

'Simple, Direct and Effective' Student Aid

To the Editor:

It will perhaps come as no surprise that we do not share all the views expressed in your Oct. 11 editorial discussing the tuition tax credit bill that we and 44 other Senators have sponsored.

We were pleased, however, that you find our underlying analysis to be sound: Most American families can ill afford the costs of sending their children to college. Some cannot manage it at all. Tuitions in public colleges and universities have more than doubled in the past decade. At the grammar school level, we find it striking that all the enrollment shrinkage of the last 10 years has come at the expense of private institutions, notwithstanding ample evidence that many families favor such schools for their youngsters and would patronize them if they could.

You suggest that encouraging more people to enroll in college will not ease the financial problems of the institutions. Poised as they are on the brink of a historical shrinkage in the traditional college-age population, and increasingly anxious about the decline in freshman applications, nearly every educator in the land would argue that steps to bolster enrollments are necessary, if not crucial, to their future institutional well-being.

It is alleged that a tax credit such as we propose would simply encourage schools and colleges to hike their tuitions further. That is a risk with any broadly based form of student assistance, be it a grant, a loan, or a tax credit. But we do not know a single trustee or legislator who yearns for higher tuition rates or ignores the financial plight of our nation's students.

We seek to reduce the artificial distinction between "public" and "private" schools and colleges, if not in governance then at least in the minds of prospective students and their families. Not until the mid-19th century did that distinction even come into existence. For many years, funds raised through public means were channeled directly into schools and colleges administered under private auspices. Indeed, this is still the case, particularly at the college level and particularly in New York State with its wide array of subsidies for "private" sector institutions and their matriculants.

You suggest that instead of a tax credit the Congress should direct funds into direct aid programs already on the books. We also set a high priority on need-based grants and scholarships for low-income students. But experience to date with the Basic Grants program suggests that it has difficulties aplenty, and should not be relied upon as a future source of financial aid to hard-pressed middle-income families. In any case, the present student aid programs do nothing for elementary and secondary school students eager to make the fullest possible use of the wondrous supermarket

of public and private educational offerings that this society provides.

Just as importantly, our bill provides assistance to those Americans who are not in the mainstream of the current Federal aid programs — the single head of a household with three dependents who needs more education to get a job or the 35-year-old whose skills are outdated. These are among the millions of people this legislation will help.

We believe that the tuition tax credit approach as represented by our bill provides simple, direct and effective financial aid to students of all levels of education without the further expansion of an already massive bureaucracy. It is an alternative worthy of consideration.

BOB PACKWOOD
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Washington, Oct. 20, 1977

The writers are United States Senators from Oregon and New York, respectively.