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ACCOUNTABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND ACCESS
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WORKFORCE PELL COMMITTEE
SESSION 2, DAY 5, AFTERNOON
January 9, 2026

On the 9th day of January, 2026, the following meeting was held in-person, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m..

P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MACK: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back. The Department has taken some time over the lunch hour to update reg text. All of the negotiators should now have that in their inboxes. We're going to take about 45 minutes to have everyone review that. And we will resume here together right at 2:15. Okay. Thank you all. Welcome back, everyone. I would like to note that for State Higher Ed, we are welcoming our alternate, Heather, to the table. And for State Grant, we are welcoming our alternate, Elizabeth, to the table. Dave, I would love to turn it over to you.

MR. MUSSER: All right. Thanks so much. So we have sent around some language. We understand that folks want a couple of tweaks to that language. So in the mean -- during this period, we've also made a couple of those tweaks. During this period, as I go through the language, this will be the first and only time that we're open to making very slight tweaks on the fly. So if you see grammatical errors, if you see little things, you know, we can make those now. At the point that we finish with this discussion, we plan to finalize the document, and we will then take a consensus vote on that document. So I think we can get started with, with going through the final changes that we've made since

earlier today. Okay. So starting out in 668.14. Unfortunately, we -- in order to stay with our coloring protocol, today is still gray, and so we didn't make changes to the coloring. So if I miss anything that you guys are aware of, don't hesitate to stop me. Put your card up. Whatever. But here, this is the section dealing with the effects of the school failing the test that we described this morning, where 50% or more of the school's students or Title IV revenue are in low-earning outcome programs. Here, we previously -- we refer to 668.16 (t), if an institution does not comply with the provisions of that, of that item at time of enactment. So this is the addition in the parenthetical here. And if you don't mind, Tamar, would you explain just a little bit about your -- the concern that prompted this one so that we were on the record?

MS. HOFFMAN: Sure. Sorry. Let me adjust my mic. Apologies. Absolutely. So the reason why this is critical is because this is the provision that gives some teeth to the accountability measure that we are agreeing to enact for loss of Pell eligibility. And the concern is that if 668.16(t) changes down the line due to other negotiated rulemaking or other processes, this would be completely worthless. So it is very important that this cross-reference be at the time of

enactment in order to preserve the teeth that we have.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Tamar.

MR. MUSSER: Thank you. Appreciate that. I think we can go on to the next change here. And that takes us down into 668.16(t). This is again the section that we worked on this morning, relating to the test itself. And this is just a grammatical change that Michale recommended, where if you look at the stem, if the institution and it has to be a verb there, so it demonstrates that at least half of the institutions, and look Joe is fixing these things on the fly, thank you, Joe, at least half of the institution's recipients of Title IV HEA funds. So the demonstrates is the verb that belongs there. Okay. So then, Joe, go on down to our next change here. Okay. Here, we -- I'm trying to recall what the change was in this section. I apologize, guys. If folks. Oh, this is -- in this, sorry, this section -- this is just a run-on sentence, yeah, thank you guys. So Michale correctly pointed out that it's very hard -- it was very hard to read in its previous form. So all we did here was move things into smaller sentences. So you guys have had a chance to, I think, to read it. It's not -- still not my favorite grammatical construction that we've ever written, but it is a little clearer, and we think that this still does the job that it previously did. And

I think we're heading down now to -- actually go back up. I think we missed one quick change here. And I think, Tamar, this was a second change that you had requested relating to a cross-reference. This is -- this -- in this section is the are the requirements for the teach-out option. And here it is. Under (g), agree not to restart the same program or to start a substantially similar program, which means sharing the four-digit CIP code. So I'll explain in more detail why this was necessary. But because -- it's because we are planning to make a change to implement the SOC code proposal that David made earlier today, except in this context. And the agreement that our employers and legal aid representatives came to was that this would apply at the four-digit CIP code, and that's where the limitation would be, without reference to CIP codes, so that we could not have just the cross-reference there. Okay. And here in this section, our negotiator for taxpayers identified, oh, wait, sorry, going back up to (2) here. This is the change that affects the proposal from the employer. So, as you guys recall, an institution is not permitted to update its list of Direct Loan eligible programs that share the same four-digit CIP code as the program that lost eligibility or was voluntarily discontinued. Here, we've narrowed it slightly to include any -- the programs that have any

overlapping SOC code with the SOC codes associated with that, with that four-digit CIP code. So that crosswalks, as you guys know, include, in many cases, a large number of SOC codes associated with the same CIP code. Here, the limitation includes all of those SOC codes. So if any program has one of those, it would not be permitted to be instated under this language.

MS. MACK: Jeff, please.

MR. ARTHUR: Would you characterize this as an expansion?

MR. MUSSER: This expands the ability of institutions to add new programs.

MR. ARTHUR: Okay.

MR. MUSSER: Because, because the limitation is now not just the four-digit CIP code, it is only those, those programs that have that four-digit CIP code and also have one of the SOC codes that was, yeah, that was associated with it. Yeah.

MS. MACK: Back to you, Dave.

MR. MUSSER: And this was just a typo on our part, but we had it -- we made a change here. Thank you to our taxpayer representative to move the reference to the and any overlapping SOC codes from the from the section above, from the area where we've struck it there to this portion here.

MS. MACK: Preston, can we hear from you?

MR. COOPER: Thank you very much for making that change. One very small request. In paragraph two, there's a reference to the CIP SOC Crosswalk being provided by a Federal agency. Can we provide that reference here as well?

MR. MUSSER: Yeah, I think we, yeah, I think that's fine. And then I think we probably want to copy and paste the, the exact language that is provided.

MR. COOPER: Thank you.

MR. MUSSER: Yep. And let's pause for a second and make sure that you're good with the construction.

MR. COOPER: That looks great. Thank you.

MR. MUSSER: And Joe, is that our last one? Okay, that is the final change. So at this point, I'd like to open it up for any other comments before we go to a vote for consensus.

MS. MACK: Michale, can we hear from you?

MR. MCCOMIS: Excuse me. Dave, I think there's one other change that you didn't mention, which was the, the provision under (e) in the teach-out.

MR. MUSSER: Yeah. Joe, if you could pull that back up. Thank you. Yeah. So, we -- Michale correctly pointed out that this particular item, is a requirement to maintain the program under a warning status. But he reminded us that the warning status also tells students that they could potentially lose eligibility for Title IV aid in the program, and that's not true under this exception. So we've also said, with the exception of that particular part of the warning, referring to the loss of Title IV -- of Direct Loan eligibility. Thank you, Michale.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Michale. Thank you, Dave. Jeff?

MR. ARTHUR: Yeah, I just want to make a couple of comments. First, I want to thank the Department for making this an in-person process once again. I mean, we all experienced why direct interaction between humans is necessary in this process to be successful. And the same goes for returning the annual conference from a virtual lecture to an in-person conference. I mean, without the ability to confer, it's not a conference. It's hard to characterize that. And proprietary institutions appreciate the Department's inclusion of a more robust transparency framework in the proposed regulations, providing students and the public

with clear program-level information about costs, time to completion, and other outcomes, is an important step towards restoring trust in higher education. And when students have a better understanding of what to expect from a particular program and institution, they are better positioned to make informed choices aligned with their career goals. Ensuring that expectations are transparent and grounded in clear information, and that these expectations are met, is where accountability and student success should ultimately converge. And we appreciate the efforts by the Department to get there. And I think this is a significant step that's going to inform us well into the future.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Jeff. David?

MR. KAFAFIAN: Thank you again for all the collaboration throughout the week. I just want to confirm can, can you just maybe elaborate on is there anything we can put in the preamble or NPRM around the way cohort inclusion will be dealt with? The way students who are enrolled subsequently in non-eligible programs will be handled? I know we had some discussions. I just want to make sure I have a full understanding there.

MR. MUSSER: Sure. So, as the language currently reads, students would be included if they were enrolled at an eligible institution in an educational

program, meaning not necessarily an eligible program. We, you know, we considered dropping that down to just eligible institution. And, you know, there is also an argument for including cases where it's not at an eligible institution. However, that's -- right this second, that's a step too far for the Department. Partly because we don't have any data on ineligible institutions. We also don't know how to distinguish between an institution in that setting and something else. We recognize that that is still an issue for some constituencies, and we are open to looking at it in the final rule if there is an issue that commenters want to bring up to us. But, and I just want to say from the Department's perspective, we understand the issue, and we're sensitive to it. It's just not something that we can make a change to in this process.

MR. KAFAFIAN: Completely understand. And as you have been throughout the process, both this week and last, very thoughtful and appreciate that. It's been a privilege to work with you all.

MS. MACK: Thank you, David. Thank you, Dave. Eric, over to you.

MR. ATCHISON: Thank you, Kayla. Dave, I just want to say thanks again for all the work that y'all have done today and during the break to clean up

this and work with us. We mentioned -- Magnus and I during lunch, we went back through our proposals and again the amendatory text, and we noticed that there wasn't much there as far as 668.43 regarding some of our proposals. I just wanted to get on the record, if you don't mind, just talk through a little bit about why the Department chose not to include the emergency aid, as well as on campus, off campus, with family, kind of things.

MR. MUSSER: Yeah. No problem. Yeah. Thank you, Eric. So we did look at that in great detail, and we discussed it. The main issue for the Department is that in order to provide the information that you requested, we would have to increase the reporting requirements for institutions, at least in terms of the housing information and some of the other components of cost of attendance. What I would say is that we are open to ensuring that the most disaggregated and most accurate information possible about all elements of costs are included on that program information webpage. The other thing I would say is we were also open to the idea of including information about emergency grants. But the way that the system is structured focuses on programs. And it really, in our view, doesn't make sense to tell students about emergency grant eligibility for programs. It makes

sense to do it at the institution level. So the Department commits to explore a little bit more about how we might be able to collect data about that in other contexts. Not necessarily FVT reporting.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Dave. Jeff, did you want to add to that?

MR. ANDRADE: Yeah. And you sort of have me to blame on the emergency aid part. I was like, wait a minute, this is a bit redundant if we're doing it on the program. But we do have a very good relationship with our colleagues in the National Center for Education Statistics. And so we're going to make a recommendation to try to pick that up on IPEDS.

MR. ATCHISON: Thank you very much.

MS. MACK: Thank you, all. Aaron, over to you.

MR. LACEY: I just had a drafting comment. I totally understand the substantially similar concept in teach-out, no issue. I just was going to suggest it's not on the screen, but what I was just going to suggest, I can explain, it says agreed not to restart the same program or to start a substantially similar program. I would just be very express and say, you know, which, for the purposes of this, 668.603(g) is defined as. Because we don't have a definition of substantially

similar. That concept is kind of thrown around in 2 or 3 different places. And I just think it's worth adding -- being very clear that it is for purposes of this determination in this section. But yeah, I mean, just -- it's just a note.

MR. MUSSER: Could Tamar -- and then Tamar again was -- wanted to get -- to have a very specific language here. Could we just say, and let me just read the sentence as I might do it, agree not to restart the same program or to start a program that shares the same four-digit CIP code?

MR. LACEY: Yeah, great. Yeah. Great, great.

MR. MUSSER: Okay. If you -- Joe, if you're able to make that change, you know, I think that says the same thing and also avoids any confusion about what constitutes a substantially similar program. Yeah. So you're watching the process play out live, friends at home. So everyone take a look at the sentence as it's written there.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Dave. Aaron, are you good?

MR. LACEY: Yeah.

MS. MACK: Perfect. Tamar, I'm coming to you next.

MS. HOFFMAN: Thank you. Just back to sort of a few little drafting things. So in 668.16, Zoe thankfully just caught a typo. So, where it said -- so it starts with sorry, I'm pulling it up on my screen as well at the same time. So, where it says demonstrates that at least half of the institution's recipients, that language should get mirrored after the end. So it should be, and at least half.

MR. MUSSER: Yes, thank you.

MS. HOFFMAN: Yeah. So that's one thing. And the other is, I just wanted to reiterate again that for the section above, which is 668.14(h)(2), that the appeal is limited to just the earnings calculation, as in the remainder of the text.

MR. MUSSER: Yeah, that's exactly right. And we will commit to including in the preamble a note that the Department's expectation is that this appeal relating to this test is only of the data that is used to perform the test.

MS. HOFFMAN: Okay. Thank you.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Tamar. David, back over to you. Dave, we have worked our way through all of the cards, comments, and questions. How would you like to proceed?

MR. MUSSER: I think we've reached the

end, folks. I think at this time the Department would like to ask for a vote on consensus.

MS. MACK: I would like to clarify that I will ask everyone to exhibit their thumb and show of consensus. If you are a thumbs up, this means you are in support of the text as we just reviewed. If you are a thumb down, that would mean that you are, in fact, blocking consensus. If you wish to give a sideways thumb, we are going to treat that as abstaining. So it will not be in support of the text, but it will also not block consensus. So if everyone around the room is side or up, we will in fact have reached consensus. Before I ask you to show those, I see a couple of cards going up. Tamar?

MS. HOFFMAN: Thank you. I'd like to know if now is the appropriate time to comment on our vote to the extent that we need to do so in order to proceed.

MS. MACK: I'm going to ask everyone to show thumbs, and then I will go round robin through the constituency group. So if you'd like to comment briefly at that point, that would be an appropriate time.

MS. HOFFMAN: Thank you.

MS. MACK: Yep. If I could please ask everyone to show their thumbs. I will then call on you individually. Please both show your thumb at that time,

and you will read the position of your thumb into the record. All right. I invite everyone to show their thumbs on the text as we just reviewed. For students. Our primary, Eric.

MR. ATCHISON: We support this regulatory language as written and are our thumbs up on behalf of 9 million Title IV students, we're proud of the work of the Committee to advocate for protections related to Pell eligibility for failing programs, delineating teach-out provisions to further support students and programs that are being phased out, developing new opportunities to support the skills needed in the short term programs through the Workforce Pell program, and providing transparency for understanding the usage of limited Pell awards and programs that fail the earnings measure. I'm very grateful to the extensive time and collegiality of my fellow negotiators, the Department, and the support of the facilitator throughout this process, and especially to Magnus Noble, the alternate for students, and a student, who joined short notice and worked nonstop with me every day to work through these proposals.

MS. MACK: Thank you very much. And for our veteran constituency. Primary, Matthew.

MR. FEEHAN: Thumbs up for student

veterans. And again, I just want to thank my colleagues in the room and the Department for the draft text. This is a monumental step forward in accountability across all sectors and both service members, veterans, their dependents, we all look forward to seeing how this develops over the future years, and thank you -- everyone again for your time.

MS. MACK: Thank you very much. For Legal Aid. Primary, Tamar.

MS. HOFFMAN: Thank you. I'm abstaining from this vote. I do so thoughtfully, and it is not easy. And the reason I am abstaining from this vote is because it was made very clear to me throughout this process that protections for students and certificate programs would be taken away altogether if I blocked consensus. And those students are just too important for me to take that risk, especially with the long history of abuse in certificate programs. I'm thankful to the committee for their consideration. I hope that we will get to a place of greater accountability moving forward. And again, for this reason, I'm abstaining.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Tamar. For public. Kristin, primary.

MS. HULTQUIST: On behalf of -- I

support this on behalf of the two-thirds of Title IV eligible students who attend a public college, we are ready to get to work. We are getting -- get to work on educating, assisting, improving, and reducing the number of programs that do not meet this earnings threshold.

MS. MACK: Thank you. And for private nonprofit. Primary, Aaron.

MR. LACEY: I'm a thumbs up. You know, I have explained to folks who have reached out to me and who have seen some of the projections around the types of programs, particularly at the degree and graduate level. As you can imagine, there are institutions that have music programs and arts programs, and others that will be affected that are concerned. And I have explained to them that we are not voting on Congress's decision to create an earnings premium. We are voting on the regulations that have presented by the Department to implement and carry forward that, that decision by Congress. And I think the Department has done a very good job, you know, taking a lot of competing interests and trying to bring them all together and to create something that can work and be sustainable. And we talked about earlier in the week, the great challenge of regulatory whiplash that has affected everyone. I mean, the Department, schools, students, taxpayers, everyone over the last 20 years. And

you know, it's a compromise we've heard said, and I think it is true, when you have compromises, that means nobody is probably getting what they want, which I also think is probably true. But I think it is a good compromise. And I think institutions and everyone, students, taxpayers, etc., will benefit for some -- from the stability of this accounting program -- accountability program. You know, I echo Kristin's comment. I think institutions are ready to finally just see something and to start working with it and accommodating it and making the changes that they need to make. And again, I think that's good for everybody. So I thank the Department. And I also just want to say to all the negotiators, this has really been a professional highlight for me. I'm just the expertise, professionalism, advocacy of everyone in this room. Cody, the -- all the data the Department provided, everyone at the Department, it has really just been, I think it seems to me the best version of what this thing is supposed to be. And for that, I'm grateful to have been able to participate in it. And grateful to everyone who was able to be a part of it.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Aaron. For proprietary institutions. Our primary, Jeff.

MR. ARTHUR: Yeah. Jeff Arthur. Thumbs up. And as I mentioned five minutes ago, our

institution's proprietary institutions are eager to be able to demonstrate where we have programs that are a great value and have good outcomes, that we're looking forward to having that opportunity to have a level comparison for the first time across several metrics with all other programs.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Jeff. And for state workforce. Our primary, Rachael.

MS. STEPHENS PARKER: Thank you. I'm a thumbs up. I think earlier this morning, you know, I expressed some overarching thoughts like many others, certainly recognizing that there have been various concerns or issues raised throughout the week, some of which could not feasibly be addressed while still reaching consensus. And I won't go through those again, now. I would say overall, I'm proud of the work of the committee and grateful for the work the Department has done with what Congress gave us, as Aaron so gracefully described a few moments ago. As I said before, while imperfect, I think this is a good compromise. I do agree, big picture, you know, accountability protections for our students and performance for our students and for our employers and our communities are too important to risk not having a clear standard and clear accountability for all types of institutions and programs. And so I'm

grateful for the opportunity to be part of this and to help provide that, hopefully in a way that can withstand enough time for us to learn about what's working and what's not. As we do this, as we really explore greater accountability across postsecondary learning. So thank you all for all of that. My stakeholders and I are certainly looking forward to working with institutions and stakeholder groups within our states to implement this, to support institutions, I should say, as this is implemented and think, like I said earlier, about how we can, you know, make sure hopefully in short order, that there are no programs that fail this measure of any kind. So with that, again, just thank you, everybody. And we're a thumbs up.

MS. MACK: Thank you very much. For state grant. We have our alternate, Elizabeth.

MS. MCCLOUD: Thank you. I am a thumbs up for this vote. On behalf of state grant agencies, I'd like to say a thank you to the Department on behalf of my colleague Richie Morrow, and to all of the colleagues around the table for the thoughtful conversations this week that got us to this point. I feel that the measure we're voting on here supports state goals around accountability and meeting workforce needs as well. And I have to also personally comment with my lifetime history

as a financial aid administrator, I feel that we've accomplished something really important this week. Thank you.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Elizabeth. And for state higher ed. We have our alternate, Heather.

MS. DELANGE: Thank you. State agencies are a thumbs up for this. And I just wanted -- I would be remiss if I didn't, like, highlight Randy in this whole thing. His sentiments around the table is that he has deep admiration for all of you. With gratitude that we even got here, as a place that he certainly did not think we would get to. I'm grateful to him for teeing this up for me so that I can sit at the big table. And the view is much different from right here. And then I think I would just like to say that I'm excited to see the work that will come from this. And then perhaps there's a way to make sure that we have, you know, perhaps a new NCLB, like No Community Left Behind so that we continue to make sure that we address all needs.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Heather. For accrediting agencies. Our primary, Michale.

MR. MCCOMIS: Thank you. On behalf of the accreditation community and our constituency, I vote thumbs up in support of the regulations as we've negotiated those. Congratulations to the group. Again,

I've already said this, but it was, at first, probably Sisyphean, but ultimately Herculean effort. And you know, congratulations on that. It is monumental to get that kind of momentum and agreement in Washington. So thank you for all of your work, your commitment, your dedication to really making an earnest attempt to get it right. So thank you. And I look forward as the accreditation community to work through as regulatory partners with the Department and the states to continue to strengthen our accountability frameworks.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Michale. For taxpayers. We have our primary, Preston.

MR. COOPER: I'm thrilled to be voting in favor of the first across-the-board, earnings-based accountability system in higher education that applies to all credential types and all sectors of institutions. This is just -- this is a massive step forward for students and taxpayers. We're going to protect hundreds of thousands of students from low-earning programs, and we're going to prevent the flow of billions of taxpayer dollars to programs that are not producing earnings outcomes that are, that are getting students into economic mobility. Obviously, you know, we have not gotten everything we wanted in terms of higher education accountability. We are working within the constraints of

what Congress passed. But I do believe that this can be the first step towards a really meaningful -- we already have a really meaningful accountability regime for higher education, and I couldn't be more excited to be a thumbs up.

MS. MACK: Thank you, Preston. And finally, our Federal negotiator, Dave.

MR. MUSSER: Department is a thumbs up, and the Department will have lots of comments that won't be coming out of my mouth necessarily. But I wanted to simply say for myself, thank you all very much. You guys have shown such incredible professionalism, creativity, a lot of hard work, and frankly, I couldn't have expected a better group of people to work with, the very first time I went through this process as a Federal negotiator. So thank you all so much for everything that you've done.

MS. MACK: I was remiss. I skipped over our employer's group. We would not be in consensus without you. David, if you could please show us your thumb.

MR. KAFAFIAN: David Kafafian, my thumb is up. On behalf of employers and business does not feel appropriate that I should get -- the wrong Dave has the last word, I guess. I do share the thanks for all of

my colleagues for the Department. This has been a wonderful experience. And Aaron, you said it correctly to career highlight. I think the president's point, the ability to get 15 years later to true harmony on a level playing field, is something that's critical and frankly, does send a level and clear market signal to employers, to schools, and to students, frankly, about where we see opportunities for them to grow and advance from a purely financial perspective. And that is important if you're thinking about students who are borrowing to pay for their investment in their future. It's imperfect, as others have said. I do hope that we can get to it at some point. And it was not our -- we were not empowered to do it here this week. But I do think it's important that we get to some solutions that are circumspect with respect to our rural communities, where there is most need for, frankly, workforce alignment between schools and employers. But I do think we will get there. And so zooming back out, as just a citizen, I'm really encouraged at a time where, you know, there's a lot of lack of trust in government in all directions. I hope other organs and levels and branches of government can maybe model a little bit what we saw here. And if anybody from Congress is watching, maybe, maybe take a page out of Dave's book and showing how to listen and be patient.

And so thank you to each of you. It's been a real pleasure.

MS. MACK: Thank you very much, David. I would -- I'm happy to turn it back over to the Department for any closing announcements or words.

MR. ANDRADE: Sure. I am not about to get over my skis and upstage anything that the Undersecretary would say, because I think he's definitely earned his pay this week, you know, helping us out and reach consensus. So my remarks would just be personal. Just you know, this morning you know, I was thinking about when I was thanking my wife for sort of, you know, covering my family responsibilities this week. I want to thank all of you. All of my colleagues from the Department, who have given so much, you know, so much time and time away from your families and their families during this time so that, you know, we can work through this -- all of this and just appreciate it. I did say it at the last one, I thought we selected, you know, the right group of people, still believe that. And I guess with that, so again, and I think people recognize the magnitude of what was done this week. So with that, I will introduce the Undersecretary of Education, Nicholas Kent.

UNDERSECRETARY KENT: Here we go.

Thank you, Jeff, and thank everyone. Before I begin, I want to take a moment to express my deepest appreciation to some key individuals and teams who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes. But first, let's give a round of applause for Jeff, Dave, Jake, and of course, Cody. Your leadership and expertise have been invaluable in moving the work of the AHEAD Committee forward. But my thanks extends far beyond this group, and I want to recognize the entire department staff whose dedication and commitment made this week possible. The countless hours of preparation, coordination, and support that you have provided have been crucial to what we have accomplished today. So please join me in thanking them. And finally, I want to thank each of you, the negotiators, who have brought your passion, your expertise, and your determination to this table. We know how much work has gone into these negotiations, and your effort is reflected not just in the work that we have accomplished here, but also in the trust that you have built with your stakeholders and the American people. As I reflect on this week's negotiations and the work that we have done as a committee, I'm reminded of the larger vision we set out with. And I want to share with you a few thoughts on that vision. When we began this process, we were crystal clear about our goals. The One Big

Beautiful Bill Act was at its heart about change, transforming higher education into a system that better serves students, families, and taxpayers. And accountability was at the core of that transformation. To be clear, accountability is not a buzzword. It's a principle. It's about ensuring that the massive public investment in higher education is producing tangible results. Results like successful graduates who can pay off their loans, students who gain skills that directly lead to well-paying jobs, and institutions that are genuinely focused on return on investment, and not just for their bottom line. As many of you know, the American people have been asking for better accountability in higher education for years. They want to see real outcomes. This isn't about punishing institutions. It's about ensuring that the taxpayer investment in higher education is working and that it works for everyone. Now let's turn to what we have accomplished this week. You have made history today by agreeing to a new accountability framework. One, that for the first time in over three decades, applies to every institution and every program, regardless of sector or credential level. This is a game-changer. For years, we have been bogged down in ineffective measures that simply fail to capture the full picture of how all programs were actually

performing. This new framework is different. It's about ensuring that all programs meet a baseline for financial value, a baseline that reflects the needs of students and taxpayers alike. We are establishing a new earnings benchmark for the first time and applying them to every program, whether it's a PhD in philosophy or a certificate in plumbing. Creating a baseline that ensures that all programs deliver financial value. This is a critical shift, and it's one that would hold -- that will hold all institutions to the same standard of accountability. I want to take a moment to emphasize just how significant this is for students. Yesterday, during a caucus conversation, Magnus, one of our negotiators representing students, shared a powerful reminder with us. He said that drafting regulations is about balancing equities. On one side, you have institutional priorities such as reducing institutional burden, and on the other, you have the interests of students. And when you add the weight to that scale, the student side should always carry more. Magnus went on to say that over the course of this week, he's seen this administration consistently put more weight on the side of students. As a first-generation student and a Pell Grant recipient myself, Magnus' words resonated deeply. This approach, which has been the hallmark of the Trump administration's policies,

underscores our commitment to building a system that focuses on real students outcomes and taxpayers interests, rather than just protecting entrenched systems and legacy programs. Students' interests should always remain at the heart of educational transformation, and this committee has clearly and exceptionally demonstrated its steadfast commitment to this principle. Let's also talk about how we have done this work. As I've said before, and I'll say it again, the days of using certain frameworks like Gainful Employment to punish certain types of institutions and programs are behind us. The old system unfairly targeted proprietary institutions and certificate programs, while letting poor-performing degree programs at public and nonprofit schools off of the hook. This framework didn't work. That's why we are - - we challenge all of you, each of you, to come up with a system that treats all institutions and programs equally and without bias. And that is exactly what you have done. And the One Big Beautiful Bill, Congress rejected the idea that only certain types of institutions should be accountable based upon poor performance. This new framework advances that same principle, holding all institutions accountable for poor performance. It ensures that all institutions are held accountable for delivering results. And it is designed to stand the test of time.

Our goal was also to ensure that we kept things simple and workable. The framework that we have agreed to today will eliminate nearly 30% of the reporting burden under the current financial value transparency framework, rebranded as the Student Tuition and Transparency System, or STATS. That means we are streamlining the process, reducing regulatory burden, and making it easier for institutions to comply while collecting only the information that's truly helpful for students and families. We've also ensured that the Department will be able to administer this framework efficiently and created a fair appeals process that's more manageable to oversee. This is about creating a system that works for everyone: students, taxpayers, and institutions. It's about accountability that is both meaningful and operationally feasible. Now, I know this process has not always been easy. In fact, at the beginning of the week, some media outlets were already writing us off. Last evening, as I was at home eating dinner and reading yet another proposal from the committee, an unnamed outlet even published an article titled Education Negotiators seem unlikely to reach deal on accountability rules. They doubted our ability to reach consensus, just as they doubted the RISE committee's success last year, or this committee's success last month in negotiating Workforce

Pell. And yet, here we are today. Together, we have built something that will stand the test of time and end the regulatory whiplash. Once again, those who bet against us were wrong. They continued to severely underestimate this administration in this committee. As we continue to re-envision and drive a sea change in higher education, the RISE and AHEAD sessions prove that a group of individuals, regardless of their affiliation, can find common ground on the issues most critical to our students and our nation's success. So what comes next? As we look ahead, no pun intended, we have the opportunity to make real change and lasting change. In just 189 days since the One Big Beautiful Bill was signed into law, we have convened two negotiated rulemaking committees, held four weeks of negotiations, provided over 20 analyses and presentations, fulfilled numerous data requests, engaged stakeholders, and reached consensus on all of the regulatory packages we have worked on. This includes implementing the new loan limits and repayment assistance plan under RISE. Standing up a brand new program and Workforce Pell, and now we have established a new accountability measure that will hold all institutions and programs accountable. By July 1 of 2026, in just 173 days, these changes will take effect and provide lasting impact for years to come. We also know that some of the

most exciting work is still ahead of us. Later this month, we intend to publish the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for the RISE Committee student loan provisions, and after that, we will move forward with the proposed rules for Workforce Pell, and finally, our new accountability framework. These will be game changers, and the Department looks forward to seeing the feedback from the public as we continue to refine these proposals. In closing, I want to remind everyone of something very important. Americans are demanding change in higher education. The status quo is not working. Through these negotiations, we've taken one more critical step toward reforming a system to ensure that it works better for students and taxpayers. We are building a future where higher education works for everyone, where students are empowered to succeed, where taxpayers can trust that their investments will be used wisely, and where institutions are held accountable for delivering results. None of this would have been possible without the collaboration, hard work, and shared commitment from each of you in this room. So thank you again for your dedication. Together we have made great strides, and together we will continue to move ahead. Thank you.

MS. MACK: As we close, Dave, was there anything else you wanted to add?

MR. MUSSER: No. I think the Undersecretary and all of you said all that needs to be said. Thank you all so very much for your participation in this process. Really appreciate it.

MS. MACK: Thank you all. Congratulations. We're adjourned.