

□ 1716

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. RIGELL) at 5 o'clock and 16 minutes p.m.

SIMPLIFYING THE APPLICATION FOR STUDENT AID ACT

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5528) to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to simplify the FAFSA, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5528

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act".

SEC. 2. USING DATA FROM SECOND PRECEDING YEAR.

Section 480(a)(1)(B) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087vv(a)(1)(B)) is amended by striking "may" in both places it appears and inserting "shall".

SEC. 3. CALCULATION OF ANNUAL ADJUSTMENT PERCENTAGE FOR FEDERAL PELL GRANTS.

Section 401(b)(7)(C)(iv)(I) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070a(b)(7)(C)(iv)(I)) is amended by striking "calendar year" and inserting "fiscal year".

SEC. 4. FAFSA SIMPLIFICATION.

(a) FAFSA SIMPLIFICATION.—Section 483 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1090) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(3), by adding at the end the following:

"(I) FORMAT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of the Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act, the Secretary shall make the electronic version of the forms under this paragraph available through a technology tool that can be used on mobile devices. Such technology tool shall, at minimum, enable applicants to—

"(i) save data; and

"(ii) submit their FAFSA to the Secretary through such tool.

"(J) CONSUMER TESTING.—In developing and maintaining the electronic version of the forms under this paragraph and the technology tool for mobile devices under subsection (I), the Secretary shall conduct consumer testing with appropriate persons to ensure the forms and technology tool are designed to be easily usable and understandable by students and families. Such consumer testing shall include—

"(i) current and prospective college students, family members of such students, and other individuals with expertise in student financial assistance application processes;

"(ii) dependent students and independent students meeting the requirements under subsection (b) or (c) of section 479; and

"(iii) dependent students and independent students who do not meet the requirements under subsection (b) or (c) of section 479.";

(2) by amending subsection (f) to read as follows:

"(f) USE OF INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE DATA RETRIEVAL TOOL TO POPULATE FAFSA.—

"(1) SIMPLIFICATION EFFORTS.—The Secretary shall—

"(A) make every effort to allow applicants to utilize the current data retrieval tool to transfer data available from the Internal Revenue Service to reduce the amount of original data entry by applicants and strengthen the reliability of data used to calculate expected family contributions, including through the use of technology to—

"(i) allow an applicant to automatically populate the electronic version of the forms under this paragraph with data available from the Internal Revenue Service; and

"(ii) direct an applicant to appropriate questions on such forms based on the applicant's answers to previous questions; and

"(B) allow single taxpayers, married taxpayers filing jointly, and married taxpayers filing separately to utilize the current data retrieval tool to its full capacity.

"(2) USE OF TAX RETURN IN APPLICATION PROCESS.—The Secretary shall continue to examine whether data provided by the Internal Revenue Service can be used to generate an expected family contribution without additional action on the part of the student and taxpayer.

"(3) REPORTS ON FAFSA SIMPLIFICATION EFFORTS.—Not less than once every other year, the Secretary shall report to the authorizing committees on the progress of the simplification efforts under this subsection.

"(4) REPORTS ON FAFSA ACCESS.—Not less than once every 10 years, the Secretary shall report to the authorizing committees on the needs of limited English proficient students using the FAFSA."

(b) FUNDING.—

(1) USE OF EXISTING FUNDS.—Of the amount authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Education to maintain the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, \$3,000,000 shall be available to carry out this Act and the amendments made by this Act.

(2) NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.—No funds are authorized by this Act to be appropriated to carry out this Act or the amendments made by this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. HECK) and the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. POCAN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nevada.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material on H.R. 5528.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Nevada?

There was no objection.

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5528, the Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act.

Early last year, I held a roundtable on higher education in my district to help better understand the issues facing students, teachers, and higher ed administrators in Nevada. Nearly everyone in attendance raised the issue of the overly complicated student aid process and, specifically, problems with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, better known as the FAFSA.

Like many aspects of the student aid system, the application for aid can be

This is a bipartisan piece of legislation with my good friends, Mr. ALLEN and Ms. BONAMICI. I am glad to be on the floor with my friend, Mr. POCAN, who I believe has a very big university in his district. He is from Madison. I thank him for doing that.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3179, "Empowering Students through Enhanced Financial Counseling Act," which amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 to authorize \$2 million allocated for activities related to student loan counseling.

Financial literacy and consumer awareness is very crucial for all loan borrowers, especially for our youth.

The loan will provide counseling of federal Pell Grant recipients with comprehensive information on the loan terms and conditions, as well as testing these students on their knowledge of this information before accepting the grant.

Students receiving any Federal Loans would be notified of the loan conditions, informing them on the amount, eligibility, exhaustion, and consequences of borrowing the loan.

An important aspect of this procedure includes a requirement for the borrowers to receive the contact information for the institution's financial aid office.

I have college students interning in my office, who have taken out loans for their education and these are the largest sums they have borrowed in their lifetime.

One student did not know that completing the FAFSA would automatically grant her a Federal Stafford Loan, and she did not find out about her loan until she received a job at her institution's financial aid office.

Mr. Speaker, taking this example into account, educated students across the nation are not as familiar with the process and terms of Financial Aid and loans as they should be or as we ought to think they are.

Through H.R. 3179, first-time borrowers will receive statements with interest rates and repayment plan options.

This legislation will educate the individuals seeking an education on how to finance their studies.

This legislation will also create jobs in underserved areas as well.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this legislation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. GUTHRIE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3179, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 45 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

confusing and too complex for many students and families to complete. The FAFSA includes 108 questions, requesting information on everything from the net worth of investments to complicated tax information. Many of these questions rely on data that students do not yet have or are so complicated they deter applicants from even completing the form.

It is critically important that students have the information they need to make timely, informed decisions about higher education; that includes information on what aid might be available to help them pursue a college degree and the responsibilities that come with accepting assistance.

If the current process deters them from even completing the application for aid, how can students possibly get the help they need? That is why, based on the recommendation of higher ed leaders in Nevada, I began working with some of my colleagues on the committee to reform the FAFSA and improve the student aid application process.

The Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act, which I am proud to sponsor with Representatives ROE of Tennessee, POLIS, and POCAN, is the fruit of that labor and does exactly what the title suggests. It will streamline and improve the application process through a number of commonsense measures, all of which will help students and parents access the financial aid information they need in a timely manner to better understand their higher education payment options.

First, it will allow students to use income tax data from 2 years prior to the date of application. Traditionally, the FAFSA has relied on income tax data from the previous year, but that data is not readily available when students should begin filling out their applications. While the Department of Education currently has the authority to allow students to use prior-prior year data, the Department only recently began taking advantage of this authority, and only after the introduction of the original legislation on this issue.

This bill will ensure students are able to use prior-prior year data in the future, allowing them to complete the FAFSA earlier and receive information about their aid options sooner. It will also provide aid administrators more time to verify the income of applicants, both strengthening the integrity of the Federal Student Aid system and enabling administrators to provide students with accurate aid information as soon as possible.

Additionally, the legislation will require the Department of Education to allow more applicants to easily import their available income data through the IRS, helping them automatically populate answers to many FAFSA questions with information from their tax returns, making it easier on students and parents to accurately complete the form. The bill will also require that FAFSA be available on a

mobile app and require the online and paper versions to be consumer tested. Both of these measures will make the application process easier and more user friendly and will work to ensure that data is protected.

By improving the application for student aid, we can help more students make smart decisions about college and realize that a college degree is within reach.

I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of H.R. 5528, the Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act.

Last year, Representative DOGGETT of Texas and I led a letter to then-Secretary Duncan regarding the importance of prior-prior year FAFSA.

Allowing students to use prior years' tax data means a student can apply for financial aid at the same time they apply for college. This means that students will get information about financial aid, which will help them make their college choice much earlier. This is especially helpful for first-generation and at-risk college students who need an accurate picture of a college's price tag well in advance in order to make their decision.

In September, I was happy to see President Obama take executive action to allow for the use of prior-prior year tax data for students. The bipartisan bill before us would make this executive action permanent and is an important step toward making college more affordable, ensuring future students are afforded the opportunity to use prior year tax data when filling out the FAFSA form.

Additionally, the Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act will also direct the Department of Education to develop a mobile app for using FAFSA. This will allow millions of Americans who do not have broadband access but do have Internet connectivity on their phones to have access to an electronic version of FAFSA.

Finally, this bill will also encourage the Department of Education to study how the Department of Education can better reach out to students with limited English language proficiency when filling out the FAFSA. These are commonsense reforms which need to be made in order to streamline the process for students applying to college.

While there is a lot more we can do to tackle college affordability, I am pleased we are moving forward with this important, bipartisan legislation today.

I thank the financial aid office at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for first raising this issue to us, and I also thank the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. HECK) for his leadership on this issue.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT).

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5528, the Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act, and I encourage my fellow Members to support it as well.

Under this bill, students and parents will be able to apply for financial aid when filling out college applications and will no longer have to wait until they have filed the current year's tax returns in order to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, form. Prior to this change, some families could not fill out the FAFSA form until they had filled out their taxes in April—or even later, with an extension—and, therefore, many students could not receive financial aid in a timely manner.

In a 2013 report from the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators report on using what is called using prior-prior year FAFSA data, they found that the expected family contribution of low-income students does not change much over time and concluded that the potential benefits of using prior-prior year data outweighed the potential cost. So last year, President Obama directed the Department of Education to switch to prior-prior year on the FAFSA form through executive action. Now, this bill will make that change permanent.

Another important provision of the bill will require the Secretary to periodically report to Congress on the needs of limited English-proficient students. To make sure that a college education is within reach for all students, the Department should make the FAFSA form more accessible to students and families with limited English proficiency.

Mr. Speaker, research has unfortunately shown us that too many students fail to attend college simply because of the complexity of the FAFSA form. This simplification will make it possible for them to fill out the form and to achieve their dream of achieving higher education.

We know how important higher education is, and I am pleased that we could come together in a bipartisan fashion to make these important changes.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. POLIS).

Mr. POLIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 5528, the Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act.

I have the great privilege of representing Colorado's major research universities: Colorado State University in Fort Collins, and the University of Colorado flagship campus in Boulder, Colorado. When I speak with financial aid offices and students who receive financial aid at both institutions, one of the first priorities and issues I hear about is how we can allow students to

complete the FAFSA and hear back earlier.

The FAFSA was initially created to help open the doors and make college within reach for more students; but unfortunately, too often, it has grown unwieldy, and students are forced to make decisions about where they go and whether they go to college before even knowing how much aid they are scheduled to receive.

Under this legislation, students will be able to complete the FAFSA several months earlier than they do now—very important. And the bill also links data with the IRS data retrieval tool, so information can populate automatically in the FAFSA form. These changes alone will go a long way toward making the process for completing the FAFSA simpler and easier.

I am proud to have worked with Representatives POCAN, ROE of Tennessee, and HECK of Nevada to have introduced this bill, and I am very excited it is coming before the floor for a vote.

Now, this bill is important. It is a good, bipartisan first step, but it is one of many things that Congress needs to do to improve college access and the completion rate for students.

For example, allowing students to take college courses in high school could significantly reduce the overall price they pay for college. When a student takes dual enrollment courses, they are more likely to attend college and less likely to need remedial courses. We have high schools in my home State and in my district where students graduate high school with an associate's degree at essentially no cost to them, thanks to dual enrollment.

We also need to look at innovative learning models, like competency-based education, which allows students to progress through their degree based on what they know instead of seat time. This model provides a more flexible path to a degree. It could be higher quality, less expensive, and more challenging than a traditional program.

Another key part of reducing the cost of college is confronting the cost of materials. A student in Colorado spends an average of \$1,200 a year on textbooks alone. Open source textbooks, which are openly licensed and free to use, can eliminate that cost.

In order to address these ideas, reforms, and more, we need a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. A reauthorization will take Democrats and Republicans working together, just like we did on this bill, which is an important first step.

I am hopeful that, in the coming months, members of the Education and the Workforce Committee can begin to lay the groundwork for a reauthorization of the HEA that truly helps make college more affordable and meets the changing needs of a global economy.

Mr. POCAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

In closing, I thank, again, Representatives ROE of Tennessee, POLIS, and POCAN for their leadership in bringing this commonsense bill to the floor today. I thank all of our colleagues on the Education and the Workforce Committee for their work to strengthen the country's higher education system.

Too many individuals already think the dream of a higher education could never become a reality for them. Too many others are discouraged by a system that is too confusing, too bureaucratic, and too outdated. The Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act and the other higher education bills on the floor today will deliver important reforms that Americans need. This bill will help students and parents better understand their postsecondary options and empower them to make timely financial decisions about their education.

I urge my colleagues to support this education.

I yield back the balance of my time. Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 5528 the "Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act" which aims to strengthen, improve, and streamline student aid process.

Access to quality education is a key factor in securing a successful and bright future.

For many students and families, federal financial aid is the only means of making postsecondary education possible.

In times of economic adversity and uncertainty across the United States, the Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act ensures that students and families are supported in realizing their education goals.

A student's application process starts when he or she submits the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Students who wish to enroll in fall classes are encouraged to begin applying for aid in January.

However, the FAFSA relies on income tax data from the previous year that is not readily available at the time students should start filling out their applications.

This flawed process results in significant delays in the submission of FAFSA forms, which leaves financial aid administrators little time to put together aid packages for incoming students.

More importantly, students do not learn in a timely manner what their financial aid packages will ultimately be, which makes it more difficult to plan for the cost of their education.

The current application runs 10 pages long and includes 108 questions on topics such as income, expenses, family size, and assets.

As part of an effort to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, the bipartisan legislation will help students make timely financial decisions about their education.

In addition this bill will allow students to use family income data from two years prior to the date of the FAFSA application.

Establishes a link between the online FAFSA form and income tax data stored by the Internal Revenue Service to automatically input income data into the FAFSA form, reducing the need to manually input information that often prevents low-income students from applying for aid.

And most importantly, strengthens the integrity of federal financial aid by providing institu-

tions more time to verify the income of their students.

As the country continues to work through some of the most difficult economic conditions in a generation, it is imperative that we increase our investment in education.

If we are truly going to compete against emerging nations like China and India, we must continue to invest in our education system.

I am proud to represent Houston, Texas which is home to several prestigious universities and dozens of community and technical colleges.

With such an emphasis on higher education, we have long been working to become a leader in producing workers for the 21st century economy.

This crucial legislation will build on the infrastructure already available in Houston and make higher education more affordable and accessible for everyone.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Nevada (Mr. HECK) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5528, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1730

ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES ACT

Mr. HECK of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5529) to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to authorize additional grant activities for Hispanic-serving institutions, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5529

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Accessing Higher Education Opportunities Act".

SEC. 2. AUTHORIZED GRANT ACTIVITIES.

Subsection (b) of section 503 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1101b(b)) is amended—

(1) by redesignating paragraphs (7) through (16) as paragraphs (9) through (18), respectively; and

(2) by inserting after paragraph (6) the following:

"(7) Student support programs, which may include counseling, mentoring, and other support services, designed to facilitate the successful advancement of students from four-year institutions to postbaccalaureate doctoral degree granting programs that prepare students for health care occupations as such occupations are described in the most recent edition of the Occupational Outlook Handbook published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"(8) Developing or expanding access to dual or concurrent enrollment programs and early college high school programs."

SEC. 3. FUNDING.

(a) AUTHORIZATIONS OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out part A of title V of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.), as amended by this Act, \$107,795,000 for fiscal year 2016.