



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

Opening Statement of Chairwoman Susan Davis (CA-53)

House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment Hearing

Engines of Economic Mobility: The Critical Role of Community Colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Minority-Serving Institutions in Preparing Students for Success

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

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Today, we will examine the critical role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and community colleges in providing low-income students and students of color with a quality higher education.

Our first three bipartisan hearings have so clearly demonstrated that a college degree remains the surest path to financial stability for Americans across the country. This is particularly true for low-income students and students of color whose educational and workforce opportunities have historically been limited by intergenerational poverty and systemic racism. In fact, studies show that students with parents in the bottom quintile of the income distribution can double their chances of moving up the income ladder if they obtain a degree. However, federal data released this morning on college enrollment reveals a 50-percentage point gap between low-income students and their wealthy peers. We have much more work to do.

HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and community colleges continue to do this work and demonstrate their commitment and ability to provide these students with the benefits that come with a quality education.

Founded for the specific purpose of educating Black students because other institutions would not, HBCUs continue to live up to their mission of providing a community where Black students can thrive. HBCUs make up less than three percent of colleges and universities yet produce almost 20 percent of all Black graduates.

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) were developed as part of a political and social movement to regain Tribal autonomy and to combat centuries of forced assimilation and destruction of Native communities. Today, there are 35 accredited TCUs serving students from more than 230 federally registered tribes.

Hispanic-serving institutions educate more than three out of five undergraduate Latino students and one quarter of *all* undergraduate students. Among four-year institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions propel low-income students to top income brackets at a rate three times that of predominantly white institutions. Hispanic-serving institutions can also act as cultural hubs for Latino students, many of whom earn their degree and return to work in their communities.

These institutions are effective engines of economic mobility because they meet students where they are and are dedicated to educating the *whole* person. HBCUs and TCUs, in particular, embed appreciation for the identity and culture of the students they serve in their foundational missions. Honoring ancestors, sustaining traditions, and engaging honestly with American history all serve to signal to students that they belong in college.

Many other institutions, such as Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions and Predominantly Black Institutions, also serve low-income students and students of color. These institutions are forced to do more with less. To be designated as a minority-serving institution, colleges must not only enroll a substantial number of students of color, but it must also enroll a substantial number of Pell students and have fewer resources than peer institutions.

In my own state, the California State University system is a model for how minority-serving institutions can help students overcome barriers to higher education. Reflecting the population of the state, more than half of CSU students are people of color, one in three students are the first in their family to attend college, and more than half of all students receive Pell Grants.

Community college also play a crucial role in providing higher education to low-income students and students of color. These two-year colleges often provide a local and affordable option for students who are priced out of four-year institutions. In fact, community colleges enroll one in three Black students and nearly half of Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and first-generation students. More than a third of low-income students attend community colleges.

The great work being done across the country by HBCUs, TCUs, minority-serving institutions, and community colleges is unfortunately hampered by deeply inadequate funding:

- The persistent and systemic underfunding of HBCUs has been extensively documented.
- The federal government has never fully fulfilled its obligation to support Native students at TCUs.
- Less than half of designed HSIs have received a grant through HSI-specific programs.
- And the average community college receives about half the amount of per-student funding received by public four-year colleges.

With this funding inequity, we must ask ourselves how are these institutions still producing such strong results? As our witnesses will highlight, when we invest in HBCUs, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and community colleges, we empower hundreds of thousands of students each year with the most powerful tool available to achieve success: a college degree.

Lastly, as we honor the 65th Anniversary of Brown v. Board and wrestle with a promise unfulfilled, it becomes evident that just like our K-12 system, we spend more money to educate wealthy college students than students who are underserved by our education system. Depriving the institutions that serve our most vulnerable college students of the resources made available to predominantly white four-year universities is contrary to our values and our best interest as a nation.

Congress has a responsibility to strengthen and invest in institutions that are promoting economic mobility. As we continue to work toward a reauthorization of key federal higher education policy, we must understand the critical work these institutions are doing to address the specific needs of today's students and invest in these initiatives.

Thank you—President Verret, Dr. McHatton, Chancellor DuBois, and President Boham—for being with us today.

I now yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Smucker, for his opening statement.