Columbia Students Lobby in Washington, D.C.

By Ellen S. Smith

Twenty-two Columbia and Barnard students and administrators made their way to Washington, D.C., joining Cornell University colleagues in the 10th annual student lobby trip to voice their support for student aid. Proposed cuts in the executive budget have made student and family involvement in advocacy even more important.

The day began with a briefing by Kelly Dixon, senior advisor to Congressman Thomas Reynolds (R-N.Y.), a leader in the House of Representatives, and Columbia graduate Robert “Bo” Newsome, CC’79, director of outreach and state liaison for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. Dixon emphasized the importance of making the case for student aid, and that most members of Congress are supporters of the issue, but did note that strong budget deficits are producing problems. Newsome reviewed the campaigns of the past and described in detail a student aid budget amendment offered by Sen. Kennedy and supported by enough senators to pass. Students and families are energized to fight cuts in student aid and make their thoughts known before a vote occurs on the amendment.

After the briefings, students divided into five groups and during the course of the day, saw more than 40 House and Senate staff members. All emphasized that one visit is not enough to affect change and that continued advocacy will be needed until the budget passes next fall. The prime focus of the advocacy was the need to increased Pell grants, retain Perkins loans and restore all funding to the TRIO programs, educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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