

and graduations. They will miss evening dinners and holidays. They leave behind mortgages, car payments, and college-tuition payments. These 9/11 illnesses not only rob families of their loved ones, but they leave them to face expenses without, in many cases, the family's primary breadwinner.

Two weeks ago, hundreds of first responders from all over the country traveled to Washington to lobby Congress not to let their health care program expire. If Congress doesn't act now, how many more first responders and their families are going to suffer medically and financially because we didn't do our job and reauthorize this program?

Let me tell you about just one responder, Ken George from Long Island. Ken was 37 on September 11, 2001. He was working for the New York City Highway Department, and after the attacks he went to do search and rescue work. He was there for a couple of weeks. Almost right away, Ken developed a cough, then asthma, and then the asthma led to restricted airway disease. Doctors found crushed glass from Ground Zero in his lungs. He was forced to retire in 2006 because his medical ailments became too burdensome, and now, as he put it, he is "financially hurting like you wouldn't believe."

We are not talking about statistics. We are not talking about data points on a chart. We are talking about a 51-year-old man with a wife and three kids, with crushed glass in his lungs because he chose to do the right thing. He chose to answer the call of duty, and he chose to search for survivors after 9/11. On top of everything else he is dealing with, Ken now has to worry if he will get the health treatments he needs and if his family will have the basic financial support they need.

The health program officially expires tomorrow at midnight, but these illnesses—Ken's and thousands of others—never expire, and neither should their health care.

We must reauthorize and make permanent the World Trade Center Health Program and Victim Compensation Fund. The participants in the health program live in every single State. They live in 429 of the 435 congressional districts. Every Senator in this Chamber has constituents who are sick and dying and are in this program.

A majority of this body has already signed on as cosponsors of this legislation, including many after our day of action a couple weeks ago. So let's finish this job. Let's give our 9/11 heroes the care and compensation they deserve and so desperately need. Let's truly never forget. The clock is ticking. Let's do our job.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS

PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12 noon, recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

TSA OFFICE OF INSPECTION ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2015—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to say a few words about the latest developments in international trade.

As most of my colleagues know, this week officials from the Obama administration are meeting in Atlanta with representatives from our negotiating partners in the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP. Many reports indicate that our trade negotiators are hoping to conclude talks and finalize a deal over the next few days.

Now, as the Presiding Officer is aware, I was an original author of the legislation that renewed trade promotion authority, or TPA, earlier this year. I fought extremely hard to renew TPA because I believe it is an absolutely essential tool to ensure we get the very best trade agreements possible. For years I have been one of the most outspoken proponents in Congress for full engagement in the various trade agreements that have been under negotiation, including the TPP.

A strong Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement could greatly enhance our Nation's ability to compete in an increasingly global marketplace and result in a healthier economy and more high-paying jobs that come with increased U.S. trade. After all, when we are talking about the 12 countries currently taking part in these negotiations, we are talking about 40 percent of the global economy. As a group, TPP countries represent the largest market for our goods and services exports. Trade with these countries already supports an estimated 4 million U.S. jobs, and, with a good trade agreement in place, I believe it can do even better.

The Asia-Pacific region, where this agreement is focused, is one of the most economically vibrant and fastest growing areas in the world. According to the International Monetary Fund, the world economy will grow by more than \$20 trillion over the next 5 years, and nearly half of that growth will be in Asia. Unfortunately, our share of exports to the Asia-Pacific has been on the decline, as exports to the region lag behind overall U.S. export growth. One reason U.S. companies have lost so much market share in this very impor-

tant part of the world is that many countries in the region maintain steep barriers to U.S. exports while they have been negotiating to remove many of the same types of barriers for other countries, most notably for places such as China and the European Union.

On average, Southeast Asian countries impose tariffs that are five times higher than the average U.S. tariff. In addition, their duties on U.S. agricultural products often reach triple digits. There are also numerous other barriers, such as regulatory restrictions, that impede access for U.S. exporters in many of these countries. These obstacles, and increased global competition, have made it increasingly difficult for U.S. companies to remain competitive in Asia.

Put simply, a strong TPP Agreement is the best tool we could have to increase the growth of U.S. exports to the Asia-Pacific region.

There are also important strategic and security reasons to support a strong TPP Agreement. We have all seen in recent years how the economies of our Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiating partners have been shaped by China's expanding economic influence. I think we would all prefer that the United States remain the world leader in trade. If we want to maintain and expand our influence in the Asia-Pacific, it is essential that we more fully engage in that region. A strong TPP Agreement will facilitate that engagement and help ensure that trade patterns develop under a U.S. model, operating under U.S. rules and applying U.S. standards.

A strong TPP Agreement can help us create high-paying jobs through increased exports, as well as help secure our strategic and economic position in the Asia-Pacific region. But to do all of that, we need a strong agreement. That is why I have been pushing the Obama administration to negotiate wisely in order to reach a TPP Agreement that advances our Nation's interests and provides significant benefits for American workers and job creators.

Despite these obvious advantages to concluding a TPP Agreement, I think it is critically important that the administration take the time necessary to get the agreement right. A number of key issues are outstanding, and how they are resolved will go a long way to determining whether I can support the final agreement.

Our country has a long history of negotiating and reaching high-standard trade agreements. While they haven't all been perfect, our existing trade agreements have, in my view, advanced our interests in foreign markets and strengthened our own economy.

There are a number of reasons why, historically, our trade negotiators have fought long and hard to get gold-standard agreements. The most obvious reason is that anything less is unlikely to pass through Congress. If the administration is serious about not only getting an agreement but getting an

agreement passed, they need to make sure they get our country the best deal possible. If that means continuing negotiations beyond Atlanta, so be it. Getting a good agreement will be worth the wait.

Over the years, I have laid out very clearly what I think a good agreement looks like. These ideas are embodied in the recently enacted TPA law. If the administration and our negotiating partners do conclude an agreement this week, they can be sure that I will examine it very carefully to ensure it meets these standards. As I have stated many times before, if the agreement falls short, I will not support it. I don't think I will be alone on that.

I am as big a proponent of expanding U.S. trade as you will find in this Chamber, with the possible exception of the Presiding Officer, and, in concept, I very much support the idea of a Trans-Pacific Partnership. While I worked very hard for a number of years to get a TPA bill through Congress, I have made it abundantly clear that I will not support just any deal, whether it is this or any other future administration that wants to sign it. We need to get a good deal. Indeed, as I have said, we need to get the best deal possible.

No one—at least no one from our side of the negotiations—should be in a hurry to close talks if it means getting a less-than-optimal result for our country. Ultimately, I don't believe anyone in the administration wants to reach an agreement that will not pass in Congress.

I think our negotiators understand these concerns. My hope is that, as they move through the latest rounds of talks in Atlanta this week, they consider what it will take to get a deal through Congress. If we look at the bipartisan coalition that supported our TPA bill, we should get a pretty good sense of the balance it will take to get enough support here in the Senate and over in the House. Put simply, if TPP does not reflect that balance, it is hard to see how it will be successfully enacted into law.

As always, I am an optimist. I know we can get a good deal here, and, for my part, I am going to do all I can to help ensure that we do.

I don't think I am alone when I say I am going to be watching very closely to see what happens in Atlanta this week. All of us have an interest in the outcome of these negotiations. Hopefully, in the end, those of us who have supported TPA and its promise of better trade terms for U.S. workers and expanded market access for American goods and services will not be disappointed at the outcome.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN PROGRAM

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise to support reauthorizing the Perkins Loan Program, which will expire tomorrow, September 30, if the Senate does not act.

Yesterday, the House of Representatives passed legislation to extend this vital program for 1 year. I urge my Senate colleagues to support this bill and send it immediately to the President for his signature.

I want to recognize and thank my colleagues, Senator BALDWIN, Senator CASEY, and the Presiding Officer, Senator PORTMAN, for their leadership in highlighting the importance of this program. I am pleased to join with them in submitting a Senate resolution urging its extension.

Since 1958, the Perkins Loan Program has helped make college affordable for millions of students who have financial need. In the State of Maine, more than 5,000 students received a Perkins loan last year, providing \$9.2 million in aid. Last Friday, I had a conversation with the president of the University of Maine, who told me just how critical Perkins loans are to UMaine students.

Perkins loans are a critical part of a college's and a student's financial aid resources. These loans help to fill gaps beyond what is available through the Department of Education's Direct Loan Program and a family's ability to pay. A Perkins loan can meet that additional need so that students do not have to resort to borrowing through private or higher cost loans, and, most of all, so they can remain in school.

Perkins borrowers are predominantly from lower income families. For example, at the University of Maine last year, 64 percent of Perkins borrowers had a family income of \$40,000 or less.

The Perkins Loan Program is campus-based, which means that participating colleges and universities administer the loans. When students graduate, they make payments directly to their college or university, and those payments are used to make new loans to other students through a revolving fund. These revolving funds are a combination of a Federal contribution and an institutional match.

Now, I think it is important to understand that Congress has not had to appropriate funds for the Perkins Loan Program since 2004 because of this revolving fund concept, but institutions continue to be able to assist needy students through this self-sustaining program. That is why we simply cannot allow it to lapse.

As a Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, I know that our committee is committed to the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. I strongly support that effort. In the meantime, however, we must ensure that there is not a lapse in the financial assistance provided to students under the Perkins Loan Program.

As I mentioned earlier, the House-passed bill extends the authority for the Perkins Loan Program for an additional year and does not authorize any additional Federal funds. Students who receive a Perkins loan during this academic year and remain in the same

academic program would be eligible to receive future Perkins loans.

We only have 1 day before the Perkins Loan Program expires. Students at our colleges and universities are looking at us—they are depending on us—to ensure that this vital and proven program does not expire. I urge my colleagues to pass the House-passed legislation so that the Perkins Loan Program can continue.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter from the chancellor of the University of Maine System in support of the reauthorization of the Perkins Loan Program.

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

MAINE'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES,
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM,
Bangor, ME, September 23, 2015.

Hon. SUSAN M. COLLINS,
U.S. Senator, Bangor State Office,
Bangor, ME.

DEAR SENATOR COLLINS: I'm writing to you on behalf of the University of Maine System in support of the Federal Perkins Loan Program. Perkins loans are an invaluable component of an institution's and student's financial aid resources. The flexibility, low fixed interest rate and generous cancellation benefits are both unique and critical to our needy student population, especially many middle and low-income students. The program is administered at the school level providing a highly efficient, self-sustaining program with accountability, transparency, and risk-sharing.

The Federal Perkins Loan Program is in danger of being discontinued. Without Congressional intervention, this program will be terminated and the Perkins funds recalled beginning October 1, 2015.

Throughout the 56-year history of the Perkins Loan Program, \$7.9 billion in federal contributions have been leveraged with institutional contributions into over \$36 billion in low-cost loans to more than 30 million needy students. The fact that this program provides critical support each year to more than a half-million students across the country, operating solely right now on the existing revolving fund dollars, is quite remarkable. A key factor of the program's success is the central role of the college that originates, services, and collects the loans, while providing loan counseling for the borrower. This is one of the most effective and efficient public-private partnerships in the federal government.

Perkins loans also offer more favorable forgiveness options for borrowers than any other federal loan program. Full or partial forgiveness is available to borrowers who work in designated, high-need, public-service areas. During a time when we are trying to reduce student loan indebtedness, the loan forgiveness aspect of this unique program provides financial relief to the student, and a well-educated workforce to fortify public service in rural and inner-city communities.

Students enrolled at one of the institutions in the University of Maine System have benefited for many years because of the efficiencies of the Perkins Loan Program. In fiscal year 2013-2014 the University of Maine System awarded almost \$5.1 million in Perkins Loans to 3,386 students who, without this program, would be forced to either borrow higher-cost loans or leave school altogether.

If this program is eliminated, students at one of the institutions in the University of

Maine System will lose a vital resource in support of their higher education goals. Public universities already struggle to provide sufficient financial aid to students, especially the lower and middle class who currently benefit from this program.

Eliminating the Perkins Loan Program will either force students to borrow through less desirable loan programs, or universities to make even more difficult cuts in an attempt to fund the gap from the loss of this program.

I sincerely hope that the students enrolled at all of the institutions in the University of Maine System, and all across the state, can count on your support of this vitally important and proven program. Also, I hope you can help facilitate a budget solution that does not impact funding in other critical areas relating to higher education and other federal loan programs.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and we appreciate your hard work and support.

Sincerely,

JAMES H. PAGE,

Chancellor, University of Maine System.

Ms. COLLINS. Again, I want to commend my colleagues, including the Presiding Officer, Senator PORTMAN, and my colleague from Wisconsin who has been a leader on this issue as well.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

AIRPORT AND AIRWAY EXTENSION ACT OF 2015

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3614, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3614) to amend title 49, United States Code, to extend authorizations for the airport improvement program, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend the funding and expenditure authority of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed, that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements related to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 3614) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

TSA OFFICE OF INSPECTION ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2015—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN PROGRAM

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, much attention has appropriately been focused upon our next 36 hours in the

Congress. A lot of attention—again, appropriately—focused on whether there would be a government shutdown for failure to pass a continuing resolution. Now we believe that is, hopefully, going to be avoided.

In just under 36 hours, there are a number of other vital programs that will expire, lapse, or sunset if this Congress does not take appropriate action. I am here to join my colleagues, Senator COLLINS and, in a moment, Senator AYOTTE, to call attention to one of those critical programs, one of those vital programs, and that is the Federal Perkins Loan Program, the authorization of which will expire in less than 36 hours if we do not take collective action in this body.

I am here today to call on our colleagues across the aisle to join me in supporting the extension of the Federal Perkins Loan Program. Already we have seen encouraging bipartisan support for the program here in the Senate. The Presiding Officer, Senator COLLINS, Senator KIRK, Senator AYOTTE, and just today Senator THUNE have all joined me and more than 20 Democrats last week in submitting a resolution highlighting the importance of the Federal Perkins Loan Program and urging its extension.

Yesterday our colleagues in the House of Representatives unanimously passed a measure that would extend the program for 1 year. I am hoping this body will do exactly the same. While I look forward to a broader conversation about improving Federal support for students as we look to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, we simply cannot sit idly by and watch the Federal Perkins Loan Program expire as America's students are left with such uncertainty.

Since 1958, the Federal Perkins Loan Program has been successful in helping Americans access affordable higher education with low-interest loans for students who cannot borrow or afford more expensive private student loans. In my home State of Wisconsin, the program provides more than 20,000 low-income students with more than \$41 million in aid. The impact of this program isn't just isolated to the Badger State. In fact, the Federal Perkins Loan Program aids over one-half million students with financial need each year, across 1,500 institutions of higher education. The schools originate, service, and collect the fixed-interest-rate loans. What is more, institutions maintain loans available for future students through a revolving fund.

Since the program's creation, institutions have invested millions of dollars of their own funds into the program. In addition to making higher education accessible for low-income students, the program serves as an incentive for people who wish to go into public service as careers by offering targeted loan cancellations for specific professions in areas of high national needs, such as teaching, nursing, and law enforcement.

As a Member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and as a U.S. Senator representing a State with a rich history of investment in cherishing of higher education, it is a top priority for me to fight to ensure the Federal Perkins Loan Program continues for generations to come.

I am fighting for students like Benjamin Wooten. Benjamin is a 2004 UW-Madison graduate and a small business owner from Genoa, WI, whose family fell on hard times while he was attending school. Ben shared with me:

The fact that I did not have to pay interest while I was in school was a huge help to me. I was attending school full time, working and trying to live on a meager budget. . . . I am a grateful and successful small business owner. I paid my loan off in full about a year ago with pride and excitement. I know that when I repaid my loan it was returned to a revolving fund and will be lent back out to other students in need.

I am also fighting for students like Brittany McAdams. Brittany is a medical school student with a passion for pediatrics and helping the most vulnerable among us—something that doesn't always yield a significant paycheck, especially in comparison to some of her medical school peers. Brittany said:

I want to be able to treat patients from all socioeconomic levels, despite their ability to pay. In other words, I want to do important work for less money than most other physicians. . . . The Perkins Loan is so valuable because it does not collect interest while we are in school. To me, that says the government believes that what I am doing with my life is important. That our country needs more doctors willing to tackle primary care. That while we need to pay for our graduate degrees, that they are going to do their part to make it just a bit easier. The Perkins Loan makes me feel valued and respected and even more passionate about my work.

Finally, I am here today fighting for students like Nayeli Spahr. Nayeli was raised by a single immigrant mother who worked two full-time jobs. She attended 10 different schools in 3 different States before she finished high school. Without the Federal Perkins Loan Program, Nayeli said that her opportunity to get a college education would have been "an illusory dream."

Today, Nayeli is the first in her family to finish college and is now in her last year of medical school and is planning to work with those who are underserved in our urban communities. She finished by telling me:

The Perkins loan program helped me reach this point. And, its existence is essential to provide that opportunity for other young adults wanting to believe in themselves and to empower their communities to be better. Please save it.

You don't have to look very far to find the significant impact of the Federal Perkins Loan Program—the significant impact that it has on America's students. There are thousands of stories like the few that I just shared, representing thousands and thousands of students who are still benefiting from the opportunities provided to them by this hugely successful program. Let's show the American people