The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Liberal Colleges Should Assume the Burden of Student Debt

By John and Andy Schlafly

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Three Senate Democrats, who must face the voters next year in states that Trump won, have just voted with Republicans to reverse President Biden's partial forgiveness of student loans. While Biden vows to veto that bill, which passed both houses under the streamlined provisions of the Congressional Review Act, the honeymoon with liberal colleges is over.

Recent generations of Americans have been told that a college degree was the path to prosperity, and worth borrowing for. But now $1.78 trillion in student loan debt suffocates 43.5 million Americans, while the good jobs needed to pay off the debt have mostly disappeared due to phony free trade.

Last week's debt ceiling compromise applauded by the media requires a resumption of payments and interest on student loans by August 30. The deal also prohibits Biden from pausing student loans again, to the chagrin of progressive voters who want a free ride.

The Supreme Court is about to rule on whether Biden ever had the authority to cancel student loan debt without first getting congressional approval. At oral argument in February, a court majority expressed doubt that Biden's student loan forgiveness was legal.

Student debt was not so much of a problem when manufacturing and other high-paying jobs were available to work it off. But the recent May jobs report, also praised by the media anxious to boost Biden, showed a loss of manufacturing jobs, while other employers were cutting hours and not increasing wages as fast as inflation.

Much of the blame for the student debt crisis belongs with liberal colleges that teach propaganda rather than skills useful to students after they graduate. Recently a University of Cincinnati professor gave a sophomore a 0 out of 20 points for using the correct, but not politically correct, term "biological women" on an otherwise strong homework assignment.

A bill in Texas, SB 18, was intended to end tenure for college professors at state schools there, in response to their imposing the woke agenda. But pressure from Texas' powerful state universities caused the legislation to be flipped around in the Texas House, to the point where the bill, as finally enacted, actually affirms college tenure although allowing for new additional oversight.

Universities hire failed liberal politicians and pay them fat salaries for little or no academic work. San Francisco's disgraced District Attorney Chesa Boudin, who was recalled by that city's fed-up liberal voters, was just hired to direct a pro-criminal "justice center" at the University of California at Berkeley, while the leftwing Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, the first mayor defeated for reelection there in 40 years, was hired by Harvard to teach about "racial equity" in public health.

There are 2.5 million fewer students enrolled in college today compared with more than a decade ago, when college enrollment reached its peak of 18 million. This decline, which is greatest among young men, accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic but has continued even after the virus subsided, resulting in a growing and harmful gender gap in higher education.

Called an "enrollment cliff" in imitation of the more familiar term of a "demographic cliff," many more people have become disillusioned with what college fails to achieve. "There's a broad-based drop in belief or trust in higher education as an institution," according to an education specialist at the accounting firm Deloitte.

Tuition costs have increased many times more than inflation since 1970. Real wages have declined since then, and college education has diverged badly from what is needed in the marketplace.

To compensate for their sagging domestic enrollment, America's universities have accepted a flood of foreign students, which helps colleges meet the liberal goal of ever-increasing diversity. The Biden administration then allows foreign students to snatch scarce good jobs after graduation, despite laws that require them to return home after completing their studies.

Downsizing of universities is long overdue, and those with bloated endowments should be required to help pay off the skyrocketing student loan debt that they helped to create. The largest debt burden is on black families, as liberal schools promoted diversity without regard for the enormous financial burdens that resulted from their liberal agenda.

It is still true that college can increase lifetime earnings, but primarily in lucrative fields such as engineering, and for students who graduate with at least a bachelor's degree. Meanwhile millions have been burdened with debt without ever finishing their coursework or receiving a degree.

About one-fourth of American adults have attended college at enormous expense without earning a bachelor's degree, and most of those (nearly 1 in 6 Americans over age 25) did not even earn an associate's degree. Colleges themselves should bear some responsibility and financial liability for taking students' borrowed money without giving them any real value in return.

John and Andy Schlafly are sons of Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) and lead the continuing Phyllis Schlafly Eagles organizations with writing and policy work.