Under Secretary of Education Nicholas Kent's remarks at the White House Roundtable, "Administrative Bloat and Low-Value Programs: How U.S. Universities are Failing American Families and How They Can Reform," on November 19, 2025:

Thank you, Secretary McMahon, for your leadership in bringing attention to the critical issues of college costs, return on investment, and institutional spending. These topics are not abstract policy concepts -- they affect the daily lives of millions of students and families trying to make responsible decisions about their futures.

As the Secretary noted, Americans are increasingly skeptical about the direction of higher education. More than half say institutions are not preparing students for well-paying jobs in today's economy.[1] Nearly 80 percent say colleges and universities are doing a fair or poor job of keeping tuition affordable. When public confidence is this low, it is a sign that the system is failing to meet its obligations—and it is our responsibility to confront that reality head on.

A major driver of this loss of trust is cost. Students, families, and taxpayers are being asked to pay more and more each year to support rising institutional and administrative expenditures that often have little to do with actual learning.

On too many college campuses, spending grows far beyond what is needed to deliver a high-quality education. Layers of bloated administration, sprawling initiatives unrelated to instruction, and ambitious building projects all add up—and students and taxpayers are forced to foot the bill.

The result is predictable: higher tuition, more borrowing, and growing debt burdens that do not inherently lead to faster completion, better job prospects, or higher earnings. When students take on debt, they are making a long-term investment. But when that debt is tied to programs that fail to deliver meaningful economic value, that investment becomes a burden for years, if not decades, on both borrowers and taxpayers. We see this in the staggering delinquency and default rates across the federal student loan portfolio.

This challenge is compounded by the antiquated accreditation system. Accreditors were intended to safeguard students and ensure quality. Yet too often, the system instead protects institutions—not the students they are meant to serve. Many accreditors act as gatekeepers to licensure and federal aid, sometimes relying on standards that are unclear, arbitrary, or badly aligned with student success.

Many accreditors also contribute to credential inflation by forcing or endorsing program expansions and higher degree requirements that are not tied to labor-market needs, pushing students toward longer and costlier pathways without commensurate value.

[1] Parker, K. (2025, October 15). Growing share of Americans say the U.S. higher education system is headed in the wrong direction. Pew Research Center.

When only one accreditor is available to an institution, meaningful reform becomes nearly impossible.

When accreditors drift away from core responsibilities – like student learning, program quality, and economic return – accountability diminishes and students pay the price. Simply put, rising college costs are not just the result of institutional decisions; they are also the product of an accreditation system that has become a barrier to new entrants and innovation, and a protector of an outdated model that is too often ambivalent to student success.

The American public has made their dissatisfaction unmistakably clear: the status quo is no longer acceptable. That is why the Department of Education is implementing President Trump's reform agenda to curb excessive pricing, particularly in graduate programs that offer too little value in the marketplace for the debt they pile on borrowers. The Department has already begun the process of implementing student loan caps, ensuring that students are not encouraged, nor enabled, to take on debt loads that would be unmanageable under any reasonable repayment plan.

Next month, the Department will take another major step in implementing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act by launching a negotiated rulemaking committee aimed at strengthening accountability for low-performing programs across all colleges and universities: public, private, and proprietary. Too many students complete programs only to discover that their earnings fall far short of what they need to manage basic expenses and repay their loans. Our goal is straightforward: programs that consistently leave students worse off must be held accountable, and programs that successfully prepare students for strong careers should thrive.

The agency is also in the process of launching a new Workforce Pell Grant program that will expand opportunities for students to enter high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand fields. This initiative recognizes that many of today's strongest career pathways do not require a four-year degree. Students deserve options that are affordable, efficient, and directly connected to real employment opportunities. Although the four-year degree should remain an option, it should not be seen as the only path to economic success.

As the son of a successful iron and steel apprentice from the Ohio Valley—and as someone who personally pursued the liberal arts college route—I can attest that many different postsecondary choices can lead to success. But it is essential that we elevate a variety of options without placing the federal government's thumb on the scale.

Additionally, the Department is moving forward with regulatory reforms to bring more competition and innovation into the accreditor landscape. Institutions should not be trapped under a single accreditor. A healthier, more dynamic system—where accreditors must compete to demonstrate value—will encourage higher standards, lower costs, more flexibility, and innovation to improve student outcomes.

In my role, I meet regularly with college presidents, system leaders, and association heads. Many acknowledge, often privately, that higher education is facing profound challenges. They see the same trends we do: rising skepticism, skyrocketing costs, and mounting anxiety about value. They agree that reform is desperately needed, even if they are reluctant to say so publicly.

Now to be fair, there are pockets of innovation taking place in certain states and on select college campuses that have the potential to profoundly change the higher education landscape. State and institutional leaders in Indiana, Ohio, and Utah are working to streamline, consolidate, or eliminate certain degree programs to ensure their offerings are more responsive to student demand and workforce needs. New funding models are creating powerful incentives for college and universities to build capacity in programs that respond to workforce demand, especially in science, engineering, technology, and health-related fields. We applaud institutions that are doing the hard work to eliminate low-value programs, despite the pushback that often comes from faculty and alumni who are tethered to bygone legacies.

We are also seeing more institutions, including those in Texas and Florida, commit to freezing tuition for in-state undergraduates for multiple years, giving students and families greater predictability as they make enrollment decisions. Students and families also need greater transparency when it comes to the cost of attendance – tuition, fees, room and board – and institutions must reevaluate their antiquated transfer of credit policies that have a profound impact on college completion and drive up debt.

Change is rarely easy. But under the leadership of President Trump and Secretary McMahon, we are already seeing momentum build across our colleges and universities to proactively make changes for the better. Institutions are beginning to re-examine long-standing practices and refocus on what matters most: students, families, and taxpayers

Our mission is clear. We must restore trust in a system that has drifted from its core responsibilities. We must create a higher education landscape that is more affordable, more transparent, and more accountable. We must ensure that every student who invests in their education can see a path toward opportunity, security, and success.

I am proud to serve alongside Secretary McMahon as we restore American greatness in higher education. Join us in not only holding institutions accountable, but in ensuring the next generation of students can live the American dream.