

Evaluating the Impact of America's College Promise Act of 2018 on Higher Education Access for Nontraditional Black Students: A Policy, Governmental, and Political Insight

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Abstract: *Despite the opportunity gap between impoverished communities and higher education as a systemic economic barrier, where those born into low - income American communities have fewer skills training, higher education opportunities, mentorship, and other necessary components to thrive from an early point in life, especially following denial of the America's College Promise Act of 2018, there is a lack of attention and political prioritization toward the America's College Promise Act of 2018. This study examines the political motivations and policy nuances associated with higher education access by Black nontraditional college students using the context of America's College Promise Act of 2018, which failed to receive a floor vote in the U. S. Congress. Through grounded theory analysis, the researcher observed the emergence of patterns in the data that illustrate clear disparities in educational access among Black college students, particularly nontraditional Black students. The data also suggest the existence of extra - political influences designed to impede progressive reform legislation in higher education. The researcher also examined economic, social, racial, and equity principles in the literature, underscoring the need for enhanced affordability in the higher education industry, which was a primary focus of the Act. The findings suggest that partisanship has created significant legislative gridlock and tribalism that often stifles higher education reform policies. Additionally, the data revealed a clear contrast between priorities and motivational factors associated with Democrats and Republicans in the U. S. Congress regarding access to funding and other resources in higher education. Even though the study results were indicative of massive differences in the approach and values of these groups, some commonalities that were found may provide pragmatic solutions, where certain tools, such as data - driven modeling, economic messaging, jobs messaging, compromise, and recalibrated branding, have the potential to facilitate meaningful higher education reform.*

Keywords: Americas College Promise Act of 2018, Nontraditional Black College Students, Higher Education Access, Equitable Policy Analysis, Political Impacts

1. Introduction

Institutional effectiveness in higher education, as it relates to best practices for student retention, has been an ongoing debate for years (Tinto, 2006). Notably, a person's socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses the entirety of their life from financial security to educational attainment, and often, educational attainment determines a person's place in their respective socioeconomic classes. This conversation has become more complex because of continuously changing societal and economic trends, marketplace realities, and U. S. educational policies. Consequently, each American person lives in a certain socioeconomic stratum that somewhat defines the future quality of their life. Those with a low SES have been found to directly correlate with poor academic achievement and overall quality of life. In the U. S., more than 39% of African - Americans live in poverty, and over 88% of Black students who enroll in college require financial aid (Brey et al., 2019). Moreover, members of this minority group are likely to be born into poverty and permanently condemned to a low SES for their entire lives. Many Black Americans never attempt to enter a higher education institution given the challenges associated with tuition costs and fees.

However, higher education can provide a valuable path to reach the American middle class when it is accessible and attainable, particularly for nontraditional Black students. Consequently, many researchers have noted the importance of increasing accessibility to higher education, which can align employment with required educational degrees and skills. In the U. S., Blacks or African Americans face twice the unemployment rate of White Americans (Ethnic and Racial Minorities, 2017). Moreover, recent data indicates that the average cost of higher education is a staggering \$160, 000, which presents a much greater hardship for Black families given their statistically lower income ratio than other racial groups (Black Student College, 2020, para.22). Despite these statistics, older, nontraditional students have emerged as the new normal in the collegiate setting. Each year, a higher number of individuals return to school to earn a specialized degree that is connected to a specific career path. According to an article published in *USA Today*, these nontraditional American college students outnumber traditional American college students (Guidry, 2018). That is, people who are 24 years of age and above, particularly Black Americans, are going back to college primarily because of marketplace realities and job prospects, along with a lack of opportunities associated with their present career trajectories or pathways that do not require certain educational degrees.

Volume 13 Issue 2, February 2024

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

www.ijsr.net

Furthermore, the previous recession or the need for higher education degrees to achieve employment that supports the cost of living today gave impetus to this trend (Patton, 2015). Approximately 74% of American college students were 24 years of age or older in 2018 (Guidry, 2018). Some of these nontraditional students are returning to complete their college education, while others are experiencing college for the first time as the first generation to attend college. However, both groups typically possess different challenges than those of their traditional freshmen student counterparts, including, but not limited to, family, career, learning patterns, and peer realities (Benyehudah, 2018). Given these differences, campus culture, institutional programs, professorial pedagogy, and access to financial resources may not translate in the same fashion for these nontraditional students. This premise could be especially true for Black students more likely to experience societal marginalization, economic disadvantages, and hyper - disconnection; this ostracism, in turn, can contribute to the disproportionate ratio of nontraditional Black students entering the middle class. Research has shown that the “sense of belonging” factor has a strong correlation to academic achievement and university degree completion (Strayhorn, 2013).

Research also reflects those economic constraints in obtaining higher education, especially for nontraditional Black students, become paramount when looking at utilizing the higher education system to enter the workforce and join middle - class America. The nontraditional Black student must overcome barriers to higher education to excel in their career and, thus, increase their likelihood of entering the middle class. Though Black adults have progressed substantially in social and economic terms, they still require forward mobility enhancers in the education and employment sectors (Beyer, 2020). The American government has provided proposals and the implementation of policies to address the social and economic disadvantages created by well - documented systemic biases in the societal construct. However, the policy is only part of the overall dynamic of governance and only one part of the conundrum at hand.

In many instances, what would be hailed as a “common sense” educational policy is withheld from public benefit given political factors, which may be invisible to the policy proposal process itself without exhaustive contextualization, insight, and research. It is from this notion that this research scope was developed to analyze, understand, and illuminate the potential policy implications of the America’s College Promise (ACP) Act of 2018 and the political realities that hindered its progress. This Act was first introduced in 2018 in correlation to its potential systemic impact on disadvantaged college students seeking entry into middle - class America, which included Black students. The ACP offered a solution for ongoing discrepancies in equal opportunity through the utilization of free academic federal funding sources. Thus, this study aims to understand the relationship between the U. S., Congress, federal higher education policy, and nontraditional Black college students and the political and policy context in correlation with the proposed bill— ACP Act of 2018. Hence, the study analyzes this Act through the research lens of its potential impact on nontraditional Black college students in American higher education and their ability to enter the middle class if the Act received a floor

vote, passage, and executive concurrence from the President of the U. S.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

A common education statistic often regards the opportunity gap between impoverished communities and higher education as a systemic economic barrier. Much of the time, those born into low - income American communities have fewer opportunities in life because of their lack of skills training, higher education opportunities, mentorship, and other necessary components to thrive from an early point in life (Mooney, 2018). This gap is unfortunate for those populations who never had a chance to succeed in the workplace or society. Thus, it is the obligation of policymakers, government officials, boards of education, and other stakeholders to enable an educational delivery model to enhance access to students with socioeconomic obstacles. Further, a percentage of this population enters college post - high school and drops out or disregards higher education altogether for various reasons. This situation establishes the need for higher education opportunities and equality for nontraditional students over the age of 24. Evidently, this gap is a major systemic problem within the U. S. The denial of the ACP Act of 2018 bill correlates with a slew of problems with the continued inequality regarding higher education access and achievement. Moreover, Black students may not overcome common hardships without promise programs, such as the ACP.

In 2015, President Barack Obama advocated for the passing of legislation that would have created a federal policy promoting greater access to higher education. This proposition included a mandate for free - college tuition at two - year public institutions, which would enable a larger population of students to have equal access to education and skill - building. However, this proposed remedy would have created an additional challenge to Historically Black Colleges and Universities’ (HBCUs’) ability to recruit. Though this research does not explore the cause - and - effect ramifications of free college regarding HBCUs, the topic is worthy of exploration. President Obama was unsuccessful at finding a legislative victory for his higher education proposal. Although the proposed Senate bill did not go through in 2015, Democrats re - introduced a similar idea three years later. The reintroduction of the ACP was sparked by Senator Tammy Baldwin (Democrat, Wisconsin) of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee and Representative Andy Levin (Democrat, Michigan) vice - chair of the House Committee on Education and Labor (ACP, 2019). Baldwin subsequently named the ACP Act of 2018 (ACP, 2018, para.1).

March 1, 2018 marks the day the ACP Act of 2018 was proposed by the Democratic Party with the primary goal to provide greater access to higher education for disadvantaged students across the U. S. While the Act covered resident and nonresident students and Indian tribes, a superior partnership includes the creation of minority - serving institutions or colleges accepting nontraditional Black students. Specifically, this proposed Senate bill would have created increased access and affordability of education to college students who were historically left out of higher education.

Moreover, the ACP Act of 2018 was designed to encourage students to complete a bachelor's degree after their two years in community college. Therefore, key reforms of the Act since its inception in 2015 anticipated the improvement of nontraditional student outcomes.

According to Benyehudah (2018), "colleges struggle to graduate Black male students, ages 24 years old and upwards compared with their similarly situated White male counterparts" (para.2). While Black female students tend to fair better in higher education than their Black male counterparts (Cuyjet, 1997; Flowers, 2004), they remain typically the most marginalized group on college campuses (Benyehudah, 2018), though they make up the largest non-White demographic of college attendees in the U. S. Thus, this scenario creates an interesting dynamic where Black males and females make up the most underserved student population in higher education. Moreover, these facts compel the researcher to consider the cause - and - effect relationship between institutional awareness of these dynamics and the American government's policy sensitivity related to higher education. The ability to afford tuition, family life, work - to - school balance, and campus culture interplay in the overall underlying forces of retention, academic performance, and, ultimately, graduation and completion rates of the nontraditional student. Research data highlights that 65% of Black college students must balance full - time jobs along with family responsibilities; thus, these students have the poorest rate of completion, reaching a drop - out ratio of more than 40% (Bridges, 2020).

As noted, the ACP bill never passed and was met with stiff political opposition. The lack of attention and political prioritization toward the ACP Act of 2018 warrant research and analyses through an examination of the current political realities and the potential real - life impact on nontraditional Black college students. The researcher speculates that if the ACP Act of 2018 was passed, many Black students would re - enter the higher education system in response to the incentives presented, economic and credit transfer barriers would be eliminated, and marketplace emphasis would be placed on degreed applicants. For this study, the data collected is contextualized through a policy implication analysis of the ACP Act of 2018. The analysis considers how this proposed legislation would affect nontraditional Black college students looking to enter the middle class in addition to the roles of political factors and their subsequent impact on this process in its entirety.

The extent to which the ACP Act of 2018 would impact underserved communities, specifically those who demonstrate the most need for the equilibrium that higher education brings, namely nontraditional Black students, is unknown. Thus, this study provides clarity to unknown factors by carefully scrutinizing various components of the Act, including why it never received a floor vote. It examined the relationship between the U. S. Congress, federal higher education policy, nontraditional Black college students, and the political and policy context of the ACP Act of 2018. Hence, this study analyzes this Act through the research lens of its potential impact on a nontraditional Black college student in U. S. higher education and their potential ability to enter the middle class.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This research examines an existing U. S. Senate bill, the ACP Act of 2018. Here, the researcher sought to understand the potential policy implications as it relates to nontraditional Black students. It further sought to ascertain why the bill was not passed (i. e., the political and policy restrictions that may have contributed to the immobility of the proposed bill) *and*, if it were passed, how it could have benefited nontraditional Black adults in their potential entry or re - entry into the middle class with higher education attainment and any hardships experienced by this demographic. It is critical to understand whether underlying political agendas halted the enacting of this law. Through proper analysis, the study aimed to acquire clarity regarding the bill's potential direct impact on higher education, insight into the economic marketplace, and the potential benefits to Black nontraditional students. Finally, this study sought to better understand the political processes in federal higher education policy.

President Obama's administration desired for higher education to become as standard as completing high school education when he originally proposed the concept of "free college." Further, he understood the need for higher education largely because the percentage of occupations requiring postsecondary education continued to rise. Again, it cannot be overstated that skills and education acquired by an individual determine their likelihood of professional success in the U. S. Low - income nontraditional Black students are already at a disadvantage in American society; therefore, higher education systems must provide a means for this demographic to earn associate's and bachelor's degrees. Today, there are just over 1, 000 community colleges across the country, which make up approximately 40% of the undergraduate population. The entire idea of community colleges is to offer a reliable and affordable route to entrance into four - year universities. Thus, the ACP emphasizes the ability of eligible individuals to utilize funding for community college programs and then proceed to four - year institutions. As the passing of the bill seems to be a catalyst for the progression of the Black population across the country, the researcher sought to understand why the bill never got out of congressional committee and if the denial relates specifically to political rather than policy - related reasons.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Given the research problem and purpose of this study, its scope covers analysis for a better understanding of the potential policy impact the ACP Act of 2018 would have on nontraditional Black college students and their ability to enter middle - class America through a well - rounded higher educational system and proper career path training. Beyond the potential policy, the impact is the political reality that the ACP is simply an idea that has not received the full support of the U. S. Congress and the support of the former U. S. President, Donald J. Trump. This reality must be examined through an unbiased, nonpolitical perspective. Hence, the study delves into the following research questions (RQs) and corresponding hypotheses.

RQ1: What were the motivating factors for the ACP Act of 2018 to be introduced?

Ho1: The idea of ACP came to be in 2015 given the ever - growing gap between the workforce and required degrees for employment; thus, unemployment rates were rising, particularly in lower socioeconomic communities. The reintroduction in 2018 considered the most underserved groups regarding access and completion to higher education. It is believed that policymakers desired to bring equality to higher education with the ultimate goal of improving the U. S. economy by expanding the middle - class system.

RQ2: What are the potential policy implications of the ACP Act of 2018, specifically, as it relates to nontraditional Black college students attempting to enter middle - class America?

Ho2: The discrepancies in former college promises could not bring full equality to higher education when it comes to the Black adult student. Therefore, if the ACP Act of 2018 were to be granted by the U. S. government, it would need specific regulations to monitor the progress of participating students and support them through graduation and obtaining employment in the middle class.

RQ3: What are the involved political dynamics that provide clarity as to the reason the ACP Act of 2018 never received a full floor vote?

Ho3: If political parties cannot act cohesively and there is significant pushback from one party or another, it is impossible to pass the bill. As President Barack Obama founded the ACP concept, it is likely the Republican Party put a stop to passing the bill based on an unrelated political agenda.

Examination of each of these questions gives way to plausible, reliable, and valid information regarding the ACP. Unlike previous literature on the topic, this study allowed for cross - comparison of information along with direct source responses, yielding a conclusion on the effectiveness of the Act (if it were to be enacted) and the primary factors contributing to its defeat.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Key goals of the Act included, but were not limited to, expanding college access to underserved and nontraditional students, strengthening educational reform to account for education and career pathways in a changing economy, and improving student outcomes and students' ability to enter the middle class through superior preparation (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Accordingly, the results of this research are significant for a few pivotal reasons. First, there is a fundamental lack of public knowledge as to the proposed U. S. Senate bill (ACP, 2018) and the potential policy impact it would have had on historically underserved communities, particularly Black nontraditional college students.

Given the reality that higher education is designed to be a conduit to middle - class America, it is paramount to understand potentially sweeping higher educational policy through its ability to catapult nontraditional adult learners to a middle - class reality. That is, understanding how underserved populations can be propelled into the middle class through educational means and its subsequent effect on the U. S. economy emphasizes the need to review higher

education policies, including their abilities to better the future of Black Americans and the education system.

Furthermore, higher education provides a path that is much more likely to provide entrance into the middle class. The ACP proposed more than \$61 billion of federal funding to underserved students in the U. S. These students would have opportunities that were otherwise unavailable, as the ACP encouraged necessary reforms to promote higher - quality education specific to the ever - growing and changing national and global economies. President Barack Obama campaigned, advocated, and lobbied for the concept of the ACP Act of 2018, which was a political deviation from the notion of four years of free college. The bill had strong support from Democratic Party allies, though it met stiff scrutiny from the opposing party. This dynamic can be best understood through an examination of the political factors that influenced this policy. Typically, educational policy tends to be met with greater levels of bipartisan support than conventional party - line legislation. The limited publicity and media attention given to the ACP Act of 2018 warrants further exploration.

This study is particularly significant in its intentions to ascertain whether political interests halt the equity of higher education access. The researcher sought to expose political agendas along with the political divide that caused the ultimate demise of the ACP. Interestingly, the ACP Act of 2018 was referred to as a "game - changer" by advocates of the policy. Though the proposed bill was written in specific terms regarding the potential higher education implications for various groups, it failed to directly correlate its potential impact on Black adult learners who are traditionally underserved regarding their quality of life in American society and the educational system.

1.5 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study, described the concept of policy conflict, and highlighted the needed reform in higher education. Although it seems obvious that the Act could be an effective solution for financially struggling adults who want to return to school and become trained in a profession or career that could lead to a middle - class lifestyle, political clashes behind the scenes may have been particularly influential in preventing it from coming to fruition. Thus far, studies on the Act have shown the viable benefits that might be attained if obstacles, such as finances, were removed, thereby allowing adult learners the opportunity to complete their education. While some naysayers have noted the high number of students who dropped out of collegiate programs after returning given family or work obligations, the Act appears to offer a promising pathway for Black students to better themselves and control their destinies toward a better future and a more productive role within their communities.

President Obama introduced the Act on the grounds that the U. S. workforce was showing an increasing gap in skills versus employment. That is, prospective employees did not have the education and skills needed to be hired for most positions. Ultimately, the Act presented an opportunity for more than five million students to graduate from higher education institutions by the end of the 2020 fiscal year

(Janssen, 2018). Hence, by offering this program to interested ones, students and their regions of residence would simultaneously benefit, as crime rates would likely drop and job retention and satisfaction would also increase. The researcher analyzed prior documented information along with personal research to answer the three primary RQs.

The following chapters examine the background and formation of the ACP Act of 2018, how it came about, why it may not have gained political traction, how it could have possibly benefited needy populations, and how it may have backfired against those same groups through political mismanagement. Moreover, they explore how the Act may still come to fruition despite obstacles associated with the current political climate. An examination is also presented regarding those in power and how they may hinder or facilitate the evolution and eventual execution of the Act for deserving underserved communities. Subsequent chapters provide insight into the relevant thoughts of popular Black scholars and alternative college promises similar to ACP. The study can help readers appreciate all characteristics of the topic through a review of current literature that defines the theoretical framework of the study, a depiction of the research methodology and accumulated data, a careful analysis of the data, and a presentation of study findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organization of the Review

Within the body of literature and research conducted on the ACP Act of 2018 and its possible ramifications, the general consensus reflects a positive trend for older students who feel trapped in dead-end careers and those who did not have access to higher education during their youth for various reasons (i. e., the need to enter the workforce, military service, raising a family, or caring for elderly parents). Nevertheless, current research strongly suggests that the implementation of this program would especially be seen and felt in lower socioeconomic areas, where crime and imprisonment are rampant given the seeming lack of alternative opportunities for forward mobility. Thus, this chapter is organized into three primary sections: Contextualization of the Literature, Emergent Themes, and Summary of the Literature. Finally, subtopics provide details regarding the ACP Act of 2018, Congress's responses to the Act, scholarly viewpoints, alternative responses, and differential acts.

2.2 Contextualization of the Literature

This section draws from the literature needed to understand the implications of every segment involving the ACP. Accordingly, the study provides insight into the minds of various researchers. It also identifies and bridges certain gaps in the current body of literature regarding the ACP, which does not adequately consider the thoughts of Black persons, the preexisting promise programs, or the poor statistics regarding nontraditional Black students. Black Americans account for over 34% of those incarcerated in American prisons (Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, 2020). Black Americans are also incarcerated at a rate five times that of the White population (Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, 2020). These

criminal rates have a major negative impact on the ability of Black Americans to acquire reliable employment.

The National Center for Education Statistics concludes that roughly 21% of Black Americans over the age of 24 held a college degree as of 2016, up from 18% in 2010 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2019). While this number continues to rise, there remains a significant disparity relative to White Americans, where 31% had acquired a college degree by 2010 and 35% by 2016 (NCES, 2019). Notably, 15% of Black Americans over the age of 24 did not complete high school as of 2016, relative to 8% of Whites (NCES, 2019).

2.3 America's College Promise Act of 2018

It is critical to appreciate the components and content included in the full text (see Appendix A) to fully understand the proposition of the Act. The U. S. Senator, Tammy Baldwin (Democrat, Wisconsin), proposed the ACP Act of 2018 with enormous emphasis on its vision of giving equal opportunity to higher education and, thus, paving a clear pathway to entering middle-class America. Many legislatures and policymakers felt this Act was necessary because 2018–2020 projections posit that more than 65% of jobs will require postsecondary education (U. S. Senator Tammy, 2018).

The Act was also designed to allow diverse students to obtain a college degree without accumulating an enormous amount of debt. According to *Forbes*, student loan debt has surpassed \$1.6 trillion in the U. S., which translates to around \$29,000 in debt per student graduate (Friedman, 2020). The amount of federal share expenditures toward eligible students under the ACP largely depends on the percentage of the community college tuition and fees regarding local or state residents. In this way, the funds given to eligible students under the Act remain fair and equivalent to current tuition prices. For potential students to be eligible for a grant under the ACP, they must submit an application each fiscal year.

Notably, the state, governor, and state agency have the majority of jurisdiction over higher education. Moreover, the Act ensures community colleges accept the transfer of credits from other schools or credits from occupational training programs while waiving resident tuition and fees for certain eligible students. These elements can be employed to improve student outcomes from enrollment to completion and employment. Along with accepting previously completed credits, the Act ensures participating colleges provide support services, such as mentoring and advising students individually (ACP, 2018). These services are especially critical for low-income, first-generation adult college students or any other nontraditional student.

Title II of the ACP Act of 2018 is explicit regarding grants to Black or nontraditional serving higher education institutions. Historically Black four-year institutions meeting the requirements of the Act would receive amounts appropriated as determined under section 204 (a) of the Act. The Act focuses more on encouraging students to enroll and complete a full bachelor's degree, as opposed to a two-year associate degree. However, eligible students are given a slew of

incentives to transfer community college credits to a four - year institution to further reduce tuition fees. Additionally, eligible 4 - year institutions must portray a student body of 35% or higher of low - income, nontraditional Black students (ACP, 2018).

Similar to community colleges, these institutions must commit to providing all necessary academic and student support services to provide the best possible opportunity for success to each student. Support services must help set individualized performance goals to improve outcomes. Accelerated learning in career and degree pathways is encouraged through the ACP. Interestingly, the Act requires predominantly Black four - year colleges and HBCUs to partner with outside employers and industries for superior advanced learning opportunities directly in the student's field of choice. Moreover, participating institutions would receive federal funding for their actual tuition and fees during the first fiscal year. Each subsequent year would increase based on program participation per student. Institutions (i. e., universities and colleges) would not receive more than a 3% increase from one fiscal year to the next. Eligible students would never receive a grant amount higher than the average tuition and fees of public four - year institutions. This amount would be determined by the U. S. Secretary of Education.

The Act significantly increases student support by accelerating learning prospects while potential students are in high school. Specifically, high school students have greater opportunities to pursue advanced education to reduce the number of credits needed to earn a degree once they attend college. The idea is to provide the most disadvantaged student with the opportunity to earn early college credit (ACP, 2018). The ACP strives to enable degree pathways early on, parallel to improving student outcomes and reducing costs. Regarding nontraditional adult Black students, the Act enforces the waiving of tuition and other fees for those returning to college. Meanwhile, the scope, quality, and training within community college programs are expanded (ACP, 2018). Again, these students could matriculate at four - year institutions with improved affordability. The Act specifically states the necessity for grants or allotment of funds to remain fair and equal for all qualifying students. No student should receive funds exceeding the average amount of full - time higher education fees in three consecutive fiscal years (ACP, 2018). Each state is required to analyze the progress of each grant fulfillment.

State institutions must also report rates of graduation, dropout, transfer, attainment of further degrees, and the like relative to other participating schools. The U. S. Secretary of Education then compiles all reported information with careful analysis, and the final report is then submitted to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) of the Senate and the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the House of Representatives" (ACP, 2018, p.12). The Secretary is responsible for supporting the necessary institutional reforms and best practices to improve student outcomes. If the federal budget is available, the state should continue to receive funding each fiscal year. If funds are expended, they will no longer be available to the Secretary. However, the Secretary has the authority to discontinue the state's share of federal funds if they see the

state cannot provide continued support after the implementation of the necessary institutional reforms (ACP, 2018). However, if the Secretary finds the federal share is insufficient based on the student - to - school ratio, they have the authority to reduce the amount distributed to each student at their discretion (ACP, 2018).

Again, the entire mindset behind the reintroduction backed the initial proposition of the ACP with the idea that higher education is meant for individuals to prosper and thrive in their life and future careers. Higher education should not include saddling students with crippling debt or the inability to receive further education based on its unaffordability. Prior studies emphasize that higher education should be a means for low socioeconomic individuals to enter middle - class society through skills and education. Essentially, the reintroduction proposed the same goals as the Act but stipulated the necessity for the federal government and all states to work more cohesively in waiving resident tuition and fees. With that, the states would receive a further incentive to contribute to the ACP by the government promising to give three dollars for every dollar invested by the state (ACP, 2018). Therefore, the state itself would benefit from its contributions to reforming higher education.

These grant programs are a necessity for low - income students to succeed and for minority - serving institutions to see improved student outcomes. While receiving funds for the ACP, students must maintain a grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher and show progress toward earning their degree to remain eligible for funding (ACP, 2018). It is estimated that savings of approximately \$3, 800 per year would be realized for those attending a community college under this Act (Janssen, 2018). Therefore, when progressing to a four - year institution, the student would have significantly more savings. Many researchers theorize that higher education institutions would benefit under the ACP by being pushed into increasing graduation percentages, improving courses, and tracking student performance and progress.

2.4 Responses of Congress to the Act

Evidently, the Act promotes a path for underserved nontraditional Black students to secure better professional opportunities. Moreover, President Obama emphasized the ability of the ACP concept to facilitate U. S. economic prosperity. Reforming education and creating affordability provides direct access to establishing a prosperous middle - class system across America (Janssen, 2018). President Obama further concluded that the best way to face economic challenges is to harness the skills, talents, and abilities of the American people. Legislators must carefully address any problems associated with the Act, including quality assurance and equal access factors, to meet its requirements (Janssen, 2018). Access to earning higher education degrees allows for a jumpstart to the middle class for those born and raised in poor socioeconomic conditions.

The ACP pointedly explains that there remains an enormous amount of inequality in the American higher education system, though it can be greatly rectified through federal education grants covering higher education tuition and fees (Janssen, 2018). Strong interventions, such as those included

in the Act, provide a remarkably effective method to overcome economic inequality and gain upward mobility in the U. S. (Janssen, 2018). Interestingly, low individual budgets and extremely high educational expectations are the primary reasons nontraditional students fail to complete their degrees and return to school at a later point (over the age of 24). With the perceived positives from the ACP, it remains quite controversial in some circles. The Republican Party was particularly critical of the proposal presented by Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin, which they expressed in a series of semi - rhetorical questions:

- How can the government provide free education without diminishing the quality of education? Is reform enough to improve the higher educational system?
- Does federal funding impede the freedom of higher education institutions or participating students?
- Will the federal funding cause students to choose two - year schools over four - year schools, thus hurting the four - year institutions in the long run?
- Will these students go on to earn four - year degrees, attain reasonable occupations, and enter the middle class?
- Republicans say most institutions are already paid for by state and federal taxes; thus, is more money the answer to better enrollment, and, hence, student outcomes? (Janssen, 2018)

Many have speculated that partisan gridlock contributes to the immobility of higher education reform in general. Notably, in 2017 when the public narrative of massive educational reform was at its peak, only one independent was part of the HELP committee (see Table 1).

Table 1: Senate Committee Party Ratios: 114th Congress (2015–2017)

	Total	Majority (R)	Minority (D)	Independent (I)
Total Senators	100	54	44	2
Total Committee Seats	376	204	162	10
Committees				
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions	22	12	9	1

Furthermore, the bill was sponsored and presented by the Democratic Party. Researchers theorize that the divided House played a role in the bill not passing. Janssen noted that the reason for the skepticism of the Republican Party remains unclear other than a significant amount of federal funding having to be used to implement the Act. It is supposed that the Republican Party did not want to spend money on a multi - billion dollar federal program with little evidence that all goals and objectives would be met (Janssen, 2018). However, many Republicans are largely in favor of emboldening American families to save for college instead of government intervention, such as free tuition (Janssen, 2018). The Democratic Party countered these thoughts by indicating that higher education institutions are only survivable in the ever - changing economy if they become affordable for underserved or nontraditional students (Janssen, 2018). The Democratic Party says the benefits outweigh any short - term issues and is vital to resilience across the country. A particular scholar highlights this concept, noting that this legislation has the potential to settle among the ranks of the most influential

federal higher education aid and access legislation passed in the 20th century, and influence the next administration's higher education agenda... [and] considering these relationships and the potential impact of ACP, it is determined that this policy has the potential to have an equally profound impact on higher education to that of the Higher Education Act [...] of 1965 but warns of ideological influences on its execution (Palmadessa, 2016, pp.52, 70).

In direct response to the proposition of the ACP, many federal officials noted that various programs and federal funding already met due diligence for the U. S. higher educational system. Janssen (2018) particularly regards Senators helping to implement the HELP committee, Federal Application for Federal Student Aid, and the PROSPER Act (2018). In fact, the HELP committee oversees many initiatives to lower student debt and prevent the "deregulation" of institutions (Janssen, 2018, p.27). However, it is important to note that this committee along with most others overseeing the U. S. higher education system is largely represented by the Republican Party and, subsequently, Republican ideals. It is increasingly obvious Congress does not contribute a high level of federal authority to yield the necessary funding and reform in higher education. Instead, Congress approves any objective that can be met in the easiest and fastest way possible (Janssen, 2018).

Evidently, this concept highlights the prime context of the Act, including its pros and cons. While the favorable side of the ACP offers a readily available path for knowledge, education, and a clear future, political agendas have the potential to cloud these issues, particularly if the Act is implemented as a means of making a given political party or individual appear more charitable or to enhance that person's or group's reputation. Such sentiment exists among the political ranks that rather than acting for the good of the community, the Act might be misused as a platform tool, harming the very same populace it purports to assist. Hence, caution would be imperative in rolling out the Act if indeed it did pass through legislation. Moreover, Palmadessa (2016) recommended using perspectives from those with firsthand knowledge of the Act, including scholars, students, and specific politicians having a strong familiarity with the purpose of the Act. Using these individuals as a source of credible and reliable information if the Act was brought to fruition should aid in keeping the political agendas focused on the demographics most in need of help.

2.5 Black Scholar Viewpoints, Alternative Responses, and Differential Acts

2.5.1 Alternative Responses and Differential Acts

After the introduction of the Act, much of the U. S. higher education recognized the need for a meaningful nexus between education and employment. There is a consensus that the educational system realizes the inability of students to obtain jobs within the middle class if they could not receive the required educational degrees (Davidson, Ashby - King, & Sciulli, 2018). Interestingly, the Governor of Tennessee signed the Tennessee Promise Act (TPA) of 2014, which set out to have 55% or more of adults within the state obtain postsecondary degrees by 2025 (Davidson et al., 2018). Now, the TPA ensured such a goal would be met by enabling

affordable tuition and fees including a focus on lowering student debt for four - year degrees. Similar to the ACP Act of 2018, the TPA of 2014 helped students obtain their degrees for free. Essentially, President Obama's proposition of the ACP enabled the Act in Tennessee and 13 other states, implementing a form of free - college tuition (Davidson et al., 2018).

Moreover, there are more than 200 active college programs across 41 states (Kelchen, 2017). While these programs may be successful in helping nontraditional college students to complete their degrees and enter the middle class, there is little long - term tracking evidence. The lack of information is partly a result of institutions neglecting to track student progress and outcomes. Notably, this situation is a factor that is noted and enforced within the ACP. Regardless, the concept of college promise programs is not new, as the first was known as Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program, enacted in 1990 (Kelchen, 2017). This program enabled many students to receive college scholarships but did not cover adult students going back to school. However, many researchers noted that over the last few decades, the Century Scholars Program increased college enrollment rates and persistence among students (Kelchen, 2017). There is no research on the actual completion of associate's or bachelor's degrees.

Another college promise initiated in 2005 is known as the Kalamazoo Promise. It was the first college promise program created and executed locally without any federal or State support or funding. The Kalamazoo Promise encouraged people to move to the area, whereby enrollment (and hopefully graduation) rates of the community college would increase. This college promise model was completely funded privately. Furthermore, only students that lived and graduated from a local high school were eligible, but Kalamazoo ensured full tuition and fees coverage for any college within the state of Michigan (Kelchen, 2017). Eventually, the promise induced a 25% increase in college enrollment and a 12% increase in actual college degree earnings (Kelchen, 2017). Relative to the ACP, the Kalamazoo Promise is extremely small, and it is only available to a limited number of students who live and graduate from high schools in the area.

Moreover, this college promise Act does not correlate with the returning nontraditional college student and has many stipulations that may hinder the future of students. For example, confining eligible students to a particular area may lead to significant disparities in areas where mobility is a barrier given abject poverty. Looking back at the ACP proposed in 2018, the primary stakeholders are any official persons involved in the higher education system in any way. Researchers have considered that federal priorities do not always accord with state priorities. Therefore, stakeholders should create a policy advisory group to work closely with and manage college promise programs through the utilization of federal funding (Janssen, 2018). Community colleges also responded to President Obama's ACP ideology by saying that it would help create a wider population of skillful and educated employees within the middle class, but the Act neglects to consider issues associated with college preparation (Janssen, 2018).

2.5.2 Black Scholar Viewpoints

Chike Akua. Black scholar Chike Akua (2017) suggested that African - American educators and policymakers are the key stakeholders to determine such legislation needed to enhance the education of Black nontraditional students. U. S. legislation must work to reform education policy for accuracy, correction, inclusion, consciousness, competence, priority, and precedence (Akua, 2017). Akua (2017) also noted that Afrocentric educational policy production should consider the history, identity, agency, and liability of those it seeks to empower (Akua, 2017) such that low - income students have the same opportunity to participate in higher education as any other student. Scholars suggest a need for educational reform to effectively and efficiently teach African - American or Black students while retaining a certain degree of professionalism. Here, agency and action are imperative to yield change in educational policies about the Black student, which must consider the best interest of the nontraditional student.

Akua (2017) recommended that local Black agencies should become involved in educational reform to motivate legislative policy stakeholders to make the necessary changes. The policy begins with formulation, legislation, implementation, and impact (Akua, 2017). One of the largest issues faced by higher education institutions in America is the ability to implement training and policy reform to acquire enhanced academic achievement for Black students (Akua, 2017). Moreover, these students face challenges in higher education, often relating to educational inequality, poor engagement in studies, and the dismantling of public education (Akua, 2017). Now, several empirical studies note that many educational institutions cannot or will not participate in reforms required to build on the success of Black students graduating from higher education institutions and entering the middle class system.

Policy analysis provides a competent starting point for understanding the process of policy and possible effects after implementation. Thus, policymakers seeking to enact the ACP Act of 2018 must define policy problems while developing actions to achieve the goals (Akua, 2017). For example, the inability of low - income nontraditional Black adults to afford and complete higher education causes them to be stuck in poor socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, initiating the Act allows for a larger population of Black adults to achieve higher education associate's or bachelor's degrees, allowing them to obtain jobs within the middle class.

The outcomes are infinite regarding improvement in livelihood for the student and their respective families. Acts such as the ACP are developed to resolve problems within society, such as inequality in higher education. "Policy formation occurs at the nexus of culture, economics, power, and positionality. It also suggests that groups who effectively utilize or access these elements will affect the creation or change of policy" (Akua, 2017, p.70). These processes occur over the years. Perhaps it is time to finally implement ACP in the U. S. higher educational system. Politicians, political organizations, the general public, and economic interests must align for the integration of proposed policies to be successful for years to come (Akua, 2017).

Cornel West: Scholar and Professor, Cornel West, acted as one of the first officials to scrutinize the quality of higher education, especially regarding the Black student. Originally, he was a high - ranking faculty member of Harvard University. West focused on the lack of credibility of Black scholarships throughout the institution, but he was scrutinized as the cause of the grade inflation within the Afro - American studies department of the school. Consequently, Harvard University brought on a more rigorous grading system and intensive training for each of its faculty. The goal of this reform was to bring equality to all active students. West opposed his critics by noting his exemplary efforts for students throughout his years at Harvard, his 16 published books, and more than 50 independent lectures at the university (West, 2005). The reality was that Cornel West is a towering and prolific public intellectual whose research is widely respected and highly regarded.

He suggested that higher education in America has become more of a competitive marketplace than its interests placed around the good of the students (West, 2005). He went on to say that U. S. professors must step up in their role to achieve academic freedom and equality. Professors are the source of establishing and maintaining the high standards and integrity of the institutions in which they work (West, 2005). In fact, he regards the issues within the higher education system to be largely based on the inability of stakeholders to work together in setting and upholding standards for all faculty and students (West, 2005). Here, this ideal coincides with the previous suggestion that politicians and relevant organizations must work cohesively for the necessary changes to be made. West concludes his analysis of higher education by noting major obstacles to overcome within the system. He notes a dedication to the Democratic tradition of life in America and better engagement with culture and education as the primary source to overcoming such challenges (West, 2005).

Inez Beverly Prosser (1897–1934): A third prominent Black scholar is Inez Beverly Prosser, a profound scholar who spent her career teaching in predominantly Black colleges. Prosser was the first Black female psychologist in the U. S. She was incredibly instrumental in helping underserved Black students obtain funding for higher education. Prosser emphasized the need for more Black students to gain a college education and believed that separate Black institutions provided the most supportive environment for nontraditional students to thrive. The scholar mentioned that students were less likely to be subject to inequality in learning opportunities. While Prosser focused largely on the psychological aspect of education, she influenced various fields by being the voice of African - American education from the 1920s to the 1930s, expressing strong advocacy for minority students to achieve higher education goals (Benjamin, Henry, & McMahan, 2005).

Overall, Prosser felt that Black students would benefit the most through policy reform throughout the higher educational system. Interestingly, much of this scholarly data was collected as early as 1931, suggesting an educational gap for many decades. Over time, Prosser developed the theory that nonacademic variables play a significant role in a student's academic success (Benjamin et al., 2005). These variables may include personality, social skills, or community activities. Therefore, Prosser helped readers appreciate that an

academic gap begins in early childhood and extends into adulthood if the child is from a low socioeconomic community and lacks the resources to be successful.

2.6 Current U. S. Politics Cohesiveness with the America's College Promise

Many active political figures believe the concept of free - college tuition and fees has become quite cliché. However, college graduates are swamped in student debt; therefore, it is a popular topic among those in or possibly attending college. The debate of whether free tuition is realistic involves the challenge of allocating government spending in the best way possible. Notably, this concept is one of the main reasons the ACP was rejected by the Republican Party. Moreover, current politicians generally have mixed viewpoints on the topic. Research portrays a strong perspective that federal college funding cannot benefit higher - income people but would result in positive effects for the low - income population. Politicians routinely emphasize that lower - income students need financial support to attend college (Halper, 2019).

Current U. S. Senator Bernie Sanders (Democrat, Vermont) has promoted the idea of free - college tuition as one of his primary political objectives for many years. Interestingly, former President Donald Trump, a Republican, has also spoken of free tuition. In fact, he has implemented several financial aid reforms including forgiveness after a certain number of years and immediate forgiveness for any disabled U. S. military veterans (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2020). President Joe Biden strives to make community college accessible to lower - income students. Therefore, the current government - political status within the U. S. is open to equality in higher education but lacks a cohesive structure of bipartisan sentiment.

Fain (2012) illustrated one of the major perils of adult education, particularly that of Blacks and African Americans. This researcher greatly pondered over the idea that adult education to the nontraditional student would falter if careful tabs are not kept as far as entrance rates, grades, student retention, and graduation rates. According to Fain (2012), “a whopping 77% of institutions do not know the graduation rate for their adult students” (para.4). Moreover, “adult students often ‘stop out’ multiple times and bounce around several institutions before earning a degree. Even a determined part - time, adult student can take eight years or more to earn a bachelor’s degree” (Fain, 2012, para.14). As daunting as these numbers seem, they grant a typical ideal of how long it could potentially take nontraditional students to achieve a basic degree, which pertains to the general education requirements plus specified courses to the student’s selected major of choice.

For many students, the amount of time involved, in conjunction with the financial investment required, is more than they can commit themselves to, especially when faced with family, work, and other personal obligations (Fain, 2012). Thus, in the absence of the Act or a similar outside force offering them a push or an incentive to pursue or finish such a program, many students give up and return to their prior low - salary jobs (Fain, 2012). A smaller population turns to options such as crime in lieu of seeking out

educational pathways. Thus, executing the ACP in a monitored and controlled manner potentially presents the best resolution sought by the public and politicians alike.

2.7 Current Educational System Cohesiveness with the America's College Promise

Nevertheless, the U. S. Department of Education (2018, para.1) concurred with this thought in the article, noting the following:

Creating a clear path to the middle class and ensuring our nation's economic prosperity means opening the doors of higher education to more Americans. Today, three - quarters of the fastest - growing occupations require education and training beyond a high school diploma. Yet nearly half the students who begin college in this country don't finish within six years.

The article described factors including the rising cost of tuition and the ongoing threat of student loan debt as deterrents for students in pursuing their education years after they have left high school and become adults. With this information, it is clear that enacting the Act ultimately helps remove such barricades and ease some of the stress that these particular students face when considering their return to higher education. However, current literature suggests outside obstacles can impede a student from completing their education altogether. For instance, Benyehudah (2018, para.1) states:

Colleges struggle to graduate Black male students, ages 24 years old and upwards, when compared with their similar White male counterparts. Solving retention and completion issues are paramount if tertiary institutions hope to broaden access and equity for all of its students.

As mentioned in other studies, elements such as work and family can block student progress, possibly derailing learners from completing their academic plans. Thus, the ACP Act of 2018 and the universities in question, must be proactive in this regard in planning for such scenarios, including providing resources to assist in such cases. For example, Benyehudah (2018) recommended employing mental health services, uniting students with peers to prevent isolation (especially when faced with an unfamiliar curriculum) and providing educational materials in a manner students can readily understand in correlation with their personal lives.

Instituting such protocols can circumvent many of the problems that Benyehudah foresaw for returning Black students and, perhaps, males especially. Benyehudah (2018, para.2) concludes that Black males face “financial constraints, work - life balance, and household management” issues when attempting to complete higher education. Furthermore, Benyehudah (2018) concludes that attempting to earn higher degrees becomes challenging when needing to find affordable childcare and time to attend courses. Therefore, resolving such issues through the Act permits students to focus on their studies.

Contrarily, however, the opposition to this movement makes a case for the low graduation and completion rates for such

programs as provided by the ACP and the costs, which would likely be passed on to other funding sources, such as taxpayers. Here, Krieghbaum (2018b) observe that the Democratic Party has been instrumental in drawing attention to the Act via the “free - college movement” by encouraging students to consider advancing their education with the eradication of expensive tuition for universities altogether.

Ben Jealous is running for governor of Maryland on a campaign to make community college free and 4 - year college ‘debt - free.’ David Garcia is campaigning for governor in Arizona on a plan to make 4 - year public college tuition - free. And Ned Lamont in Connecticut wants to make the first two years free at any public college or university in the state. In all, nearly 10 Democratic gubernatorial candidates are running on some kind of free - college plan. (Krieghbaum, 2018b, para.3)

While Krieghbaum (2018b) concedes that many of these movements, including the ACP Act of 2018, came to a grinding halt with the election of President Donald Trump, the present movement of new Democratic candidates has created a renewed interest in similar programs, and has once again brought the Act back into consideration by many individuals, students, and policymakers. The very fact of the Act’s resurfacing gives hope to those who may need it most, namely Black students faced with major challenges and life in low socioeconomic communities unless they are given alternative school, career, and life choices. Additionally, the cost of the program must be considered. This topic was not lost on either side of the debate:

Two recent reports from the Institute for Higher Education Policy and Ed Trust—both nonpartisan groups focused on equity in postsecondary education—reinforced concerns many already had about free college. Both reports found that tuition - free college programs often fail to meet the needs of the poorest students and overlook costs of attendance beyond tuition. (Krieghbaum, 2018a, para.19)

Essentially, the costs of these programs would be beneficial but would still fall shy of the true level of help that returning adult students, particularly minority students, may require for them to be successful in completing their educational programs. Therefore, allocating more resources, such as help agencies, in tandem with the reduced or removed tuition, makes such higher educational programs fully functional. Parallel to this success, it helps to demonstrate to opponents of such programs that they can and do produce positive results and outcomes.

2.8 Emergent Themes

Based on the literature and research, the primary emergent themes for the ACP Act of 2018 appear to reflect some of the resurgence of the Democratic Party in renewing interest in “free - college tuition” programs and underscoring the advantages of this Act for underprivileged and financially constrained students, including those who are people of color or those who live in lower socioeconomic conditions. That is, there is significant traction on the topic of free - college tuition with the main objective to diminish the educational gap between the lower - income population and the rest of the U.

S. population. Moreover, for Black students especially, options for higher education in many regions seem limited. Thus, it would behoove higher education venues, political policymakers (local and federal), and students themselves to seek out and endorse the implementation of programs, such as the ACP Act or comparable legislation. Moreover, a similar bill or regulation has the potential to provide renewed hope for adults to return to school and complete their education, permitting these communities to reinvent themselves and move up from their current low socioeconomic state. The literature emphasizes programs or Acts such as the ACP to enable improved quality of life for the nontraditional Black American student returning to school.

However, some political forces may align against such rulings simply by their very nature or given their biased views against other races or demographics. Even so, there remains a lack of credible research regarding racial bias. Notably, research criticizes the Republican Party for being more focused on the allocation of federal funds for their political objectives rather than the well - being and improvement of low socioeconomic Black communities across the country. Others accord with the need to carefully report on participating schools and students if the ACP Act were to pass floor votes at some point. Thus, monitoring the progress of this Act or similarly proposed programs would be prudent to ensure all actions are ethical and open for all parties.

2.9 Summary of the Literature

The ACP Act has formulated a backdrop of hope for students who previously had none regarding returning to school or furthering their education as adults. Many of these individuals, especially Black students, held out little optimism about affording the exorbitant expense of college education, particularly when such a balance was placed against their other outstanding obligations, such as children and family. While, on the surface, the Act seems to cover a great deal of ground toward eradicating financial constraints and contributing to student success, factors such as low graduation rates and decreased student retention have shed light on other external issues facing older returning students, including work and familial obligations.

Opposition from external political forces or other related groups has also stymied the movement of the Act as to its being heard by the higher courts or passing through legislation. Thus, to resolve the barriers precluding Black students from finishing their coursework, these rulings must be reinstated as far as attaining political attention and, perhaps, monitored by third parties as they are proposed and executed to ensure that they are being put into operation fairly and properly. Lastly, by incorporating these Acts or bills in conjunction with helpful agencies or resources, such as mental health counseling or peer counterparts, universities and lawmakers may be assured that they are effectively providing the means for populaces to better help themselves and achieve their personal benchmarks for accomplishment.

While the Black community has progressed enormously in the last 50 or so years, the literature has portrayed a deep - rooted inequality for Black Americans to achieve higher education degrees and enter the middle class. In fact, the median wealth of Black families equals a mere \$17, 000 as

opposed to \$171, 000 for White families (Beyer, 2020). In general, the public must be made aware of such inequalities to spark attention toward initiatives such as the ACP Act of 2018. The literature reveals that Black adults face many more disparities than other Americans, furthering their inability to achieve college degrees or enter the middle class. For instance, community colleges were originally designed to equalize higher education regarding low - income and underserved Black students (Davidson et al., 2018). Policymakers must ensure students have adequate access to higher education, as factors such as federal funding, change over time. Community promise programs are fundamental to increasing nontraditional students' confidence in their ability to attend and afford undergraduate degrees (Davidson et al., 2018).

Now, such programs may be established within the state itself via gift aid or reducing tuition by requiring a small number of mandatory fees. Students must still pay for their education as opposed to the ACP Act of 2018, which proposed completely free tuition and fees. Interestingly, Taylor and Lepper (cited in Davidson et al., 2018) found that students receiving college promise aid achieved higher GPAs and enrolled in a greater amount of credits than their student peers. Meanwhile, other grants and scholarships decreased while college promise programs increase. Therefore, the programs designed to provide opportunity and equality have the potential to work toward the contrary. It is, thus, critical for stakeholders to ensure the objectives of the Act are met while equality and opportunities for *all* students are retained if the ACP Act was to have a chance at becoming law. A careful analysis of persistence and retention among students once college promise programs are implemented will help to make the necessary adjustments to avoid adverse effects.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Research Design

This study primarily employs qualitative methodology. A qualitative approach provides the opportunity to summarize current literature and explain the magnitude of the issue regarding Black students over the age of 24 from a systematic and subjective perspective. The researcher employed a combination of grounded theory and case study qualitative approaches. The grounded theory allows for conclusions related to the RQs and hypotheses to be developed. All steps of this approach occur simultaneously from a meta - analysis of collected interview information and many sources of literature. The current body of literature is expanded upon to discuss and explore why a federal promise program is needed to facilitate the necessary educational reform for equal opportunity and access to higher education. Thus, the researcher used the literature to correlate higher education with improved job prospects and a gateway to middle - class America. Evidently, a qualitative method is the best framework, given the complex motivating factors of the ACP proposal, any possible implications relating to the nontraditional Black student, and the political dynamics associated with the ACP Act of 2018.

The research also employs aspects of case study methodology to narrow the research topic to the sole group of nontraditional

Black American students over the age of 24. However, the study compiles a range of data on the subject without any forms of observation or interaction. Additionally, the study remains focused on theory development and concept formation to reach specific recommendations and conclusions. Within the framework, the researcher notes the limitation of the study with literature often having biased viewpoints on promise programs, educational attainment, and political beliefs. Moreover, the researcher recognizes that qualitative research cannot be fully completed in comprehensive terms, as the success of the ACP Act is impossible to determine unless put into action and monitored for a given period. Overall, the study is founded based on discovery and meaning with an individual perspective toward the ACP Act of 2018. This methodology provides a particular understanding of objective ideals and beliefs and a careful meta - analysis of the current literature. Moreover, the researcher conducted interviews with four federal lawmakers. Each of the four participants was interviewed based on the RQs (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3). Below is a discussion of important relevant concepts.

3.2 Theory of Variables

For this study, the first set of variables considers the Act from a political perspective. Essentially, the governmental representative is the leading stakeholder that could impact the dependent variables (i. e., outcomes for Black college or university students). Federal officials served as an independent variable, encompassing members of Congress. The dependent variables, from the narrow perspective of this study, relate to the nontraditional Black American student, male or female, over the age of 24 rather than all college students. The researcher recognizes these variables as the combination needed to employ the grounded theory approach. As the researcher interviews four federal lawmakers, these individuals fall into the category of independent variables. Federal lawmakers have the authority to change student outcomes in higher education (i. e., the dependent variable). These variables expand on grounded theory and integrate aspects of case study methodology to provide valuable insight and a better understanding of the problem and possible solutions.

The dependent variables (outcomes for Black college students) are heavily affected by their respective educational environment, access to education, grades or GPA, socioeconomic class, and whether they have a familial history that includes members who pursued degrees in higher education. The latter act as independent variables determining student outcomes, employability, entry into the middle class, and overall quality of life. Each student possesses varying life experiences, which define and shape their perceptions as they move into their new role as students in a higher educational context. Strayhorn (2013) defines what he refers to as “grit,” which is the dedication and determination students bring to their studies. Strayhorn (2013) notes that “grit is positively related to college grades for Black males and that background traits, academic factors, and grit explain 24% of the variance in Black male’s college grades” (2013, p.2). Similarly, variations among administrators and political affiliates could occur within their understanding of what the Act means, how

it may be instilled into the university system, how it works overall, and how it may benefit Black students.

3.3 Definition of Variables

As a general overview, nontraditional college students are those aged 24 years of age and above. Further, to refine the concept of a “nontraditional student,” the researcher focused on Black students regarding their experiences within different academic institutions entering back into the higher education system at a later point than the traditional college student. Along with describing the Act and what it means, study participants were required to be familiar with relevant terms, as the researcher cannot assume lawmakers are aware of them. They include but are not limited to student retention, graduation rates, overall test scores, and grading results (see the next section). Fain (2012) noted that many universities have begun to take measures to assess such elements, such as spreadsheets, reports, and templates, that may aid in keeping track of graduation rates and ongoing student progress. Notably, it is an imperative variable to track in the case that the ACP Act of 2018 was implemented. That is, tracking student progress, retention, and completion rates help to determine the effectiveness of the Act and its objectives.

[Wester Association of Schools and Colleges] has taken a substantial step in this direction with the recent release of a template for tracking undergraduate retention and completion rates, which also includes metrics for measuring adult student performance. A template for graduate programs is also in the works. (Fain, 2012, para.16).

Here, such streamlined items can help administrators, advisors, and even students to keep tabs on their goals and areas in which they can improve. Thus, incorporating these tools into the study may help students reference how their respective schools assist them in the relevant areas. If all stakeholders are aligned regarding students completing college courses under the ACP, then there is a higher chance of completion and entrance into the middle class. Regardless of this information, the next section presents pertinent definitions of key terms.

3.4 Other Terms

- **American College Test:** A test to help students on the path to college.
- **African - Centered Education Movement:** Institutions fully immerse in African traditions, values, symbols, and other cultural characteristics. These schools are largely cohesive with the values of modern Black American families.
- **Career pathway:** Structured education programs for the adult student to advance his or her career over time. The term also relates to superior job training through education.
- **Community College:** A local college establishment; usually a two - year term college that allows students to earn an associate’s degree.
- **Cultural knowledge:** Public information that defines unique cultural groups. It helps to define why many low socioeconomic students are Black.

- **Dependent Variable:** The factor altered by the independent variable. It depends on the independent variable.
- **Early college credit:** When high school students can earn college credit. High school students take high school courses and college courses or high school students take Advanced Placement courses in high school, acting as the equivalent to college credit.
- **Eligible Student:** A student can receive a federal grant under the ACP Act of 2018 rules.
- **Historically Black College or University:** Institutions established to meet the educational needs of Black Americans. These institutions came into being when Black students were originally denied admission to White establishments.
- **Higher Institution:** Education provided by colleges, universities, community colleges, institutes of technology, trade schools, career colleges, and the like.
- **Independent Variable:** A factor that does not depend on another but impacts another.
- **Inductive Analysis:** A qualitative review of interview information free from any predetermined framework.
- **Institution of higher education:** See definition for "Higher Institution."
- **Low - income student:** Students with families having income within the lowest 20% of the country, generally less than \$40, 000 per year, or those below the Federal poverty line at \$25, 100 yearly income.
- **Meta - Analysis:** Accumulating and analyzing data from multiple credible sources.
- **Minority - serving institution:** Higher education establishments that serve minority populations with differentiating objectives toward other institutions.
- **Multicultural Education:** Higher education institutions that incorporate the beliefs and perspectives of all different racial, ethnic, and social groups. Education institutions that provide equal opportunity to all students.
- **Nontraditional student:** A student who is 24 years of age and older.
- **Political:** Commonly referred to as nonpolicy related factors (ideas, strategies, and agendas) not readily identifiable or understood
- **Secretary:** Otherwise known as the Secretary of Education who is the head of the U. S. Department of Education.
- **Senate Bill:** How lawmakers may introduce their proposals for or against a law.
- **Socioeconomic status:** Where an individual or group of individuals stands within any given society. It considers income, resources, access, education, and crime rates.
- **State:** A specific territory within the U. S.

3.5 Summary

Overall, the primary variables within this study are associated with students, scholars, administrators, and political entities along with each of their perceptions regarding the Act and how they view its nuances. All pertinent stakeholders could alter the results of the Act if it were to be implemented in today's higher educational system. The qualitative approach employed a grounded theory approach to construct a dynamic framework to look at specific settings and social processes

(Newman, 2012). While the researcher has employed three hypotheses correlating with each RQ, the variables are not accumulated and analyzed through numerical data. However, certain variables are interpreted using in - depth interviews and a comprehensive review of the literature to discover all elements of the research topic. Hence, grounded theory is a process of collecting subjective and factual data (Newman, 2012). At all times, the research is open to discovering unexpected information regarding the ACP, including its implications related to Black American adult students, the U. S. economy, and political factors.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This qualitative research study incorporates typed interviews administered through e - mail exchanges and one direct mail method to gain direct insight from stakeholders involved in the law and policymaking of college promise Acts while maintaining strict confidentiality. The researcher focused on the use of qualitative data to record responses from official stakeholders involved in the ACP Act if it were to be applied in the higher educational system across the country today. The researcher also studied previously written documents based on the topic to have a full understanding of the extent to which the Act was carried out and the reasons that it did not make it to the floor for a vote. Some of the meta - analysis of literature involves depicting the differences between ACP and previously existing college promise programs. Accordingly, the researcher could ask the interviewees pertinent questions while fully understanding their responses and incorporating newly learned information with preexisting research.

All responses from the study participants were carefully logged and compiled as they are received. For confidentiality and acting ethically, all participant names were removed from the interview responses. Further, to maintain organized research, question responses were designated with letters or a series of numbers to correspond to the particular federal lawmaker throughout the process (i. e., FDL1, FDL2, FRL1, and FRL2). Note that this type of coding is analytical data categorization, used for the benefit of the researcher's categorization or organization of the study. FDL1 and FDL2 are of the Democratic Party while FRL1 and FRL2 are lawmakers supporting the Republican Party. Once responses were tabulated, the research design could then encompass review work in tandem with a correlational study based on the informal e - mail interactions with each study participant. A careful analysis of interviews enabled the researcher to gain insight into official knowledge regarding the ACP Act of 2018 and thoughts on whether the Act was to be implemented. Moreover, the researcher sought to find further political insight and motivation regarding the Act that might not necessarily be published in the current literature (see Appendix B for full interview questions and answers).

4.2 Description of the Setting

Qualitative data is empirical information that can reach beyond the current literature on college promises and the ACP. In particular, the researcher took advantage of a unique opportunity to see the perspective of four different federal

lawmakers, including their thoughts and potential actions surrounding the research problem. In general, adding the interview component to this study enabled the researcher to make further discoveries to develop empirical knowledge for more reliable, well - rounded conclusions (McKenzie, 2018). Indeed, the interview methods of participants had to be completed via technological means given the current societal circumstances. The researcher noted that in - person settings provide the most meaningful and interactive correspondence, but e - mail provides a suitable alternative. As the setting was through e - mail technology, the researcher took the time to introduce himself and explain the conditions of the study, including any information the sample group should know, such as basic information on the ACP Act of 2018 and why the researcher was interviewing on the topic. Again, any interaction between study participants and researchers was free from bias or coercion. Each participant was told that no breach of identity or privacy would occur, as any publishing of their responses would remain anonymous. Fortunately, e - mail provides all participants the ability to provide detailed and thoughtful responses, as there is minimal pressure to immediately respond to the interviewer.

4.3 Sampling Procedures

The subjects were chosen randomly chosen based on their political credentials within the region. All federal lawmakers to be interviewed were verified as official stakeholders before the release of interview questions via e - mail. The role of each participant was confirmed through government portals indicating the background and professional title of each person. Besides the aforementioned information, the researcher was attentive in reading the responses of each interviewee. The researcher endeavored to verify any perspectives or findings from the interviews, parallel to the meta - analysis of the literature on the ACP Act of 2018. These steps took place before devising any final recommendations and conclusions. Regarding the interview, all four participants were given the same questions as follows:

- 1) As a federal lawmaker, are you supportive, nonsupportive, or neutral regarding the ACP Act of 2018? Please explain thoroughly.
- 2) What was the political motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?
- 3) What was the policy motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?
- 4) Would you describe the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018 as an authentic attempt to resolve challenges many marginalized Americans encounter when attempting to access higher education?
- 5) Do you serve a constituency where more than 30% of your district would benefit from the ACP Act of 2018?
- 6) Did President Obama's initial involvement in the "Free - College Movement" help or hinder the ACP Act of 2018?
- 7) If approved, would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive or negative impact on nontraditional Black college students (nontraditional is defined as 24 and older) ? Please explain your reasoning.
- 8) Would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive effect on the economy through increasing employability in the marketplace?

- 9) Are there any groups the ACP Act would have adversely impacted?
- 10) Based on your career and expertise as a federal policymaker, what is the relationship between higher education and forward mobility in the workplace?
- 11) What, if any, were the political dynamics involved which provide clarity as to the reason the ACP Act of 2018 never received a full floor vote?
- 12) If political influences existed to cause the demise of the ACP Act of 2018, are there remedies available to overcome the political gridlock?
- 13) Why did the ACP Act not receive a full floor vote?
- 14) In your opinion, is it foreseeable in the future that the ACP Act of 2018 would receive a resurgence of support from your colleagues?

Follow - up questions were asked as appropriate (see Appendix B for full questions and answers).

4.4 Working with Human Subjects

Using a qualitative analysis methodology allows for a fluid and dynamic conveyance of research. The researcher could connect with stakeholders at a human level, enabling complex thought processes on the topic. Further, communication with the four federal lawmakers induces the researcher to make sense of the accumulated data, note any new concepts or perspectives, and link the theoretical framework between the study participants and current literature (McKenzie, 2018; Newman, 2012). When dealing with human subjects in any form for documented research, it is imperative to uphold ethical and moral boundaries, respect one's subjects, and provide fully informed consent for all research activities. This framework includes interview questions and answers and any other information shared with or by the subjects.

Participants should be advised regarding the purpose of the study, how their personal data and responses will be utilized, and the ultimate goal of the study. Smith (2003) referenced the need for ethical behavior and confidentiality. "When done properly, the consent process ensures that individuals are voluntarily participating in the research with full knowledge of relevant risks and benefits" (Smith, 2003, para.14). Additionally, participants can decline to be part of the study. Again, on agreeing to voluntarily participate, the researcher ensures a clear understanding of how their anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved (Smith, 2003). Therefore, avoiding the use of names in the study and assigning numbers and alphabetical designations can provide some security for subjects while simultaneously adhering to the required research standards.

4.5 Description of Data Analysis Methods

This study compiles and analyzes the data given through respondents. The researcher analyzed the recorded material from each participant to gain a full interpretation of its overall meaning as per politics regarding the ACP of 2018. This research exposed common themes within the interview responses without any predetermined framework or preconceived notions on what the interviewees' responses would be (i. e., inductive analysis). This report provides a comprehensive overview of what knowledge study participants have concerning the Act, what motivated its

creation, which political variables were at play, and how some of the obstacles that have previously prevented its advancement could be overcome. Moreover, these interviews provided real - life examples of how the Act could help those most in need. Given such context, it is hopeful that local and federal congressional members will see and understand the need to make a difference for the nontraditional Black student population by revisiting this policy and enacting it into law (see Chapter Six "Limitations of the Study" for additional information).

4.6 Summary

Overall, this study was conducted to assess and draw meaning to interview responses without any bias or push for interviewees to answer questions in a specific manner. Consequently, each interview question was developed to obtain information to answer the primary RQs of the study. The researcher needed to address interviewees in a detailed manner that would add to their findings, especially regarding the RQs. All four interviewees were required to give full consent to voluntary participation and made aware of the ethical standards developed by the researcher. Participants were also made aware of what the information is intended to be used for and how it may be used. Regardless, this research design is the best method for this qualitative research study.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Theoretical Paradigm

It is important to note that qualitative research is largely based on an interpretivist model and framework. However, this does not take away from the ultimate value of the study. Based on the social nature of the RQs, the qualitative design was selected over quantitative approaches as the best option for the "social inquiry" of "what happens if this Act were to become a law..." Thus, the researcher utilized an interpretivist paradigm, relying heavily on the interview and meta - analysis methods. Concurrently, the researcher also enabled a critical theory paradigm in fostering a critical review of the research problem while challenging assumptions on ACP, college promises, and nontraditional Black students. Hence, the researcher is an interpretative but critical theorist seeking to find credible and reliable information to move the higher educational system to greater equality among students. Simply, this unique mixed theoretical paradigm can enable deeper discussions of concepts, contemplation of political influences, and justification of the work.

5.2 Standards for Addressing Research Questions

The concept of developing quality RQs encompasses the intention to maximize the qualitative research. Therefore, it was critical for the researcher to develop RQs to enhance the feasibility of the study. Moreover, the researcher sought to develop RQs that were not covered in prior work on the ACP Act of 2018 and subsequent topics. At this point, the researcher identified the general framework in which they wanted to work (i. e., the ACP Act of 2018). This study also examined commonalities in the social population most affected by college promises or higher educational law. An

issue regarding the nontraditional Black students and possible benefits from an Act as large as the ACP Act of 2018 emerged. Thus, the study was designed to gain perspective on current and past politics regarding the practicality and expansion of the ACP Act, if it were to be implemented today. Again, the RQs are as follows:

RQ1: What were the motivating factors for the ACP Act of 2018 to be introduced?

RQ2: What are the potential policy implications of the ACP Act of 2018, specifically, as it relates to nontraditional Black college students attempting to enter middle - class America?

RQ3: What are the involved political dynamics that provide clarity as to the reason the ACP Act of 2018 never received a full floor vote?

Moreover, each question was prioritized to accumulate qualitative research data to bridge important gaps in the current literature. Each of the questions was considered based on overlooked areas regarding the topic and was developed under careful thought processes and evaluation of what type of study would induce the most informative conclusion. The objective was to discover conclusions that may help change the status of higher education in America. The researcher developed the RQs through careful consideration of the following:

- What is the issue?
- What is missing within the literature?
- Who is affected by the research problem?
- What changes must be made?
- Why does this problem exist?
- What does the future look like?
- Is there equality in higher education?
- Why is higher education important?
- Who are the stakeholders capable of making the change?

5.3 Analysis of the Data

The first interviewee (FDL1) presented a supportive viewpoint of the ACP Act of 2018 and based much of this sentiment on personal experience as a college seeker and lawmaker. Respondent FDL1 stated that it would be a practical solution to the educational gap for underserved communities. This participant emphasized the benefit of the ACP Act, specifically highlighting its additional factors that would improve the workplace with higher educated persons and create better pathways for high school students by earning college credit. The respondent also indicated that the only foreseeable way for underserved Americans to enter middle - class America is to complete some form of a college education. Moreover, the respondent strives to fix such problems by supporting bills based on collegiate funding. FDL1 stated that it is an ongoing process and cannot be fixed overnight. As a Democrat, FDL1 sided with Baldwin's proposal of the Act but suggested the need for a Republican to co - sign the bill for it to be passed. Here, FDL1 noted that the former president, unfortunately, contributed to the political divide, which induced additional controversial legislation. FDL1 also considered the idea that the bill did not pass in 2018 because the U. S. government was not in a political position to follow through. That is, Washington was "polarized," and Republicans saw the bill as another waste of federal funds. Regardless, the bill was intended and introduced solely to help those of low socioeconomic

backgrounds and the improvement of HBCUs. FDL1 concluded that every decision made within the government comes from a political angle that impacts legislative ruling. One lawmaker cannot make the necessary changes required to eliminate political influences. Instead, it will necessitate a movement from within and without for sustainable transformative measures to give disenfranchised students better access to higher education.

Finally, this lawmaker gave insight that President Obama was effective in introducing the topic, but it was a new concept in 2015 and, perhaps, 2018 to pass. However, the ACP Act would likely not pass today during the Trump administration either, as President Trump was unwilling and uninterested in incorporating the concept into his national reform despite it being mentioned. If the Act were to be approved, FDL1 noted the infinite advances to the nontraditional Black student. Any student over the age of 24 can benefit from the ACP Act of 2018, and adult students should be discussed more, as this group is already a part of the workforce within the country. Simply, those with a college education have more opportunities and make more money. FDL1 conclusively said the Act did not reach the floor vote given Republican polarization and needs bipartisan support. Based on the analysis of this interviewee's response to the questions, it is obvious that the Democrat Party remains in favor of the ACP Act of 2018 today.

However, arguably, this Act may never be passed in today's politics. Though some campaign for free - college tuition, current world circumstances have set all legislative items aside. Again, it truly seems that the Act needs bipartisan support, regardless of which party the current U. S. president supports. At this point in the research, the researcher found reasonable information to believe that the ACP Act must be refined based on current circumstances, such as the inclusion of underserved communities through virtual higher education, as opposed to face - to - face attendance. Therefore, when or if this Act ever passes the floor vote, it truly needs reform based on that year. Perhaps, the Act would need reform year - to - year with careful reporting and observation of its progression and outcomes when in operation.

Further, the second interviewee (FDL2) offered an insightful and helpful perspective. Similar to FDL1, FDL2 stated constant support for continuously improved education systems including higher education. FDL2 believed it is common sense to support the ACP Act of 2018. Furthermore, this interviewee uniquely noted that rather than a political agenda, the general public perception is highly influential to laws that would affect large groups of Americans. However, similar to FDL1, FDL2 noted that Washington politics often have an organized agenda and it would not matter who may benefit from the ACP Act. Moreover, they regarded their position as a platform to help others in the name of the greater good of the country. The idea for free tuition emerged with the increasing cost and inaccessibility of higher education. FDL2 further indicated that Republicans could have noticed the economic investment and opportunity associated with the legislation but were unwilling to support it because they would receive no political credit for it. An interesting thought from FDL2 regarded the idea that Democrats would be open

to looking at a Republican model of the same concept of reform in higher education through cost accessibility.

Furthermore, FDL2 believed the motivation for the introduction of the ACP stemmed from improving enrollment in colleges and serving larger demographics. Similar to FDL1, FDL2 highlighted that better education is key to improving career pathways, and the benefits to the country would be enormous. This interviewee agreed that the ACP Act of 2018 is an authentic attempt to resolve the negative aspects of disenfranchised communities, and the Democratic Party was quite thoughtful in addressing HBCUs individually within the proposed bill. Under similar federal and state promise program proposals, private HBCUs are typically not considered when developing these policy initiatives. According to HBCU leaders, without careful consideration for the inclusion of institutional pillars, such private institutions may cease to exist.

Apparently, President Obama's introduction to college tuition was too early politically and publicly to accept. Here, Senator Bernie Sanders had more traction as it is more of an acceptable idea today than it was in the 2015–2018 period. FDL2 highlighted that the Act would predictably decrease impoverished communities across the country and economically improve middle - class America. The nontraditional Black student has real - life responsibilities as opposed to the traditional college student, giving more meaning to the nontraditional student earning the education needed to obtain a career versus a "job. "

Finally, FDL2 gave way to the idea that the debate on the bill was carefully crafted (as noted by FDL1), but the political talking points distracted from the direction of the possible economic benefits of the bill. With this information from FDL2, the researcher has a more hopeful mindset that the ACP Act would one day be enacted by the U. S. government and significantly improve the economy. The researcher recognizes the need for economic improvements as the country comes out of a general decline in its stalled state because of the recent pandemic. Thus, the Black adult community should have equal rights to the White community in wage - earning and higher education access. This concept of equality should not be confused with equity, which is the reasonable allocation of resources based on the historical need to compensate for past injustices that created inequities. Again, if the bill were to ever come to fruition, it is imperative for there to be bipartisan support so neither party can claim ownership.

The next lawmaking interviewee (FRL1) was of the Republican Party. FRL1 began answering interview questions by noting their support for all affordability and access to higher education without any racial confines. The respondent suggested the proposed bill by Baldwin did not give way to the solution of rising costs in higher education. FRL1 believed Democrats desired some Republican support but not from the entire party. The interviewee went on to note that the bias in support is likely because the bill has positive and negative pieces. Regardless, political agendas barred the ACP Act of 2018. FRL1 suggested Democrats sought "freebies" for the underserved American population and, again, did not seek bipartisan support. The interviewee said that Republicans

have always sought more affordable higher education, and it was not the development of the Democrats. Regardless, FRL1 confirmed a major disconnect between college education and the ability to be hired within corporate America. FRL1 aligned with FDL1 and FDL2 in the fact that the bill would have gained much more traction and possibly have passed the floor vote if it had the support of both political parties.

Further, FRL1 noted that the distance learning required today would benefit the working - class group greatly. However, this interviewee would prefer proven methods of allowing superior education rather than possibly hurting the American taxpayer by dishing out additional federal funds to low - income communities. FRL1 noted that the ACP Act does not justify mass federal spending in economically unstable times. FRL1 finished by noting that poverty does not exist solely in Black communities, specifically, Black adults over the age of 24, adding that the underlying problem relates more to the current massive student debt. The Republican Party would need more substantial cause for being in favor of such a bill. Moreover, FRL1 noted that education is not a pass to the middle class. Instead, education provides career opportunities per what the student studies and what hiring companies seek in terms of skills and competencies.

The researcher noted an interesting perspective from FRL1, where the issue stems far beyond the cost of education entailing a larger issue between higher education and employment. That is, even if the lower - income population had more access to college, it does not guarantee their entrance into the middle class. Despite this alternative idea, it is obvious once again that legislators must align for an Act of this significance to become known. The Republican Party requires an entire revamping and reformation of the Act to consider it. According to the respondent, such adjustments must include access to low socioeconomic populations without deeming only certain racial groups eligible. FRL1 made many plausible statements, saying that current student debt should be tackled first before spending more money on higher education. Meanwhile, the researcher again gained insight that better access to education would be an enormous decrease in poverty and an increase in middle - class economics. However, this notion is only viable if the student obtains an educational degree per what hiring companies seek. At this point, the researcher had to consider that higher education is not a one - way ticket and solution to the research problem.

The final official policymaker interviewed (FRL2) was also a Republican. FRL2 began emphasizing support for the concept of the ACP Act of 2018 but did not agree with the possible shock to taxpayers. FRL2 agreed with FRL1 in noting that Democrats introduced the Act without true consideration for the well - being of all Americans. In this respect, FRL2 believed the Democrats sought attention from the media to induce backlash toward the Republicans. Once again, a political agenda was considered the driving force behind the motivation and interaction of the ACP Act of 2018. FRL2 agreed with all the other interviewees on the need for bipartisan support for passing. This interviewee aligned with FRL1 in suggesting that the act must include all low socioeconomic groups as possible rather than just Black communities. FRL2 aligned with the notions of FDL1 and

FDL2 that President Obama's introduction of the idea was not timely. FRL2 added that the original pushback of the Act did not stem from a partisan issue but that the country was simply not ready to consider free - college tuition. Notably, FRL2 observed that higher education obtainment is only beneficial when the workplace requires those specific credentials. The accessibility to higher education does not deem every student to have immediate access to a middle - class job. Regardless, FRL2 noted the need for bipartisan support on such a massive amount of consideration in federal funding. The Act cannot induce further economic burden on Americans. FRL2 believed the only way for the political gridlock to be remediated is with the support of former President Trump. FRL2 concluded that Democrats must consider the ideas of Republicans and stop negotiating skeleton agreements.

This final interview demonstrated a significant political divide. It was obvious that the Democratic and Republican Parties do not see eye - to - eye on the issue regarding college tuition, access to higher education, and student debt. Once again, bipartisan support was noted as the only option for the ACP Act of 2018 to ever work. The researcher considers the need for significant reform to the Act, especially in enabling all demographics to be eligible for free tuition, as low - income nontraditional adult students are not limited to Blacks.

5.4 Summary of the Analysis

The basic concept from the study analysis is: if underserved nontraditional Black adults can gain access to earning higher educational degrees, then they can attain improved employment, possibly in the middle class, but such degrees do not guarantee any significantly positive outcome or change in the quality of life. Nevertheless, Black adults who receive higher educational degrees can then move their families out of the low - income communities and provide the same for the next generation, provided better employment is the outcome of the education. Clearly, with the decrease in the poorer class and increase in the middle class, crime rates and other negative aspects of the country's socioeconomic paradigm would likely improve at the same time, with the implementation of the ACP Act. The U. S. government should, thus, be obligated and accountable to bring about such changes solely for the improved well - being of the country's citizens. However, all four interviewees proposed that such an act should not be limited to Black Americans but be open to all groups across the country.

While the ACP Act of 2018 had initially raised controversy and seemed like a farfetched dream at its inception, a more thorough inquiry into its tenets revealed that it would be a true asset for Black students who are most in need of its financial benefits, as it bridges the gap for them in achieving their higher educational goals. Although the act did not originally pass when it was introduced, some political candidates are seeking to revisit the act and its associated advantages. The analysis clearly signified the need for bipartisan support for the ACP Act to come to fruition. Although the present political climate appears unfavorable toward this resurgence of interest in this topic, presenting real - world examples of how this Act would promote education for poor Black populations through this study, along with administrators and political officials, helps to create a portrayal of how the ACP

Act could aid Black students in learning, growing, and attaining their middle - class goals, which improves their personal lives, professional reputations, and self - esteem.

That is, if the Democratic Party chooses to present the Act again, the Republican Party expects to see extreme reform and careful consideration for all aspects of the act, including the potential negative effect on taxpayers, existing financial aid programs, and middle - class college students. Boards of education should feel they are fulfilling their legal and social obligation to provide equal opportunity to all potential students. For further competency in the quality of the ACP Act, each participating institution must designate or hire staff to report on participating students, support those students, and track enrollment, progress, and completion. It would then be best for a legislator to introduce the new ACP Act with a predetermined amount of monies and a specific timeline, such as the allocation of \$100 billion fully funded by the government over the course of 10 years. Funding is only granted to eligible nontraditional students. Institutions must conduct support services and requirements for degree and career pathways. The federal government gives incentives to participating schools through additional funding for institutional needs and general profit. Federal grants and scholarships to non - eligible students will also not be subjected to a decrease, as the funding benefits the new ACP Act. Finally, all stakeholders are fully accountable for the terms of the Act.

6. Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusions

6.1 Discussion of the Findings

ACP Act of 2018 was primarily intended to be a federal - state partnership that allows free higher education to promote gainful middle - class employment. Regardless of increasing access to higher education for the nontraditional Black student, there remain many obstacles to overcome. For example, the nontraditional student depicted in this study must learn how to balance coursework with their already difficult lives. Notably, a college degree does not guarantee immediate employment *and* does not guarantee employment in the middle class. However, research demonstrates people are more likely to succeed economically with a college degree. Virtually all educational leaders agree that the lack of opportunities for Blacks in higher education contributes to inequitable economic and social outcomes. One could argue that the death of the unarmed, handcuffed American citizen, Mr. George Floyd, and America's eruption into civil unrest and mass demonstrations stem largely from the extreme inequities faced by Black Americans, not just police brutality. Politicians who favored the Act sought to have the most educated and skillful workforce worldwold. Regardless, the political and social divide within the U. S. government halted any further progression of the bill. Much of the literature, along with interviewee responses in this study, strongly suggests that the ACP has the potential to significantly increase economic growth in the U. S.

There is also a concurrent conversation by some in the U. S. Congress regarding the need for a reparations bill for descendants of African slaves that would address various

systemic expressions of historical injustice. These injustices include willful and intentional bias, government - sanctioned oppression, and state - sponsored racism. Research shows how these elements contributed to a racial economic underclass, while artificially undergirding White Americans with an economic floor. Increased access to higher education could remedy the economic inequity in America and, by extension, the sentiment of many citizens who have been systematically disenfranchised.

While there have been many past college promise programs and several still in the works today, the ACP Act of 2018 has been conceived on a much grander scale and has the potential to enhance the quality of life for a large portion of the population, especially Black students. It is important to note that any future reform of the bill should be even more inclusive regarding lower socioeconomic populations needing federal funding to attend higher education. The ACP Act truly desires to help as many Black students as possible, including those seeking to return to school after the age of 24. Notably, many previous college programs have focused solely on the recent high school graduate looking to enroll in college as opposed to the adult desiring to go back to school. Thus, policymakers, lawmakers, and any other relevant officials must remove restrictions for the adult student (Kelchen, 2017). Moreover, officials must remove the stipulation that high school graduates must immediately enroll in higher education institutions, as this is often not the case for low - income families. Beyond college promise programs, most scholarships or financial aid programs limit their resources to the traditional college student, which also fails to cover students aged 24 or older.

Essentially, it seems quite clear that low - income students need more than a basic college scholarship to earn a degree. Elected officials should be pressed to seriously consider collaborative methods of overcoming the taxation arguments that routinely hinder programs like the ACP Act of 2018. The reality is that a large portion of Black Americans from low - income communities disregard college altogether because of the unaffordable cost (The Racial Poverty Gap, 2019). Indeed, the last U. S. Census confirmed that more than nine million African Americans are living below the poverty line (The Racial Poverty Gap, 2019). Consequently, many nontraditional Black students require full funding, as their income goes to the cost of living and could not possibly cover college tuition and fees.

Again, these hardships exist across all races, though at higher rates in Black communities given many factors, especially systemic oppression, bias, lack of generational wealth, and lack of access to quality K - 12 education. Obviously, the ACP Act of 2018 envelops an enormous financial burden and consumption of resources. However, the long - term outlook suggests a major increase in the U. S. economy by improving the middle - class system, lowering unemployment, and decreasing crime rates (i. e., enabling adult students to earn a more secure economic position) (Kelchen, 2017). The findings indicated that policymakers should primarily focus on long - term economic value instead of the short - term burdens these solutions may bring.

6.2 Implications of the Study

The study aimed to gain insight from active federal lawmakers regarding their perspectives on the ACP Act of 2018 and college funding for their local region. This study revealed answers to RQs on the ACP Act of 2018. It extensively analyzed information supporting the study to help determine the motivating factors of the Act, political factors that hindered the Act, why the Act did not receive a floor vote, and how the Act could impact nontraditional Black college students. Further research regarding the educational gap within the U. S., particularly higher education, would once again bring awareness to the possibility of free tuition and fees for those students who require support. Moreover, the literature is largely deficient in depicting how higher educational opportunities may change the lives of nontraditional students who are 24 or older. Thus, the wide array of data covered in this study can encourage relevant stakeholders to support a newer, reformed ACP Act, which would promote transparency in the discussion.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a relatively small sample of responses from four federal lawmakers regarding the Act and its implications. Some of these parties may have been unfamiliar with the Act before becoming a participant, which could hamper or skew the results given their lack of knowledge. The researcher's unbiased approach was designed to minimize any such hampering. Additionally, the study was limited to interviews conducted through technological means (i. e., e - mail) and one mail - in response, which may have limited the opportunity to build a better rapport with interviewees. The researcher could not see the facial expressions and body movements of the interviewee in reaction to the posed question. In some ways, it is easier to obtain thoughtful responses in writing, which prevents the researcher from asking additional or follow - up questions while the interviewee ponders over the topic. Given these shortcomings, there is a lag in the accumulation of data.

Furthermore, within the framework, the researcher noted the limitation of the study, as relevant literature often presents biased viewpoints on college promise programs, educational attainment, and political beliefs. Moreover, according to Kreighbaum (2018a), most higher education organizations do not report their nontraditional graduation and retention numbers publicly because accrediting agencies do not require data for nontraditional learners (Fain, 2012, para.3). This situation creates a deficiency in the understanding of this demographic that generally warrants more research. The study was limited to existing information regarding traditional and nontraditional Black college students. While there was a great deal of reliable information and statistics on this population, the researcher could not determine the accuracy in conjunction with college promises or the ACP Act. Moreover, the researcher recognized that qualitative research could not be fully completed in comprehensive terms because the success and failures of the ACP Act are impossible to determine without a demonstration and monitoring for a given period.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Increased federal funding for the indicated population of college students is the obvious solution, but this solution disregards thoughtful consideration of the existing middle class, existing financial aid programs, the negative impact on taxpayers, the political divide, and the current need for distance learning. Future research cannot be limited to preexisting financial aid sources, federal grants, and state grants. The issues in higher education stem beyond traditional financial aid means, which, ironically, has induced over a trillion dollars in student debt (Harris et al., 2018). Notably, many considerations for college promise programs focus solely on the high school graduate wishing to earn a postsecondary degree.

Here, specific addendums or perhaps separate Acts must be implemented to explicitly help the nontraditional student (those over the age of 24). Another consideration for the ACP Act is an addendum allowing participating students to attend the establishment on a part - time basis with a minimum number of credits per semester or trimester. Students can earn their degrees while maintaining a healthy work - life balance. In reality, policymakers within the states of Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee have strategically determined how to meet the needs of the nontraditional student through college promise programs. That is, these states require a minimum of six credits per semester for students to continue receiving funding toward their degree. The ACP Act of 2018 must explicitly mention these terms in eligibility sections for the entire U. S.

Notably, this research encompasses the ACP Act relative to previously existing college programs, portraying the Act as significantly higher in potential success than local or state programs. Thus, future researchers may consider quantitatively controlled trials of the new ACP Act to determine its progress, successes, and failures. Future research ought to cover student hesitations in returning to college, as there is a large portion of the data on student motivations, not the opposite. In essence, consideration of how hesitations and motivating factors play a role in the success of a student completing college and entering the middle class would help to better understand adjustments needed within the act to widen positive student outcomes. Moreover, future research must determine a realistic percentage of nontraditional Black students who could receive federal funding, what this entails, and the effects on their community (Harris et al., 2018). Overall, many aspects of this topic can provide seemingly endless opportunities for future research. Therefore, researchers need to consider the positive effects on the quality of life for underserved communities and the enhancement of the U. S. economy in general.

Multiple states and local communities have created their version of "college promise" for local citizens. These programs should be examined through the lens of local economic impact and not simply predicated on academic measurements. Based on the research, the economy benefits even when a population has some colleges as opposed to none. What may seem like an academic failure could be an economic success.

6.5 Conclusions

Interpreting data from the respondents revealed differences and commonalities. This study provides a glimpse into the personal bias and political mindset of lawmakers when processing and contemplating massive social reform. It seems that purely ethical factors associated with the effects of the Act are not the primary consideration for some. All respondents agreed the ACP Act of 2018 would provide relief for Black nontraditional students, but not all lawmakers believed the bill was presented in good faith. An emerging theme suggests that Republican lawmakers wanted more control and ownership of the process before the concept of higher education reform became the Democrat's political territory. Many Democrats are aware of the political tribalism at play, though they still chose to write and push the bill without a bipartisan approach. One can deduce that in Washington politics, how a bill is presented can be even more important than the policy variables of the bill. It induced an interesting discovery in the research; Democrats may be just as much at fault as Republicans for the Act not receiving a floor vote.

This research was conducted during the early stages of the COVID - 19 pandemic and civil unrest associated with American police agencies killing or covering up the deaths of unarmed citizens, including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Subsequent conversations were ignited around reimagining police agencies. This narrative quickly evolved into conversations about opportunity structures and equitable economic access in the U. S. of America. Government agencies along with private corporations made attempts to find answers amid growing frustration, anger, and protest that culminated in massive acts of civil disobedience. It became clear in the dialogue that inequitable power relations in America contributed to the overall sentiment of unfairness and historical systemic oppression. Using the proposed functionality, the ACP could address some of these factors in a pro - social manner and alleviate some of the tension associated with a disillusioned citizenry.

The rising cost of tuition and fees along with student debt has widened the wealth gap across the country. According to Congressman Andy Levin, these elements further the gap in education inequality and increase the problem of income equality (Representative Levin and Senator Baldwin, 2019). Evidently, the ACP Act would be most effective with significant reform and considerations for other key components. Participating schools must evaluate the completion rate, enrollment, and entrance into the workforce of graduates to higher education institutions to determine whether the act would truly be beneficial. The Secretary of Education should remain in charge of the management of the Act, once in place, but must be immediately informed of any adverse actions by the frequent reports of institutions. Notably, funding for nontraditional students must be adequate without harming the U. S. economy in other ways, such as increasing taxes to compensate for the output of federal funds, which would create public friction and obstruct its potential passage. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the Black population would benefit from full federal support in higher education obtainment, improving the overall quality of life through education, skill, and employment. There will always

be pushback against the idea of free college tuition, which often comes from those who have means and access. However, it is up to relevant stakeholders to explain the long - term positive economic growth elements that would come from the ACP Act. Here, the ACP Act must receive bipartisan support to work. Additionally, culturally embracing international higher education institutions, that tend to offer comparatively high - quality academic programs, and in some instances, superior research capabilities, may become more attractive as an alternative approach for nontraditional and traditional students seeking affordable, but high - quality education, given the cost of tuition in the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Nicaragua, Columbia, and other nations is a fraction of the higher educational system costs in America.

Furthermore, the ACP Act of 2018 has formulated a backdrop of hope for students who previously had none regarding returning to school or furthering their education as adults. Many, especially Black students, held out little optimism of affording the exorbitant expense of college education, particularly when such a balance was placed against their other outstanding obligations, such as family and work life. On the surface, the Act seems to cover a great deal of ground toward eradicating financial constraints, thereby contributing to student success, factors such as low graduation rates and decreased student retention have shed light on other external issues facing older returning students (i. e., work and familial obligations). Moreover, opposition from external political forces or other related groups has stymied the movement of the Act as to its being heard by the higher courts or passing through legislation. Thus, to resolve the barriers precluding Black students from finishing their coursework, these rulings must be reinstated as far as attaining political attention and monitoring by third parties, as they are proposed and executed to ensure the new act is put into operation fairly and properly.

Lastly, the data suggest that Democrats and Republicans have a history of politicizing social legislation for different reasons. One respondent revealed the existence of a Republican version of the ACP Act, which received even less attention than the ACP. This information lends itself to the notion that fundamentally, Democrats and Republicans agree on higher education reform as a policy need but disagree on certain details, implementation, and, naturally, the politics of who takes credit. Bipartisan legislation typically does not move the political and partisan needle of either Party. Thus, bipartisan victories are rarely sensationalized in this polarized climate.

Through a thoughtful process of incorporating these Acts and bills in conjunction with helpful agencies or resources, such as mental health counseling or peer counterparts, universities and lawmakers may be assured that they are effectively providing the means for these populaces to better help themselves and achieve their personal benchmarks for accomplishment. Federal funding must be allocated to benefit disenfranchised and disillusioned U. S. citizens, not solely those born into better socioeconomic circumstances. There must be equal opportunity for nontraditional Black students to succeed, which can be motivated through the ACP Act of 2018. This bill can be effective if rebranded using a bipartisan approach with concurrent leadership approval on the overall theme of making higher education affordable and accessible.

It can be accomplished if Democratic and Republican lawmakers are willing to share the political credit and make concessions where possible.

Appendix A

Senate Bill S.2483: "ACP Act of 2018"



II

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 2483

To provide greater access to higher education for America's students.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 1, 2018

Ms. BALDWIN (for herself, Mr. BROWN, Mr. CARDIN, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. DURBIN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Ms. HARRIS, Mr. HEINRICH, Ms. HIRONO, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Mr. WHITEHOUSE) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To provide greater access to higher education for America's students.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the "America's College
5 Promise Act of 2018".

6 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

7 The purpose of this Act is to help all individuals of
8 the United States earn the education and skills the indi-
9 viduals need—

2

1 (1) by making 2 years of community college
2 free, through a new partnership with States and In-
3 dian Tribes to help the States and Indian Tribes—

4 (A) waive resident community college tui-
5 tion and fees for eligible students;

6 (B) maintain State and Indian Tribe sup-
7 port for higher education; and

8 (C) promote key reforms to improve stu-
9 dent outcomes; and

10 (2) through a new partnership with minority-
11 serving institutions to—

12 (A) encourage eligible students to enroll

13 and successfully complete a baccalaureate de-
14 gree at participating institutions; and
15 (B) promote key reforms to improve stu-
16 dent outcomes.

17 **TITLE I—STATE AND INDIAN**
18 **TRIBE GRANTS FOR COMMU-**
19 **NITY COLLEGES**

20 **SEC. 101. IN GENERAL.**

21 From amounts appropriated under section 107(a) for
22 any fiscal year, the Secretary shall award grants to eligible
23 States and Indian Tribes to pay the Federal share of ex-
24 penditures needed to carry out the activities and services
25 described in section 105.

•S 2483 IS

3

1 **SEC. 102. FEDERAL SHARE; NON-FEDERAL SHARE.**

2 (a) **FEDERAL SHARE.—**

3 (1) **FORMULA.—**Subject to paragraph (2), the
4 Federal share of a grant under this title shall be
5 based on a formula, determined by the Secretary,
6 that—

7 (A) accounts for the State or Indian
8 Tribe's share of eligible students; and

9 (B) provides, for each eligible student in
10 the State or Indian Tribe, a per-student
11 amount that is—

12 (i) not less than 300 percent of the
13 per-student amount of the State or Indian
14 Tribe share, determined under subsection
15 (b), subject to clause (ii); and

16 (ii) not greater than 75 percent of—

17 (I) for the 2019–2020 award
18 year, the average resident community
19 college tuition and fees per student in
20 all States for the most recent year for
21 which data are available; and

22 (II) for each subsequent award
23 year, the average resident community
24 college tuition and fees per student in
25 all States calculated under this sub-

•S 2483 IS

1 clause for the preceding year, in-
2 creased by the lesser of—

3 (aa) the percentage by which
4 the average resident community
5 college tuition and fees per stu-
6 dent in all States for the most re-
7 cent year for which data are
8 available increased as compared
9 to such average for the preceding
10 year; or

11 (bb) 3 percent.

12 (2) EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN INDIAN

13 TRIBES.—In any case in which not less than 75 per-
14 cent of the students at the community colleges oper-
15 ated or controlled by an Indian Tribe are low-income
16 students, the amount of the Federal share for such
17 Indian Tribe shall be not less than 95 percent of the
18 total amount needed to waive tuition and fees for all
19 eligible students enrolled in such community col-
20 leges.

21 (b) STATE OR TRIBAL SHARE.—

22 (1) FORMULA.—

23 (A) IN GENERAL.—The State or Tribal
24 share of a grant under this title for each fiscal
25 year shall be the amount needed to pay 25 per-

•S 2483 IS

1 clause for the preceding year, in-
2 creased by the lesser of—

3 (aa) the percentage by which
4 the average resident community
5 college tuition and fees per stu-
6 dent in all States for the most re-
7 cent year for which data are
8 available increased as compared
9 to such average for the preceding
10 year; or

11 (bb) 3 percent.

12 (2) EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN INDIAN
13 TRIBES.—In any case in which not less than 75 per-
14 cent of the students at the community colleges oper-
15 ated or controlled by an Indian Tribe are low-income
16 students, the amount of the Federal share for such
17 Indian Tribe shall be not less than 95 percent of the
18 total amount needed to waive tuition and fees for all
19 eligible students enrolled in such community col-
20 leges.

21 (b) STATE OR TRIBAL SHARE.—

22 (1) FORMULA.—

23 (A) IN GENERAL.—The State or Tribal
24 share of a grant under this title for each fiscal
25 year shall be the amount needed to pay 25 per-

•S 2483 IS

1 cent of the average community college resident
2 tuition and fees per student in all States in the
3 2019–2020 award year for all eligible students
4 in the State or Indian Tribe, respectively, for
5 such fiscal year, except as provided in subpara-
6 graph (B).

7 (B) EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN INDIAN
8 TRIBES.—In a case in which not less than 5
9 percent of the students at the community col-
10 leges operated or controlled by an Indian Tribe
11 are low-income students, the amount of such
12 Indian Tribe’s tribal share shall not exceed 5
13 percent of the total amount needed to waive tui-
14 tion and fees for all eligible students enrolled in
15 such community colleges.

16 (2) NEED-BASED AID.—A State or Indian Tribe
17 may include any need-based financial aid provided
18 through State or Tribal funds to eligible students as
19 part of the State or Tribal share.

20 (3) NO IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS.—A State or
21 Indian Tribe shall not include in-kind contributions
22 for purposes of the State or Tribal share described
23 in paragraph (1).

1 **SEC. 103. ELIGIBILITY.**

2 To be eligible for a grant under this title, a State
3 or Indian Tribe shall agree to waive community college
4 resident tuition and fees for all eligible students for each
5 year of the grant.

6 **SEC. 104. APPLICATIONS.**

7 (a) **SUBMISSION.**—For each fiscal year for which a
8 State or Indian Tribe desires a grant under this title, an
9 application shall be submitted to the Secretary at such
10 time, in such manner, and containing such information as
11 the Secretary may require. Such application shall be sub-
12 mitted by—

13 (1) in the case of a State, the Governor, the
14 State agency with jurisdiction over higher education,
15 or another agency designated by the Governor to ad-
16 minister the program under this title; or

17 (2) in the case of an Indian Tribe, the gov-
18 erning body of such Tribe.

19 (b) **CONTENTS.**—Each State or Indian Tribe applica-
20 tion shall include, at a minimum—

21 (1) an estimate of the number of eligible stu-
22 dents in the State or Indian Tribe and the cost of
23 waiving community college resident tuition and fees
24 for all eligible students for each fiscal year covered
25 by the grant, with annual increases of an amount

•S 2483 IS

1 **SEC. 103. ELIGIBILITY.**

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3 or Indian Tribe shall agree to waive community college
4 resident tuition and fees for all eligible students for each
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8 State or Indian Tribe desires a grant under this title, an
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10 time, in such manner, and containing such information as
11 the Secretary may require. Such application shall be sub-
12 mitted by—

13 (1) in the case of a State, the Governor, the
14 State agency with jurisdiction over higher education,
15 or another agency designated by the Governor to ad-
16 minister the program under this title; or

17 (2) in the case of an Indian Tribe, the gov-
18 erning body of such Tribe.

19 (b) CONTENTS.—Each State or Indian Tribe applica-
20 tion shall include, at a minimum—

21 (1) an estimate of the number of eligible stu-
22 dents in the State or Indian Tribe and the cost of
23 waiving community college resident tuition and fees
24 for all eligible students for each fiscal year covered
25 by the grant, with annual increases of an amount

•S 2483 IS

1 that shall not exceed 3 percent of the prior year's
2 average resident community college tuition and fees;

3 (2) an assurance that all community colleges in
4 the State or under the jurisdiction of the Indian
5 Tribe, respectively, will waive resident tuition and
6 fees for eligible students in programs that are—

7 (A) academic programs with credits that
8 can fully transfer via articulation agreement to-
9 ward a baccalaureate degree or post-baccalaure-
10 ate degree at any public institution of higher
11 education in the State; or

12 (B) occupational skills training programs
13 that lead to a recognized postsecondary creden-
14 tial that is in an in-demand industry sector or
15 occupation in the State;

16 (3) a description of the promising and evidence-
17 based institutional reforms and innovative practices
18 to improve student outcomes, including completion
19 or transfer rates, that have been or will be adopted
20 by the participating community colleges, such as—

21 (A) providing comprehensive academic and
22 student support services, including mentoring
23 and advising, especially for low-income, first-
24 generation, adult, and other underrepresented
25 students;

•S 2483 IS

1 (B) providing accelerated learning opportu-
2 nities, such as dual or concurrent enrollment
3 programs, including early college high school
4 programs;

5 (C) advancing competency-based education;

6 (D) strengthening remedial education, es-
7 pecially for low-income, first-generation, adult
8 and other underrepresented students;

9 (E) implementing course redesigns of high-
10 enrollment courses to improve student outcomes
11 and reduce cost; or

12 (F) utilizing career pathways or degree
13 pathways;

14 (4) a description of how the State or Indian
15 Tribe will promote alignment between its public sec-
16 ondary school and postsecondary education systems,
17 including between 2-year and 4-year public institu-
18 tions of higher education and with minority-serving
19 institutions described in section 371(a) of the High-
20 er Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1067q(a)), to
21 expand awareness of and access to postsecondary
22 education, reduce the need for remediation and re-
23 peated coursework, and improve student outcomes;

24 (5) a description of how the State or Indian
25 Tribe will ensure that programs leading to a recog-

•S 2483 IS

1 nized postsecondary credential meet the quality cri-
2 teria established by the State under section 123(a)
3 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
4 (29 U.S.C. 3153(a)) or other quality criteria deter-
5 mined appropriate by the State or Indian Tribe;

6 (6) an assurance that all participating commu-
7 nity colleges in the State or under the authority of
8 the Indian Tribe have entered into program partici-
9 pation agreements under section 487 of the Higher
10 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1094); and

11 (7) an assurance that, for each year of the
12 grant, the State or Indian Tribe will notify each eli-
13 gible student of the student's remaining eligibility
14 for assistance under this title.

15 **SEC. 105. ALLOWABLE USES OF FUNDS.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—A State or Indian Tribe shall use
17 a grant under this title only to provide funds to partici-
18 pating community colleges to waive resident tuition and
19 fees for eligible students who are enrolled in—

20 (1) academic programs with credits that can
21 fully transfer via articulation agreement toward a
22 baccalaureate degree or postbaccalaureate degree at
23 any public institution of higher education in the
24 State; or

•S 2483 IS

1 (2) occupational skills training programs that
2 lead to a recognized postsecondary credential that is
3 in an in-demand industry sector or occupation in the
4 State.

5 (b) ADDITIONAL USES.—If a State or Indian Tribe
6 demonstrates to the Secretary that it has grant funds re-
7 maining after meeting the demand for activities described
8 in subsection (a), the State or Indian Tribe may use those
9 funds to carry out one or more of the following:

10 (1) Expanding the waiver of resident tuition
11 and fees at community college to students who are
12 returning students or otherwise not enrolling in
13 postsecondary education for the first time, and who
14 meet the student eligibility requirements of clauses
15 (i) through (v) of section 106(5)(A).

16 (2) Expanding the scope and capacity of high-
17 quality academic and occupational skills training
18 programs at community colleges.

19 (3) Improving postsecondary education readi-
20 ness in the State or Indian Tribe, through outreach
21 and early intervention.

22 (4) Expanding access to dual or concurrent en-
23 rollment programs, including early college high
24 school programs.

•S 2483 IS

1 (5) Improving affordability at 4-year public in-
2 stitutions of higher education.

3 (c) USE OF FUNDS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PUR-
4 POSES.—A State or Indian Tribe that receives a grant
5 under this title may not use any funds provided under this
6 title for administrative purposes relating to the grant
7 under this title.

8 (d) MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT.—A State or Indian
9 Tribe receiving a grant under this title is entitled to re-
10 ceive its full allotment of funds under this title for a fiscal
11 year only if, for each year of the grant, the State or Indian
12 Tribe provides financial support for public higher edu-
13 cation at a level equal to or exceeding the average amount
14 provided per full-time equivalent student for public institu-
15 tions of higher education for the 3 consecutive preceding
16 State or Indian Tribe fiscal years. In making the calcula-
17 tion under this subsection, the State or Indian Tribe shall
18 exclude capital expenses and research and development
19 costs and include need-based financial aid for students
20 who attend public institutions of higher education.

21 (e) ANNUAL REPORT.—

22 (1) IN GENERAL.—A State or Indian Tribe re-
23 ceiving a grant under this title shall submit an an-
24 nual report to the Secretary describing the uses of
25 grant funds under this title, the progress made in

•S 2483 IS

1 fulfilling the requirements of the grant, and rates of
2 graduation, transfer and attainment of recognized
3 postsecondary credentials at participating commu-
4 nity colleges, and including any other information as
5 the Secretary may require.

6 (2) INCLUSION IN HEA ANNUAL REPORT.—At
7 the discretion of the Secretary, the information re-
8 quired in the report under paragraph (1) may be in-
9 cluded in an annual report on higher education re-
10 quired under the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
11 U.S.C. 1001 et seq.).

12 (f) REPORTING BY SECRETARY.—The Secretary an-
13 nually shall—

14 (1) compile and analyze the information de-
15 scribed in subsection (e); and

16 (2) prepare and submit a report to the Com-
17 mittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
18 of the Senate and the Committee on Education and
19 the Workforce of the House of Representatives con-
20 taining the analysis described in paragraph (1) and
21 an identification of State and Indian Tribe best
22 practices for achieving the purpose of this title.

23 (g) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary shall
24 provide technical assistance to eligible States and Indian
25 Tribes concerning best practices regarding the promising

•S 2483 IS

1 and evidence-based institutional reforms and innovative
2 practices to improve student outcomes as described in sec-
3 tion 104(b)(3) and shall disseminate such best practices
4 among the States and Indian Tribes.

5 (h) CONTINUATION OF FUNDING.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—A State or Indian Tribe re-
7 ceiving a grant under this title for a fiscal year may
8 continue to receive funding under this title for fu-
9 ture fiscal years conditioned on the availability of
10 budget authority and on meeting the requirements
11 of the grant, as determined by the Secretary.

12 (2) DISCONTINUATION.—The Secretary may
13 discontinue funding of the Federal share of a grant
14 under this title if the State or Indian Tribe has vio-
15 lated the terms of the grant or is not making ade-
16 quate progress in implementing the reforms de-
17 scribed in the application submitted under section
18 104.

19 **SEC. 106. DEFINITIONS.**

20 In this title:

21 (1) CAREER PATHWAY.—The term “career
22 pathway” has the meaning given the term in section
23 3 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
24 (29 U.S.C. 3102).

•S 2483 IS

1 (2) COMMUNITY COLLEGE.—The term “commu-
2 nity college” means a public institution of higher
3 education at which the highest degree that is pre-
4 dominantly awarded to students is an associate’s de-
5 gree, including 2-year tribally controlled colleges
6 under section 316 of the Higher Education Act of
7 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059c) and public 2-year State in-
8 stitutions of higher education.

9 (3) DUAL OR CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT PRO-
10 GRAM.—The term “dual or concurrent enrollment
11 program” has the meaning given the term in section
12 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education
13 Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

14 (4) EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL.—The term
15 “early college high school” has the meaning given
16 the term in section 8101 of the Elementary and Sec-
17 ondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

18 (5) ELIGIBLE STUDENT.—

19 (A) DEFINITION.—The term “eligible stu-
20 dent” means a student who—

21 (i)(I) enrolls in a community college
22 after the date of enactment of this Act; or

23 (II) is enrolled in a community college
24 as of the date of enactment of this Act;

•S 2483 IS

1 (ii) attends the community college on
2 not less than a half-time basis;

3 (iii) is maintaining satisfactory
4 progress, as defined in section 484(c) of
5 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
6 U.S.C. 1091(c)), in the student's course of
7 study;

8 (iv) qualifies for resident tuition, as
9 determined by the State or Indian Tribe;
10 and

11 (v) is enrolled in an eligible program
12 described in section 104(b)(2).

13 (B) SPECIAL RULE.—An otherwise eligible
14 student shall lose eligibility 3 calendar years
15 after first receiving benefits under this title.

16 (6) IN-DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTOR OR OCCUPA-
17 TION.—The term “in-demand industry sector or oc-
18 cupation” has the meaning given the term in section
19 3 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
20 (29 U.S.C. 3102).

21 (7) INDIAN TRIBE.—The term “Indian Tribe”
22 has the meaning given the term (without regard to
23 capitalization) in section 102(2) of the Federally
24 Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (25
25 U.S.C. 5130(2)).

•S 2483 IS

1 (8) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The
2 term “institution of higher education” has the
3 meaning given the term in section 101 of the Higher
4 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

5 (9) RECOGNIZED POSTSECONDARY CREDEN-
6 TIAL.—The term “recognized postsecondary creden-
7 tial” has the meaning as described in section 3 of
8 the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (29
9 U.S.C. 3102).

10 (10) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary”
11 means the Secretary of Education.

12 (11) STATE.—The term “State” has the mean-
13 ing given the term in section 103 of the Higher
14 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1003).

15 **SEC. 107. APPROPRIATIONS.**

16 (a) AUTHORIZATION AND APPROPRIATIONS.—For
17 the purpose of making grants under this title, there are
18 authorized to be appropriated, and there are appro-
19 priated—

20 (1) \$1,515,150,000 for fiscal year 2019;

21 (2) \$3,352,200,000 for fiscal year 2020;

22 (3) \$4,277,940,000 for fiscal year 2021;

23 (4) \$5,988,450,000 for fiscal year 2022;

24 (5) \$7,837,710,000 for fiscal year 2023;

25 (6) \$8,974,350,000 for fiscal year 2024;

•S 2483 IS

1 (7) \$11,302,020,000 for fiscal year 2025;
2 (8) \$14,451,090,000 for fiscal year 2026;
3 (9) \$15,077,130,000 for fiscal year 2027; and
4 (10) \$15,729,810,000 for fiscal year 2028 and
5 each succeeding fiscal year.

6 (b) AVAILABILITY.—Funds appropriated under sub-
7 section (a) shall remain available to the Secretary until
8 expended.

9 (c) INSUFFICIENT FUNDS.—If the amount appro-
10 priated under subsection (a) for a fiscal year is not suffi-
11 cient to award each participating State and Indian Tribe
12 a grant under this title that is equal to the minimum
13 amount of the Federal share described in section 102(a),
14 the Secretary may ratably reduce the amount of each such
15 grant or take other actions necessary to ensure an equi-
16 table distribution of such amount.

•S 2483 IS

1 **TITLE II—GRANTS TO HISTORI-**
2 **CALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND**
3 **UNIVERSITIES, HISPANIC-**
4 **SERVING INSTITUTIONS,**
5 **ASIAN AMERICAN AND NA-**
6 **TIVE AMERICAN PACIFIC IS-**
7 **LANDER-SERVING INSTITU-**
8 **TIONS, TRIBAL COLLEGES**
9 **AND UNIVERSITIES, ALASKA**
10 **NATIVE-SERVING INSTITU-**
11 **TIONS, NATIVE HAWAIIAN-**
12 **SERVING INSTITUTIONS, PRE-**
13 **DOMINANTLY BLACK INSTI-**
14 **TUTIONS, AND NATIVE AMER-**
15 **ICAN-SERVING NONTRIBAL**
16 **INSTITUTIONS**

17 **SEC. 201. PATHWAYS TO STUDENT SUCCESS FOR HISTORI-**
18 **CALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.**

19 (a) IN GENERAL.—From amounts appropriated
20 under section 204(a) for any fiscal year, the Secretary
21 shall award grants to participating 4-year historically
22 Black colleges or universities that meet the requirements
23 of subsection (b) to—

•S 2483 IS

1 (1) encourage students to enroll and success-
2 fully complete a bachelor's degree at institutions eli-
3 gible under subsection (b);

4 (2) provide incentives to community college stu-
5 dents to transfer to institutions eligible under sub-
6 section (b) through strong transfer pathways to
7 complete a bachelor's degree program; and

8 (3) support institutions eligible under sub-
9 section (b) to better serve new and existing students
10 by engaging in reforms and innovations designed to
11 improve completion rates and other student out-
12 comes.

13 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to receive a grant
14 under the program under this section, an institution shall
15 be a historically Black college or university that—

16 (1) has a student body of which not less than
17 35 percent are low-income students;

18 (2) commits to maintaining or adopting and im-
19 plementing promising and evidence-based institu-
20 tional reforms and innovative practices to improve
21 the completion rates and other student outcomes,
22 such as—

23 (A) providing comprehensive academic and
24 student support services, including mentoring
25 and advising;

•S 2483 IS

1 (B) providing accelerated learning opportu-
2 nities and degree pathways, such as dual or
3 concurrent enrollment programs and pathways
4 to graduate and professional degree programs;

5 (C) advancing distance and competency-
6 based education;

7 (D) partnering with employers, industry,
8 nonprofit associations, and other groups to pro-
9 vide opportunities to advance learning outside
10 the classroom, including work-based learning
11 opportunities such as internships or apprentice-
12 ships or programs designed to improve inter-
13 cultural development and personal growth, such
14 as foreign exchange and study abroad pro-
15 grams;

16 (E) reforming remedial education, espe-
17 cially for low-income students, first generation
18 college students, adult students, and other
19 underrepresented students; or

20 (F) implementing course redesigns of high-
21 enrollment courses to improve student outcomes
22 and reduce cost;

23 (3) sets performance goals for improving stu-
24 dent outcomes for the duration of the grant; and

•S 2483 IS

1 (4) if receiving a grant for transfer students,
2 has articulation agreements with community colleges
3 at the national, State, or local level to ensure that
4 community college credits can fully transfer to the
5 institution.

6 (c) GRANT AMOUNT.—

7 (1) INITIAL AMOUNT.—For the first year that
8 an eligible institution, as described in subsection (b),
9 participates in the grant program under this section
10 and subject to paragraph (3), such eligible institu-
11 tion shall receive a grant in an amount based on the
12 product of—

13 (A) the actual cost of tuition and fees at
14 the eligible institution in such year (referred to
15 in this section as the per-student rebate); multi-
16 plied by

17 (B) the number of eligible students en-
18 rolled in the eligible institution for the pre-
19 ceding year.

20 (2) SUBSEQUENT INCREASES.—For each suc-
21 ceeding year after the first year of the grant pro-
22 gram under this section, each eligible institution, as
23 described in subsection (b), that participate in the
24 grant program shall receive a grant in the amount
25 determined under paragraph (1) for such year, ex-

•S 2483 IS

1 cept that in no case shall the amount of the per-stu-
2 dent rebate for an eligible institution increase by
3 more than 3 percent as compared to the amount of
4 such rebate for the preceding year.

5 (3) LIMITATIONS.—

6 (A) MAXIMUM PER-STUDENT REBATE.—

7 No eligible institution, as described in sub-
8 section (b), participating in the grant program
9 under this section shall receive a per-student re-
10 bate amount for any year that is greater than
11 the national average of annual tuition and fees
12 at public 4-year institutions of higher education
13 for such year, as determined by the Secretary.

14 (B) FIRST YEAR TUITION AND FEES.—

15 During the first year of participation in the
16 grant program under this section, no eligible in-
17 stitution, as described in subsection (b), may in-
18 crease tuition and fees at a rate greater than
19 any annual increase at the eligible institution in
20 the previous 5 years.

21 (d) APPLICATION.—An eligible institution, as de-
22 scribed in subsection (b), that desires a grant under this
23 section shall submit an application to the Secretary at
24 such time, in such manner, and containing such informa-
25 tion as the Secretary may require.

•S 2483 IS

1 (e) USE OF FUNDS.—Funds awarded under this sec-
2 tion to an eligible institution, as described in subsection
3 (b), shall be used to waive or significantly reduce tuition
4 and fees for eligible students in an amount of not more
5 than up to the annual per-student rebate amount for each
6 student, for not more than the first 60 credits an eligible
7 student enrolls in the eligible institution.

8 **SEC. 202. PATHWAYS TO STUDENT SUCCESS FOR HISPANIC-**
9 **SERVING INSTITUTIONS, ASIAN AMERICAN**
10 **AND NATIVE AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER-**
11 **SERVING INSTITUTIONS, TRIBAL COLLEGES**
12 **AND UNIVERSITIES, ALASKA NATIVE-SERV-**
13 **ING INSTITUTIONS, NATIVE HAWAIIAN-SERV-**
14 **ING INSTITUTIONS, PREDOMINANTLY BLACK**
15 **INSTITUTIONS, AND NATIVE AMERICAN-SERV-**
16 **ING NONTRIBAL INSTITUTIONS.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—From amounts appropriated
18 under section 204(a) for any fiscal year, the Secretary
19 shall award grants to eligible minority-serving institutions
20 to—

21 (1) encourage students to enroll and success-
22 fully complete a bachelor’s degree at institutions eli-
23 gible under subsection (b);

24 (2) provide incentives to community college stu-
25 dents to transfer to institutions eligible under sub-

•S 2483 IS

1 section (b) through strong transfer pathways to
2 complete a bachelor's degree program; and

3 (3) support institutions eligible under sub-
4 section (b) to better serve new and existing students
5 by engaging in reforms and innovations designed to
6 improve completion rates and other student out-
7 comes.

8 (b) INSTITUTIONAL ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to
9 participate and receive a grant under this section, an insti-
10 tution shall be a minority-serving institution that—

11 (1) has a student body of which not less than
12 35 percent are low-income students;

13 (2) commits to maintaining or adopting and im-
14 plementing promising and evidence-based institu-
15 tional reforms and innovative practices to improve
16 the completion rates and other student outcomes,
17 such as—

18 (A) providing comprehensive academic and
19 student support services, including mentoring
20 and advising;

21 (B) providing accelerated learning opportu-
22 nities and degree pathways, such as dual or
23 concurrent enrollment programs and pathways
24 to graduate and professional degree programs;

•S 2483 IS

1 (C) advancing distance and competency-
2 based education;

3 (D) partnering with employers, industry,
4 nonprofit associations, and other groups to pro-
5 vide opportunities to advance learning outside
6 the classroom, including work-based learning
7 opportunities such as internships or apprentice-
8 ships or programs designed to improve inter-
9 cultural development and personal growth, such
10 as foreign exchange and study abroad pro-
11 grams;

12 (E) reforming remedial education, espe-
13 cially for low-income students, first generation
14 college students, adult students, and other
15 underrepresented students; and

16 (F) implementing course redesigns of high-
17 enrollment courses to improve student outcomes
18 and reduce cost;

19 (3) sets performance goals for improving stu-
20 dent outcomes for the duration of the grant; and

21 (4) if receiving a grant for transfer students,
22 has articulation agreements with community colleges
23 at the national, State, or local levels to ensure that
24 community college credits can fully transfer to the
25 institution.

•S 2483 IS

1 (c) GRANT AMOUNT.—

2 (1) INITIAL AMOUNT.—For the first year that
3 an eligible institution, as described in subsection (b),
4 participates in the grant program under this section
5 and subject to paragraph (3), such eligible institu-
6 tion shall receive a grant in an amount based on the
7 product of—

8 (A) the actual cost of tuition and fees at
9 the eligible institution in such year (referred to
10 in this section as the per-student rebate); multi-
11 plied by

12 (B) the number of eligible students en-
13 rolled in the eligible institution for the pre-
14 ceding year.

15 (2) SUBSEQUENT INCREASES.—For each suc-
16 ceeding year after the first year of the grant pro-
17 gram under this section, each eligible institution, as
18 described in subsection (b), that participate in the
19 grant program shall receive a grant in the amount
20 determined under paragraph (1) for such year, ex-
21 cept that in no case shall the amount of the per-stu-
22 dent rebate increase by more than 3 percent as com-
23 pared to the amount of such rebate for the pre-
24 ceding year.

25 (3) LIMITATIONS.—

•S 2483 IS

1 (A) MAXIMUM PER-STUDENT REBATE.—

2 No eligible institution, as described in sub-
3 section (b), participating in the grant program
4 under this section shall receive a per-student re-
5 bate amount for a grant year greater than the
6 national average of public 4-year institutional
7 tuition and fees, as determined by the Sec-
8 retary.

9 (B) FIRST YEAR TUITION AND FEES.—

10 During the first year of participation in the
11 grant program under this section, no eligible in-
12 stitution, as described in subsection (b), may in-
13 crease tuition and fees at a rate greater than
14 any annual increase made by the institution in
15 the previous 5 years.

16 (d) APPLICATION.—An eligible institution, as de-
17 scribed in subsection (b), shall submit an application to
18 the Secretary at such time, in such a manner, and con-
19 taining such information as determined by the Secretary.

20 (e) USE OF FUNDS.—Funds awarded under this sec-
21 tion to an eligible institution, as described in subsection
22 (b), shall be used to waive or significantly reduce tuition
23 and fees for eligible students in an amount of not more
24 than up to the annual per-student rebate amount for each

•S 2483 IS

1 student, for not more than the first 60 credits an eligible
2 student enrolls in the eligible institution.

3 **SEC. 203. DEFINITIONS.**

4 In this title:

5 (1) ELIGIBLE STUDENT.—

6 (A) DEFINITION.—The term “eligible stu-
7 dent” means a student, regardless of age,
8 who—

9 (i)(I) enrolls in a historically Black
10 college or university, or minority-serving
11 institution; or

12 (II) transfers from a community col-
13 lege into a historically Black college or uni-
14 versity, or minority-serving institution;

15 (ii) attends the historically Black col-
16 lege or university, or minority-serving in-
17 stitution, on at least a half-time basis;

18 (iii) is maintaining satisfactory
19 progress, as defined in section 484(c) of
20 the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20
21 U.S.C. 1091(c)), in the student’s course of
22 study; and

23 (iv) is a low-income student.

•S 2483 IS

1 (B) SPECIAL RULE.—An otherwise eligible
2 student shall lose eligibility 3 calendar years
3 after first receiving benefits under this title.

4 (2) HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNI-
5 VERSITY.—The term “historically Black college or
6 university” means a part B institution described in
7 section 322(2) of the Higher Education Act of 1965
8 (20 U.S.C. 1061(2)).

9 (3) LOW-INCOME STUDENT.—The term “low-in-
10 come student”—

11 (A) shall include any student eligible for a
12 Federal Pell Grant under section 401 of the
13 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
14 1070a); and

15 (B) may include a student ineligible for a
16 Federal Pell Grant under section 401 of the
17 Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C.
18 1070a) who is determined by the institution of
19 higher education in which the student is en-
20 rolled to be a low-income student based on an
21 analysis of the student’s ability to afford the
22 cost of attendance at the institution.

23 (4) MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTION.—The
24 term “minority-serving institution” means any pub-
25 lic or nonprofit institution of higher education—

•S 2483 IS

1 (A) described in paragraphs (2) through
2 (7) of section 371(a) of the Higher Education
3 Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1067q(a)); and

4 (B) designated as a minority-serving insti-
5 tution by the Secretary.

6 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
7 the Secretary of Education.

8 **SEC. 204. APPROPRIATIONS.**

9 (a) AUTHORIZATION AND APPROPRIATIONS FOR
10 HBCU AND MSI GRANTS.—For the purpose of carrying
11 out sections 201 and 202, there are authorized to be ap-
12 propriated, and there are appropriated—

- 13 (1) \$61,050,000 for fiscal year 2019;
- 14 (2) \$199,800,000 for fiscal year 2020;
- 15 (3) \$1,189,920,000 for fiscal year 2021;
- 16 (4) \$1,237,650,000 for fiscal year 2022;
- 17 (5) \$1,287,600,000 for fiscal year 2023;
- 18 (6) \$1,338,660,000 for fiscal year 2024;
- 19 (7) \$1,359,750,000 for fiscal year 2025;
- 20 (8) \$1,449,660,000 for fiscal year 2026;
- 21 (9) \$1,508,490,000 for fiscal year 2027; and
- 22 (10) \$1,569,540,000 for fiscal year 2028 and
23 each succeeding fiscal year.

•S 2483 IS

1 (b) AVAILABILITY.—Funds appropriated under sub-
2 section (a) are to remain available to the Secretary until
3 expended.

4 (c) INSUFFICIENT FUNDS.—If the amount appro-
5 priated under subsection (a) for a fiscal year is not suffi-
6 cient to award each participating institution in the grant
7 programs under sections 201 and 202 a grant under this
8 part that is equal to 100 percent of the grant amount de-
9 termined under sections 201(c) and 202(c), as applicable,
10 the Secretary may ratably reduce the amount of each such
11 grant or take other actions necessary to ensure an equi-
12 table distribution of such amount.



•S 2483 IS

APPENDIX B Survey Research

Federal Democratic Lawmaker 1 (FDL1)

1) *As a federal lawmaker, are you supportive, non-supportive, or neutral regarding the ACP Act of 2018? Please explain thoroughly.*

I'm completely supportive of the idea and [the] practical opportunity it grants underserved communities. ACP Act of 2018 not only provided a substantive mechanism for additional federal dollars; it also provided incentives for workforce programs, dual enrollment, and pathway programs for bachelor completion programs. College is the ultimate conduit into middle - class America. My job as a lawmaker is to look at policy as a chance to fix a problem. My support of this bill and other similar bills is rooted in my personal experience of fighting to find money for college. My peers experienced the same fight. Some of them succeeded, others gave up. We all now know that education beyond high school translates into more money for the individual who was fortunate enough to obtain it.

2) *What was the political motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?*

That's more complex than most care to know. While I stand with my colleagues in the Democratic Party and am in complete agreement that the ACP Act of 2018 would have been a significant game - changer for anyone seeking to complete their undergraduate degree, it was shrouded in political dogma. Senator Tammy Baldwin, a Democrat, proposed the bill without a Republican co - sponsor, which

made the measure lack bipartisan support. [Mean]while, it should be noted President Trump has created a level of political separation we did not think possible. A Republican as co - sponsor may have helped the bill move through the orifice of bureaucracy associated with controversial social legislation. During the bill's introduction, the "free - college movement" had significant momentum but was politically "owned" by progressives. Some Democrats were not even convinced of the viability of the bill, especially those in moderate districts. It sounds like free money to some. I'm not sure how hard Senator Baldwin pushed to try and obtain bipartisan support in her proposal of the bill, but any Republican influence would have helped push the bill but also would have surely eliminated some of the hallmarks of the bill and watered it down. Some lawmakers would argue [that] something is better than nothing. The bill came in 2018 at a time when Washington was polarized more than normal. The bill was dead on arrival and we all knew it. Many Democrats used it as a wedge argument to show how unreasonable Republicans were, while other Democrats championed the bill as if it had passed. Republicans simply made their typical talking points: it devalues college, throws money at the problem, cheapens the experience, [and] it's another welfare program.

3) *What was the policy motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?*

The policy motivation was much simpler: to create additional access to higher education for individuals who would benefit the most given their socioeconomic background. While we were right on the policy angle, our politics may have damaged

the future success of the bill. The bill would have also increased technology capabilities at HBCUs, increased work - based learning opportunities, and reformed remedial education, all initiatives that even moderate Republicans may have agreed to.

4) *Would you describe the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018 as an authentic attempt to resolve challenges many marginalized Americans encounter when attempting to access higher education?*

This answer requires additional background into the culture of Washington politics. The first lesson you learn in D. C. politics is this; there's a political angle to everything. Unfortunately, we cannot completely separate the political reality of our legislative decisions. Some are able to insert less "politics" in their decisions than others; I try to be that person as much as I can. All of us have a public narrative that must make sense, at least to those who elected us. With that being said, the sentiment that we needed to decrease barriers for underserved communities to obtain access to higher education was genuine. I try to stay away from the word "marginalized" because I think, in a sense, it can become a self - fulfilling prophecy. These are individuals who have been disempowered through systemic oppressive tactics for decades. The bill sought to address the obvious disparities in higher education access for minority communities. The introduction of the bill was to resolve the difficulty associated with higher education access and to score political points with our base and hopefully left - leaning independents and moderates. This is true with all legislation.

5) *Do you serve a constituency where more than 30% of your district would benefit from the ACP Act of 2018?*

I do.

6) *Did President Obama's initial involvement in the "Free - College Movement" help or hinder the ACP Act of 2018?*

It did both. Let me put it this way, President Obama helped make it a mainstream conversation. President Trump is not interested in this being part of his national platform, which has given cover to Republican leaders to keep it politically "dead." When Obama was first elected president, the notion of free college was still a hard policy to digest even with many Democrats, but when he placed it on his national agenda, it made other Democrats fall in line. This also made it almost impossible to get Conservative lawmakers or sensible Conservative groups to show public support for the bill once introduced after Obama's presidency.

Follow - up question: Did race play a factor in the way President Obama's support of the free - college movement was received?

It did, but not in the way that most think. There was unprecedented congressional obstruction against President Obama. If he supported it, the Republicans opposed it. Many voters on the left assumed this was because of racism in the political ranks, and while some of that obviously exists, it was more about racism in rural America. All of us have one thing in common: we depend on voters in our state to send us back to Washington every election. Republicans will not admit it publicly, but most if not all of them realize that they have a significant number of racist supporters, and anytime they opposed President Obama, it worked to keep that base happy.

When they agreed with President Obama, they could lose their jobs. I saw highly respected colleagues engage in a race to the bottom once this happened.

7) *If approved, would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive or negative impact on nontraditional Black college students (nontraditional is defined as 24 and older) ? Please explain your reasoning.*

The Act would have had an overwhelmingly positive impact on nontraditional Black students for a number of reasons. Let's start with the fact that the bill aimed to help college students complete their undergraduate degrees. There was no age qualifier. The bill also made provisions for transfer students and those with existing college credits. And if that wasn't a paradigm changer, the bill provided incentives to colleges to streamline and advance distance education and competency - based education. Simply put, if the adult student was a working parent, they would still benefit from the bill and have access to higher education from their homes or workplaces. Something not discussed enough is competency - based education, which is in the bill for a reason. Many of the free - college movement advocates have also advocated for more real - world skills training, another element that assists adult learners who are already part of the workforce.

8) *Would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive effect on the economy by increasing employability in the marketplace?*

The employment connection is simple. Citizens with some college or a completed college degree make more money during the course of their lifetimes. This means one thing: they pay more taxes! Of course, there's a direct correlation between higher education and the economy. As the government, we don't produce anything. Our revenue plan is wholly based on our ability to tax. When people make more money, we receive more tax revenue—simple. We are constantly briefed on models that project how the economy fluctuates based on skill - based training and college education. The economic connection is one that personally we all agree with as lawmakers, but the politics of it all clouds the translation.

9) *Are there any groups the ACP Act would have adversely impacted?*

Not that I can think of.

10) *Based on your career and expertise as a federal policymaker, what is the relationship between higher education and forward mobility in the workplace?*

My answer remains the same. College education is linked directly to increased wages. Typically, you arrive at [...] increased wages through forward mobility in your industry. There are still many jobs where you can earn a livable salary but must possess a college degree. The more access underserved groups have to higher education opportunities, the more opportunities for workplace advancement.

11) *What, if any, were the political dynamics involved which provide clarity as to the reason the ACP Act of 2018 never received a full floor vote?*

This is not a simple answer. Let's start with the first part of your question; yes, there were political dynamics that hindered the movement of the bill and created severe partisan

dissension. To clarify, the floor vote was not the ultimate goal, or at least it should not have been the ultimate goal, but the passage of the bill is the victory. As Democrats, we wanted a floor vote but knew it was only to get Republicans on record for not supporting the bill, which we believed would have been a political victory for us and a political loss for them. The bill itself was politically polarizing to Republicans. Since Republicans controlled the House and the Senate at the time, there was no way Republicans were going to allow the ACP Act on the floor for a full vote. Because the bill was fully "owned" by Democrats, it would have been a Democratic victory if passed and a Democratic victory if it failed to pass. Passing the bill would have meant that Republicans were incapable of creating meaningful higher educational reform. If it failed to pass, Republicans would have looked like political stooges, unable to place partisanship aside for legislation that would have helped voters in their respective states.

12) If political influences existed to cause the demise of the ACP Act of 2018, are there remedies available to overcome the political gridlock?

The best remedy remains a bipartisan introduction or in this case reintroduction of the bill. It may even need a name change to be palatable for the right - leaning lawmakers. The potential danger of galvanizing a bipartisan introduction of the bill is the guarantee that some if not much of the legislation will be diluted with Republican - influenced agendas. The art of compromise is also knowing when the other side is operating in good faith or not. As I said, there's always some level of politics involved, but where the line is drawn matters.

13) Why did the ACP Act not receive a full floor vote?

There was first a public movement for free college, rooted in progressive politics. These advocacy groups were all left - leaning and generally inflexible. This created a do - or - die moment in the political reality of Washington politics. If Democrats waited too long to act, they risked appearing incompetent, or even worse, incapable. If they decided to work with Republicans and presented a water - downed version of their movement's agenda, they would have been viewed as Republican - light, an attribution even moderate Democrats run from. The introduction of the bill lacked bipartisan support mainly because the public outcry [that] led to the bill had little bipartisan support from the masses, even though Americans from all political backgrounds would have benefited from its passage, directly or indirectly.

14) In your opinion, is it foreseeable in the future that the ACP Act of 2018 would receive a resurgence of support from your colleagues?

Not now. We have an entirely different fight. Covid - 19 has sent all legislative items, even the ones with significant bipartisan support, to the political grave, at least for now. Here's the irony, if we would have passed the ACP Act, many of the colleges that struggle with technology funding today would have already had funding for streamlining their technological needs. Distance education learning was a factor in the bill to help working adults remain employed while finishing their degree. Now, virtually every college is leaning on virtual delivery and distance education models. According to reports, many of these colleges are struggling to keep up.

Many of these factors would have been resolved through this bill. We are still footing the bill. Instead of paying for this on the front end, we're now paying colleges on the back end, which is always a more expensive and less resource - savvy approach.

Federal Democratic Lawmaker 2 (FDL2)

1) As a federal lawmaker, are you supportive, nonsupportive, or neutral regarding the ACP Act of 2018? Please explain thoroughly.

My personal and professional convictions have always led me to support legislation that increased access to college, especially for the least of these. My faith strongly influences my legislative record. My support of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) comes from common sense, treating others the way we would want to be treated, and economics. I think the financial impact argument has been underutilized as a strategy by the leadership of the Democratic Party to push bills like this. Fortunately or unfortunately, there's always a public perception angle associated with laws that affect large groups and cost the taxpayer. I see my role as a uniter of government services to those who would benefit the most and [an] educator to those who don't get it right away.

2) 2. What was the political motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?

I think you're likely referring to the underbelly of Washington politics. Actually, it's not much different from local politics anywhere in America. There are always political agendas. They are more pronounced in the hallways of the nations' capitol, but the same general principle applies. Some legislation is pushed because of the organized agendas of major groups or companies. [However], this was more about everyday people feeling more and more left out of the American Dream. The shock is this: pound for pound, more conservative and moderate voters would benefit from bills like this than African - American voters. The core of the movement that demanded free or reduced college, which is widely known as the "free - college movement," originated from increasing costs in higher education. The political angle is less noticeable by most, but it's there. As with all policy initiatives, there's an intentional push to vilify the other side who opposes it. There was a time when we could debate the issue on its merits, but things are quite different now, and I've seen the shift in real - time. From day one, Democrats wanted to own the free - college movement, which also connected to the "eliminate college debt" movement. Same principles. Republicans could have easily jumped on this and made it about economic investment, skills training, or something else that fit their "jobs first" platform. Once Republicans saw that the only way they could be supportive was to join our efforts, [for] which they would receive no political credit [...], the idea went to partisan purgatory.

Follow - up question: Would Democrats be willing to look at a Republican model for higher education reform to reduce costs and streamline accessibility?

Yes, if the approach is sincere and not an attempt to simply change the narrative and distract from the problem that needs

to be addressed, [which] is college affordability and accessibility.

3) *What was the policy motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?*

Policy is a written contract between the public and their government, at least in my observation. The policy motivation with the ACPA was to find ways to support colleges that served demographics that routinely encountered obstacles when seeking higher education or attempting to complete their bachelor's degree. At its core, the ACPA provided increased access to technology, online education, and corporate partnerships. The pure policy argument was this: when a man or woman is better educated [and] has a completed undergraduate degree, they can obtain a career, not just a job. Careers pay the bills and allow for forward mobility. Careers are also more reliable. This effect has sweeping benefits for America: fewer unemployment claims, less need to rely on government assistance, higher household median income, higher home ownership, and increased taxable income.

4) *Would you describe the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018 as an authentic attempt to resolve challenges many marginalized Americans encounter when attempting to access higher education?*

Yes. The introduction of the ACPA not only resolved many of the access dilemmas surrounding college hopefuls from disenfranchised communities; it also was thoughtful enough to address specific needs for [HBCUs].

5) *Do you serve a constituency where more than 30% of your district would benefit from the ACP Act of 2018?*

Yes, and proudly.

6) *Did President Obama's initial involvement in the "Free - College Movement" help or hinder the ACP Act of 2018?*

History has a way of re - writing itself. It was President Barack H. Obama who really changed the minds of a lot of my Democratic colleagues. Initially, many Democrats were not "feeling" the free - college agenda. Some publicly opposed it, especially when they had a significant number of constituents who were politically moderate and frankly racist. It really goes without saying that President Obama's push definitely polarized the matter in D. C. politics, just like the Affordable Care Act, but without his voice, this may have never become a mainstream conversation. I know many would disagree with my assessment, primarily due to Senator Bernie Sanders' emergence as the free - college champion, but a simple look at the historical record and you will clearly see President Obama proposed making community college free years before it was an acceptable idea. As a matter of fact, he received significant pushback not only from the opposing party but also from traditional four - year institutions [that] were more reliant on tuition - based education.

7) *If approved, would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive or negative impact on nontraditional Black college students (nontraditional is defined as 24 and older) ? Please explain your reasoning.*

I predict if passed (never say never), it would provide for an economic shift in this country that would decrease our poverty

ratio and increase our middle class and upper - middle class. Black adults who are 24 years old or older are living in the real world with real responsibilities. A job is great, but a career is better. The ACPA would have a significant impact on the Black working class for a number of reasons laid out in the bill; (a) providing funding for access to college, (b) emphasizing competency - based education, (c) increasing online and distance learning opportunities for working adults, and (d) providing enhanced corporate sponsorships that serve as pipelines to gainful employment.

8) *Would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive effect on the economy through increasing employability in the marketplace?*

While employability would naturally increase if this bill were to become law, the core principle remains wages. Increased wages are intractably linked to social status. Follow my logic on this. When a family is educated, they generally make more and combine earnings for a higher household median income. This is true with single parents as well. This higher income allows them to move the child (ren) to a better community. This community decreases opportunities [and] the chances of negative police interaction; this community also has a higher - quality K - 12 program. This K - 12 program increases the child's chances for college readiness. You get the picture. Beyond the linear argument of taxation and employability, this bill could break the curse of generational poverty for many Americans.

9) *Are there any groups the ACP Act would have adversely impacted?*

There are always groups that bills like this may unintentionally negatively impact. The bill has wording that would mandate partner colleges to offer programs where credits earned are fully transferable to other in - state colleges. This presents a control and accountability question that must be answered. Usually, these institutions do not desire additional federal bureaucracy, but in order to enforce some of the bills' core principles, additional federal oversight would be required. The bill may also have a moderate impact on private colleges. While the ACPA makes provisions for minority - serving institutions, it does not do the same for traditionally White institutions.

10) *Based on your career and expertise as a federal policymaker, what is the relationship between higher education and forward mobility in the workplace?*

I'm not so sure if education is concretely linked to forward mobility in the workplace, but I am sure it's linked to getting the job in the first place. Once there, forward mobility should be based on your ability to produce results.

11) *What, if any, were the political dynamics involved that provide clarity as to the reason the ACP Act of 2018 never received a full floor vote?*

Republicans did not want to admit that Democrats were right about education reform. This, coupled with their disdain for President Obama, especially near the end of his presidency, made it a political sword rather than an opportunity for bipartisanship.

12) *If political influences existed to cause the demise of the ACP Act of 2018, are there remedies available to overcome the political gridlock?*

I believe this bill or a version similar could eventually receive a vote and have bipartisan support, but the question is would President Trump even sign it? The political influences that existed during the Obama presidency have changed, but not for the better. The bill still needs tweaking, but that's the natural process of fully vetted legislation. The remedy is to have a real president who understands the complexity of this issue. Trump has decided on his political agenda and it does not seem to include equity in higher education. This president does not work in concert with his Republican legislators. Even if they presented a bipartisan bill, he would likely not approve, unless there's a promise for border wall money or some other "red meat" item.

13) *Why did the ACP Act not receive a full floor vote?*

Politics. It may be proper to note that there are politics on both sides, but much more pronounced on the Republican side for this. While there's no debate about this bill helping those who could benefit the most, the argument gets dragged into [a] sea of talking points, calling it socialism, communism, or even Marxism. These political talking points have been carefully crafted to instill fear and distract from the direct economic benefits of the bill. All because they can't claim ownership of the idea.

14) *In your opinion, is it foreseeable in the future that the ACP Act of 2018 would receive a resurgence of support from your colleagues?*

Yes. [However], to be effective, it may need to be represented as a co - sponsored bill with Republicans [...] after Trump is no longer president.

Federal Republican Lawmaker 1 (FRL1)

1) *As a federal lawmaker, are you supportive, nonsupportive, or neutral regarding the ACP Act of 2018? Please explain thoroughly.*

I'm for increasing options [for] affordable higher education for all Americans, but the challenges of affordability do not stop at race. The bill proposed by Senator Baldwin falls short of addressing the general need for affordability and only provides a temporary bandage to a gaping wound, which is the rising cost of higher education for all Americans. This bill was based on ideology and not bipartisan debate, review, and compromise. Democrats only wanted the support of a select few Republicans, not the Republican Party as a whole on this. Even though bipartisan support would have surely given the bill legs, since 2016, Democrats have been fixated on optics and media narratives, more so than usual. They made themselves the darlings of higher education reform. After I thoroughly reviewed the bill again, there are parts that I support, oppose, and [am] still pondering the effectiveness. [However], it's important to understand federal policy and the politics of it all. Good legislation is usually able to make it through partisan gridlock, eventually, but great legislation attracts Democrats and Republicans like flies to dead flesh. Overall, this bill was neither.

2) *What was the political motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?*

Democrats were trying to push overreaching social freebies as a way to court votes and excite their political base. If they were serious about passing the legislation, Democrats would have teamed with moderate Republicans to reintroduce the bill. There's no rule against that. If my memory serves me right, Democrats have pushed similar bills before Senator Baldwin's ACP Act of 2018. It didn't go anywhere then either. [However], it allowed Democrats to spin to the media in 2018 that Conservatives were somehow heartless and we should all be voted out of office. Most Americans knew better.

3) *What was the policy motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?*

The same policy motivation that Republicans have to make college more affordable. We believe in educational reforms. In 2012, well before Democrats were seriously talking about free college, the Republican Party adopted in its platform an education goal called "back to the basics." Back then, reports showed that roughly 50% of college graduates were either unemployed, underemployed, or working in a career field unrelated to their college education. We saw this as a major disconnect between college education and corporate America. Some of the proposals that came from this platform would have positively impacted Americans, including minorities, such as restructuring online education for adult students, expanding technical training programs for community colleges, and eliminating the federal loan program. Because of the media's sensational appetite and aptitude to spin stories, any talk of eliminating the federal loan program would immediately cause media hawks to demonize us and the idea. Congressional members on both sides of the aisle know that private loan agencies, if given the opportunity to naturally compete in this arena, would drive down interest rates and force colleges and accrediting agencies to seriously review their fee and tuition structure. It would also make students more selective about the quality of college they attend and more practical about their chosen course of study. Private loan companies would have the legal leverage to be more selective about what kind of technical training or academic programs they would cover. With the federal government virtually giving these loans to anyone who wants to attend college, the college is under no pressure to develop programs for careers that are in demand. I don't speak for every Republican on this, but if we were to eliminate the partisan noise, Democrats would give the idea room to be discussed as well.

4) *Would you describe the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018 as an authentic attempt to resolve difficulties many marginalized Americans encounter when attempting to access higher education?*

Not the way Senator Baldwin introduced the bill and I'm sure she was guided by Democrat leadership. The bill could have been powerful bipartisan legislation if there was a chance given to negotiate and compromise. That opportunity was never afforded. Remember, as I said before, Democrats were only interested in obtaining support from a few Republicans to push leadership to a floor vote.

5) *Do you serve a constituency where more than 30% of your district would benefit from the ACP Act of 2018?*

I don't know the exact percentage, but I'm sure there are elements in the bill, especially related to institutional effectiveness and distance learning that would greatly benefit working - class Americans. We have other ways of addressing these concerns that don't [include] massive spending and unproven methods. No one has really answered the fiscal question. Truthfully, it's not even being asked. No one knows how much this bill would have cost the American taxpayer. The numbers that are thrown out as estimates lack credibility and try to justify massing spending on the front end with zero guarantees on the back. For the citizens I serve, it's unacceptable to support legislation that's economically unsustainable.

6) *Did President Obama's initial involvement in the "Free - College Movement" help or hinder the ACP Act of 2018?*

We all know politics is a full - contact sport. The Obama presidency struck a tone in college cost reform that positioned us as adversaries. Obama's hyper - politicization along with his supporters in mainstream media made it nearly impossible to have a reasonable debate and compromise about any of the Democrat's proposals around college affordability. Democrats are much better at using the media to control how the public perceives a particular stance on a policy. I think it was President Obama who helped hinder the idea and intentionally and strategically placed it outside of the idea spectrum of Conservatives. Making it seem as if Democrats were the only ones with reform ideas, which is contrary to the facts. This guaranteed that any positive movement of the bill would still give the political and policy victory squarely to the Democratic leadership. Both parties engage in this political wrangling and I too have been known to weigh the political winds before committing to or opposing a bill. We all do it to some measure. To get things done in the game of politics, you must understand the rules of the game, [the] culture of the game, and the crowd that's watching the game.

7) *If approved, would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive or negative impact on nontraditional Black college students (nontraditional is defined as 24 and older) ? Please explain your reasoning.*

Sure, there would be some positives for Black nontraditional students, but what about White nontraditional students? We are all citizens regardless of color. Poverty is an equal opportunity employer. The common problem that lawmakers should all commit to solving is affordability. It's just as devastating for a poor African - American family to be shut out of education options as it is for a poor White family. The bill does not address the underlying problem. It only throws money at the industry of higher education, which continues to create undereducated students for the workforce, hire faculty and administrators with bloviated salaries that push political agendas, and take on massive debt unrelated to academic quality or instruction. As with any industry, the consumer in one way or another bears the ultimate cost for these decisions. I know this is not applicable to all colleges or universities, but it does apply to many. Until we raise the entire ocean, this one - ship - at - a - time approach will fail.

Follow - up question: Would Republicans be in favor of giving this bill a second look if it contained more programs directly related to technical training?

It definitely wouldn't hurt, but it can't just be a token gesture.

8) *Would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive effect on the economy through increasing employability in the marketplace?*

Once again, this is what's pushed by many of the free - college groups and their Democrat allies. As I stated in an earlier response, studies show that 50% of college - educated adults are either unemployed, underemployed, or work outside of their degree field. This means that the solution is not just about college education, but it's truly about what [they are] being educated in. Bills like this come down to implementation. If there's a strong technical skills training component that rewards institutions [that] are meeting in - demand careers, well that's something tangible. This would have definitely been proposed if Democrats gave us an opportunity to partner on the legislation.

9) *Are there any groups the ACP Act would have adversely impacted?*

Without knowing the return on investment, it could adversely impact the taxpayer. And last time I checked, virtually all citizens pay taxes. There may be some industry backlash within the "business" of higher education, but that would be low on my list of concerns. I would only support a bill that provides opportunity for all Americans who need it and [...] gives the American taxpayer a true return on their investment.

10) *Based on your career and expertise as a federal policymaker, what is the relationship between higher education and forward mobility in the workplace?*

As I stated, it depends on what you're educated or trained in. Simply having a college degree won't magically make you employable. Companies are looking for skilled workers and technical competencies. Granted, some college is better than no college. But does that solve the overwhelming training needs in the workforce? If we're in the business of expanding the middle class, we should start with a market - centric approach.

11) *What, if any, were the political dynamics involved which provide clarity as to the reason the ACP Act of 2018 never received a full floor vote?*

The manner the bill was introduced sent a clear message to Republicans and Democrats. This was their bill. You would be amazed at how much could get accomplished in D. C. if elected officials didn't care who got the credit. But given the reality of a voting electorate, knowing who did what is politics 101.

12) *If political influences existed to cause the demise of the ACP Act of 2018, are there remedies available to overcome the political gridlock?*

They know the remedy. Open the door for true conversation and compromise. Yes, they may lose some steam in the bill or have to tolerate amendments not celebrated by liberals, but that's how the political process was designed to work.

13) *Why did the ACP Act not receive a full floor vote?*

Republicans were wise enough to see the ultimate partisan goal of the Democratic Party, which was to manufacture a

wedge issue to tout during the election. They were crafty. Democrats were keenly aware of the political “hot potato” this would be, especially without any hint of bipartisan sentiment. They pushed it anyway. We did a poor job explaining the political move of the opposition party, which likely contributed to us losing crucial seats in the midterm elections.

14) *In your opinion, is it foreseeable in the future that the ACP Act of 2018 would receive a resurgence of support from your colleagues?*

Not under the same premise. It would need to be completely revamped,

Rebranded, and renamed for the legislation to have a fresh start. It's possible but, given the current leadership, unlikely.

Federal Republican Lawmaker 2 (FRL2)

1) *As a federal lawmaker, are you supportive, non-supportive, or neutral regarding the ACP Act of 2018? Please explain thoroughly.*

I support the concept of the Act but have major issues with the price tag to taxpayers, emphasis on educational programming and accessibility requirements.

2) *What was the political motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?*

Democrats wanted another social program to excite members of their party and garner political favor in the media. It was the aim of the Act in 2018 and the previous forms of the bill.

3) *What was the policy motivation driving the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018?*

Democrats will say the policy agenda was based on college tuition rates and its effect on certain communities, but they failed to address [the] real issue of higher education as an enterprise. Every lawmaker is disturbed by the price of college, but what's really pushing that cost? And does throwing more money at it solve the core issue [of] making it truly affordable? The bill does not directly address why college education is so expensive: increased demand, more financial aid options, decreased state funding, robust salaries, inefficient, yet expensive student services programs, and our private accreditation model. [...] The bill does not address any of [these].

4) *Would you describe the introduction of the ACP Act of 2018 as an authentic attempt to resolve difficulties many marginalized Americans encounter when attempting to access higher education?*

For some, it was an authentic attempt, for others, it was politics as usual. I can say unequivocally that the Act had and possibly still has room for bipartisan support. [However], the approach should actually solve the problem and give colleges and citizens a lasting solution. Allowing the federal government to directly accredit rather than depending solely on a private accreditation model would ease annual and biannual fees and make a difference, especially for smaller institutions. As with any organization, any savings can be passed down to the consumer, in this case, the student. Once again, [this is] something not even discussed by Democrats when debating the merits of higher education reform.

5) *Do you serve a constituency where more than 30% of your district would benefit from the ACP Act of 2018?*

The Act has some good in it that could benefit some Americans, but it leaves a huge hole with others who are just as deserving. The bill should focus on rewarding colleges that provide more access to education for underserved groups. This should be a bottom - up approach, where the government doesn't pick winners and losers but provides incentives to higher education models that meet certain criteria as a way to truly transform the culture of education.

6) *Did President Obama's initial involvement in the "Free - College Movement" help or hinder the ACP Act of 2018?*

I've always felt that President Obama's passionate and partisan support of the Affordable Care Act created such a polarized climate in this country that it became difficult for him to get behind a policy and it not automatically become [ing] a partisan issue. When Obama threw his weight behind the movement publicly and fiercely, there was an immediate reaction in conservative spaces. Obama was a brilliant political leader and knew his vigorous support would lead to a partisan battle. Not really sure if he had any other choice. Progressives were moving in this direction and moderate voices were not being heard.

7) *If approved, would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive or negative impact on nontraditional Black college students (nontraditional is defined as 24 and older) ? Please explain your reasoning.*

It may have a positive impact if applied to fit the needs of the job market. But it may also have a negative impact by not addressing the actual cost of education. Let's pretend the bill makes it to final passage and is signed into law by President Trump. If that happens, would colleges reduce their tuition rates? Would students primarily receive an education that connects them to careers at a more efficient rate? Not at all. And if the program is not renewed or goes through a restructuring as to who can qualify, colleges may actually be even more expensive in the future, making the problem of affordability worse than it is now.

Follow - up question: What are some Republican ideas that could potentially revise the ACP Act of 2018 if fully adopted?

In addition to having co - sponsors from both political parties, Republicans would likely need to see more [emphasis] on education that prepares graduates for employment, accountability factors for colleges who are unable to develop programs that lead to employment, eliminate redundant regulations, place higher importance on competency - based - education, and streamline the student aid system. This would be a good start. There is a Republican - backed bill called the PROSPER Act that addresses much of this. Maybe there's room to have both conversations together.

8) *Would the ACP Act of 2018 have a positive effect on the economy through increasing employability in the marketplace?*

Only if the education received is relevant to current career demands. Something the bill does not fully [y] address. Career employment differs from region to region. What's in demand in one area may be completely saturated in another. That's why I'm a proponent of institutions providing [a] model of

education based on a regional reflection of what the local area demands. This does not negate the valuable work of research universities and students traveling from near and far to attend these schools, but if the idea behind affordability [is] to enlarge the middle class, then the emphasis must be on working adults.

9) *Are there any groups the ACP Act would have adversely impacted?*

I think colleges [that] are already burdened with excessive government oversight would be negatively impacted. There are always penalties when institutions partner with the federal government but are unable to adhere to the strict government oversight. This could become a major challenge for small colleges as well.

10) *Based on your career and expertise as a federal policymaker, what is the relationship between higher education and forward mobility in the workplace?*

With the right educational skills, matched with the student's career goal, opportunities are limitless. That connection needs to be concrete and not abstract in the bill. This is why [we should incentivize] institutions [that] take [the] initiative to change their approach to meet the demand in the marketplace [...].

11) *What, if any, were the political dynamics involved which provide clarity as to the reason the ACP Act of 2018 never received a full floor vote?*

The political dance was afoot. Democrats knew the bill would go nowhere without significant input from Republicans, and Republicans knew that the bill was more about base politics than real reform. The Democrats looked progressive on a mainstream issue, and [the] Republicans looked fiscally responsible. Both political sides were able to keep play [ing] "base" politics over [the] bill.

12) *If political influences existed to cause the demise of the ACP Act of 2018, are there remedies available to overcome the political gridlock?*

The only remedy that would give it life again is securing the support of President Trump. The President is such a force in Republican politics that he can singlehandedly get Conservatives to back the bill. Ironically, President Trump has supported many left - leaning initiatives during his presidency, only to be opposed by Democratic leadership. When President Trump supported criminal justice reform, the left said he was just pandering to Black voters and still called him racist.

13) *Why did the ACP Act not receive a full floor vote?*

Republican leadership was well aware of the partisan game Democrats were playing and refused to get coerced into a political pissing match. The bill needs to be a bipartisan bill to be effective. It is time for Democrats to consider that Republicans have good ideas too.

14) *In your opinion, is it foreseeable in the future that the ACP Act of 2018 would receive a resurgence of support from your colleagues?*

It's been attempted so many times. I think the best way to make this bill sing again is through top leadership in both

parties negotiating a skeleton agreement and presenting it to the body.

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