

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

SATELLITE TELEVISION EXTENSION AND LOCALISM ACT REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I rise this afternoon because there is a legislative deadline in front of this body that we dare not miss. Even as I speak, our colleagues in the House Energy and Commerce Committee are considering the Satellite Television Extension and Localism Act Reauthorization, or STELAR. For 30 years, STELAR and previous versions of the law have allowed people who live beyond the reach of a broadcast signal to receive broadcast programming nonetheless.

Some Senators believe that in 2019, STELAR has outlived its usefulness and want it to expire, but other Senators want to extend some of these provisions—at least in the short term—to prevent consumers from losing these broadcast signals; still others want to use the STELAR reauthorization legislation as a vehicle to implement other reforms.

I have introduced new legislation, the Satellite Television Access Reauthorization—or STAR—Act to move this process forward. The existing STELAR statute expires December 31. So absent congressional action before the end of the year, the provisions included in STELAR that enable nearly 870,000 Americans to access broadcasting TV signals will no longer be the law of the land. These Americans who depend on STELAR are mostly in rural parts of this country, like my home State of Mississippi. They include truckers, tailgaters, and RV drivers, and they include Americans living in very remote areas.

I say to my colleagues, now is the time for Senators to make their positions clear. Over the course of this year, I have been polling Members to ascertain what this body wants. As chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, I will act according to the majority wishes, but time is running short. Many people point to the fact that the media landscape is changing. There are more options for video content than ever before. New programming is coming out every day that is being streamed through new services. Those are all great things.

As I said at a June Commerce Committee hearing, we are living in the golden age of television. The Commerce Committee has been working to close the digital divide between rural and urban America to make sure all families can access those choices and all families can be a part of the golden age, but there are still Americans without Internet access and without broad-

cast signals. They deserve the ability to view basic television services just like everyone else.

Without the reauthorization of STELAR, many Americans will not be able to watch broadcast news or enjoy access to programming that is available for the rest of the country. They will be on the wrong side of the digital divide, and there will be a wide cultural divide, as they would be cut off from the flow of programs and information.

If Members of this body are of a mind to move forward with some extension of this statute, we will work with our colleagues in the House. That may include improvements and enhancements to STELAR that address good faith requirements, level the playing field in the marketplace, promote access to programming, and ensure robust competition, but we don't have much time.

After this week, Senators will go home for Thanksgiving. Many of those across the country who benefit from STELAR in our States will watch football games and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, thanks to the STELAR law. They will enjoy time with their families, and I look forward to doing the same, but when Congress returns, there will be just 2 weeks—10 legislative days—to finalize any legislation and send it to the President for his signature.

In this body, taking no action is easy. It comes naturally. But in this case, no action equals the repeal of the STELAR law in its entirety, and Members should know that. They have 10 days to ensure 870,000 Americans will be able to watch the same programs next year that they are seeing this year, or we can let STELAR expire and take the risk of letting the chips fall where they may.

To repeat, my colleagues should be advised they need to make a voice that is heard on whether the STELAR legislation needs to be extended or expire.

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2486

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise today to urge immediate passage of the bipartisan FUTURE Act, which is H.R. 2486, to restore critical funding for historically Black colleges and universities, known by the acronym here in Washington as HBCUs, as well as minority-serving institutions, so-called MSIs.

The \$255 million in funding that HBCUs and MSIs rely on lapsed on September 30 of this year. Both the historically Black colleges and univer-

sities and the minority-serving institutions are underresourced and don't have the flexibility to operate in the red in the hopes of potential reimbursement later on.

Campuses are already feeling this impact. Just 2 weeks after this program expired, some campuses notified employees that their positions and programs may be terminated. We are talking about real people losing their jobs and programs being cut that play a critical role in graduating and retaining students in the STEM field—science, technology, engineering, and math fields. All of this is impacting students across the country. Presidents of some of these institutions have told us that planning has “all but stopped.” This funding lapse is urgent, and it must be addressed now.

From the perspective of my home State of Pennsylvania, we have two of the oldest historically Black colleges and universities—two of the oldest in the whole country—Cheyney University, as well as Lincoln University, and, in addition to that, a growing Hispanic-serving institution, in this case, the Reading Area Community College.

We know that the investment made by the FUTURE Act will support college completion and academic opportunities at these and all historically Black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions across the country. The FUTURE Act is fully paid for. It would not add to the deficit. It has strong bipartisan support in both Chambers.

My colleagues in the majority are holding this funding hostage in an effort to pass what I would argue is a partisan bill. That is not just my argument or my opinion; some of my Republican colleagues have said this is the reason they are holding up this critical legislation.

Instead of passing a bipartisan comprehensive reauthorization of our future higher education law, which my colleague Senator MURRAY is pushing for, some Republicans want to force Democrats to support a partisan bill.

Instead of working in a bipartisan fashion to fix our current system so it works better for students, families, and teachers, they want us to support a so-called micropackage, the Student Aid Improvement Act. This act, in my judgment and the judgment of others, fails to address a number of critical areas, including improved campus safety and access to higher education affordability and accountability. Because of that, it maintains the status quo.

Make no mistake, the Student Aid Improvement Act is a partisan bill. The bill fails to address the challenges students are facing in obtaining a college degree—including childcare, housing, food and mental health, among others—nor does it address the needs of first-generation students, students of color, and students with disabilities.

Let's debate these issues. Let's come to the table to negotiate on a bipartisan overhaul, but let's not hold historically Black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions hostage in the meantime. We can get something done in the short run that would be beneficial to these institutions.

We need to ensure that colleges and universities have the resources to provide support to all students they serve, including students with disabilities. A couple of examples of some of my bills—the Higher Education Mental Health Act, which is supported by over 250 college and university presidents, including 15 of the historically Black colleges and universities—would help institutions of higher education identify the resources and services needed to support their students with mental health needs.

A second bill of mine, the RISE Act, would make it easier for colleges to provide support to students with disabilities by accepting student assessments from high school and smoothing the transition to higher education.

A third bill, my Expanding Disability Access to Higher Education Act, would increase the funding for TRIO Programs that serve first-generation students with disabilities and make higher education more accessible.

These bills would provide the resources needed for students to be successful as they pursue higher education, but without a comprehensive bill, the needs of these students will continue to go unmet. Rather than blocking vital resources from flowing to our Nation's historically Black colleges and universities, we should immediately pass the FUTURE Act. This would restore funding, while providing us time to work on a comprehensive re-authorization that addresses the needs of all students.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that as in legislative session, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 212, H.R. 2486. I ask unanimous consent 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 motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

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

I have a better idea, which I am going to offer to the Senate once again. It is permanent funding for historically Black colleges at the level of \$255 million a year. The distinguished Senator from Pennsylvania has stated he doesn't want a piecemeal bill. He wants a more comprehensive bill. I have offered such a bill and introduced it in the Senate. I will describe it in a few moments when I ask unanimous con-

sent to pass it, and it will include not a 2-year short-term fix based upon a budget gimmick, which will have difficulty passing the Senate, but permanent funding of historically Black colleges and minority-serving institutions.

It will include simplification of the FAFSA, the form that 8 million minority students fill out every year, which in our State is the biggest obstacle to minority students having an opportunity for higher education and a variety of other bipartisan proposals.

I am ready to pass a comprehensive bill. I offered one before. It was blocked by my Democratic friends. I am going to offer it again in a minute, and we will see if they agree to it, but I don't think we should pass a piecemeal bill. I agree with the Senator from Pennsylvania. I think we should be more comprehensive, and not only that, we should do permanent funding of historically Black colleges.

The last point I will make before I object is that the U.S. Department of Education has written all the presidents of the historically Black and minority-serving institutions and said there is sufficient funding in the Federal Government for the rest of the year—fiscal year—until October 1 of next year. So while we need to finish our work, there is no crisis at the moment, so let's do the job right.

I will offer, in just a moment, the way to do that, which is permanent funding of historically Black colleges and minority-serving institutions. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2557

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, for the convenience of the Senator from Pennsylvania, I am going to offer my unanimous consent agreement at the beginning of my remarks, and then if he wishes to stay, he can, but if he has another place to go in his schedule, he may do that.

Let me just say that the provision I am going to—let me preface it in this way. I know very well the value of historically Black colleges. One of my favorite stories is the story that the late author, Alex Haley, the author of "Roots" and "The Autobiography of Malcolm X"—I suppose the two best selling books ever on the history of the African American—used to tell about his father, Simon P. Haley, who was wasted as a child. That was the word they used.

He was allowed to go to college, and he went to North Carolina A&T where he was ready to drop out. He came back, got a summer job on a Pullman train to Chicago, and a man talked to him at night asking him for a glass of warm milk. He got the glass of warm milk and thought nothing more about it. He went back to North Carolina A&T, a historically Black college.

The principal called him in. He thought he was in real trouble, as the

president of the college called him in. Simon P. Haley thought he was in real trouble. The President of the college said that the man on the train had sent enough money for Simon P. Haley to graduate—to pay his tuition to graduate from college.

So Alex Haley wrote for the Reader's Digest the story of the man on the train who helped his father. That father went to Cornell and became the first Black graduate of Cornell's agricultural college. He came back to Lane College, one of the six historically Black colleges in Tennessee, where he taught and raised a son, who is a lawyer, later Ambassador to Gambia; two daughters, one a teacher; he raised another son, an architect; and then he raised a son he thought wouldn't amount to anything who joined the Coast Guard and ended up writing a Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "Roots," and "The Autobiography of Malcolm X."

I know the value of Lane College, Fisk University, Tennessee State University, Lemoyne-Owen College, Meharry Medical College, and America Baptist College, and I want to help them. The request I am going to make is that the Senate pass a small package of bills that are sponsored by Democrats and Republicans, 29 Senators—17 Democrats and 12 Republicans. The first provision would be permanent funding. That is \$255 million every year permanently for historically Black colleges and minority-serving institutions. A second provision—I ask consent to use this document on the Senate floor.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. That is the FAFSA. This is the document that 20 million Americans fill out every year. We know how to reduce it. It is the biggest impediment to minority students going to college today. We are ready to pass it. Eight million minority students fill this out. The president of the Southwest Community College from Memphis tells me he loses 1,500 students a semester because of the complexity of that.

There are other provisions in this package, which include the Portman-Kaine provision for short-term Pell grants sponsored by about 20 Senators, many of them Democrats; the provision for Pell grants for prisoners who are eligible for parole; an increase in the number of Pell grants; an increase in the amount of Pell grants. All of that is in this package that I have offered, but it starts with permanent funding for historically black colleges. Since there is time until October 1 of next year, the Department of Education has said that there is plenty of Federal funding for all of those institutions. There is no reason we can't agree to my package today, send it over to the House of Representatives, send it to the President, and let all of these institutions know they don't have to worry about funding permanently instead of just for 2 years.