

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)
Full Committee Markup of H. Con. Res. 14 Section 2001(b)(3), H. Res. 344
Tuesday, April 29, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, in this town, there is a saying that if you want to see someone's values, show me their budget.

Regrettably, the reconciliation plan that has come before us today reveals a betrayal of the promise that President Lyndon B. Johnson made when he signed the *Higher Education Act* back in 1965—he said, and I quote:

'[T]he signing of this means that 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.'

In signing the *Higher Education Act*, America demonstrated its values. That is, the federal government will help students seeking higher education, aspirations, and opportunities.

This is why, just a few decades ago, the Pell Grant covered 80 percent of the cost of attending a state college. With this financial support, America promoted higher education and was making great strides to support the value of a liberal arts education, which improves critical thinking, enhances an appreciation for, and exalts the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Over the last couple of decades, however, there has been an open hostility to higher learning. We have seen the disinvestment in higher education, so that the Pell Grant now covers about one-third of the cost of attending a state college. We also saw some questionable for-profit schemes masquerading as institutions. It's not just my opinion. Just consider [the poll](#) that shows that 58 percent of Republicans distrust higher education.

And now, if this reconciliation plan becomes law, President Johnson's promise that income will not be a barrier to higher education will be out of reach for millions more Americans.

So let me say emphatically that I appreciate that my colleagues acknowledge that the cost of college is too high, and that Congress should reform the system. But the Committee print before us today will cut \$330 billion in student aid — and that seriously misses the mark of making college more affordable.

This current reconciliation plan would:

1. Increase costs for colleges and students;
2. Limit students' access to quality programs, which would then reduce their likelihood of finding a rewarding or successful career; and,
3. Then take all the so-called "savings" to pay for more tax cuts for the wealthy and the well-connected.

So let me first start with the misleading idea that this bill ‘reduces costs.’ There is certainly no incentive for colleges, the way the bill is constructed, if you’re below the median cost, there’s *actually* incentive to increase your cost. Most of the provisions targeted toward reducing federal student aid exacerbate the college affordability crisis by limiting the students’ access to Pell Grants and federal loans and then pushes them to the only thing that may be left if they want to go to college – and that is predatory, private loans.

Put bluntly, this Republican proposal will limit how much money middle- and low-income students can borrow from the federal government. As a result, limiting the federal student aid that students can receive means that millions of students will not be able to access federal assistance that they need to complete their degrees.

Moreover, this bill would force student borrowers into unaffordable repayment plans. Rather than streamlining the path to repayment, this bill would require students to pay more and be in repayment longer.

For example, for a single borrower making \$45,000 a year, the payment would nearly triple. Under the SAVE Plan, which was Biden’s final plan, the borrower would have been paying \$41 a month. Now under this Republican income-driven repayment plan, this borrower would pay \$150 a month. And, instead of paying off their loans in as little as ten years, they would not be eligible for any loan forgiveness for thirty years.

In addition to making it more expensive to attend college, the bill will also reduce students’ access to quality programs.

By eliminating the 90/10 rule, the bill eliminates the very regulations 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. And we should remember that, ultimately, students and taxpayers will bear the brunt of those costs.

The reconciliation bill will cut access to higher education for students and also will shower the wealthy with massive tax cuts. These are not our values. That is why Democrats will oppose this bill, and I encourage my Republican colleagues to join us.

And finally, today we were also prepared to debate H. Res. 344, a resolution allowing Congress to ask the Administration very basic questions about why it is planning to dismantle the Administration for Community Living (ACL) – the office that administers very popular bipartisan programs, such as Meals on Wheels, that help seniors and people with disabilities live independently and with dignity.

However, my colleagues are so unwilling even to *ask* questions of the Administration about what they’re plans are that they’re in the process of changing House rules — the rule came out of the Rules Committee last night — that prevent the Committees from demanding accountability of our Administration and its service to the American people. Reasonable minds can only conclude that stripping the demand for answers of this Administration shields people on the other side of the aisle from taking a public position on accountability. Not just doing something — but just merely asking the question.

And so, I hope to work with you, Mr. Chairman, to ensure that ACL and other programs are protected, but at least we should get to know what is going on. An important first step would be to hold a hearing on the proposed HHS reorganization that I have requested, in conjunction with every Democratic Member on this Committee.

But prior to that, we should at least ask questions about what the plans are, just as H. Res. 344 requires the Administration to respond to. Mr. Chair, when will we consider that resolution? I yield to you.

Well, reclaiming my time, Mr. Chairman, I would hope we would take it up, and you would join us in asking questions about what is going on in the Administration.

People trying to live independently with disabilities, seniors with frailty through age, depend on programs like Meals on Wheels. We would just like to know what the plan is to dissolve that agency. I would hope that you would join me to as the question: what's going on?

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.