

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Alma Adams (NC-12)**

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development Hearing

*"Public Funds, Private Politics: Examining Bias in the Truman Scholarship Program"*

2261 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, December 3, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Let me start with a number that says a lot about the crisis we're facing:

The cost of attending college today is 40 times higher than it was in 1963 – I think I was probably a sophomore in high school. That kind of increase doesn't just affect students during college—it follows them long after they graduate. Student debt now keeps millions of Americans from buying a home, starting a family, saving for retirement, or simply living the life they hoped for.

And we know the burden of student debt doesn't fall equally. Women and people of color take on more student debt, and they're less likely to be able to pay it off. That's not because of poor decisions—it's because of persistent wage gaps, racial wealth disparities, and systemic inequality that continue to shape who gets ahead and who doesn't.

Now, with all that in mind, you'd expect this Committee to be laser-focused on addressing that crisis, on bringing down the cost of college, and making student loans more manageable. But instead, Republicans have chosen to spend our time attacking the Truman Scholarship program, a respected, bipartisan program that has helped thousands of students pursue careers in public service.

And let's be clear about what's really happening here. This hearing is not about oversight. It's not about waste, fraud, or abuse. This is just the latest attempt by Republicans to stir up a culture war. They're once again fixated on abstract, manufactured issues and so-called "wokeness." And in doing so, they are completely out of touch with what American families actually care about.

Democrats, on the other hand, are focused on what matters. We're working to make higher education more accessible, more affordable, and fair—so that every student has the opportunity to pursue a college education if they choose, without being saddled with debt for the rest of their lives.

If we want to discuss real threats to students, let's start with this "Big Ugly Law," which Republicans and President Trump pushed through earlier this year. That law didn't just fail to solve the student debt crisis—it doubled down on it.

This law forces student loan borrowers into an unaffordable repayment plan that raises monthly payments by nearly \$200 for the average borrower and does not offer loan forgiveness after 20 or 25 years.

It also eliminates forbearance options for low-income borrowers, even if they're facing serious life challenges like medical bills, childcare costs, or job loss. That makes it harder—not easier—for struggling Americans to get back on their feet.

And by eliminating Graduate PLUS loans, capping Parent PLUS loans, and limiting access to Pell Grants, the law pushes students into predatory private loan markets, where they'll face higher interest rates and fewer protections. It even blocks students with full scholarships from receiving Pell Grants if their school believes their basic needs are already covered, regardless of the student's actual financial situation.

To make matters worse, the Trump Administration is also illegally dismantling the Department of Education, putting equal access to higher education further at risk. Specifically, by moving the Office of Postsecondary Education, which oversees the majority of programs Congress has authorized under the *Higher Education Act*, to the Department of Labor, the Administration is undermining the law and making it harder for institutions like our HBCUs and students to access the tools they need to succeed.

So, while Republicans are holding hearings to attack a scholarship program, they're also backing policies that make college more expensive, make loans harder to repay, and leave students and families with fewer options.

That's why Democrats have reintroduced the *LOAN Act—the Lowering Obstacles to Achievement Now Act*—to confront the student debt crisis head-on. This bill would double the Pell Grant, lower interest rates, streamline repayment options and lower monthly payment amounts, and make the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program more accessible to public service workers. By improving how we finance higher education, the *LOAN Act* would make loans easier to take out and easier to pay off—for students now and in the future.

Instead of staging partisan attacks on programs like the Truman Scholarship, we should be working together to pass serious reforms. The American people aren't asking us to fight over culture war buzzwords. They're asking us to make college affordable and ensure the next generation has a fair shot.

Thank you, and I yield back.