

# Increasing Student Debt: U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross Says Federal Government Is Failing Students

By KHRISTOPHER J. BROOKS  
THE LEDGER

**Published: Monday, April 27, 2015 at 2:07 p.m.**

**Last Modified: Monday, April 27, 2015 at 11:22 p.m.**

LAKELAND | U.S. House Rep. Dennis Ross stood before 100 students in a Southeastern University classroom on Monday and said he feels sorry for them.

The Lakeland Republican remembered how much it took to pay his tuition at Auburn University. But students these days are experiencing higher tuition, and subsequently, are taking out loans and being given more money than they should take, he said.

The government, Ross said, is making life hard on recent graduates.

"Not only are we saddling you with (regular) debt, we're saddling you with student loan debt," he said.

In a standing-room-only classroom, Ross said the federal government is failing students like those at Southeastern because federal officials are granting loans to students who will eventually take jobs in industries that won't pay nearly what it takes to pay back the college loan.

Aside from the explosion of for-profit institutions and rising tuition costs, one of the biggest issues facing American higher education is how much debt students have hanging over their heads.

The total U.S. student loan debt is more than \$1.2 trillion, according to credit monitoring group Experian. According to its data, 40 million people have student loan debt, and each person owes, on average, \$30,000.

Student loan debt wasn't always this bad, Ross said. Decades ago, college was much more affordable when tuition was subsidized by a stronger G.I. Bill, heftier Pell Grants or friendlier student loans.

"Student loans back then had a better interest rate," Ross said.

Ross decided to visit the private Christian university because he wanted to encourage young 20-year-olds to be more politically active and he wanted to hear what issues are relevant to college students.

The congressman made a few remarks about student loan debt and then opened the floor for questions.

During the question-and-answer portion, Christopher Jones, a sophomore from Maryland, asked Ross whether there's any legislation he could introduce to combat rising tuition.

Ross said the government should look into paying off the tuition for students who agree to enter high-demand fields, like nursing or teaching. He said the plan would go something like: The government would pay off the loan as long as the student "gives us five years in these schools or in these hospitals."

Ross gave another example for medical students. He said the government should look into paying off

medical school loans for students who graduate and agree to work in Medicare facilities for at least five years.

Jones, a legal studies and organizational leadership major, said he was hoping Ross could push for all colleges to lock in and guarantee a certain tuition for each cohort, much like how ITT Tech or Liberty University is doing for its students.

Chris Chau, a Southeastern junior from Ocala, said he came to listen to Ross because it's important to get thoughts from people in high political offices. Chau said he wasn't required to come to the talk, but enjoyed himself nonetheless.

"I like hearing that Congress and the government does have our interest in mind, though," Chau said.

[ [Khristopher J. Brooks](mailto:khristopher.brooks@theledger.com) can be reached at [khristopher.brooks@theledger.com](mailto:khristopher.brooks@theledger.com) or 863-802-7536. [Read his Extra Credit blog on TheLedger.com](#). Follow him on Twitter @americanglow ]

Cf: <http://www.theledger.com/article/20150430/edit02/150429281>

[ LETTER ]

## Student Debt and Dennis Ross

**Published: Thursday, April 30, 2015 at 12:01 a.m.**

**Last Modified: Wednesday, April 29, 2015 at 9:54 p.m.**

U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross' speech to students regarding student debt (the irony is huge) is just another lie and misrepresentation of the facts regarding the cost of college education in the U.S. From the American Council on Education: "House GOP Budget Proposes Freezing Maximum Pell Grant, Cutting \$5.1 Trillion in Federal Spending Over 10 Years," April 2, 2014.

In addition to the current proposed cutting of federal aid, the House right-wing Republicans want to raise the interest on outstanding student debt, making it even harder for middle- and lower-class students.

The main reason student debt has risen over the last 15 years has been because of the constant reduction of federal and state aid, which used to be the main component of financial support for U.S. students.

The creators of this dilemma are almost solely the responsibility of right-wing Republicans, not the whole federal government, just the Republican congressional House of Representatives and the Florida Republican-controlled Legislature.

To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw: In a Democracy the people tend to get the government they deserve. We certainly deserve a much better representative than Dennis Ross.

RICHARD THORNTON

Lakeland