



**Opening Statement of Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC)
Chairwoman, Committee on Education and the Workforce
Markup of H.R. 4508, the *Promoting Real Opportunity, Success,
and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act***

It is my belief that lifelong learning is what enables Americans to pursue the lives they want for themselves. The desire for lifelong learning is not always developed in a semester-by-semester or a 2, 4, or 6 year degree program. It is an individual and deeply personal calling that drives people to learn more about the world around them, and in turn, learn more about themselves.

Lifelong learning is the root of all innovation, which, in this country, has always been the foundation for real prosperity.

It was the desire to be a lifelong learner that helped me persevere through the seven long years it took for me to become the first member of my family to earn a baccalaureate degree.

I saw that same desire for lifelong learning in the students I worked with for many years as a college instructor, academic advisor, and administrator.

The conversations I had with those students over the years have stayed with me as we have worked toward this markup today. Those students came from different backgrounds, different communities, all kinds of family structures, and were all ages. But they asked the same questions—the same questions I asked:

“Can I finish this program on time?”

“Can I finish this program at all?”

“How am I ever going to pay for this?”

“Will I get a job when I graduate?”

“Is all of this work even worth it?”

The times have changed, but for any student in any sector of higher education, the questions have not. That is why we’re here today.

Today, there are six million unfilled jobs in this country. Those jobs are unfilled because many employers have found that applicants lack the needed skills for those jobs.

Today, Americans carry more than a trillion dollars in student debt. Somehow, despite the six types of federal student loans, nine repayment plans, eight forgiveness programs, and 32 deferment and forbearance options out there,

college costs continue to surge, leaving millions of families paying the price for well-intentioned but poorly executed federal involvement.

That is why this bill is before us today. No Americans—no matter their walk of life—can afford for us to simply reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA). They need us to reform it.

The members of this committee have much to be proud of, not just in this bill, but over the course of this year. This spring, when we worked together to introduce, mark up, and see the House pass the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, we sent a clear message to the overwhelming majority of Americans who do not have a baccalaureate degree.

We affirmed the simple fact that all education is career education, and that their options and their choices mattered to us. We showed them that we agreed with them that there is real dignity and value in pursuing a technical skills-based education that allows them to be the best they could be in the careers they really wanted to pursue.

The PROSPER Act sends that same message to those who believe that a postsecondary education is the key to their future success. It reforms federal education policies to allow, not hinder, the pursuit of lifelong learning, wherever that may lead.

It promotes innovation, access, and completion—for students. It simplifies and improves student aid—for students. It empowers students and families to make informed decisions, and it ensures strong accountability and a limited federal role so institutions spend less time complying with outdated federal requirements and spend more time and resources on what's really important – the students.

No bill is perfect when it begins its course through the legislative process, and we can all agree that no bill is perfect when it reaches the end of the legislative process. But we are here today because we cannot allow the status quo to continue. High school students, stay-at-home moms, single parents working multiple jobs to make ends meet, older Americans who still have so much to offer—these are just a few examples of those looking to postsecondary options to help them live a successful life.

I thank the members of this committee who have worked together so diligently with these Americans, our constituents, in mind. The PROSPER Act is for them.

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