

stating: “If you can somehow procure a brain or a heart you’re going to get more money than just [an . . .] umbilical cord.” As a father of four, and a strong advocate for the sanctity of life, I am deeply disturbed by reports of these gruesome and inhumane actions.

However, Planned Parenthood currently continues to receive funding from hard-working taxpayers, many of whom also find their practices deplorable. Between fiscal year 2010 and fiscal year 2012, Planned Parenthood received an average of \$500 million per year, totaling \$1.5 billion. On top of these high levels of federal funding, Planned Parenthood has made a profit every year since 1987.

Given our current fiscal climate and all our talk of the need to cut excessive and wasteful spending, there is no justification for continuing to subsidize their profitable venture with taxpayer dollars. It is time for big abortion businesses like Planned Parenthood to be investigated and defunded, and I have taken several actions to do just that.

For the last three congresses, I have been the Senate sponsor of the title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act. Title X is a grant program that has unfortunately become a large subsidy for abortion providers that claim to provide family planning and women’s health care services. My bill, S. 51, would prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from providing this Federal funding to an entity or their affiliate that performs an abortion.

I have also signed on to two letters regarding needed investigations into this matter. In one letter, I joined 49 fellow senators to request that Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell immediately begin a “thorough review of the compliance of the Department and Planned Parenthood—one of the Department’s grantees—with all relevant and applicable Federal statutes, regulations, and other requirements.” In a second letter, I joined 10 Senators in asking both Secretary Burwell and Attorney General Loretta Lynch to conduct a full investigation into Planned Parenthood to determine if the organization violated Federal law.

Lastly, I am supporting a bill introduced by Senator JONI ERNST that would prohibit Planned Parenthood, or any of its affiliates, subsidiaries, successors, or clinics, from receiving any Federal funds. Instead, funds that are currently offered to Planned Parenthood would be available to other eligible entities to provide women’s health care services, including diagnostic laboratory and radiology services, well-child care, prenatal and postnatal care, immunizations, and cervical and breast cancer screenings.

The sanctity of human life is a principle that Congress should proclaim at every opportunity. The time has come to respect the wishes of the majority of Americans who adamantly oppose using taxpayer dollars for abortions by

denying Federal funds to these abortion providers. I strongly encourage the support of my fellow Senators on efforts to defund Planned Parenthood and protect unborn babies from being the target of these gruesome practices.

INNOVATION

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a copy of my remarks at the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions hearing on Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act: Exploring Barriers and Opportunities within Innovation be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

INNOVATION

This is our sixth hearing during this Congress on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. This morning we are talking about innovation in higher education.

Ranking Member Murray and I will each have an opening statement, then we will introduce our panel of witnesses. After our witness testimony, senators will each have 5 minutes of questions.

Clark Kerr, the former president of the University of California, wrote in his 2001 book, “The Uses of the University” that of 85 human institutions founded before 1520 and largely unchanged today—about 70 are universities.

As for the other 15 institutions—well, among them are the Catholic Church, and the Isle of Man.

Kerr wrote: “Universities are among the most conservative of all institutions in their methods of governance and conduct and are likely to remain so.”

If that’s true, maybe we ought to pack up this hearing on innovation in higher education and head home?

Let’s keep our seats for a minute.

The world around the universities is changing—especially the students who attend them.

First, there are more people attending.

Right around the end of World War II, only about 5% of the population 25 years old and up had earned a college degree.

When the first Higher Education Act was signed in 1965, only about 10% of this population had a college degree.

Now, about 32% of Americans 25 and up have a college degree.

Second, American colleges and universities are now serving the most diverse group of students ever—

40% are 25 years or older and come to college with experiences in the workforce.

Of the 21 million students in higher education, only one-third are full-time undergraduates under 22 years old.

Only 18.9 percent of first-time, full-time students live on a campus and students are increasingly coming from a wide array of backgrounds and are the first in their family to attend college.

Third, employers need workers with postsecondary degrees.

Labor economist Dr. Anthony Carnevale of Georgetown University tells us, if we don’t change the trend, we’ll be about 5 million short in 2020 of people who have the proper post-secondary skills.

Congress needs to help colleges and universities meet the needs of a growing population of today’s students—one that has less time to earn their degree, wants flexibility in scheduling their classes, and needs to start

earning an income sooner. And Congress may also need to consider new providers of education that don’t fit the traditional mold.

I have two questions for today’s hearing:

First, how can Congress help colleges find new ways to meet students’ changing needs, and how can we end practices by the federal government that discourage colleges and universities from innovating?

And second, should the federal government be considering a new definition for the college or university? There are many new learning models that are entering the landscape, thanks to the internet. We need to consider what role they play in our higher education system, and whether federal financial aid ought to be available to students who are learning outside our traditional institutions.

On the first question, how we can stop discouraging innovation, I want to focus one example of innovation—competency-based learning:

One of the most promising innovations that traditional colleges and universities are making is through something called competency-based learning.

These competency-based models allow students to progress through their studies as they demonstrate competency, enabling skilled and dedicated students to finish degrees more quickly and often at significantly less cost.

For example, a working mom studying at the University of Wisconsin has an associate’s degree in nursing and wants to get her Bachelor’s in Nursing to increase her earning potential. Through the university’s new Flexible Option, she’s able to earn credits and finish tests and assignments on her own time, including between her shift and her son’s baseball game. Because the degree program is based on her ability to demonstrate knowledge of the subjects—rather than her ability to sit through courses twice a week—she might finish a Biology course in 8 weeks, but take only 3 weeks to finish a Mathematics course.

But it’s possible that government regulations may be stifling this new model of learning.

The report by the Task Force on Government Regulation, which was commissioned by a bipartisan group of four Senators on this Committee to examine higher education regulations, told us that “government regulation is a barrier to innovation.”

And in one example, they cited a 2010 Department of Education regulation that established a federal definition of a credit hour as a minimum of 1 hour of classroom instruction and 2 hours of outside work.

The government relies upon this definition of “credit hour” in determining how to award grants and loans to students.

Concerning the credit hour definition, the Task Force wrote “by relying on the concept of ‘seat time,’ the Department’s definition has discouraged institutions from developing new and innovative methods for delivering and measuring education, such as competency-based models which don’t rely on credit hours.”

When Kentucky Community and Technical College System began a competency-based program in 2009, federal time requirements related to the credit hour, which are building blocks of semesters and academic years, got in the way. Now when students finish within the last 5 weeks of the semester they have to wait till the following semester to continue their studies.

In 2005, Congress established a provision in the higher education law for competency-based education known as “direct assessment.” This provision permitted programs at colleges and universities to use “direct assessment of student learning, in lieu of

measuring student learning in credit hours" as a way to distribute federal aid. The law said that each program had to be approved by the institution's accreditor and the Secretary of Education.

Despite this flexibility granted in the law, accreditors and the Education Department have given approval for receiving financial aid to just 6 institutions to offer one or more of these programs.

Shifting gears, a second barrier to innovation may be accreditation.

In this committee we have begun looking at the accreditation system, recognizing that it must improve, but that it also may be a barrier to innovation.

Accreditation is very old-fashioned in many ways—it is still regional, despite the fact that institutions compare themselves to peers across the country and may have little in common with those in closest proximity.

It also hasn't kept up with new ways students are learning and the new ways teachers are teaching. Today, some institutions are modifying a professor's traditional role in teaching and evaluating learning.

I'm sure there are many other examples of government discouraging institutions from innovating and I hope our witnesses can speak to some of these and ways to make policy more flexible for innovations to come.

On the second point—whether we should consider the role of new providers of higher education:

I have said that the American higher education system of today is like the American automobile industry of the 1970s.

First, it offers a remarkable number of choices of the best products in the world at a reasonable cost.

Second, it is not doing enough about challenges that will require major adjustments if, 20 years from now, it wants to be able to make that same claim of superior choices at a reasonable cost.

Like the Japanese auto manufacturers that ultimately brought the American auto industry to its knees for a time, there is an emerging market of new or upstart providers of affordable higher education.

These are organizations that aren't necessarily colleges, like we are accustomed to, but are providing higher education that may offer students a similarly high-quality education at a lower cost.

For example, students are learning technology, software-coding or product design in as little as 12 weeks at places like General Assembly, a school that hires industry experts from places like Apple and Cisco to teach adult students skills that today's employers value.

Or they're taking general education classes like college algebra from online organizations like StraighterLine under a monthly subscription fee with credentialed teachers, or attending a MOOC—a Massive Open Online Course that's free and delivered by professors at many traditional colleges.

Some organizations such as Mozilla Foundation are developing open-source "digital badges" that allow more types of organizations to identify and recognize an individual's subject matter mastery and competency.

But there's no place for any of these innovators in today's Higher Education Act or accreditation system. The definition of what is a college has largely remained consistent since 1965.

Some senators, the President and Secretary Duncan are interested in understanding how to enable an environment where these new providers of higher education can compete with traditional higher education and potentially offer students a lower cost, high quality education.

In 2013, President Obama said in documents accompanying his State of the Union

that Congress should consider "a new system . . . that would provide pathways for higher education models and colleges to receive federal student aid based on performance and results."

What he and others are proposing is that students could use federal aid at these new organizations that aren't traditional colleges.

A bill from Senator Lee would allow states to create parallel accreditation pathways to broaden the kinds of classes students could attend while also receiving federal aid. Under the bill, students could receive aid for attending specialized programs, apprenticeships, professional certifications, competency tests, even individual courses. I believe Senators Bennet and Rubio are working on legislation that has a similar goal.

RECOGNIZING THE UDALL FOUNDATION

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I wish to call attention to a remarkable foundation that has benefited thousands of young Americans. The Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation was established by Congress to honor the public service of the Udall brothers. During the past 20 years, the foundation has effectively leveraged modest Federal appropriations into unique learning experiences for over 3,000 young Americans who are committed to public service in natural resources, Native nations, and environmental areas.

The Udall Foundation has rewarded over 1,400 scholarships to college students in all 50 States, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and 44 tribal nations, for their work in public service. One of the distinguished college students receiving a scholarship from the Udall Foundation comes from my home State of Florida. Ms. Steffanie Munguia is a junior at the University of South Florida and is receiving a scholarship for her dedication to environmental conservation.

Additionally, the Udall Foundation has provided more than 200 students, from 110 tribal nations, the opportunity to gain practical experience in the Federal legislative process, through their Native American Congressional Internship Program.

The foundation strives to educate underserved middle school youth to the joys of outdoor exploration through their Parks in Focus program. Thus far, it has introduced more than 1,500 youth to 22 national parks, monuments, and other natural areas.

The Udall Foundation benefits countless groups and many areas of our environment, and I would like to congratulate them on 20 outstanding years. The foundation has delivered real results for people in every State in the Nation since its establishment and has earned our continued support now and in the years ahead.

USHER SYNDROME AWARENESS

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I wish to bring attention to a genetic condition known as Usher syndrome. Usher syn-

drome is the most common form of combined deafness and blindness in the United States, impacting as many as 50,000 Americans, not including their families, friends, and communities. It is estimated that 82 percent of those afflicted by deaf-blindness are unemployed. In the United States, the annual economic cost of blindness alone is estimated at 145 billion dollars.

Usher syndrome results when there are mutations in genes that are important for the function of both photoreceptors in the retina and hair cells in the cochlea, or inner ear. To date, 11 genes have been identified that can cause different subtypes of Usher syndrome when mutations take place. These mutations usually lead to a deficiency of a protein that is critical for the health and function of the retina and cochlea. Usher type 1 individuals are born deaf and then learn, often before adolescence, that they are also losing their vision. Usher type 2 individuals are born with moderate to severe hearing loss and then in the prime of their adolescent lives are told that they are losing their vision. Usher type 3, usually diagnosed during adolescence, leads to the slow loss of both hearing and vision.

Life with Usher syndrome requires constant adaptation to the loss of vision, caused by retinitis pigmentosa. First is the loss of peripheral vision, when the rods are impacted resulting in the loss of night vision and the onset of tunnel vision, which shrinks over time to the size of a pinhole. Once the rods are gone, the cones atrophy. Color vision and the ability to read lips are lost, further impacting the hearing impaired Usher syndrome individual's ability to communicate with others. Often, central vision fades and the person is left completely blind.

During this time—for which there is no prediction of how long the decline to total blindness will take—individuals with Usher syndrome are constantly adapting to remain aurally and visually connected. For the hearing loss, hearing aids, cochlear implants, American Sign Language, closed captioning, assistive listening devices, and tactile sign language are among the adaptive strategies used. For the vision loss, glasses, magnification, high contrast on computer screens, screen readers, audio descriptive devices, braille, canes, and guide dogs are used to compensate for the increasing blindness.

To accelerate research, the Usher Syndrome Coalition is raising public knowledge by launching "Usher Syndrome Awareness Day" on the third Saturday in September. The theme centers on the autumnal equinox, which marks the start of days that contain more darkness than light—a powerful metaphor for the threat of Usher syndrome. This will be a global event that starts on one side of the world—Australia—and runs around the globe to the farthest point before the international dateline in Alaska.

Like many, I too have a personal connection with Usher syndrome. A