



COMMITTEE ON
**EDUCATION
& LABOR**
REPUBLICANS

**COMMITTEE
STATEMENT**

**Opening Statement of Rep. Greg Murphy (R-NC), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment Hearing:
"Rising to the Challenge: The Future of Higher Education Post COVID-19"
March 17, 2021**

(As prepared for delivery)

“Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you to all our witnesses for joining us here today.

America’s higher education system has been in desperate need of reform for years. The system’s weaknesses were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many pathways to success besides the traditional baccalaureate degree, and institutions of postsecondary education need to realize this fact if they hope to help their students thrive in the coming decades.

We are not here today to discuss whether higher education needs reform, as both sides can agree that the system needs work. According to one analysis, four in ten baccalaureate-degree recipients are underemployed in their first jobs after school. Roughly 60 percent of students complete their degree program within six years. Certainly, these are not numbers worth celebrating.

Now is not the time to expand on failed, big government policies. While Congress has a role to play in improving all forms of postsecondary education, it should not take the form of expensive government handouts that push unworkable, partisan priorities.

When COVID-19 placed heavy strains on our higher education system, Congress acted quickly to provide the necessary funding for educational institutions to combat this once-in-a-century pandemic. Under President Trump, Congress allocated roughly \$35 billion towards these efforts. That is 35 billion with a b.

Republicans do not take spending taxpayers' dollars lightly, which is why my Republican colleagues voted against the Democrats' budget reconciliation bill. Unfortunately, Democrats unilaterally pushed ahead with their large spending bill.

With these unprecedented levels of taxpayer money being funneled into educational institutions, combined with valid concerns about return on investment, it is imperative that Congress take a close look at how the Department of Education and institutions of higher learning spent hard-earned taxpayer dollars, and consider necessary structural reforms to the *Higher Education Act* to serve students better. I am disappointed that this hearing seems to have a glaring lack of actual and necessary oversight.

We have a responsibility to diligently and responsibly allocate taxpayer dollars to those who truly need assistance. Too many in this Committee find it way too easy to spend hard-earned taxpayer dollars without promising accountability. As a Committee, our loyalty should be to all students, present and future.

Any conversation surrounding postsecondary education must aim to reduce the cost of attendance and boost graduation rates, while also supporting students to pursue the type of education that works for them – whether it be seeking a baccalaureate degree or pursuing equally valuable, skills-based alternatives, such as career and technical education and apprenticeships, that lead to in-demand, good-paying jobs.

Before the pandemic, there were over seven million unfilled jobs in the U.S., in part due to a skills gap. With employers in desperate need for qualified employees, now is the time to strengthen all learning opportunities that provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the workforce.

This type of strategy will not only benefit students but will boost our entire economy.

Higher education is in a state of emergency, but we cannot allow this to turn into an excuse to nationalize the entire postsecondary education sector. The U.S. Constitution grants no authority over education to the federal government. Education is not mentioned in the Constitution of the United States, and for good reason. The Founders wanted most aspects of life managed by those who were closest to them, either by state or local government or by families, businesses,

and other elements of civil society. Certainly, they saw no role for the federal government in education. Now, if we are going to be involved in education, we ought to expect a civic, financial, and productive return on our investment.

Committee Republicans are focused on supporting students in completing an affordable postsecondary education that will prepare them to enter the workforce with the skills they need for lifelong success.

We ought to work together – and I mean actual collaboration – to give students access to education options that will prepare them to enter the workforce with the skills they need for lifelong success. Students need pathways not partisanship.

It is my hope that this hearing is a step in the productive and bipartisan direction. Again, thank you all for being here, and I look forward to discussing reforms to higher education that increase student success without expensive government handouts and burdensome programs.”

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