill that makes it easier for students and families to access financial counseling.”

“Access to financial counseling will help students who receive federal financial aid better understand the process before undertaking massive student loan debt,” **said Sen. Gardner.** “A high quality education provides students with the tools they need to succeed, and financial literacy is an essential component to achieving that success. This bipartisan proposal will help tens of thousands of students better plan for their future.”

A survey of current students and recent graduates with a high level of student loan debt found that more than 40 percent could not recall having received financial counseling, even though counseling is already required before students can receive their first federal loan. Further, no counseling is provided to students who receive only a Pell Grant or to parents who take out federal loans to help pay for their children's education. As a result, many students graduate unable to manage the loans they used to finance their education, leading to significant hardship for borrowers and greater risk for taxpayers.

To help students make smart decisions about financing their higher education, the Empowering Students Through Enhanced Financial Counseling Actwill promote financial literacy through enhanced counseling for all recipients of federal financial aid.

In addition, the bill:

* Ensures borrowers - both students and parents - who participate in the federal loan program receive interactive counseling each year that reflects their individual borrowing situation.
* Provides awareness about the financial obligations students and parents are accumulating by requiring borrowers to consent each year before receiving federal student loans.
* Informs low-income students about the terms and conditions of the Pell Grant program through annual counseling that will be provided to all grant recipients.
* Directs the Secretary of Education to maintain and disseminate a consumer-tested, online counseling tool that institutions can use to provide annual loan counseling, exit counseling, and annual Pell Grant counseling.

The Empowering Students Through Financial Counseling Actwas previously introduced in the 114th Congress. A companion bill passed the House of Representatives last year by voice vote and has been reintroduced this year.

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