

Jason Altmire ([00:04](#)):

Hello again, and welcome to a new season of Career Education Report. I'm Jason Altmire, and today we have a very special guest, Congresswoman Virginia Foxx, who is no stranger to any audience in higher education and certainly not to the proprietary sector where she has been the absolute number one supporter of the sector in her many years in Congress. And before serving in Congress, she served 10 years in the North Carolina Senate. She was Deputy Secretary for Management for the North Carolina Department of Administration. She's got a doctorate in education. She has taught community college. She has been an instructor at Appalachian State University where she also served as a high level administrator and she was president of a community college. So we are very fortunate to have her today. Congresswoman Virginia Foxx, thank you for being with us today.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([01:03](#)):

Thank you for inviting me, Jason.

Jason Altmire ([01:06](#)):

We, of course, served on the committee together for three terms, and one of the things that I noticed about you that was different than anybody else was you brought the experience that you had in higher education to your thinking process when it came to public policy. And I was just wondering, as an educator yourself, how does that experience in post-secondary education inform your views and your work in Congress?

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([01:32](#)):

Well, it's very valuable experience. I was on a school board number one, for 12 years, then I was at a university for 15 years, I was an administrator and a faculty member, and then I became the president of community college. And then in the Legislature, I was on what amounts to the Education Policy Committee. I was not on the Appropriations Committee. So I think it's very valuable to have that insight. As I joke, I say, I know where the bodies are buried in education, and so it gives me a very, very good perspective from both the public and the private because I do understand how the private universities operate differently from the public. And having been a community college president for seven years, I have very deep understanding of that process.

Jason Altmire ([02:25](#)):

And when people think about the committee, any committee you think about public policy, passing bills, having markups, having discussions. But another issue that is a significant responsibility of committee work in Congress is oversight of the executive branch. And now that the Republicans have taken control of Congress, obviously, Republicans will be in control of the committee. So what oversight actions do you think House Republicans will focus on to counter this administration's actions on higher education?

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([02:57](#)):

Well, some of us have always understood the issue of oversight, whether it's in a Republican administration or a Democratic administration. That's our job as Congress. We have that responsibility. We have to hold the Biden administration accountable for what it's doing in terms of its reckless behavior, harming students and taxpayers from the Biden administration, new regulations, making expansive and unnecessary changes to borrowing, defense, to public service loan forgiveness, and other provisions of the loan program. It appears that the administration's goal is to discharge as much debt as possible. So we believe that the Biden administration is creating a backdoor to free college. But again,

this is our responsibility. How money appropriated by the Congress is spent is extremely important for us to get a handle on.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([03:59](#)):

The Biden administration's student loan agenda has been catastrophic. He has continued the nearly three year repayment pause, issued illegal waivers to expand loan cancellation programs to those who were never eligible, and worse of all, he used 40 million borrowers as pawns to score political points before an election. He did this knowing full well the promise of mass loan cancellations was more than likely empty. There's no way to beat around the bush, the actions of Biden administration are disgraceful. We are going to fight at every turn to stop the president's aggressive power grab and abuse of the executive pen. Jason, we have three branches of government, the legislative, the executive, and the judicial. And what President Biden and the people in the education department are trying to be is both the executive and the legislative branches.

Jason Altmire ([04:58](#)):

And the third branch, of course, the judicial branch, as we tape this, we do not know the outcome of the Supreme Court decision on this. How do you feel that the Supreme Court will rule?

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([05:10](#)):

Well, the Supreme Court has now called for hearings in February. I hope and pray that the Supreme Court is going to rule that the administration has grossly overstepped its bounds in terms of what it's doing. It just does not have a legislative base for the executive decisions that it's making.

Jason Altmire ([05:38](#)):

With the new Congress underway, I was wondering if you could talk about what the priorities are going to be of the committee in the new Congress.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([05:45](#)):

Well, we want to do a big reform to HEA, and we know that finding consensus is going to be an issue for any bill that's passing out of the Congress in the next session. It has been in this session. There haven't been a lot of bills passed. I saw a small number of bills that were passed last year. I think it's set a record. But we will be working with everybody we can work with to do what we can to reform higher education. The student loan system has been turned upside down, and as you know, politics ahead of students and taxpayers from our perspective. But what we want is to redirect the course for American post-secondary education, so student and workers of tomorrow are benefiting from a better system.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([06:42](#)):

So here will be our approach. Giving students access to lower college costs. That's going to be the number one goal we have. More high quality programs and a reformed financial aid system that provides all Americans opportunity for economic mobility. We want to make sure that students, whatever their age, have access to continuing their education. We'd like to do short-term Pell and other kinds of programs. So earlier in this year, we worked to put forward the Real Reforms Act. We think that this could draw bipartisan support in the new session of legislation. So here's what it does. It bars the education secretary from issuing regulations that cost taxpayers tens of billions of dollars without approval from Congress. It ends the costly and regressive repayment pause, which desperately needs to

be done. It ends uncapped borrowing for graduate students, but allows students to borrow up to 25,000 annually or a \$100,00 aggregately in graduate Stafford Loans. We think it's important to have reasonable borrowing limits because as long as there's unlimited loans available, institutions have little incentive to price programs competitively. So the limits are not arbitrary. We took into consideration how much students are borrowing today and these limits will not affect many graduate bars.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([08:34](#)):

So the Real Reforms Act, we think is really a good start for us. It also allows institutions the flexibility to lower borrowing limits based on a student's circumstances and protecting students from taking out debt they can't afford. It streamlines a confusing web of income driven repayment plans, IDR, into one transparent, predictable plan. We have so many plans right now that they're very, very confusing. And that plan that we have, the borrowers will repay only the principal with the standard 10 years worth of interest. Right now, students sometimes never get to paying the principal and they're saddled with the debt even after 10 years of paying on it. It's also going to provide targeted relief to borrowers who made years of payments but saw their balances explode due to the Democrats poorly designed repayment policies.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([09:41](#)):

Then once we get the Real Reforms Act, any borrowers that have paid back more than they owed will have their remaining balances discharged. It also allows the Pell grants to be used for short-term career focus programs that provide valuable credentials for in-demand jobs. The hope is that you have Pell grants for short-term programs that allow students to start working with skills that they need for a good job, and then they continue their education after that going on to gain more and more skills.

Jason Altmire ([10:19](#)):

I wanted to focus on that issue in particular. This is what you've proposed in the past. You've talked about extending the Pell Grant to short-term programs of at least 150 hours and at least eight weeks long. And of course, we think that is a great idea. What are the impediments? That seems like something that could draw bipartisan support. Do you think that this is something that Congress will be able to pass?

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([10:44](#)):

I do think it will draw bipartisan support. Jason, every member of Congress is being told by their constituents that there are not people out there with the skills to fill the jobs that are out there, and so I do believe it will draw bipartisan support. It was impossible to get bipartisan support as long as the House was in the hands of the Democrats, the Senate in the hands of the Democrats and the President. But when I was chair of the committee under President Obama, actually, I was the chair of the Higher Ed Committee, and we were able to pass WIOA. It was called the Skills Act when it passed the House. People weren't ready at that time for short-term Pell, so we didn't propose it in that bill. But when that bill passed, it had bipartisan support from the House, and then it sat in the Senate for a long time, and even President Obama got on board with it, and we were able to get it passed in a Democrat-controlled Senate with a Democrat president. So I think we have the potential to do that again.

Jason Altmire ([11:52](#)):

And that issues of particular importance. Of course, our membership at Career Education Colleges and Universities were the proprietary sector of career schools. And you have visited career schools all over the country. I'm sure, more than any other member of Congress, and you have personally seen firsthand the work that they do. And I just wonder, in your travels and visiting these schools, what have you learned and how do you apply that to public policy?

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([12:20](#)):

Well, first of all, let me say, every proprietary school I have visited has been the most up-to-date in terms of equipment that the students need. They're extremely impressive. They're located where it's easy for students to get to them. They always have plenty of parking. I'm very impressed with their accessibility. I'm also impressed with the caliber of the faculty at the schools and the focus again on having the students gain the skills they need so that when they complete their program, they're able to pass whatever licensing exams are out there. And the schools have very, very strong completion rates as well as passage of the licensing exams or credentialing exams. So I'm very, very impressed with what I have seen across the country, and I love visiting the schools and talking to the students.

Jason Altmire ([13:23](#)):

This administration has been fixated on the for-profit sector of higher education. Some of the political appointees put in charge of the policies related to higher education have long histories of hostile writings and speaking about the for-profit sector. What do you think drives that ideological motivation?

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([13:45](#)):

Well, I think that they believe that they want everything controlled by the federal government. It isn't just your area that they want to cut out, but that's the one I'm most familiar with obviously from my work. And it does seem they go after your schools with more vitriol than they go after other parts of the economy. So it's hard for me to understand why when your schools are serving so many minority students, you're serving in areas that public schools are not serving, you're meeting the needs of employers, so it's really hard to understand what drives them except the desire to get rid of anything that has the word for-profit in it. You all are paying taxes. You're not taking money from taxpayers. It's the opposite of what the other schools are doing. You have better completion rates than many of the schools that are getting huge amounts of money from taxpayers and producing very little in the way of graduates and people who are able to go to work.

Jason Altmire ([15:07](#)):

As you know, a lot of the issues that we face are regulatory issues, things like gainful employment, borrower defense, the 90/10 rule. Is there a role for Congress and a role for the committee in assisting or supporting career schools as we engage in these discussions with the regulatory apparatus in Washington?

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([15:30](#)):

Oh, absolutely. The position I take, Jason, is we're here to protect students and to protect taxpayers. And so we need rules and regulations to apply to everyone. If the rules and regulations are going to apply to the proprietary sector, then they should apply to all. And that provides a level playing field for you all. It is not fair for this administration and the Obama administration too, to target your sector of education and say, well, everybody else is fine. When we know, when you look objectively at the numbers, the percentage of students who graduate, the percentage of students who go on in a career in

their major, all of those kinds of things that most of your schools do better than many schools in other sectors, either the private sector or the public sector. So I think what we need to do is to treat everybody the same and have the rules apply to everyone.

Jason Altmire ([16:38](#)):

Well, Dr. Foxx, as we close, I just want to, on behalf of CQ and our 750 member campuses across the country, I want to thank you for your support for everything that you have done to support our students and to support higher education generally. There is no one who has fought harder for students in this country and no one in Congress with greater expertise in those issues than you. So thank you for the work that you do, and thank you so much for being with us today.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([17:06](#)):

Well, Jason, I want to return the thanks to the schools in your association because again, I know what an important role they are playing in our country, in helping students who want desperately to continue their education and be contributing citizens in our country. And so I am extraordinarily thankful to your association and your members for the dedication they have to their students, and tell you that I'm going to continue to do everything I can to see that you're treated fairly in the future.

Jason Altmire ([17:44](#)):

Well, we appreciate that very much. Dr. Virginia Foxx, thank you for being with us today.

Dr. Virginia Foxx ([17:50](#)):

Thanks, Jason.

Jason Altmire ([17:52](#)):

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