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Education is one of the most important resources we have to ensure the continued progress and prosperity of this great nation.

It is imperative that future generations have a quality education to keep the United States globally competitive. Our country's community colleges are some of the most effective institutions to help achieve this goal, and I am proud to acknowledge May as National Community College Month.

There are more than 1,200 community colleges nationwide serving more than 11 million Americans with hopes of attaining a higher education. These close-to-home centers provide high-quality education at a low cost and encourage any individual to enroll regardless of previous schooling.

Community colleges also encourage older Americans to seek out education when that might not have been a possibility when they were younger. The degrees and certificates these institutions of learning offer also help create additional career opportunities that otherwise might not have been available.

Furthermore, our community colleges are at the forefront of strengthening our nation's health care community, ensuring the continued safety of our homeland and enhancing many other vital industries. In fact, according to the American Association of Community Colleges, half of new nurses and a majority of other new health care personnel are educated at these institutions.

The AACCC also notes that nearly 80 percent of our first responders are credentialed at community colleges. It is heartening to know that many of these individuals give back so selflessly to the communities in which they were educated.

As a product of an education received at St. Petersburg College, I know the vital role it played in preparing me for my future education at the University of Florida and Stetson Law School, as well as my career. For that reason, I proudly stood with my colleagues in Congress when we unanimously approved a resolution recently supporting the goals and ideals of National Community College Month.

Florida's 9th Congressional District is fortunate to have three of the best community colleges in the country: St. Petersburg College, Pasco-Hernando Community College and Hillsborough Community College. I am encouraged that every year more and more Americans are taking advantage of the great opportunities these institutions offer and because of that I look forward to America's continued success.

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