

Mr. Chairman, at a time when the global economy demands a highly trained, educated workforce, Congress is making it more difficult for our students to succeed. The Higher Education Reauthorization Act represents a missed opportunity at a critical time for improving education.

All across America, communities are struggling to deal with education funding for preschools through high schools. Many of these communities are recovering from difficult economic times and have financially stressed the local education systems. Many states have responded to budget crunches by reducing their support for postsecondary education at a time when we need to be desperately training students for their own as well as the country's future. It is expected by 2020, the U.S. will experience a shortage of up to 12 million college-educated workers. We are providing less support as a percentage of overall educational costs than ever before.

In part, it is because of a tragic decision of the Republican majority to sacrifice education for \$70 billion in tax benefits for America's wealthiest individuals. This has made the funding problem even worse than it needs to be. There are opportunities to simplify financial aid forms, to increase access to higher education and to improve higher education, but instead that focus is lost. Had a truly bipartisan approach been taken by Congress a much better bill would have been possible.

Tuition and fees have already climbed by 46 percent at four-year public colleges since 2001, nearly six times faster than Pell Grant Scholarships. Students are taking on record high loan debt and working longer hours in order to attend college. There are over 90,000 Oregonians borrowing money to attend college. While costs are going up and burdens on families are greater, there is less federal support.

Many of the higher education professionals that I have worked with suggests they would rather have another extension of the current law than this reauthorization, quite an indictment and a signal of what we should be doing. I am hopeful that as this bill works its way through the legislative process that logic and the needs of students, families and our society for a well educated citizenry will prevail. Although, I am pleased the bill includes the bipartisan Blumenauer-Ehlers-Wu amendment to convene a summit of higher education experts working in the area of sustainable operations and programs, we can make this bill better and until that happens I cannot support it.

