

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Markup

H.R. 7894, *Truman Scholarship Clean House Act*

H.R. 7890, *The Science of Reading Act of 2026*

H.R. 7892, *No Aid for Ghost Students Act of 2026*

H.R. 7891, *Student Aid Fraud Oversight and Accountability Act of 2026*

H.R. 7893, *FAFSA Verification Efficiency Act*

H.R. 7661, *Stop the Sexualization of Children Act*

H.R. 6084, *ERISA Litigation Reform Act*

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Tuesday, March 17, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, hardworking Americans are finding that a comfortable, affordable life is increasingly out of reach. The cost of health care, groceries, child care, student loans, gasoline, and housing — all of those costs continue to rise while workers are being left behind. According to a new report from Vanguard, a record number of Americans are raiding their 401(k) savings to cover their living expenses.

This Committee is uniquely positioned to address the cost of living because of the breadth of our jurisdiction. However, I am frustrated that this is the fourth markup this year, and yet the majority of the bills we have considered are partisan messaging bills that will do little to alleviate the anxieties of our fellow Americans.

For example, the *Truman Scholarship Clean House Act*, which I believe will be one of the first we will consider — my order may be different than yours. One of the first bills we will consider is, the *Truman Scholarship Clean House Act*, which would dismiss the current members of the Truman Foundation's Board and make questionable changes to the scholarship selection process. Currently, the Truman Foundation awards approximately 60 scholarships to juniors in college who are committed to working in public service. Under current law, the Board of Trustees is composed of two Members of the House and two Members of the Senate, the Secretary of Education, and several nominees of the President.

This bill would allow the President to immediately dismiss the entire Board and replace them with his own picks, ensuring his handpicked Board could remake the Scholarship and Foundation as the President sees fit. In other words, he could do to the Truman Scholarship what the President has done at the Kennedy Center. It would weaponize a historically bipartisan program that could now be used to seek retribution for perceived "anti-conservative" bias in higher education. Of course, there is a non-conservative bias in education, because conservatives don't believe in science. So, it would be absent from higher education.

So I will be voting no on that, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Another bill we will consider is the *Science of Reading Act*, a bipartisan bill focused on strengthening literacy instruction. This bill clarifies that federally supported literacy instruction should align with the science of reading, including core components such as phonics, fluency, and vocabulary.

I believe this is a reasonable, research-based approach to ensure that federal literacy funding supports practices that help students learn. I thank the gentleman from New York, Mr. Mannion, and the gentlelady from Indiana, Ms. Houchin, for their leadership on this issue.

I would point out that I have heard some concerns about the effect of this legislation on those who are English language learners and disabled [individuals]. I thank the sponsors for making sure that the bill did not adversely affect those communities.

The third bill we will consider is the *No Aid for Ghost Students Act*. The bill would require the Department of Education to use an identity fraud detection system to review each FAFSA application. Under this bill, if an applicant is found to have what the bill details as a “reasonable suspicion of identity fraud,” then they would be subject to additional identity verification. “Reasonable suspicion” is a legal term that is often called “articulable reasonable suspicion.” It’s not a hunch, it’s not bigotry – it is articulable, credible suspicion. When you have that, of course, you should have action taken.

I understand this bill would codify the Department's existing actions to combat fraud and ensure that financial aid resources go to students in need rather than perpetrators of fraud and phishing schemes. We need to reduce fraud, and we need to make sure the language really means “reasonable suspicion” in the legal sense, not someone’s hunch or racial bias. But if that’s the intent of the bill, and I am sure it is, I hope the Committee can make sure that’s agreed to and everybody can work together to root out fraud.

The other bill is the *Student Aid Fraud Oversight and Accountability Act of 2026*. This bill would reduce a school’s flexibility in disbursing aid to students. Under current law, schools are allowed to disburse financial aid if the institution has not found a credible reason to believe an applicant’s FAFSA application is inaccurate prior to complete verification. Instead of allowing schools this discretion, this bill would require the Department of Education to prioritize an institution for program review if that institution has disbursed financial aid to a single student whose application was flagged for “raising a reasonable suspicion of identity fraud.”

I understand this bill is attempting to codify the Department’s current fraud-prevention practices. However, just a single error by a college would trigger this additional review, and I’m not sure that’s appropriate. We will offer amendments to prioritize program reviews only to schools that display a pattern of disbursing aid to fraudulent applicants, rather than after just one mistake. Again, I expect the Committee to work with stakeholders to ensure that colleges are set up for success in addressing fraud.

The [next bill is the] *FAFSA Verification Efficiency Act*. Under present law, the Department of Education verifies students’ eligibility for federal aid by matching data with the IRS, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security. While the law already allows verification of student and parent information, gaps in the statute mean that some contributors, such as spouses or stepparents, must undergo slower verification processes.

This bill would require the Department of Education, working with the Social Security Administration, to verify both Social Security numbers and citizenship status for anyone whose information is provided in connection with federal student aid. While supporters argue this would speed up the FAFSA process, the bill goes much further than necessary by expanding federal collection of citizenship data to individuals who are not even applying for federal aid.

This expansion raises serious concerns about unnecessary data collection and the potential misuse of personal information for immigration enforcement. As currently drafted, the bill goes too far, and I hope that we will not pass it.

Another bill, the *Stop the Sexualization of Children Act*, prohibits the use of any funds authorized through the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to “develop, implement, facilitate, host, or promote” programs, activities, literature, or materials that include “sexually oriented material” for students under the age of 18, and specifically calls out “gender dysphoria” and so-called “transgenderism.” I’m not sure that’s a word.

Let me preface this conversation by saying that, of course, teachers should consider age-appropriateness in their lessons. No one is advocating that schools teach age-inappropriate material. That being said, this bill is drafted so poorly that it would even prohibit the teaching of the Virginia state flag, because the Virginia state flag depicts a woman whose breast is exposed. You can’t talk about the Virginia state flag or the *Obergefell* Supreme Court decision. We intend to offer a series of amendments to demonstrate how problematic the legislation is – especially for trans kids. And how this bill attempts to impose federal censorship as to what can be taught in states and classrooms across the country, and which authors and material is ok — if one author writes something, that’s ok, but another author, maybe not.

So I will be opposing that legislation.

[The last bill is] the *ERISA Litigation Reform Act*. Under the *Employee Retirement Security Act*, workers have a legal right to bring claims in federal court. Thanks to this bedrock right, workers have been able to fight back against being charged excessive fees that reduce their retirement savings. Last year, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that plan participants need to only allege that a violation of ERISA’s rules occurred to pursue their case.

This bill would overturn that unanimous Supreme Court decision and impose additional burdens on workers when seeking to enforce their rights in court. In particular, this bill unfairly delays workers’ ability to recover losses by placing a hold on discovery until motions to dismiss have been decided. Committee Republicans are advancing legislation that weakens retirement savers’ right to seek justice when harmed, while at the same time, the Trump Administration seems poised to encourage retirement plans to include risky assets, such as cryptocurrency, in 401(k) plans.

This is not in the best interest of workers, who are already facing an economy that isn’t working for them. For those reasons, I will be urging my colleagues to oppose the bill.

Mr. Chairman, as I have stated before, today is a missed opportunity to actually improve Americans’ lives and reduce the cost of living. Americans are in crisis, and counting on us to help. We could do that, but we’re not doing it today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.