



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment Hearing:
“Engines of Economic Mobility: The Critical Role of Community Colleges,
Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Minority-Serving Institutions in
Preparing Students for Success”
May 22, 2019**

“We’re all here today because we believe that every American should have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education. We’ve seen the doors opened by a college degree, and we understand the importance of making this kind of opportunity achievable for everyone in our country. Higher education should be accessible and attainable, regardless of circumstance, which is why the federal government has made it a clear priority to ensure low-income and first-generation students have the tools they need to prepare for postsecondary education commitments and manage the costs associated with earning a degree.

As we continue to consider what must be done in any reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act*, we have the opportunity to ensure that restructuring and innovation in our higher education system provides all students equal access to opportunities that offer pathways to success – both inside and outside of the conventional classroom. This could mean alternative pathways to a four-year degree, such as offering programs to teach in-demand skills so that students can take only the courses they need to do their jobs, dual enrollment pathways, and opportunities later in life to re-skill.

For any of these changes to take place, we must recognize that money is an important part of the conversation, and institutions need to be willing to take more responsibility for the outcomes of their students. Stories like one from this weekend, where a billionaire gifted an entire graduating class with paying off their student debt, are great examples of one person’s capacity for excellence and generosity. They also illustrate something too easily forgotten: that nothing is

free, and someone always pays the price. This means Congress and institutions need to step up to the plate, and do all they can respectively, to make higher education an investment that doesn't cost more than it reaps- for students and taxpayers.

In the *Promoting Real Opportunity Success and Prosperity through Education Reform* (PROSPER) Act, which was a comprehensive proposal to reauthorize the HEA in the 115th Congress, Republicans included reforms that allowed students greater access to federal student aid, promoted earn and learn programs, increased flexibility in spending institutional aid, and reformed the federal work study program to better prepare students for future employment in their chosen fields. These bold ideas for affordable and accessible postsecondary education recognized that for too long, the federal government has complied with a myopic view of what postsecondary education is and why people pursue any kind of higher education. We must recognize that postsecondary education needs to work for students—not the other way around.

The committee should continue to consider these reforms top priorities as it discusses policy changes that could be included in the reauthorization of the HEA. We need to be striving, on both sides of the aisle, for new ideas that will increase opportunities for all American students, regardless of circumstance, and support their efforts to succeed and prosper.”

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