NAICU 2014 Summer “Home” Talking Points

GENERAL

Message in brief: Historically, the federal government has provided access and choice through need-based student aid to all deserving students who aspire to a higher education. Today, that federal role continues to be essential, and should not be abandoned. In addition, important tax incentives have been enacted to help families to save and pay for college, and to help students repay their loans. We recognize that college prices and debt can present financial challenges for students and their families, and we are working to maintain both at reasonable levels. We want to participate in finding solutions, while avoiding micromanagement by state governments and overregulation by the Department of Education. American higher education has thrived because of its independence, flexibility, and ability to provide both skills for jobs and enrichment for life. We need your help to preserve these strengths.

- **Opening:** Federal support for financial aid and tax incentives for those attending college is critically important to my institution, the students we serve, and our local community. Thank you for your support.

- **Student Aid:** We recognize that budget constraints require all federal programs — including student aid — to be examined critically. As you consider changes in this area, please:
  
  o Protect the essential role of student aid in providing access for needy students.
  
  o Avoid “trendy,” unproven reform models that divert dollars from student access.

- **Tax:** We support maintaining the charitable deduction without percentage caps or dollar limitations. We also support extending both the IRA charitable rollover and tuition deduction immediately, while the committees work on longer term tax reform bills. Any efforts to reform the current higher education tax benefits should maintain the current three-tiered structure, providing benefits for saving for college, paying tuition, and repaying student loans.

- **Cost:** We understand why people are worried about paying for college. We are making every effort to meet student need so that college is affordable. *(Give examples from your institution.)* We also need to encourage saving for college, which is currently at a very low level.

- **Affordability:** Our institutions also offer a great deal of student aid from our own funds to keep net tuition and fees as low as possible, and to facilitate on-time graduation so students can avoid additional years of expense.

- **Debt:** Student debt is a concern; however, most student debt is manageable. The average debt upon graduation is just over $29,000. *(Give examples from your institution.)*
• **Value/Ratings:** We believe that the benefits of higher education are multi-dimensional, and not all are easily measurable. We are very supportive of initiatives that would help students find their *best fit colleges*, but do not believe they should see their Pell grant awards reduced simply because of the college they choose to attend.

• **Completion:** College completion is an important federal goal — and independent colleges have the best graduation rates of all sectors. However, if the federal government implements new initiatives in this area, we hope: (1) that any proposed changes in the distribution of federal aid are made public before a vote; (2) that Congress does not make inappropriate rules on the awarding of academic credit, which is integral to each institution’s mission; and (3) if states are to coordinate any such efforts, that the structure for participation by independent colleges will be sensitive to the fact that our institutions are not state entities.

• **Regulatory Burden:** Reporting, disclosure, and other compliance activities have grown to overwhelming proportions. We support the work of the Task Force on Government Regulation of Higher Education and hope it will provide relief. It is not encouraging though, as it appears the Education Department is about to issue confusing and unnecessarily burdensome distance education regulations. Please don’t allow new requirements until you’ve carefully assessed those that are already in place.

• **Teacher Preparation** *(If teacher preparation is an important part of your college’s academic program):* We support legislation ensuring high-quality teacher preparation programs assessed via multiple measures and research-based practices. We oppose regulations not based on actual practice or valid research — such as using value-added test scores of K-12 students to reward, punish, or even close teacher preparation programs whose graduates teach those students.