

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Scott (VA-03)**

Full Committee Markup

H.R. 6951, *College Cost Reduction Act*

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, January 31, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

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Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, you've heard me quote President Lyndon B. Johnson when he signed the *Higher Education Act*—when he said that it meant—and I quote:

*'a high school senior anywhere in this great land of ours can apply to any college or any university in any of the 50 states and not be turned away because [their] family is poor.'*

That's the way it used to be. Just a few decades ago, the Pell Grant covered 80 percent of the cost of attending a state college. Now, it covers less than a third of that cost.

Despite President Johnson's promise, a college degree remains out of reach for millions of Americans.

I appreciate that my colleagues acknowledge that the cost of college is too high, and that Congress needs to reform the system of affording higher education. But, regrettably, the Committee Republican proposal is seriously missing the mark.

H.R. 6951, the so-called *College Cost Reduction Act*, would:

1. Increase costs across the board for colleges and students,
2. It would limit students' access to quality programs, which then reduces their likelihood of finding a rewarding career, and
3. Needlessly fuels divisive culture wars and jeopardizes the integrity of our accrediting partners.

First, let me start with the misleading claim that the bill 'reduces costs.' Most of the provisions in H.R. 6951 that are targeted toward reducing federal student loans only exacerbate the problem by limiting the students' access to federal loans and then pushing them to the only thing that is left: the predatory, private loan market.

Let me say that again for those who might have missed it. The proposal to make college more affordable for students is to limit how much federal student aid they can access.

By limiting the federal student aid that students can receive, the bill will leave half of all students seeking a college degree without the federal assistance that they need.

H.R. 6951 would force student borrowers into unaffordable repayment plans. Rather than build on President Biden’s work to streamline the path to repayment, this bill would have students pay more and, because there is no discharge after 20 years, they could have borrowers paying off their loans for the rest of their lives.

Second, the Committee Republicans claim that H.R. 6951 improves accountability and transparency. But the bill eliminates the very regulations—made stronger by the Biden Administration—that protect students and taxpayers from predatory, low-quality for-profit programs. These are the very same programs that disproportionately target veterans and low-income students and defraud them out of their federal student aid.

Removing these safeguards would expose students and taxpayers to waste, fraud, and abuse. If my colleagues want to return to the Devos era of radical deregulation, they should remember that students and taxpayers bore the brunt of the costs.

Lastly, the Committee Republicans’ proposal needlessly fuels divisive culture wars and jeopardizes the integrity of our accrediting partners.

For example, the ‘Prohibition on Litmus Tests’ invites additional federal oversight into the accreditation process. Under this bill, accreditors may not create standards based on any ‘ideology, belief, or viewpoint.’

For example, the Department of Education could potentially revoke an accreditor’s recognition over a claim that its standard that colleges teach evolution as part of their biology classes, or a geology curriculum that dates the age of the Earth at 6,000 years, is an illegal imposition of an ‘ideology, belief, or viewpoint’ on a college.

This provision is unnecessary and would do nothing but bring chaos and confusion into the process.

So let me be clear, there are provisions in the 224-page bill that do have bipartisan support, such as codifying Postsecondary Student Success Grants and eliminating interest capitalization and origination fees on student loans. But, on balance, the havoc this bill would wreak on our higher education system, and the pain it would inflict on students and families, far outweigh any minor improvements the bill may make.

If my Republican colleagues are serious about reforming our higher education system, I would encourage them to work with Committee Democrats to pass the bills in our [\*Roadmap to College Student Success\*](#). This campaign lays out a proactive agenda to bring down the cost of college, help students access a quality degree, and—once students are in school—provide them with the support they need to graduate.

I hope that, together, we can make higher education in America work for students, colleges, and taxpayers, but the bill before us does the opposite. So, I oppose this bill, and I encourage my colleagues to oppose it as well.

Thank you, and I yield back.