

Financial Burden: House Chairwoman Can Relate to Students

With the rise of community colleges and a new emphasis on vocational skills, the nature of secondary education is changing. CBN News recently interviewed a lawmaker who's offering an education reform bill to meet the needs of prospective students.

U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., is no stranger to how student loans can burden college graduates. As a young student with no money, she didn't think she'd make it past high school. But now as a house chairwoman, she's fighting to make things easier for generations to come.

In high school, Foxx worked as a janitor to make money. Ranked No. 3 in her class but without financial means, she had no plans to further her education until a teacher recommended junior college.

She decided to attend the junior college and against all odds, Foxx went on to earn both a master's degree and a doctorate, eventually becoming the president of a local community college.

"I tell young people. if some people like me can do what I've done, then they have no limits," she tells CBN News.

Foxx wanted to pursue education, but God had other plans. Her personal hardships prepared her to lead efforts in education reform in Washington. She currently serves as chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

She is sponsoring a new education reform bill. The bill, known as the Prosper Act, focuses on helping people obtain any post-

secondary education from trade certificate to bachelor's degree and getting them into the workforce.

"Post-secondary education should be focused on students and what are the needs of the students. We believe that's what the Prosper Act does," Foxx said.

In a break with the past, this bill would make financial aid available for programs as short as 10 weeks and push schools to be more upfront about costs and benefits.

"We want program level information," Foxx explained. "What it's going to cost; what are their chances of getting a job; [and] what are they likely to make."

She said the proposed measure will not just benefit the young.

"Seventy-five percent of the people are what have been called 'non-traditional students.' We're calling them contemporary students," the congresswoman said.

Another goal is to make it much easier to get financial aid.

"The federal government is the largest source of financial aid for students, and what we're doing is making it much simpler for students to qualify for financial aid and to apply for financial aid," she said.

And Foxx also feels it's important to protect freedom of speech and religious liberty on all campuses.

While both parties agree reform is needed, Democrats are unlikely to support the bill as it stands. Some are unhappy with the grants and loans it eliminates, plus the boost, they say, it provides career colleges.

"Unfortunately, the bill cannot be considered bipartisan because it chooses clear winners and losers. Under this bill, corporate interests are put first and students are put last," said U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va.

Reforming higher education is clearly a challenge. Congress hasn't passed anything regarding higher education since 1965. Chairwoman Foxx says with millions of unfilled jobs and a trillion dollars in student debt, we can no longer afford to just kick the can down the road.

Reprinted with permission from . Copyright The Christian Broadcasting Network, all rights reserved. {eoa}