

# Election year yields gains in student aid

By CHARLES DERVARICS

Just weeks before the election, President Clinton and the Republican-controlled Congress have approved far-reaching gains in student financial aid that exceeded even the most optimistic forecasts of education advocates.

"The budget we agreed to... contains the biggest increase in Pell Grant scholarships in 20 years," the president said Sept. 30 after the White House and congressional leaders reached the end of marathon negotiating sessions.

The agreement provides a maximum Pell Grant of \$2,700, an increase of \$230 above the current level. The White House first proposed the \$2,700 level six months ago in a budget most lawmakers called "dead on arrival" at its introduction.

The figure also is significantly higher than recent Republican student-aid proposals. The House had proposed a \$2,500 grant and the Senate Republicans countered with a \$2,600 maximum.

Lobbyists attributed the change to fear that the White House might provoke another government shutdown to embarrass congressional Republicans just before the election. But GOP leaders were intent on not allowing the president to take credit for increases in Pell and other programs.

"We've increased education spending off the board," said Rep. Randy Cunningham (R-Calif.), one of a number of lawmakers who criticized Democrats for tak-

ing unfair shots at the GOP on education.

Overall, the final agreement contains an additional \$3.5 billion for education above the budget for fiscal 1996, which expired Sept. 30.

"It's the best budget that we've had in a long time," said David Merkowitz, director of public affairs for the American Council on Education. "We certainly would hope that this would not be a one-year wonder."

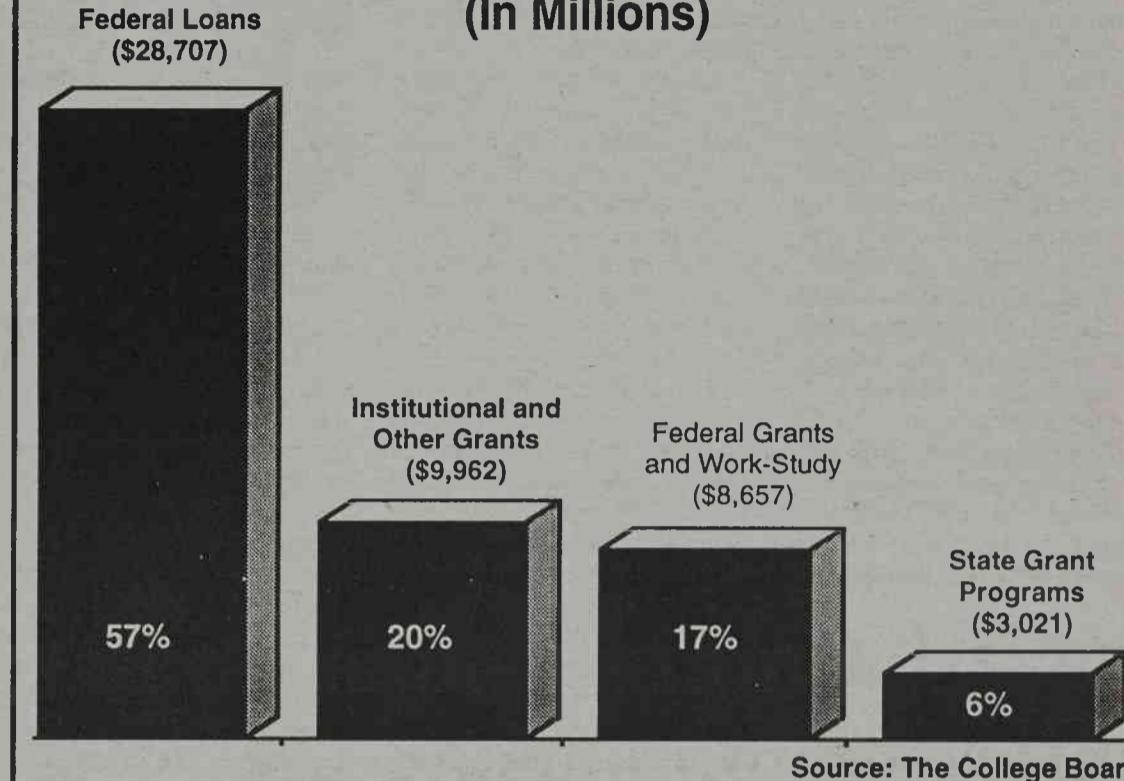
Merkowitz, who characterized the education cuts proposed last year as "truly Draconian," credited grassroot student campaigns for educating members of Congress on student aid and making it an election-year "litmus test issue."

The overall picture on student aid is overwhelmingly positive. We've come a long way since January 1995," he said.

Among other student-aid programs, work-study emerged as a clear winner with an increase of \$213 million, or 34 percent. The bill provided \$830 million for these programs, which goes a long way toward meeting a White House goal of \$1 billion in funding by the end of the century.

The agreement also dropped a House plan to terminate new capital contributions for Perkins Loans, a campus-based program. The final plan allotted \$158 million, the same as the president's request. This amount also is \$90 million more than the level floated in a Senate-proposed compromise last month.

## Student Aid to Colleges and Universities, 1995-96 (In Millions)



Source: The College Board

Here is how the agreement affected other higher education programs:

- State Student Incentive Grants: The pact earmarked \$50 million, up significantly from current funding and earlier GOP plans. The House originally wanted to terminate the program, while the Senate countered with \$13 million.
- Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants: The agreement provided \$583 million, the same as 1996 funding.

- TRIO: Congress agreed to \$500 million, up \$37 million from 1996 for a program that helps recruit disadvantaged students for college.

- Direct loans: Congress agreed to a 13 percent increase for administrative costs needed to run the program, in which the government provides loan capital directly to schools without help from banks. The White House originally sought a larger increase, but the new budget preserves the program after many Republicans sought to terminate it during the past two years.

The budget fell far short of administration requests in at least one area, however. The final budget did not fund a proposed \$130 million Presidential Honors scholarship program, targeted to high achieving students. Nonetheless, lawmakers increased funding for other federal scholarship programs from \$29 million to \$39 million for 1997.

Congress and the White House also agreed to continue the AmeriCorps national service programs. In a separate bill, Democrats and Republicans voted to continue funding at \$402 million, the same amount as 1996. Some GOP members sought termination of the program, in which students earn loan forgiveness or financial aid in exchange for serving their communities.

Republican leaders praised the final 1997 budget for upholding some of its long-term goals. "Student loans and grants are very high priority," said Rep. John Por-

ter (R-Ill.), who chairs the House subcommittee that deals with education spending.

Nonetheless, some hard feelings remain, as evidenced by remarks from Rep. John Kasich (R-Ohio), chairman of the powerful House Budget Committee, who took aim at colleges' and universities' financial practices.

The nation should "ask presidents of colleges and universities why their costs are getting out of control," Kasich said at a news conference to draw attention to GOP support for education.

Kasich also urged parents to "march over to the [college] administration office" to question officials about high budgets for non-teaching personnel and the growing number of faculty members with limited English skills.

Colleges and universities faced more muted criticism from Rep. William Goodling (R-Pa.), who chairs the House Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee. College costs are up nearly 300 percent during the past 10 years, he said, compared to an 80 percent increase in overall inflation.

Goodling and other lawmakers plan to make college costs a key issue in next year's scheduled reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the federal law that authorizes most student-aid and higher-education programs.

President Clinton signed the measure Sept. 30 to avoid any chance of a federal shutdown. The agreement covers the 1997 fiscal year, which began Oct. 1.

## New art exhibit, reception features Rocky Mount artist

A selection of recent drawings and paintings from Rocky Mount artist J. Chris Wilson is now on exhibit through Dec. 17 in the Mims Gallery at the Dunn Center for the Performing Arts.

A free public reception to meet the artist will be held in the gallery next Tuesday at 1 p.m. At the reception there will also be a dedication of the acquisition of Wilson's recently finished portrait of Daisy Thorp, Wesleyan professor emeritus of art.

Wilson is an accomplished and inventive contemporary realist painter who occasionally uses unusual sculptural surfaces in his portraiture. His 1966 portrait of Thorp, titled "The Garden House:

Daisy Thorp," is painted on woven paper. His portrait of contemporary author and Rocky Mount native Allen Gurganus is painted on a dimensional wooden checkerboard panel seven feet high.

Some of Wilson's recent still life paintings with a colorful kimono mural have been inspired by an extended working trip to Japan that Wilson made with his wife and daughter in 1994.

Wilson is well known locally as an exhibiting artist and professor of art at Barton College. He also has had numerous important exhibitions in the United States and abroad. He had a solo exhibition at the Aichi Shukutoku Uni-

versity in Nagoya, Japan, in 1994.

His work is found in many well-known public and private collections, such as R.J. Reynolds/Nabisco in Winston-Salem and Poyner & Spruill at both the law firm's Charlotte and Rocky Mount offices.

Wilson, a longtime friend and associate of Wesleyan College, was the restoration director of the landmark Bellemonte House on campus.

The Mims Gallery is free and open to the public weekdays from 2-4 p.m.

Special viewings and additional information are available by contacting the curator at 985-5268.