

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO: ASAHP Members**  
**FROM: Kristen Truong**  
**DATE: February 28, 2019**  
**RE: Center for American Progress: An Equity and Opportunity Agenda for Higher Education**

February 28, 2019, 2:30PM

**Summary of Remarks**

Senator Patty Murray discussed her priorities for the HEA reauthorization and how she and **Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** would like to have a comprehensive HEA reauthorization that will be able to pass the Senate and the House.

Four major points of her remarks:

1. **Make college more affordable** – increase investments in Pell grants; encourage state-federal partnerships to invest in higher education; address total cost of college – tuition, textbooks, transportation, childcare, and others; and fix loan forgiveness.
2. **Accountability** – enroll all students, regardless of their backgrounds; ensure students are getting quality degrees and certificates that is needed in today's workforce; and end predatory practices of for-profit colleges.
3. **Increase access to higher education** – expand access to historically underrepresented students – students of color, homeless students, student parents, veterans, and others. Provide additional support to colleges serving these students that often receive less support.
4. **Improve student safety on campus** – students should feel safe on campus and not have to experience harassment, bullying, sexual assault, or hazing.

**Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) Remarks on HEA Reauthorization [Video of Her Remarks]**

How we can increase equity and opportunities in higher education? To make a lasting impact, it's important that we get this right. It's been over 10 years since the last reauthorization of the HEA and today's students are coming from very different circumstances and entering a completely different economy and society.

Joshua, in Vancouver, WA, earned college credit from dual enrollment before graduating high school. He took a full year off to work and save for college. He's back working towards his bachelors but is only part time. He can't afford the high cost without working. Angela, a single mom, spent 5 years to earn her bachelor's degree in chemical engineer. She started at a community college and transferred to 4-year institution while working full time. She used a combination of grants, work study, and scholarships to pay for her degree and financed the rest with student debt. Angela is now working to earn doctorate in aerospace engineering. Her research stipend, loans, childcare subsidy, and savings aren't enough to make ends meet. She's had to work on the side. Lakota, a single mom who wants to end the cycle of poverty in her Indian reservation, picked up her 2 daughters and moved to the other side of the country. After 2 years, she realized her education was lacking her sense of family and cultural understanding. She moved again to a tribal college to pursue a degree that values her heritage and incorporates her native culture into her program of study.

I've heard from varying students on complex issues that impede students. We can't just address the simple issues. Students are working hard and holding up their end of the bargain. We need to write a law that strengthens federal investments in our students, supports and incentivizes states to reinvest in higher education, ensures students have access to an education of value, and that students graduate with high quality certificates and degrees in today's workforce and society. We cannot leave out one of the key roles the federal government should play in higher education is to help address the inequities in our societies especially based on race, ethnicity, and income. And provide opportunities so every student who works hard no matter where they come from is able to succeed in this country. That was the original intent of the HEA Act when signed 50 years ago.

As **Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** and I work on the reauthorization of this law, we have to address the widening opportunity and equity gaps in higher education. There are 4 key priorities that the HEA reauthorization must address to ensure equity and give students the opportunity to succeed.

1. **Making college more affordable.** It is important to note that when talking about college affordability – make college more affordable for current and future students and also for the 44 million student loan borrowers manage that \$1.5 trillion debt. Today’s students are being asked to pay more for college than previous generations with less financial support. This is something near and dear to my heart as someone able to go to college thanks to federal support, including the predecessor of Pell grants. The maximum Pell grant today covers  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the cost of attending public 4-year colleges, down from half the cost in the 1980s.

Many low-income students are forced to heavily rely on loans. Nearly 60% of Pell grant recipients take out loans. Only a quarter of those students, who do not need Pell, borrow loans. Students of color are more likely to borrow, borrow in greater amounts, and less likely to pay down their debt compared to their white peers. Black students, nearly 80% borrow and end up having a 50/50 chance of defaulting of their loan within the 12 years of entering college. We can’t turn into a society where the rich go to college and working families are funneled into low quality programs or shut out of college. Everyone who wants to go to college – 2- or 4-year degree – should have the choice to do so and not be saddled with debt.

Our HEA reauthorization must include a state-federal partnership to promote new investments in our students and families and pave affordable pathways to higher education. We need to increase investments in need-based aid, like Pell or Federal Supplementary Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and work study. We need to address total cost of college – tuition, food, textbooks, housing, childcare, and more. Cost of living is the cost of college. Many students are struggling to meet their basic needs. We can and should simplify the FAFSA.

Student debt crisis exploded to \$1.5 trillion, more than credit card debt and automobiles. Nearly \$170 billion is in serious delinquency. More than 1 million borrowers a year are defaulting. A student, who graduated from college, makes more than most of her age feels she’s getting nowhere on her student debt because of high interest rates. Simplify the student loan repayment option but for millions of borrowers, we need to provide them with real relief. We need to fix the path to loan forgiveness, which is already laid out in federal law for students cheated by their schools, public servants, and those who can no longer work because of disability. Our system of federal student loan servicing has to work for borrowers, not against them. We see servicing breakdowns at every servicer for all types of borrowers at every stage of repayment. College affordability is an issue that gets a lot of attention. Providing students the ability to graduate without debt and covering tuition and fees at public colleges and these proposals are worthy of consideration. We may not be able to achieve them in a bipartisan reauthorization because Republicans need to come to the table for us to do that. We can make a step in the right direction and make a significant down payment to provide real opportunities for future students.

We have to evaluate these proposals with equity lenses and an eye to closing our growing racial wealth gaps. I’m confident with rigorous debate and diverse voices we can find solutions that truly help students who need it the most.

2. **Accountability** – we have made clear that higher education is an investment we can and should make. Taxpayers make a sustainable investment in our country, students, and colleges. A question is what do we get for it? We spend \$130 billion of taxpayer dollars in loans and grants, not to mention the money students pay. It’s an investment in students and the economy. We are educating today and tomorrow’s workers and leaders. It’s critical that schools hold up their end of the bargain. Schools must be enrolling all types of students even from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Schools must ensure students can get a job with their degree/certificate where they can make enough money for their student debt and thrive in our economy.

We can create a system that lifts up expectations and supports less resource schools while putting end to predatory practices that leave students worse off and in financial ruin. One root cause is low quality programs/colleges that require students to take out too much debt without providing them with the support and credentials of value to get a good paying job. We only look at Corinthian or ITT Tech or Education Corporation of America and other large predatory for-profit colleges to know that the HEA needs to

respond. These colleges often target students of color, low-income students, vets, and servicemembers. They put profit before students. Even though they have ample resources, they are willing to spend little of it on educating students or ensuring the value of certificate/degree. We must reject the path Secretary DeVos has taken to allow predatory actors to run rampant and put their supporters and former execs in charge of overseeing this industry.

3. **Increasing access to higher education** – higher education can change someone’s life. We have to expand access to students who have been traditionally left out of higher education by enhancing federal investments in support systems that help those historically underrepresented students – students of color, first generation college students, student parents, homeless and foster youth, women, students with dualities, LGBTQ, working students, vets, servicemembers, and their families. Colleges need to help students in school with peer mentoring/counseling to navigate financial aid, academic support, and career counseling and connecting students with housing and food benefits. Reduce the cost of textbooks and supplies. Colleges need to invest in additional support for disabled students. Lot of schools focusing on serving historically underrepresented students, like community colleges, HBCUs, tribal colleges, Hispanic serving colleges, and other minority serving institutions too often are asked to do more with less. They have not received equal resources in the past due to a legacy of discrimination or a lack of prioritization by states or the federal government. Our HEA authorization has to do more to support those schools with the resources they need.
4. **Improving campus safety and protecting students’ civil rights** – schools are responsible that all students are safe. Exchange of ideas is a critical part of higher education, but no student should have to face harassment, assault, or discrimination. I want to address the epidemic of sex assault on college campuses across the country. 1/5 women and 1/18 men experience sexual violence in college. Survivors felt their schools did not do enough or respond quickly enough and feel retraumatized when seeing their attacker. Some were forced to go to class with their attacker. There are those who dropped out as a result. Secretary DeVos has taken steps to sweep campus sexual assault under the rug. Her proposed rule would weaken protections to students and allow schools to shirk their responsibility to protect students. I’ve voiced my opposition, and notably over 100,000 students submitted comments to Secretary DeVos. She should scrap this proposal. We need to address discrimination on campuses. We need to take a look at bullying, harassment, and hazing. Over the last few years, we’ve heard stories of students taking drastic measures because of being bullied, including suicide, and stories of tragic deaths as a result of hazing. Colleges and universities must take their responsibilities to keep students safe.

I’m pleased **Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** and I have begun working on good faith negotiations to tackle these issues. **Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** and I have a long history of working on tough issues together. We need to bring in the voices of students and tackle the big complex issues and listen to each other even when we don’t see eye to eye. We have to negotiate a comprehensive reauthorization that addresses a full spectrum of issues. The House is working as well under **Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA)** and **Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (R-NC)** and we’ll work closely with them. If we want a result, we need to work in the Senate that allows for ultimate passage in the House.

I want to share my family’s higher education story with you. My dad was diagnosed with MS while I was in high school. My family had to go on food stamps. My mom enrolled to get her accounting degree and got it done in 2 years even with 7 kids. After my mom got her degree, she could help all 7 of us get college degrees. We got help from federal programs, like Pell, student loans, and work study. Our country was there for us. We went on to become an attorney, fire fighter, Microsoft innovator, teacher, stay at home mom, a sports writer, and Senator. Today’s higher education often reinforces the inequities in society.