

sworn into office, less than 1 year before the next election.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Ms. ERNST. Madam President, before I begin my remarks today, I do want to thank the senior Senator from Texas for his remarks on the Violence Against Women Act and the Debbie Smith Act. I think it is vitally important that both of these acts are reauthorized this year and the sooner the better so our advocates can get their work done. Thank you very much for those remarks.

#### DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS

Madam President, last week we saw our Democratic colleagues once again playing politics ahead of the defense of our great Nation. They are putting their actions ahead of the support that we need to give to those who defend our Nation. For the second time this year, as has already been stated today, Senate Democrats have blocked funding for our servicemembers. The kicker, folks, is that the vote they blocked was one that would have simply allowed us to debate the issue. It sounds unbelievable even while saying it now, folks, but it is the sad reality of where we are today.

What message does it send to our men and women in uniform when every single Senator of the Democratic Party votes against providing the funding our troops need for training, for new defense programs critical to our national defense strategy, for the largest military pay raise in 10 years—which our troops more than deserve after nearly two decades of fighting for their country.

When I was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in the early days of the war on terror, the most important thing was not only to ensure my soldiers and I had the right training and equipment to carry out our missions but knowing, without a doubt, that the American people and the policymakers of government who sent us to war stood behind us and supported us every step of the way. It was placing faith in our country's leadership to make the sound decisions to effectively employ military force and to have the will, the resolve, and the tenacity to make tough decisions without regard to politics.

The decision of the Democrats last week to not even open debate on what our troops need to fight and win is so sorely disappointing. What will it take in order to get our servicemembers at home and abroad the resources they need? Will we really deprive our troops of critical training opportunities to hone their readiness in the most dangerous strategic environment since the end of the Cold War?

Will we actively aid our enemies by failing to fund those things which we have identified as critical to maintaining an edge against our adversaries? It is absolutely unacceptable that Democrats would even entertain these possibilities.

If they want to have a debate, then let's have a debate, but to say they support the troops and then obstruct the ability to discuss in this Chamber what our servicemembers need doesn't even add up.

That is why I am on the floor today to call upon all of my colleagues who sank the prospects of defense funding to come down and do the job that all of us were sworn to do when we took our oath of office. It is time to give our troops what they need to do their jobs, and it is time to stop running this government through wasteful continuing resolutions in an increasingly dangerous world.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2486

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, we need to pass the FUTURE Act to help students in historically Black colleges and universities, minority-serving institutions, and we need to do that now.

I am here to advocate on behalf of Maryland's four HBCUs that face a funding cliff due to congressional inaction. Without the immediate passage of the FUTURE Act, Bowie State University, Coppin State University, Morgan State University, and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore face a collective \$4.2 million funding shortfall now that the Higher Education Act's authorization for mandatory funding for these institutions lapsed October 1 of this year.

This clean, bipartisan, and paid-for 2-year authorization gives breathing room to continue to negotiate the full reauthorization of the Higher Education Act without holding these historically underfunded institutions hostage.

Our HBCUs and MSIs know they can count on this mandatory funding each year to strengthen their course offerings and in-demand STEM programs, make infrastructure improvements, and provide academic counseling and student support services to first-generation and historically underrepresented students.

Throwing the budgets of these institutions into chaos directly harms their ability to serve their students and communities. Institutions would have to make decisions about potentially reducing levels of academic services, delaying needed infrastructure investments, and make longstanding staffing decisions. These decisions are being made all across the country at schools of each of our States. Collectively, the MSIs risk losing out on \$255 million in mandatory funding. This is an unnecessary obstacle our HBCUs and MSIs do

not need to face. We have a paid-for available for us today to address this issue.

We can get this done now. The House is prepared to accept this 2-year extension, which gives us a chance to negotiate a complete reauthorization of the Higher Education Act but does not hold these institutions hostage with the mandatory funding that is provided by law.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 212, H.R. 2486; that the Murray amendment at the desk be agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

I thank the distinguished Senator from Maryland for giving me this opportunity to present the right way to help historically Black colleges and universities, and I intend to do that when he is finished speaking about this and explain what we can do together.

Unfortunately, the bill he proposes is a shortcut the House took, which has no way to pass the Senate. It is based upon a budget gimmick and uses a method of funding that many Senators object to. It creates a new funding cliff within 23 months, and it is unnecessary because the Secretary of Education has written all of the heads of historically Black colleges and universities to say that there are sufficient funds until next September so there is no funding problem.

This gives me an opportunity—which I will do in a just a moment—to suggest the right way to do it. The right way to do it is to do permanent funding of historically Black colleges and universities in a package of bills I have introduced. That package includes other legislation—which I will discuss when my time comes—which include simplifying the FAFSA.

It is a bill Senator JONES and I have introduced which will help 20 million families, including almost every student at a historically Black college or minority-serving institution. The bill package also includes grants for prisoners and short-term Pell grants, and it simplifies the student aid letters.

This package is ready. It includes short-term Pell grants, as I mentioned. This package has been put together by a number of Democratic and Republican Senators. It is ready to pass the Senate and ready for the President to sign it. It permanently funds Black colleges and universities instead of this shortcut.

In a moment, I will talk more about that, but in the meantime, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I greatly respect the chairman of the committee. I know of his sincerity in dealing with higher education and education in our country, but the issue is pretty simple. Without the continuation of mandatory funding as provided by current law, historically Black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions cannot rely upon the funding source the chairman is talking about. There are going to be tough decisions that have to be made on infrastructure improvements, tough decisions on staffing, and there is no need for it.

We all agree that mandatory funding should continue. I am all for permanent extension. This UC will give us the 2-year window to make sure we pass the Higher Education Act reauthorization to fund that.

The issues the chairman is going to talk about are all matters that are under discussion and debate that have to be worked out between the members of his committee, the floor, and reconciliation between the House and the Senate. In the meantime, historically Black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions will suffer.

I fully support what the chairman is trying to do getting matters accomplished, but if I understand the unanimous consent he will be asking for, it doesn't deal with all the issues that need to be dealt with. We have to fully address the challenges students face with college access, affordability, accountability, and campus safety. The chairman's bill does not meet that test and limits what we could do in the future to meaningfully address the cost of attending and succeeding in colleges. The bill continues to let the realities of getting a college degree—the challenges of childcare, housing, food, textbooks—go unaddressed for our country's growing diversity of students, including student veterans, students with disabilities, students of color, and students of low-income families or those who are the first in their families to attend college.

I agree with the chairman. Let's bring the Higher Education Act forward and debate it but don't hold these institutions that have historically been discriminated against hostage to a program we all agree needs to be continued.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, why would we hold hostage bipartisan legislation that would simplify the FAFSA from 108 questions to 18 to 30—the Federal aid that 20 million families fill out every year in this country—unnecessarily? Why are we holding that hostage? Why are we holding hostage the legislation introduced by Senator PORTMAN and Senator KAYNE and co-sponsored by CARDIN, GILLIBRAND, HAS-SAN, KLOBUCHAR, STABENOW, BALDWIN, BROWN—these are all Democrats—here is a Republican, CAPITO, COONS, ERNST, JONES, MORAN, SHAHEEN, SINEMA, SMITH, WICKER, and BRAUN.

This is legislation we all agree on—or at least that many agree on—on short-term Pell grants. Then we have Senators GRASSLEY, SMITH, CASSIDY, ERNST, HASSAN, JONES, KLOBUCHAR, MANCHIN, and RUBIO, who would like to simplify the Federal aid letters so you don't get a letter in the mail, if you are living in Maryland or Tennessee, and think you have a grant you don't have to pay back, when in fact it is a loan you do have to pay back.

We also agree on increasing the maximum Pell grant. We also agree on how to pay for it. We also agree on permanent funding for the historically Black colleges and institutions in a way that the Budget Committee can easily approve, and it can pass the Senate.

If we can agree on all that and it all helps students at historically Black colleges and minority-serving institutions, then why don't we pass it? Why don't we do that? Why do we come up with a short-term, gimmick-supported, House-passed bill that sets up a new cliff? Why don't we take a permanent funding, with a Budget Committee-approved way of paying for it, and do some other things that we have been working on for 5 years in a bipartisan way? This is not an Alexander proposal. This is a package of proposals by 29 Senators—17 Democrats and 12 Republicans. It is ready to pass the Senate; it is ready to be worked on with the House of Representatives; and it is ready to be signed by the President of the United States.

Let me add to this. The Secretary of Education, and people seem to ignore this, has written all the presidents of the historically Black colleges and said there is enough money in the bank to pay for all their funding until next September. So we have nearly a year to do this the right way instead of the wrong way. We are not on vacation. I know everybody is talking about impeachment, but we have lots of students around this country who would like to have a simpler way to go to college. We have lots of historically Black institutions and minority-serving institutions that would like to have a permanent method of funding. We have lots of employers and potential employees who want a short-term Pell grant.

Simplifying FAFSA would actually add, according to the Congressional Budget Office, 250,000 Pell grants, and it would increase the number of Americans who are eligible for the maximum Pell grant. All that is ready to go. All that is ready to go so why don't we do that instead?

I thank the Senator from Maryland for giving me an opportunity and a reason to bring up my package of bills with permanent funding of the historically Black colleges and universities paid for, not by a gimmick, but by a Budget Committee-approved method that President Trump and President Obama both had in their budgets.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2557

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health,

Education, Labor, and Pensions be discharged from further consideration of S. 2557—that is my bill—and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I ask unanimous consent that the bill providing permanent funding for historically Black colleges and universities and other matters be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object and for the reasons I have already stated, there will be ample time to bring up the permanent reauthorization of the funding for historically Black colleges and universities and minority institutions. That is why the unanimous consent for which I asked was for 2 years.

My party doesn't control the activities on the floor of the Senate. This reauthorization bill is going to take some time on the floor. We are going to have to deal with amendments, and we are going to have to reconcile the differences between the House and the Senate. There is no other category of expenditures that is mandatory of this nature to underserved and historically discriminated institutions that is being held hostage as we debate a broader bill. I think this is a truly unique circumstance and should not be held hostage.

We need to have a way of debating the issues to make sure that in a reauthorization that occurs only every so often within the Higher Education Act that we deal with the current gaps we have for diversity—for students with disabilities, for students of color, for students from low-income families, and for those who are the first in their families to attend college.

For those reasons, I object to the request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, we have been working for 5 years, for example, on simplifying the Federal aid form that students fill out to go to college—5 years. We have bipartisan support for it in the Senate and in the House. We have families who, in my State, will be discouraged from going to college because of this complex form.

Why don't we pass it? It is important to fund historically Black colleges; that is true. They have funding for another year. So why don't we add to that the simplifying of the FAFSA form, which, I would imagine, 95 percent of the students in historically Black colleges have to fill out every year? In addition to that, they have this verification process that they go through during which somebody catches them telling the IRS one thing and the Department of Education another so that they jerk their aid. They think that is important.