



**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC)
Republican Leader, Committee on Education and Labor
Hearing on "The Cost of College: Student Centered Reforms to Bring Higher
Education Within Reach"
March 13, 2019**

This hearing cuts to the heart of why postsecondary education reform is necessary and why it is so difficult to accomplish. It's necessary because college is so increasingly expensive. For decades, tuition and fees have risen higher than the cost of inflation. Because costs have always varied between different types of institutions, it's often hard to know what option would provide the best value for the unique needs of each student and their families.

Here is a way to put the cost of college into perspective: if the price of cars had risen at the same rates tuition and fees have risen, the average car today would cost more than \$80,000. The high cost of college is not a question for debate, it is a matter of fact.

That's also why change is so difficult. High costs for all mean very, very high payouts for some. As a former college administrator, I know firsthand the complexity and the ripple-effects of budget decisions at the institutional level. Sometimes, it takes creativity and resourcefulness to manage an institution's finances well. Sometimes, the easiest way to grow your budget is to use an old business mindset and pass costs along to the consumer. In this case, the consumers are students and families, and they are not willing to take the high costs anymore.

There are ways to protect students from absorbing the costs of institution-level budget decisions, and I must say, I don't believe every college administrator in the country is giving students the consideration they deserve when deciding how to manage institutional finances. Any discussion of college affordability must involve serious questions about institutional accountability. I hope we'll hear more about that today, and I hope we'll all have the courage to confront those who seek to maintain the status quo, at the expense of students, for their own benefit.

The federal government's role in trying to help families pay for college is a classic example of the unintended consequences of good intentions. On top of the different types of grants available, the federal government deals in five loan programs, nine repayment plans, eight forgiveness programs, and 32 deferment and forbearance options. Somehow, all these numbers and options have added up to more than \$1.5 trillion in student debt and counting—a number no Congress could have anticipated as each of these federal aid options came online.

These facts should be further indication that college costs are not simply a matter of supply and demand or loan amounts or interest rates, but a symptom of deeper systemic flaws in American postsecondary education systems and, perhaps more importantly, popular perceptions.

I have long said that we need bold reforms in postsecondary education if we're going to make the system work for students again, and I've put those ideas forward. I believe in the necessity of comprehensive reform today more than ever. However, I'm happy to acknowledge that there are a few bright stars in the system as we know it. The comparative success of the Pell Grant program has made it the cornerstone of federal student aid. In today's economy, there are ways to strengthen the Pell Grant program in ways that may not have been evident in previous decades, and that comes back to my point about public perceptions. If we consider ways to make Pell Grants applicable to shorter-term, skills-focused programs that meet the needs of students and the communities in which they live, I believe we'll see a higher, faster, and more satisfying return.

All education is career education. American students view postsecondary education as a necessity, and they aren't wrong in thinking that way. As we broaden our ideas of what postsecondary options can look like for students of every age, the question of how they'll pay for it looms large. I am glad to see increasing public interest in this issue, and I welcome this hearing and these witnesses today.

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