



COMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION & LABOR  
REPUBLICANS

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STATEMENT

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**Statement of Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA), Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment  
Markup of H.R. 4674, *College Affordability Act*  
October 29, 2019**

(As prepared for delivery)

“Our debate today on the reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act (HEA)* comes at a time when college costs are skyrocketing and current federal overreach is causing more harm than good. Unfortunately, the Democrats’ so-called *College Affordability Act* doubles down on failed policies that are hurting students and American taxpayers.

A recent Pew Charitable Trusts report calculated that federal spending in higher education (not including loans and tax deductions) reached over \$74 billion in 2017. What do students, taxpayers, and businesses get for this investment? The numbers do NOT tell a heartwarming story.

Fewer than 60 percent of students complete their program of study within six years. That number drops to a meager 40 percent for students attending public two-year institutions.

Four in 10 baccalaureate-degree recipients are underemployed in their first jobs after school, meaning they have jobs that don’t require the degree they’ve earned.

Without question our postsecondary education system is failing us. More than 40 million Americans are carrying over \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt. People are delaying important life decisions like buying homes, having children, and starting small businesses because of burdensome student loans.

Federal policy should provide a framework to address the underlying drivers of college cost; make the federal student aid system easy to access, understand, and complete; and spend our limited resources on those students who are truly disadvantaged. The *College Affordability Act* misses the mark on all three accounts.

The role of the federal government in higher education has traditionally been about access. The HEA is supposed to provide everyone that so wishes the opportunity to pursue a college degree or certificate. However, the Democrats are not satisfied with this important yet passive role. Instead, they want to dictate choice. The policies put forward by the bill today illustrate that Democrats believe the federal government knows what is best for you better than you do.

In fact, the *College Affordability Act* seeks to expand the federal government's role in higher education to limit academic freedom, turn state and institutional decisions over to the Secretary, and publicly shame those entities expressing constitutionally protected rights.

But its these types of burdensome federal regulations and requirements that drive up tuition costs. And these policies are hidden in the Democrats' proposal.

I'm left to ask, why would Democrats vote for a bill to make college more unattainable for the students they claim to serve?

Equally confusing is that the Democrat's proposal ignores the need for necessary reforms to help close America's skills gap. There are over seven million unfilled jobs due to a skills gap. With employers more eager than ever for qualified employees, now is the time to improve the HEA to allow for stackable credentials, earn-and-learn opportunities, and cutting-edge forms of delivering education. The *College Affordability Act* fails to connect higher education and America's workforce.

The Democrat bill also fails to deliver on promising innovations for millions of Americans by refusing to recognize competency-based education and other alternative education models that would increase completion rates, lower college costs, and better equip students to meet the needs of today's workforce.

Furthermore, the bill seeks to implement a one-size fits all education model by single-tracking students into community college rather than allowing students to choose an education to career pathway that best suits their needs. The Democrats claim they are expanding opportunities by allowing short-term programs to be eligible for Pell, but they layer on so many requirements and bureaucratic mandates that those programs will be unworkable.

Lastly, the *College Affordability Act* all but eliminates private career and technical schools that are critical to filling the needs of employers and providing veterans and low-income Americans an affordable education that prepares them for a successful career.

Rather than offering real solutions that better prepare students for work, Democrats have offered yet another partisan proposal that fails to close America's skills gap and meet the need of students and employers. I urge them to abandon this partisan bill and collaborate with Republicans on solutions that will work for students and our economy."

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