



Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform

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Presidential Candidates Share Views On Controversial Financial Aid Law

BREAKING NEWS – President George Bush and Senator John Kerry released written answers to a question about the Higher Education Act Drug Provision this morning. In a statement released today by the non-partisan New Voters Project (www.newvotersproject.org), a young voter boldly asked, “Do you feel it is necessary to deny financial aid to a student who has already paid for their crime? Are you aware that students with a rape or murder conviction are not exempt from receiving financial aid?”

President Bush responded, “My 2005 Budget proposes to fix the drug provision of the Higher Education Act so that incoming students who have a prior drug-related conviction would be able to receive Federal student aid, and only students convicted while in college would lose their eligibility for student aid.”

John Kerry’s statement said, “If a young person has overcome past obstacles and is ready to go to college, I don’t think that a nonviolent drug conviction in their past should prevent them from doing so.”

Senator Kerry’s statement today seemed to agree with the President that the drug provision should not apply retroactively. Senator Kerry has also said previously public appearances, Senator Kerry has said “If the offense is use, yes. If the offense was for selling, no.” Both candidates’ views indicated that they do not support the full repeal of the Higher Education Act drug provision.

Independent candidate Ralph Nader also participated in the debate. He replied, “Repeal the Higher Education drug provision as it applies to non-violent offenders.”

Chris Mulligan, Outreach Director for the Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform (CHEAR), said of the debate, “Though both President Bush’s and John Kerry’s proposed reforms are welcomed, thousands of students around the country will still have their lives turned upside down every year because of the drug provision. Whoever ends up in the White House, this fundamentally flawed policy must be repealed by the next Congress.”

The drug provision question was selected from over 5,000 potential questions the New Voters Project received from young people around the country and then asked website visitors to vote on which questions they thought were the most important. The questions were narrowed down to the twelve most important issues pertaining to young people.

Students at the University of Arizona will rally outside of tonight’s debate calling on both major party candidates’ to repeal the drug provision.

CHEAR is a coalition of religious, education, civil rights, and rehabilitation organizations seeking the full repeal of the Higher Education Act Drug Provision which has denied over 150,000 students financial aid since taking effect in 2000.

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