

Office: Representative for Congressional District 3

Candidate: Susie Lee

Party: Democratic

Campaign website: susieleeeforcongress.com

Q: Public funding of higher education has declined in relative terms over the past two decades while student fees and tuition have increased and student debt has rapidly expanded, both nationally and in Nevada. How should these issues be addressed?

Lee: Making sure that all students have access to a quality education is the main reason I ran for Congress. I believe that education is at the core of achieving the American Dream and that access to it should not be based on race, sex or the zip code in which one lives. As a member of Congress, I have spent every day championing education access and equitability for all.

Our higher education system is broken. Higher education costs have soared over the last 5 decades, and student debt and default has ballooned, especially since the Great Recession, further exacerbating racial and ethnic inequality. Excessive student debt has created barriers to home ownership and small business startups for younger generations. We must first work to reduce the cost of higher education, restructure our student loan programs to increase accountability, as well as expand the Pell Grant program, to increase access to higher education for our most needy students without forcing them to take on increasing debt.

As a member of the Education and Labor committee in the 116th Congress, I helped craft the College Affordability Act, which would increase the federal investment in higher education by \$400 billion over 10 years. Key provisions include:

- Providing two years of free community college through a federal-state partnership, where the federal government contributes 75% of the costs, while the states assume 25%;
- Increasing the maximum Pell Grant award by \$500, extending eligibility to 14 semesters, among other reforms to increase access;
- Expanding other federal aid programs like TRIO and GEAR UP; Perkins loans and Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program; Federal investment to reduce tuition at Minority Serving Institutions;
- Simplifying and streamlining the FAFSA process.

I also helped start the College Affordability Caucus to explore solutions and produce legislation to address the increasing costs of higher education, as well as increasing debt load of students. I introduced the Pell Grant Sustainability Act to increase the value of Pell Grants, which nearly half of all students in NSHE rely on. As a member of the Appropriations committee, I have secured funding for Nevada State College's Nurse Transition from Academia to Practice Readiness program, University of Nevada Las Vegas' advanced sports research, the establishment of Nevada State College's Center for Career Advancement and Education, and so much more.

Q: The recruitment and retention of state employees, including faculty and staff in our public colleges and universities in Nevada, has become a crisis. Reasons cited for widespread vacancies include lagging compensation and cuts to healthcare benefits. What solutions do you have to restore and retain the higher education workforce in Nevada?

Lee: People want to love where they live. They want to know they will have the support necessary for they and their families to survive and thrive when establishing roots and a career. This is the very hurdle that has long plagued not only our education workforce, but our health care workforce and more. People want to

know that the various facets of their life affected by their communities, their housing, child care, health care, education, and more, will be supported and stimulated by the community they live and work in. This is why I have made these endeavors my central foci during my time in Congress. By working to address the doctor shortage to improve health care access; by working to bring down health care costs by capping insulin at \$35 and advocating for Medicare's ability to negotiate lower drug prices; by approving funding through the American Rescue Plan for affordable housing; by introducing bills such as the Small Business Child Care Investment Act, all of these actions are intertwined and seek to make the lives of everyday Nevadans more affordable. But let's face it, the bottom line is that our higher education workforce should be paid more, and should not be the first line of defense in an economic downturn. That is why I continue to work to increase the federal investment in Nevada's higher education system. We still have so much work to do, but Nevadans will always have an ally and a fighter in me.

Q: Do you support collective bargaining rights for professional employees in our public colleges and universities?

Lee: Yes, I fully support collective bargaining rights for public sector employees, including professional employees of public colleges and universities.

Q: Do you support the principle of academic freedom that protects faculty members from political interference in their teaching and scholarship? (For more information see the AAUP 1940 Statement on Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure.)

Lee: Yes, I believe academic freedom is an important principle and do not believe that there should be undue political interference in academia.

Q: Thank you for your responses. What else, if anything, would you like to communicate to NFA members?

Access to higher education is at the core of my family's history. My father, a veteran, who came from a deeply broken family, was able to put himself through school with the GI Bill. Education was his top priority and he made sure that each of his eight children went on to higher education. I struggled through my undergraduate career, working multiple jobs to pay my way, especially after my dad was laid off my sophomore year. Yet, I had access to Pell Grants, Work Study and affordable Perkins loans. In short, I had a government that worked for me. That's why I make it a priority to ensure that it will work for everyone. I also had professors, university employees, mentors, and coaches who each helped in the ways that they could. I know personally the impact that NFA members have on the lives of our future generation and I want you to know how much I value that work and would value your endorsement.

(Submitted 8/7/2022)