

## Senators Urge Spellings to Refrain from Imposing New Accreditation Regulations

By Amit Agarwal

Senator Edward M. Kennedy and members of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee have asked U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings to refrain from imposing new accreditation regulations on colleges and universities until Congress reauthorizes the Higher Education Act.

In a letter written to Spellings, 18 of the 21 senators on the HELP Committee stated that Congress is considering changes to current accreditation provisions. The letter says these changes would strengthen the nation's accreditation system by clearly defining the responsibilities of the Department of Education regarding recognition of organizations and accreditation agencies. The changes would specify the criteria agencies must look for when reviewing institutions of higher education. The letter also asks Spellings to wait until proceedings in Congress addressing the same issues are completed. The Department of Education was earlier accused of aggressively pursuing its own plans for new regulations.

HELP members and Republican Senators Wayne Allard of Colorado, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, and Orrin Hatch of Utah refrained from signing the letter. Although the three Republicans have abstained from signing the letter, it states that the committee's members support the Education Department's overall aim of ensuring that the accreditation system promotes quality in higher education.

Apart from Senator Kennedy, other committee members who signed the letter are Michael B. Enzi, Christopher Dodd, Judd Gregg, Tom Harkin, Lamar Alexander, Barbara A. Mikulski, Richard Burr, Jeff Bingaman, Johnny Isakson, Patricia Murray, Lisa Murkowski, Jack Reed, Pat Roberts, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack Obama, Bernard Sanders, and Sherrod Brown.