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## Obama administration to boost Pell Grants by 40 billion

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Last month, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill boosting Pell Grants with an additional \$40 billion over the next decade. According to information in the Washington Post, many experts don't believe that the increase in assistance to students will make any difference.

According to U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), the House raised the grant in accordance to inflation, but that it isn't meant to offset recent national tuition hikes. "This is a very important round of resources to be made available to students and families," said Miller. "But clearly, for a host of reasons, the costs continue to rise faster than families and the federal government can keep up with them."

In the 1970s over two thirds of tuition was covered by the grant; in the 1980s nearly half; in recent years that percentage has dropped to about one third.

Over recent years, college tuition has been increasing dramatically – Rhode Island College has seen a 75 percent increase in tuition and fees since 2004 with the Board of Governors for Higher Education's latest increase, approved last week. Of the other public Rhode Island colleges, the Community College of Rhode Island has increased by 72 percent and University of Rhode Island has increased by 64 percent.

"The tuition hike was necessary because the amount of state support continues to dwindle...we are now down to 39 percent state allocation in our budget," said President Nancy Carriuolo. "State allocation is an important factor because tuition and state support are the major portions of the college's budget."

The Board voted to increase tuition for the third consecutive time in three years, not including an unprecedented mid-year tuition increase last semester at all three institutions.

"Our stated goal is to make higher education affordable and accessible," said Chairman Frank Caprio. "Every time we do this, we make it less affordable and less accessible. And we are disenfranchising many young people whose only chance out of poverty is education."

According to the Obama administration, about 7 million people will qualify for the grant this year, with awards ranging from \$3,611 to \$5,350 – a total of \$25 billion in government spending this year.


"We've arrived at a point where we have to, in a most serious vein, ask about what is the future for financing higher education in this country," said Miller.

According to those skeptical of the increase's effectiveness, colleges and universities use the grant money as an excuse to keep tuition on the rise and students working harder.

"When you look at the overall trend, it is very clear that colleges and universities eat up all of this money, eventually," said Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute, a public policy research foundation in Washington D.C. "It sort of gives them a constantly increasing budget."

The Pell Grant was named in 1973 after long-time Rhode Island Senator Claiborne Pell, a staunch advocate for improving access to higher education, who passed away Jan. 1.

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