

exhibits of the Federal aid application form.

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

#### FAFSA

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I am here this morning to talk about a hearing that we had in the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee this morning that affects 20 million families who have to fill this out every year. This is called the FAFSA. Usually, there is an adjective ahead of it. It is called the “dreaded” FAFSA.

There are 400,000 Tennessee families who fill it out every year. If you want to go to college and you need a Pell grant or a student loan, you have to fill this out—108 questions. And then after you fill it out, the way it has been working and still works today, you have to send in the information on 22 of the questions to two different agencies: one to the IRS and one to the Education Department. And then they go through an elaborate process to check to see whether you have made any mistake.

So let's say you are a homeless student or a student in foster care or you are not able to identify your parents or you are living with your grandparents or any of those people have an aversion to filling out 108-question Federal forms or giving their information to the government twice, then you don't go to college. That is what happens.

In Tennessee, we have had a Governor named Bill Haslam in the legislature that said everybody in Tennessee without a degree, that you can have 2 more years of college free, but first you have to fill out this Federal form. They say this is the single biggest impediment to having the opportunity to have those 2 free years of higher education in our State.

So you would think somebody would do something about that, right? Well, somebody has or at least has been trying to. Here is what it could be. This is 33 questions. Almost everybody agrees that this is better than this—the State counselors, the Governors, the teachers, the students, the families. You could fill it out more easily. It keeps many fewer students from walking away from the opportunity to go to college.

So you would ask: Why don't you pass it? Well, Mr. President, that is exactly what Senator MICHAEL BENNET, the Democratic Senator from Colorado, and I said 7 years ago in a hearing before the Senate Education Committee when we had four witnesses and we talked about this. And I said at the end: There seems to be a lot of agreement about this. Why don't the four of you experts—and these are people who work in financial aid who try to help students and who try to help minority students. I mean, this is the kind of stuff we are talking about all over America today. What do we do about

racial justice? What do we do to help low-income students? How do we help people who are especially hurt by a pandemic?

Well, 7 years ago, I said: Would you be willing to write us a letter, each of you, and tell us exactly what to do to eliminate the complexity of this FAFSA? What they said was that most of these questions are unnecessary and that the Federal Government doesn't need to know the answer to these questions to decide whether you are eligible for a Pell grant or eligible for a student loan. That is what they all said. So the four witnesses who had testified looked at each other and said: We don't need to write you separate letters. We will write you one letter because we all agree on what to do. So they did.

Senator BENNET and I introduced legislation called the FAST Act that would reduce this to the size of a postcard. It only had two questions on it. Well, that was too simplified. What we found out, for example, was that the State of Indiana and the State of Tennessee have their student aid, and they rely on some of this information to decide what aid to give in addition to the Federal aid. So we took the questions off this, and then they would have to ask the questions, so we really hadn't solved any problems.

So we kept working. Senator MURRAY, the Democratic leader of our committee, and I worked together on this during these 7 years, and we began to make some progress. The progress we made first was with the Obama administration, and they agreed to what sounded like a simple change. They just administratively allowed you to use your previous year's tax returns rather than your current year's tax returns to fill out the 22 tax questions on this form. You can imagine how hard it would be to use this year's tax returns, so that was a big help.

Then the Trump administration put this 108-questionnaire on an app so you can use your iPhone to fill it out. Now, that would be pretty hard for me, but I have seen a lot of the youngsters in Tennessee in the Sevier County High School, for example, who went right to work. They did a pretty quick job of doing this. That helped a lot.

Then, Senator MURRAY and I, Senator JONES from Alabama and Senator SCOTT from South Carolina—last year we introduced a bill called the FUTURE Act, and the FUTURE Act did two things. It said that for 22 of the questions here, the ones that you have to give to the government twice—you give it to the Education Department and you give it to the IRS, and then they check to see if you made a mistake, and if they do, they slow down your aid. We said: Let's simplify that. Let's just say all you have to do is check a box, and the IRS will answer those 22 questions for you. That is a law now, and it will take a couple of years to implement because, again, we are talking about 20 million families a year. So we saved them that trouble.

Now, guess what else we saved. We saved enough money to permanently fund historically Black colleges. How about that? Filling out all this form didn't save the government money; it cost the government money. So we were able, in one act, to save 20 million families—many of them minority families and most of them low income—the trouble of filling out those 22 questions and permanently fund Black colleges. So now we have legislation, Senator JONES and I and others—and there are many Senators who have been involved in this, in addition to Senator MURRAY. Senator BOOKER has had an interest, and Senator COLLINS, Senator KING, Senator BURR. Again, I mentioned Senator BENNET earlier. You can see Republicans and Democrats all see the wisdom of this, as well as every witness we have ever had who comes before us. So we have a new bill that says: Let's get rid of 53 questions and turn this into this. That is what the hearing was about today.

Now, why wouldn't we do that? Almost everyone says we should. Should we deliberately require 20 million families to answer 53 unnecessary questions that discourage many low-income students from going to college? Should we insist on that? I don't think so.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, this would probably mean that about 400,000 more students would apply for Pell grants. That is what the Pell grant is for. It is to encourage low-income students who want a ticket to the head of the line, a ticket called higher education, a ticket that the college board said increases your earnings by \$1 million over your lifetime if you get a 4-year degree, and this is our effort to help low-income students get that ticket to a better life and a better education and more money.

So why wouldn't we do it and why wouldn't we do it during this pandemic? This has to be the strangest year of college in a century—at least a century. Students are stressed out, families are stressed out, and then we are going to add to the stress by saying: And in addition, your friendly Federal Government, in order for you to get a Pell grant, is going to insist that you answer 53 questions that everybody says are unnecessary for the government to determine whether you are eligible for the loan or for the grant.

And then there is one final reason we should do it. The act that Senator MURRAY and Senator JONES and Senator SCOTT and I introduced and became law last year with President Trump's signature, the one that saved enough money to permanently fund historically Black colleges, that is going to take a couple of years to implement. So if we go ahead and pass the law that turns this into this before the end of this year, we can do both of them at the same time.

I think the American people would feel pretty good about the U.S. Congress that, in the midst of a pandemic, finished its work on such an important piece of legislation.

Our hearing today was well attended. We had four of the same witnesses who came 7 years ago and said: There is no need to ask all these questions. Nobody needs them. Nobody needs the answers. All it does is turn away from college students whom we want to encourage to go.

Now, think about that. That is a deliberate act by the Federal Government not to change that. It doesn't save any money. It doesn't eliminate any fraud. All it does is turn away from college the people whom we want to encourage to have a chance to go.

I am hopeful that the hearing today and our repeated efforts will help us create approval of this before the end of the year. Since nobody tells me they are against it, you would think we would do it. Sometimes people say: Well, we need to agree on everything before we pass anything. Sometimes that is true. But when something is this important, when it affects this many families, and when it comes at a time when families are under stress anyway, let's turn a 108-question FAFSA into a 33-question FAFSA. Let's allow that to be implemented by the Federal Government at the same time last year's law is implemented, and let's make it simpler and easier for deserving Americans to go to college.

There are lots of other things we need to do about higher education. We need more accountability. We need to deal with student loans. There are many things we need to do. We have had a lot of discussions about those. We are not going to get agreement on that this year, but just as we were able to do for the historically Black colleges last year and the first step of the FAFSA, I think it would be wise to finish the job.

I was very pleased with our hearing. I am grateful to Senator MURRAY for her kind comments this morning that she made and for her friendship and her willingness to work with me on this, and I would hope that, for the benefit of those 20 million families, we would have some success.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### RECOGNIZING IGIUGIG, ALASKA

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, it is Thursday, and as you know, it is one of my favorite times of the week.

The Presiding Officer has the good fortune of listening to a number of the "Alaskan of the Week" speeches when I get to come down to the floor—typically every Thursday—to talk about a person or group of people who are doing great things for my State. As I said, so many of my colleagues here—even

some of the reporters—know this is the person we call our Alaskan of the Week, but sometimes we call them our Alaskans of the Week.

This week, we are going plural in a big way. This week, we are recognizing an entire community for how this community—the whole community—banded together to literally help save a young child who was sick and needed medical attention.

Before I get into the story, let me say that, in Alaska, community is everything. Living in one of the most magnificent places in the world is not without its challenges. We depend on each other. Communities often come together to help each other. Typically, in our rural communities, traditional knowledge is critical and so is hard-won ingenuity and determination to overcome many of the challenges in living in the great State of Alaska.

I would like to transport you to one of those communities. It is the village of Igiugig in Southwest Alaska. Rich in Native traditions, Igiugig is home to around 70 year-round residents, growing to over 200 in the summer months.

The name "Igiugig" originated from a Yupik word meaning "like a throat that swallows water," referring to the village's location where the Kvichak River meets Iliamna.

Going all the way back to the purchase of Alaska from Russia over 150 years ago, Igiugig has maintained a commercial fishing and subsistence-based economy. They have been incredibly innovative with alternative energy there—wind and hydro—and most importantly, this community has maintained a strong sense of connection with each other, which is so important for communities like this. This is evidenced by what happened just a few weeks ago when a young girl needed to be airlifted out of the community to Anchorage—some 250 miles away—for medical help, and nearly every member of the community pitched in to help.

What happened? Here is what happened. On the night of August 28—so about 3 or 4 weeks ago—around 11:30 a.m., the Tribal administrator and village council vice president Karl Hill was sitting at home when he saw the LifeMed Alaska flight, which he knew was coming in to help this young girl, circling above the small runway.

Over 200 of our communities aren't connected by roads. They aren't connected by roads, so a lot of them have very small airports and landing strips.

Karl got this phone call when the pilot was above circling. There was a problem with the runway lights; they weren't working. He ran out to the airport to try to turn the lights on manually. That didn't work, so he got into his plane—he was one of only two pilots in the village with a plane. He got on the plane just to talk to the pilot, who was circling above, over the headset. That pilot who was on the medevac flight told him he was getting low on fuel. He wouldn't be able to circle much longer, and he couldn't land. But

this young girl needed help as soon as possible.

In so many of our Native communities and rural communities, there is no hospital. There is barely even a medical clinic sometimes. So she needed to be medevacked.

While Karl communicated with the pilot over his headset, other community members began calling people in the community asking for help. Ida Nelson made calls and jumped on her four-wheeler and headed to the airport. Community leader Christina Salmon, whose sister is Alexanna Salmon—who was our Alaskan of the Week in 2017, by the way—made around 32 phone calls. Health aide Amanda Bybee, Jeff Bringham, and so many others started calling and rallying this community, and they all came out. They all came out in any kind of vehicle with lights that they had—trucks, cars, ATVs, kids on four-wheelers, many still in their pajamas. This was in the middle of the night. They arrived to provide enough light on the runway for the pilot to see the landing strip. They staggered the vehicles facing east and running the whole length of the runway, lighting the medevac pilot's way.

They waited intensely. Ida Nelson told a reporter:

I was anxious and nervous. . . . I was like, "so what if that was my baby (waiting for that) plane?" What if it was my young girl who needed lifesaving help?

They waited for the plane to touch down, for the girl to be transferred, and for the plane to take off again. All of this happened with the lights provided by the community in a makeshift lighting of the runway.

By this time, it was around a little past 1:30, closer to 2 o'clock, but when the plane took off, the community, of course, was in a celebratory mood.

"We were pumped up," Karl Hill said. "It was really an amazing feat that we were able to pull together so quickly" in the middle of the night. He added, "It was really a nice evening."

That young girl who needed to be medevacked and airlifted in Anchorage is now back in the community, and she has recovered, thank God.

LifeMed Alaska, which provided the medevac, posted a photo on social media with the following caption: "What appears to be a blurry, dark photo is actually a view of what an amazing community can do with a lot of determination," lighting a runway, saving a life. Indeed.

We are so proud to be a State full of such tight-knit communities that work together every day to make Alaska so special. We are particularly proud as we recount the events of August 28 in Igiugig and so grateful to everyone in the community who came out in the middle of the night, some in their pajamas, to make sure that young girl could get the medical help she needed.

Thank you to Igiugig for being such an amazing community with great determination, great heart, and great innovation. Congratulations to all of you for being our Alaskans of the Week.