

Kentucky legislature raids need-based college grant funds

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Poor Kentuckians are facing a widening assault on their right to higher education. The Lexington *Herald Leader* has revealed that since 2006, the state's General Assembly has taken some \$90 million in lottery proceeds meant to fund Kentucky's College Assistance Program (CAP) for poor and working class students. The funds were diverted into the general fund.

The General Assembly raids funds on a regular basis, the *Herald Leader* found. In 1989, Kentuckians approved the lottery with the understanding that 100 percent of funds would go towards education. Funding for financial aid is based on proceed estimates rather than actual sales of lottery tickets. Since 2006, the lottery has produced \$78 million more than was estimated. The entire surplus was ravaged by the General Assembly, and used for other projects.

The Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship, or KEES, is awarded to all high school students who have a GPA of 2.5 or greater. The article also revealed that KEES takes precedent over need-based aid.

In the atmosphere of global economic and social catastrophe, more Kentuckians are pursuing higher education. With increased tuition and subordination of need-based aid to aid awarded for academic achievement—and more people competing for the same modest financial aid funds—poor and working class students are being squeezed out.

The students who are most affected by the General Assembly's fund diversions are community college students. Working class and non-traditional (older) students make up the bulk of the community college student body. The main reason that community college students are disproportionately affected is due to late registration.

Older and working class students often have to hold down full-time jobs, manage children and a myriad of

other life problems not common to the traditional student. They may enroll in courses at the last minute because of a sudden job loss, needing to retrain. Because of these issues, they are more likely to be denied aid like the CAP grant, which requires students to apply early for the limited aid.

With the absence of adequate aid available, students are forced to take out loans to pay for tuition, books and living expenses while attending school.

The *Herald Leader* reports that the average Kentucky student graduated with a student-loan debt of \$19,000. Altogether, 58 percent of students had college debt, which is growing at a rate four times faster than the state's gross domestic product, according to the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA). A recipe for social disaster, it is but a microcosm of an international phenomenon.

Despite the enormity of the problems, there is no effort in state or federal government to address them. Joe McCormick, who was the director of KHEAA until 2006, reported to the *Herald Leader*, “[D]uring the time I worked at KHEAA, I wasn't able to identify a champion of need-based aid anywhere in the public or the legislature.”

“And I don't see that now,” McCormick added. “I don't see any initiatives being put forth to increase need-based aid, given the fact that state support is continuing to dwindle and colleges have no choice but to increase their tuition.”

Aside from the facts presented in the *Herald-Leader* report, the newspaper repeats the argument put forward by the political establishment that there is simply “no money” for grant aid. The article reports that there are “more applicants than money” for poor and working class students to attend college, without probing why this is the case.

In total, more than 90,000 Kentuckians were turned down for CAP or KTG (Kentucky Tuition Grant) funds in 2011, up from 22,000 in 2006. There are many reasons for this, but none of them have anything to do with lack of money.

Rather, the largest reason is a state and federal political superstructure that is subordinate to the ruling class and its program of war, austerity and police-state scaffolding. There is more than enough money at the state level to provide for a massive expansion of need-based grant programs—but it is handed out by the millions to the coal, racehorse, and other industries in the form of tax “incentives” each year.



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