## Bail out college students

Written by Judge Greg Mathis Tuesday, 14 July 2009 14:41

In recent months, the federal government has bailed out banks, auto companies and, to a lesser extent, families and individuals via programs built into its economic stimulus package. College students are now in need of a helping hand. And the government needs to step up.

Organizations that provide private college scholarship have cut back on the money they give to students, thanks in part to the economic downturn. Funding sources have either been reduced or completely eliminated, to the detriment of those wanting to further their education. These cuts, combined with a difficult economic climate that makes it even harder for families to afford college tuition, are dashing the college dreams of numerous students across the country, most of whom come from working and middle class families.

Even though the economy has made things difficult for numerous industries, now is not the time for scholarship cutbacks. During an economic downturn, Americans should be encouraged to return to school to obtain training, increase their skills or to develop new ones. This way, when things improve – and they always do – these individuals will be better prepared for the job market. The quality of workers available to employers will have improved and companies will be motivated to refrain from outsourcing key jobs.

The financial coffers of the foundations and other organizations that offer scholarships are drained. So the government must step in. Given the assistance that has been extended to other industries, it is not too much to ask that the government help the workers who may potentially help grow these sectors in the future. Because state scholarship programs have also taken a hit – California is considering shutting down its state scholarship program and Pennsylvania has reduced the amount of funds available to students – the responsibility falls on the federal government to ensure students have access to money for college.

The federal government should either expand the economic stimulus package to include funds for college scholarships or create a new funding source specifically for this purpose. Additionally, federal grants to students need to be further extended and programs designed to eliminate student loan debt in exchange for work – i.e. teaching for a year, working in new industries in city's hit by urban blight – need to be researched and implemented.

Some have argued that the current administration is on a spending frenzy and will attempt to block the allocation of additional funds for college students. However, even in an economic crisis, it is important to invest in the future. And there is nothing more important to the continued growth of this country's economy than its workforce.