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Dr. Harry L. Williams Discusses Higher Ed Affordability on Capitol Hill

DSU President Harry L. Williams went before a U.S. Senate committee June 6 to give his perspective on the issue of college affordability during a June 6 roundtable discussion of the U.S. Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee.

The DSU president participated in a Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee hour-long roundtable discussion that focused on the escalating costs of higher education, the resulting student debt load increase, and what the federal government can do to make college more affordable to all Americans.

Dr. Williams came before the committee at the invitation U.S. Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.). The DSU president was joined by leaders from 13 other colleges, universities, and education advocacy groups, who were all given an opportunity to share their ideas on how to make higher education more affordable.

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DSU President Harry L. Williams told a U.S. Senate committee that escalating higher education costs especially impact minority students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Dr. Williams told the committee that making college more affordable for students is a never-ending priority for the University.

?Because of the increasing challenges of higher education affordability, Delaware State University constantly works to raise funds to help students make it through college without interruption due to financial reasons,? Dr. Williams said. ?Dreams deferred often become dreams cancelled, and it motivates DSU to do all it can to keep students on their journey toward earning a degree.?

Noting that minority students are unfortunately the ones suffering the most due to the rising costs of college, Dr. Williams shared research findings that show how the rising costs of college results in decreased enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Sen. Coons said that when it comes to finding ways to make college more affordable, all options should be explored. He noted that many students are delaying college because of the astronomical costs that are associated with obtaining a degree.

?Today?s meeting was helpful in facilitating an open discussion among members of the Senate and leaders in the education world and I thank Dr. Williams for joining us and sharing his insight and wisdom,? Sen. Coons added. ?I look forward to continuing to work with Dr. Williams to help more Delaware students to access and complete college.?

Sen. Coons also discussed legislation he has introduced that would help at-risk students prepare for and complete college.

- The *American Dream Accounts Act,* which he introduced in March, encourages partnerships among schools, colleges, non-profits and businesses to develop secure, Web-based student accounts that contain information about academic preparedness, financial literacy and high-impact mentoring and would be tied to a college savings

account.
- The *Communities Committed to College Tax Credit Act*, which he introduced in April, is designed to help spur private investment in scholarship-funding trusts to make higher education more accessible and affordable for generations of Americans.

During the meeting, Dr. Williams also told the committee how DSU?s focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education is prompting the university to establish an early college high school on campus by the fall of 2013. The DSU president said that through this effort, the University hopes to encourage more minority students to pursue careers in STEM fields as well as reduce their cost of college.

Sen. Coons has also been an outspoken advocate for promoting STEM education.

There has been a lot of discussion in Washington recently on college affordability and ensuring that students can get a higher education that doesn?t cripple them financially. Today?s meeting comes a week after the New America Foundation released a report showing that children can be more successful at saving for college when it starts early and they are given the infrastructure to save.

The release of the New America Foundation report coincided with the U.S. Department of Education announcement on Thursday that the College Savings Account Research Demonstration Project will make an $8.7 million commitment of federal GEAR UP funds to support college savings accounts for students participating in the GEAR UP program.

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