

OPINION

Affordable College for Students like Me

Debt can deepen already stark inequality

BY ARIEL TOMLINSON

As a black woman who was raised in poverty, I understand what it means to face constant hardships.



I grew up in a single parent household watching my mother's mental health deteriorate over time. She relies on disability checks to support herself, so hasn't been able to financially support me for college.

Attending college has always been a dream of mine, but the road hasn't been easy. After dropping out of high school at 15, I went back to get my GED at 20. Eventually, I enrolled in the Community College of Denver and graduated in 2015.

Currently, I'm pursuing my bachelor's degree at the Metropolitan State University in Colorado. Pell Grants help finance my high-

er education, but there's a lot they don't cover. I still have to take out student loans to fill the financial gap, which means I'm taking on student debt to fund my education.

My experience might be different if Congress acts soon and reauthorizes the Higher Education Act (HEA) — by far the most important law in higher education. The HEA hasn't been reauthorized in more than 10 years, which means the needs of college students across our country aren't being met.

That's because the cost of attending a 4-year higher education institution has risen 1,122 percent since 1978. Meanwhile, 95 percent of jobs created since the Recession have gone to someone with an education beyond high school. Getting yourself out of poverty basically requires a postsecondary education, which means taking on debt.

Still, many families like mine fear that getting an education might not be worth the debt they take on.

My two younger sisters, Destiny and Kayla, have decided to

not attend college. They're both bright and talented individuals that I know would succeed in college, but they're afraid of the debt they'd incur. They've told me that watching me struggle to pay for school has influenced them not to pursue a college degree.

This truly breaks my heart as their older sister, but I understand student debt is a risk not everyone wants to take. For many young people who wish to attend college, this debt can deepen already stark inequality, especially for people of color like me.

Pell Grants are among the most common ways that low-income students can afford college. But even the maximum Pell Grant award of roughly \$6,000 doesn't come close to covering tuition, books, and living expenses. That's why many low-income students are forced to take out loans to finance the rest of our education and burden ourselves with debt we know we can't afford.

Updating the HEA could help ensure that Pell recipients are receiving the necessary financial aid they need to avoid graduating with

crippling debt. And it could make the financial aid process simpler to ensure students are getting the money they qualify for.

I intend to continue my higher education journey through my Master's degree, though I know this will likely increase my student loan debt. Frankly, the idea of owing more debt terrifies me. But like many other college students, I have no other choice but to take out more loans to ensure I get the education I need to find a job that pays well.

Maybe one day we'll have debt-free college in this country. Or maybe, as Senator Elizabeth Warren recently proposed, working people will get their student debt forgiven.

Until then, there's a simple step we can take: Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act and making sure today's students get a fair chance at a successful higher education experience.

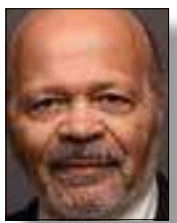
Ariel Tomlinson is a mental health and higher education advocate based in Denver, Colorado. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

Didn't Need Mueller to Tell Us Trump is a Skunk

Protect the people and impeach No. 45

BY OSCAR H. BLAYTON

No person in his or her right mind will deny that America is a thicket of racism, misogyny, entitlement for the wealthy, dishonesty and a fictitious veneer of meritocracy. So, it is befitting that we have an occupant in the White House who exemplifies all these things.



Donald Trump clearly displayed his many loathsome traits before being elected to the highest office in the land. He also proved that he had neither the knowledge nor the understanding necessary to competently lead a nuclear power.

The only believable aptitude that his campaign presented to the American electorate was his abiding belief in white supremacy. And he rode that one trick pony all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

After occupying the Oval Office for more than two years, Trump has had his corrupt and illegal practices laid out in more than 400 pages of a government report produced by a team of investigators and lawyers led by Special Counsel, Robert Mueller.

Political pundits have expressed their shock and surprise at the depth of Trump's immorality. The legion of lies, his schemes to overthrow the rule of law and his constant efforts to obstruct justice were revealed in page after page of Mueller's report.

But the most surprising thing about this episode of America's history is not Trump's immortality, but the sense of surprise — real or pretended — expressed by members of the major media outlets.

When you climb into a pigpen to kiss a hog, you should not be surprised by what winds up on your lips. And many Americans have been French kissing this swine for more than two years.

The question now should not be "How did things come to this?" The answer is clear. We elected a villain to the White House. The question we must now answer is: "How do we rid the American body politic of this cancer?"

Some Democratic leaders in the U.S. House of Representatives are counseling against impeaching Trump. Instead, they call for the American voters to turn him out of office in 2020. Fearful of losing their seats by angering conservatives, these shameful Congressmembers are asking voters to do the job they were elected to do.

Cowering before small but vocal segments of their constituencies, these self-serving politicians are willing, for the sake of their own re-elections, to surrender the public good to the worst elements of our society.

When these politicians make their next predictable pilgrimages to black churches and neighborhoods seeking what they believe are "guaranteed" Democratic votes, they should be pressed on why they did not see fit to protect the American people and move to impeach No. 45. Every day Trump remains in office is a threat to the well-being of people of color. His policies diminish our quality of life and the tone he sets in the White House gives license to those in America whose hateful, racist inner demons have waited decades for a chance to wreak havoc on their victims.

For months, Robert Mueller was hailed as the hero who had ridden in on his white horse to make everything right in Washington. But his report disappoints by failing to call out Trump's illegal actions for what they are. Anecdotes in the Mueller Report confirming already well-founded suspicions and widely known violations of law that had been reported in the media for months did little to further inform the public of Trump's wrongdoings. And in

its present form, the report is subject to manipulation by Trump allies to normalize his behavior and anesthetize the American people to the abuse heaped upon us daily by this administration.

Anyone who cannot see an attempted conspiracy between the Trump campaign and the Russian government is simply choosing not to look. Anyone who is not convinced that Trump clearly obstructed — and attempted to obstruct — justice is choosing to abandon the rule of law.

Trump committed his many crimes in full view of the American public, so the facts laid out in the Mueller report should come as no surprise.

Right-thinking Americans should not allow politicians to be surprised at the contents of the Mueller report. Any politician who expresses such surprise is either too dishonest or too stupid to be returned to office.

Right-thinking Americans should not allow politicians to shirk from legitimate efforts to impeach Donald Trump. If they are too cowardly to weather the turmoil of an impeachment process, they should pack their bags, leave Washington and look for another line of work.

Oscar H. Blayton is a former Marine Corps combat pilot and human rights activist who practices law in Virginia.



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