

MSU students lobby in D.C. to raise Pell Grant limit

MSU students, along with a few hundred others from colleges around the country, convinced lawmakers to pass an amendment raising the maximum Pell Grant award from \$4,050 to \$4,500.

By Robb Murray, Free Press Staff Writer [published in The Free Press, Mankato, MN 3/28/2005]

MANKATO — For Katie Kendhammer, spring break was exhilarating and inspiring, and she didn't even go to Mazatlan.

Instead, she and nine other Minnesota State University student leaders drove to Washington, D.C., to bend the ears of any federal lawmakers who would listen.

Their issues were the same ones they've talked about for years, but they're still compelling, especially if you're a college student.

And they found some success. The MSU students, along with a few hundred others from colleges around the country, convinced lawmakers to pass an amendment raising the maximum Pell Grant award from \$4,050 to \$4,500. The amendment puts \$1.4 billion into higher education, and if passed would go into effect in 2006.

Kendhammer was surprised at how successful their lobbying efforts were. That success, in turn, has inspired her to continue to work for change.

"The people you got to meet and the stories we got to hear were amazing," Kendhammer said.

Their agenda was a full one.

The students attended training sessions on lobbying lawmakers, working with the media and running a campus campaign. They also met with politicians, including Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Rep. Gil Gutknecht, R-Minn.

Beyond the Pell Grant stipulation, the amendment also seeks \$2 billion to save programs not included in President George W. Bush's proposed budget.

The MSU students who joined Kendhammer were student senate president Shazad Anwer, vice president Goga Copic, Adam Weigold, Vickie Verhelst, Syeda Khumar Raza, Shuaib Ibrahim, Irfan Bangash, Kyle Struck and Ruth Nieto.

"I thought this would just be a starting point," Kendhammer said. "To have that much change happen is incredible."