



Oppose the Creation of a Sunset Commission

July 26, 2006

Dear Representative:

On behalf of over 100,000 bipartisan members of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), we urge you to oppose the creation of a sunset commission. Specifically, AAUW urges opposition to the Government Efficiency Act of 2006 sponsored by Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-KS). Votes on this measure will be scored in AAUW's Congressional Voting Record for the 109th Congress.

While AAUW supports efforts to review, scrutinize and evaluate the effectiveness of government programs and agencies, such mechanisms already exist. Programs and agencies are reviewed during the appropriations, authorization, and reauthorization process by members of Congress, with opportunities for public input and comment. However, under the guise of "good government," efforts are underway to craft legislation to create a sunset commission to review all federal programs and agencies and make recommendations to Congress regarding the elimination of programs and agencies.

Today, the leading sunset commission proposals would create an unelected commission, whose members would be appointed by the president, to review government programs and recommend whether they live or die. Rather than evaluating programs in the light of day through the authorization and appropriations process, this commission would push the reorganization and termination process behind closed doors.

Members of congressional committees and their staff spend a considerable amount of time and resources understanding a particular area of government policy. In contrast, the sunset commission would be required to absorb the expertise of 21 Senate committees, 24 House committees, 6 joint committees and countless subcommittees in order to make overarching recommendations.

Finally, the commission would rely on White House evaluations of program effectiveness to make its recommendations. Most likely, these evaluations would build on the evaluations already conducted by the White House, known as the Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART). While these evaluations pretend to be neutral policy tools, both anecdotal evidence and a GAO report have found substantial subjectivity in PART evaluations. Even more distressing, programs have often been evaluated as ineffective for following the mandates of their authorizing statute. Such programs that would be targeted by the sunset commission that AAUW has a particular interest in are:

TRIO programs help approximately 455,000 middle and high school students with college preparation. Last year more than 74,000 young people from these programs went on to college. These students were four times more likely to earn an undergraduate degree than those from similar backgrounds who did not participate in TRIO programs.

GEAR UP has encouraged more than 2.3 million students from low-income families to prepare early for college. Without these programs, many low income students would lose this valuable assistance.

The **Perkins loan program** provides long term, five percent interest loans to undergraduate and graduate students with exceptional financial need. Unlike other federal student loans, Perkins loan borrowers don't have to pay origination or insurance fees. No student wants to borrow more than is necessary to finance higher education, but when students need to borrow they should have access to loans that carry the most favorable terms and conditions. This is especially important for women, who are more likely to borrow than men and who will earn lower wages on average after graduation. Female graduates are more likely to struggle with their loan debt thus making access to loans through the Perkins loan program even more important. ¹ If this proposal is enacted, in 2006 alone, more than 670,000 student borrowers would lose out on loan forgiveness if they became teachers, law enforcement officers or if they serve in the military.

The **Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA)** represents the federal commitment to helping schools eradicate sex discrimination from their programs and practices and ensuring that girls' future choices and successes are determined not by their gender, but by their interests, aspirations, and abilities. Since its inception in 1974, WEEA has funded research, development, and dissemination of curricular materials, including training programs, guidance and testing activities, and other projects to combat inequitable educational practices. WEEA funds programs primarily for local implementation of gender-fair policies and educational models. These activities have been important in assisting educational agencies with their obligation to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

In addition to these examples, the remaining 38 education programs targeted for elimination in the president's FY07 budget would almost certainly be some of the first programs to be considered for elimination if a sunset commission is established.

AAUW believes these vital education and training programs play a central role in our nation's strategy to strengthen the economy and prepare Americans for the 21st century workforce. For this reason, and others outlined above, AAUW opposes the creation of a sunset commission. If you have further questions, please contact me at 202/785-7720 or Cyndi Lucas, Government Relations Manager at 202/785-7730.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz
Director, Public Policy and Government Relations

¹ Price, Derek V. 2004. *Borrowing Inequality: Race, Class, and Student Loans*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers.