

6.6.07 - U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall Hails Passage Of Act To Help West Virginia Undergrads Study Abroad

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall, D-WV, hailed the passage of legislation in the House of Representatives late Tuesday that will help more American undergraduate students, including West Virginians, to gain a hands-on understanding of the rest of the world.

The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2007, which Rahall is co-sponsoring, will create a national program to help establish study abroad as the norm, rather than as the exception, for college students.

"The invaluable experience of studying abroad should not be limited to a privileged few," Rahall said. "This legislation will open the doors for many West Virginia students to live and learn in other countries, and, in turn, put our Nation on a path to a brighter future."

The bill authorizes \$80 million for grants to individual students, colleges and universities, and nongovernmental institutions that provide study abroad opportunities. The Paul Simon Foundation will also be able to leverage funds from the private-sector.

Under the bill, at least one-million American undergraduates will be able to study abroad over the next 10 years. The bill will also expand overseas study opportunities for students who are currently underrepresented and increase the number of students who study abroad in non-traditional destinations - exposing more young Americans to diverse ideas and experiences.

"In today's world, cultural understanding is essential to our security and our future success in an increasingly global economy," Rahall said. "This bill will help to arm our leaders of tomorrow with the educations they will need to move us ahead in the 21st century and beyond."

The legislation has been endorsed by university and college presidents across the country, the National Association of International Educators, and the higher education presidential associations. Officials at Marshall University in Huntington have expressed their support for the bill.

"This act is very important to improving the global awareness of students today in higher education," said Sarah Denman, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Marshall University. "The more we expose our students to the world around them, the better educated citizenry they will become."

Said Clark Egnor, Executive Director, Center for International Programs, at Marshall University: "This act will help far

more West Virginia students gain the necessary world knowledge and cultural understanding to be effective in today's global society."

According to Clark, currently less than 1 percent of all undergraduates in West Virginia study abroad as part of their university degree program. At Marshall University, which offers more than 125 exchange programs with 35 countries, about 150 undergraduates have the opportunity to study abroad each year. With the passage of this act, Clark expects to see about 750 students going abroad each year from Marshall over the next 10 years.

The legislation now goes to the Senate for a vote.