Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise to support reauthorizing the Perkins Loan Program, which will expire tomorrow, September 30, if the Senate does not act.

Yesterday, the House of Representatives passed legislation to extend this vital program for 1 year. I urge my Senate colleagues to support this bill and send it immediately to the President for his signature.

I want to recognize and thank my colleagues, Senator Baldwin, Senator Casey, and the Presiding Officer, Senator Portman, for their leadership in highlighting the importance of this program. I am pleased to join with them in submitting a Senate resolution urging its extension.

Since 1958, the Perkins Loan Program has helped make college affordable for millions of students who have financial need. In the State of Maine, more than 5,000 students received a Perkins loan last year, providing $9.2 million in aid. Last Friday, I had a conversation with the president of the University of Maine, who told me just how critical Perkins loans are to UMaine students.

Perkins loans are a critical part of a college's and a student's financial aid resources. These loans help to fill gaps beyond what is available through the Department of Education's Direct Loan Program and a family's ability to pay. A Perkins loan can meet that additional need so that students do not have to resort to borrowing through private or higher cost loans, and, most of all, so they can remain in school.

Perkins borrowers are predominantly from lower income families. For example, at the University of Maine last year, 64 percent of Perkins borrowers had a family income of $40,000 or less.

The Perkins Loan Program is campus-based, which means that participating colleges and universities administer the loans. When students graduate, they make payments directly to their college or university, and those payments are used to make new loans to other students through a revolving fund. These revolving funds are a combination of a Federal contribution and an institutional match.

Now, I think it is important to understand that Congress has not had to appropriate funds for the Perkins Loan Program since 2004 because of this revolving fund concept, but institutions continue to be able to assist needy students through this self-sustaining program. That is why we simply cannot allow it to lapse.

As a Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, I know that our committee is committed to the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. I strongly support that effort. In the meantime, however, we must ensure that there is not a lapse in the financial assistance provided to students under the Perkins Loan Program.

As I mentioned earlier, the House-passed bill extends the authority for the Perkins Loan Program for an additional year and does not authorize any additional Federal funds. Students who receive a Perkins loan during this academic year and remain in the same academic program would be eligible to receive future Perkins loans.

We only have 1 day before the Perkins Loan Program expires. Students at our colleges and universities are looking at us--they are depending on us--to ensure that this vital and proven program does not
expire. I urge my colleagues to pass the House-passed legislation so that the Perkins Loan Program can continue.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record a letter from the chancellor of the University of Maine System in support of the reauthorization of the Perkins Loan Program.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

MAINE’S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES,

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM,

Bangor, ME, September 23, 2015.
Hon. SUSAN M. COLLINS,
U.S. Senator, Bangor State Office,
Bangor, ME.

DEAR SENATOR COLLINS: I’m writing to you on behalf of the University of Maine System in support of the Federal Perkins Loan Program. Perkins loans are an invaluable component of an institution’s and student’s financial aid resources. The flexibility, low fixed interest rate and generous cancellation benefits are both unique and critical to our needy student population, especially many middle and low-income students. The program is administered at the school level providing a highly efficient, self-sustaining program with accountability, transparency, and risk-sharing.

The Federal Perkins Loan Program is in danger of being discontinued. Without Congressional intervention, this program will be terminated and the Perkins funds recalled beginning October 1, 2015.

Throughout the 56-year history of the Perkins Loan Program, $7.9 billion in federal contributions have been leveraged with institutional contributions into over $36 billion in low-cost loans to more than 30 million needy students. The fact that this program provides critical support each year to more than a half-million students across the country, operating solely right now on the existing revolving fund dollars, is quite remarkable. A key factor of the program’s success is the central role of the college that originates, services, and collects the loans, while providing loan counseling for the borrower. This is one of the most effective and efficient public-private partnerships in the federal government.

Perkins loans also offer more favorable forgiveness options for borrowers than any other federal loan program. Full or partial forgiveness is available to borrowers who work in designated, high-need, public-service areas. During a time when we are trying to reduce student loan indebtedness, the loan forgiveness aspect of this unique program provides financial relief to the student, and a well-educated workforce to fortify public service in rural and inner-city communities.

Students enrolled at one of the institutions in the University of Maine System have benefited for many years because of the efficiencies of the Perkins Loan Program. In fiscal year 2013-2014 the University of Maine System awarded almost $5.1 million in Perkins Loans to 3,386 students who, without this program, would be forced to either borrow higher-cost loans or leave school altogether.

If this program is eliminated, students at one of the institutions in the University of
Maine System will lose a vital resource in support of their higher education goals. Public universities already struggle to provide sufficient financial aid to students, especially the lower and middle class who currently benefit from this program.

Eliminating the Perkins Loan Program will either force students to borrow through less desirable loan programs, or universities to make even more difficult cuts in an attempt to fund the gap from the loss of this program.

I sincerely hope that the students enrolled at all of the institutions in the University of Maine System, and all across the state, can count on your support of this vitally important and proven program. Also, I hope you can help facilitate a budget solution that does not impact funding in other critical areas relating to higher education and other federal loan programs.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and we appreciate your hard work and support.

Sincerely,

James H. Page,
Chancellor, University of Maine System.

Ms. COLLINS. Again, I want to commend my colleagues, including the Presiding Officer, Senator Portman, and my colleague from Wisconsin who has been a leader on this issue as well.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, much attention has appropriately been focused upon our next 36 hours in the Congress. A lot of attention--again, appropriately--focused on whether there would be a government shutdown for failure to pass a continuing resolution. Now we believe that is, hopefully, going to be avoided.

In just under 36 hours, there are a number of other vital programs that will expire, lapse, or sunset if this Congress does not take appropriate action. I am here to join my colleagues, Senator Collins and, in a moment, Senator Ayotte, to call attention to one of those critical programs, one of those vital programs, and that is the Federal Perkins Loan Program, the authorization of which will expire in less than 36 hours if we do not take collective action in this body.

I am here today to call on our colleagues across the aisle to join me in supporting the extension of the Federal Perkins Loan Program. Already we have seen encouraging bipartisan support for the program here in the Senate. The Presiding Officer, Senator Collins, Senator Kirk, Senator Ayotte, and just today Senator Thune have all joined me and more than 20 Democrats last week in submitting a resolution highlighting the importance of the Federal Perkins Loan Program and urging its extension.

Yesterday our colleagues in the House of Representatives unanimously passed a measure that would extend the program for 1 year. I am hoping this body will do exactly the same. While I look forward to a broader conversation about improving Federal support for students as we look to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, we simply cannot sit idly by and watch the Federal Perkins Loan Program expire as America’s students are left with such uncertainty.
Since 1958, the Federal Perkins Loan Program has been successful in helping Americans access affordable higher education with low-interest loans for students who cannot borrow or afford more expensive private student loans. In my home State of Wisconsin, the program provides more than 20,000 low-income students with more than $41 million in aid. The impact of this program isn't just isolated to the Badger State. In fact, the Federal Perkins Loan Program aids over one-half million students with financial need each year, across 1,500 institutions of higher education. The schools originate, service, and collect the fixed-interest-rate loans. What is more, institutions maintain loans available for future students through a revolving fund.

Since the program's creation, institutions have invested millions of dollars of their own funds into the program. In addition to making higher education accessible for low-income students, the program serves as an incentive for people who wish to go into public service as careers by offering targeted loan cancellations for specific professions in areas of high national needs, such as teaching, nursing, and law enforcement.

As a Member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and as a U.S. Senator representing a State with a rich history of investment in cherishing of higher education, it is a top priority for me to fight to ensure the Federal Perkins Loan Program continues for generations to come.

I am fighting for students like Benjamin Wooten. Benjamin is a 2004 UW-Madison graduate and a small business owner from Genoa, WI, whose family fell on hard times while he was attending school. Ben shared with me:

The fact that I did not have to pay interest while I was in school was a huge help to me. I was attending school full time, working and trying to live on a meager budget. ..... I am a grateful and successful small business owner. I paid my loan off in full about a year ago with pride and excitement. I know that when I repaid my loan it was returned to a revolving fund and will be lent back out to other students in need.

I am also fighting for students like Brittany McAdams. Brittany is a medical school student with a passion for pediatrics and helping the most vulnerable among us--something that doesn’t always yield a significant paycheck, especially in comparison to some of her medical school peers. Brittany said:

I want to be able to treat patients from all socioeconomic levels, despite their ability to pay. In other words, I want to do important work for less money than most other physicians. ..... The Perkins Loan is so valuable because it does not collect interest while we are in school. To me, that says the government believes that what I am doing with my life is important. That our country needs more doctors willing to tackle primary care. That while we need to pay for our graduate degrees, that they are going to do their part to make it just a bit easier. The Perkins Loan makes me feel valued and respected and even more passionate about my work.

Finally, I am here today fighting for students like Nayeli Spahr. Nayeli was raised by a single immigrant mother who worked two full-time jobs. She attended 10 different schools in 3 different States before she finished high school. Without the Federal Perkins Loan Program, Nayeli said that her opportunity to get a college education would have been `an illusory dream.'
Today, Nayeli is the first in her family to finish college and is now in her last year of medical school and is planning to work with those who are underserved in our urban communities. She finished by telling me:

The Perkins loan program helped me reach this point. And, its existence is essential to provide that opportunity for other young adults wanting to believe in themselves and to empower their communities to be better. Please save it.

You don't have to look very far to find the significant impact of the Federal Perkins Loan Program--the significant impact that it has on America's students. There are thousands of stories like the few that I just shared, representing thousands and thousands of students who are still benefiting from the opportunities provided to them by this hugely successful program. Let's show the American people and the one-half million students impacted by this program that we can come together, that we can find a bipartisan and commonsense solution.

I urge my colleagues to immediately take up and pass the House bill so that we can avoid another crisis of our own creation and put America's students and our Nation's future first.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I rise today and join my colleagues, and I wish to thank Senator Baldwin from Wisconsin for the speech that she gave and for her leadership--as well as yours, Mr. President--on the resolution to extend the Federal Perkins Loan Program. This is something we should take up and pass right now. There is strong bipartisan support to do so.

Yesterday the House of Representatives passed the Higher Education Extension Act of 2015, which would extend this important program for an additional year. But if the Senate does not act by tomorrow, this program, which helps the most financially needy students receive a college education, will expire. We can't let that happen.

I have heard from students, colleges in my State, universities, and financial aid administrators who have urged us to act and to make sure we continue this program, which allows students with exceptional financial needs to have access to low-interest loans they need so they can get higher education, live the American dream, and contribute to our society. Making sure they have that access is critical.

In New Hampshire, approximately 5,000 students received a Perkins loan during the last academic year. Across the country, as Senator Baldwin mentioned, over one-half million students received a Perkins loan during the 2013-2014 academic year. That is one-half million students across this country that will be impacted--their access to higher education negatively impacted--if we do not take up the House-passed bill and immediately pass it in this body.
The cost of higher education in the United States continues to skyrocket. My home State of New Hampshire has the highest average student-loan debt in the country--either putting college out of reach for too many or requiring students to take on substantial amounts of debt in order to get a college education that is often hard to repay, especially with the first job they receive right out of college.

There are several things we must do to address the issue of rising college costs, including, in my view, requiring schools to have more skin in the game and providing more transparency for students and for parents. But as we stand here today, there is one thing right now we can do to help make college just a little bit more affordable, especially for low-income students and families,

and that is by taking up and passing the House bill to extend the Federal Perkins Loan Program for 1 more year. Allowing Perkins to expire would mean that hundreds of thousands of low-income students across the country could see a decrease of about $2,000 on average in their student aid packages. For many, that could put college out of reach because they are counting on it. If we don’t take this up now, we will be in a position of really leaving those students hanging, and we should not do that. We should not allow that to happen.

I again thank my colleague from Wisconsin and the Presiding Officer, who is from Ohio, for his leadership.

Again, this has such strong bipartisan support. I hope we get it done today. Let’s do it now. Let’s make sure we extend the Perkins Loan Program for another year, just as the House did, and ensure we can work together to make college more affordable for everyone so that everyone has the opportunity to live and achieve the American dream.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the Perkins Loan Program as well. We heard a number of important presentations here about the critical nature of this program to students across the country who are trying to fulfill the American dream, and one way to do that is to have access to higher education.

The benefit of a higher education has become so essential not only to being able to learn and to grow but also to getting the best job you can to be able to move forward. One of the ways young people are able to do that is by having access to Perkins loans. They are fixed-rate, low-interest loans, and they are meant for students who, as we heard before on this floor, have exceptional financial needs. For example, in Pennsylvania, in the 2013 to 2014 school year, nearly 40,000 students in Pennsylvania, at more than 100 colleges and universities, were able to go to school because of these loans. Nationwide,
more than 539,000 students were helped. For many students, these loans are the difference between staying in school and working toward a bright future or literally dropping out of school.

According to the Coalition of Higher Education Assistance Organizations, one-quarter of all loan recipients are from families with incomes of less than $30,000 a year. We all have examples in our States.

I have one example from the northwestern part of Pennsylvania. Edinboro University is part of our State system of higher education. I had a chance to speak at their graduation this year.

Nikki Ezzolo, a 2015 graduate of Edinboro University, said the following:

I am sending this to you to tell you that I just started my new job at Highmark.

Highmark is a major health care company in western Pennsylvania.

She goes on to say:

I am a single mom who wasn't your normal 20 year old at college. I was an adult student who had left school more than once when I thought I couldn't do it. The last time I came back I was dedicated to getting my degree but I didn't have enough financial aid to help me pay my bill. I had messed up along the way in school and used up my only chance of having a good life with my daughter.

I wanted to thank you for the perkins aid that I needed in order to graduate. I am proud to be a college grad and my daughter is proud of me too. I have always been a bartender and this week I started my career at Highmark. I am so grateful for getting the perkins money to help me. I know that I wouldn't be where I am right now without it and that is a really scary thought.

Whether it is Nikki from northwestern Pennsylvania or Kayla McBride, a recent graduate of Temple University--Temple University is all the way at the other corner of our State in southeastern Pennsylvania. Kayla also talked about the Perkins loan. Kayla said:

I wanted to extend my gratitude to Temple University and the Bursar's Office.

With the rising costs of tuition, attending college might seem impossible for some students. I come from a single-family home and my mom did everything in her power to see that I graduated. When my mom was laid off from her job, I thought graduating would no longer be possible. I received some scholarships, but it was still not enough to cover the entire cost of tuition as well as room and board.

Without the assistance of the Federal Perkins Loan finishing college would've been very difficult. I am now a college graduate and I am thankful for all of the financial assistance I received during my undergraduate years. College can be an expensive investment, but I am glad that I had the Perkins Loan to assist me.

Both cases exemplify and validate the importance of the Perkins Loan Program.

Since the 1960s, over 30 million students have been helped by Perkins loans, and we have to do everything we can to continue the program.
What we are trying to do now is very simple. We are trying to get some time in order to fully update and reauthorize Perkins loans so that all students have access to an affordable college education. I urge the majority to work with us on this bipartisan effort to allow the bill to pass so we can move forward and continue the Perkins Loan Program even as we focus on changes in the future.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I think a lot of people here talk about what they think everyone should be focused on, but what I think we should be focused on is that this month students across the country are making their way back to college campuses. When more Americans pursue their degrees beyond high school, it is actually good for our country. It strengthens the middle class. It strengthens the workforce that needs to compete in the 21st century global economy. So here in Congress what I believe we should be working on are ways to help more students earn a degree and gain a foothold into the middle class.

Unfortunately, instead of keeping students’ options open to help them succeed, we are facing another deadline and another artificial crisis. If we do not act in the Senate, the Perkins Loan Program will expire after tomorrow. That means that more than 100,000 students will no longer be eligible for this assistance over the next year. That is going to leave a lot of students in this country in the lurch.

Without Perkins loans, students might have to take out private loans that have higher interest rates and fewer repayment options. So students would end up with a heavier burden of student debt or they might decide not to enroll in the first place. That is the exact opposite outcome we need for the future of this economy.

In my home State of Washington, more than 15,000 students received Perkins loans last year. That includes about 4,700 students from the University of Washington. I want to make sure the next class of students has the same opportunity so they can better afford college.

We in Congress need to supply students with more support to manage rising college costs, not less. I am hopeful that today we can extend the Perkins loan for 1 year while we work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act because there is no reason to block this bipartisan legislation that would give our students some certainty for next year.

The Perkins Loan Program gives students with financial needs three things that private loans do not. The loans are low cost. They do not accrue interest while a student is enrolled and for 9 months afterward. That can reduce student debt by hundreds or even thousands of dollars. The loans provide flexible repayment terms, and they also give those who are interested in the public sector generous forgiveness options.

The House Representatives has already acted to extend this program for 1 year. We should do the same before the clock runs out.

I am so glad this effort to extend the Perkins Loan Program has strong bipartisan support in the Senate. It would provide new students with some certainty for the current school year. Today, students face unprecedented challenges in financing their education. The cost of college has skyrocketed, and many students are struggling under the crushing burden of student debt. Preventing the Perkins Loan Program
from expiring will not solve all of their problems. I hope we can continue this bipartisan work on ways to make college more affordable and rein in student debt.

Passing this bill to extend the Perkins Loan Program is a step we can take so students don't have the rug pulled out from under them. There is no reason students should have to face this uncertainty and there is no reason we shouldn't be able to pass this by unanimous consent.

I know firsthand how important education is for families and for our Nation's middle class. When I was 15, my dad was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and, in a few short years, he couldn't work any longer. Without warning, my family had fallen on hard times, but instead of falling through the cracks, my brothers and sisters and I got a good public education at our schools and we had a country at our back that helped make sure we were able to go to college with student loans and what is now known as the Pell program. My mom got the skills she needed to find a better paying job at Lake Washington Vocational School. So even though we faced some hard times, we never lost hope that with a good education we would be able to find our footing and earn our way to a stable middle-class life.

Students at colleges and universities across the country today are looking now to us to make sure they have a solid pathway into the middle class. So I urge my colleagues to support extending this program to make sure students have the financial aid tools they need so they can build their skills, grow our economy, and help lead the world in the 21st century.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I join my fellow colleague from Washington State, talking about the Perkins Loan Program. The House has already acted on this. They extended it for 1 year. All we are asking is that our colleagues on both sides of the aisle allow us to have the opportunity to do that here, probably by unanimous consent.

It shouldn't be terribly controversial. After all, this is a program that is working. I am following a number of my colleagues today in talking about this. We just heard from Senator Murray. We also heard from Senators Collins, Baldwin, Ayotte, and Casey. This is a bipartisan effort. It is an attempt on our part to ensure that students are not going to fall between the cracks. They are getting started this fall in colleges and universities, and they are wondering whether this program is going to be here or whether we are going to allow it to expire. We ought to be sure these young people know that, yes, the program is going to be here and, yes, they are going to have the opportunity to get ahead by using this relatively low-cost student loan option that is focused on kids with the most need to be able to get an education.

Since 1958 this program has been strong. It has been one that works. By the way, there is no appropriation involved. There is no spending involved here. It is a matter of allowing the program to continue. The program has what is called a revolving fund, where whenever somebody gets a loan and
pays that money back, the money goes back to another student. This is an opportunity for us to continue a program that is working.

If we don't pass it, we are going to have a situation where new loans will not be awarded. College tuition is already too tough. I hear it all the time from families back home and from students back home. One of the biggest concerns they have—we had a tele-townhall meeting last night, and one of the biggest concerns that people have, of course, is the cost of education. This is a way to ensure that young people can pursue their dreams, despite the fact that college tuitions are too high in many cases. This is a tool that is incredibly important.

It is also a matching program that hasn't been talked about much on the floor today. The fact is that the program is administered by the schools, and the schools actually match so that they are providing some of the funding for this. That is another reason why I like this program.

There are 67 colleges and universities in the Buckeye State, my State of Ohio, that participate and take advantage of this. I have gotten interesting correspondence from some of the schools and students. Last year there were 25,000 or so Ohio students who received Perkins loans. I heard from Kent State. They have 3,000 students involved in Perkins. I have heard from Ohio State, which has 1,700 students there. I have also heard from other schools. I have heard from the University of Toledo, Oberlin, and Ohio Wesleyan.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record some of the correspondence because it describes the needs of the program so well.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

KENT STATE,

Kent, Ohio, September 3, 2015.
Hon. Lamar Alexander,
Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Hon. Patty Murray,
Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions

DEAR CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER AND RANKING MEMBER MURRAY: On behalf of Kent State University, I write to you today in support of reauthorizing the Federal Perkins Loan Program before it is due to expire on September 30.

Since its inception over 55 years ago, the Perkins Loan Program has played an important role in providing need-based financial aid for our students by distributing low-interest, subsidized loans to those with demonstrated financial need.

Kent State University students receive the largest volume of Perkins Loans in the entire State of Ohio. Total disbursements for the 2015-16 academic year alone are estimated to reach over $9M.

While there have not been federal capital contributions to the Perkins Loan Program in recent years, universities have continued to use existing resources to fund new loans for needy students. Absent
Congressional action before the end of this month, these loans will cease to be disbursed and hundreds of thousands of students across the nation will lose a vital source of aid.

In a higher education environment that focuses on access and affordability, the expiration of the Perkins Loan Program would have a devastating effect. I therefore urge that you delay the expiration of the Perkins Loan Program until Congress has the opportunity to enact a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Sincerely,

Beverly Warren,
President.

--

OBERLIN COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY,

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT,

Oberlin, Ohio, September 18, 2015.
Hon. Rob Portman,
U.S. Senate, Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, DC.

Dear Senator Portman: I am writing to you as President of Oberlin College asking that you intervene to extend the Perkins Loan Program, which is set to expire on September 30, 2015. As you may be aware, the Perkins Program provides federal funds to institutions of higher education in order to offer low-interest loans of up to $5,500 per year to students. More than 500,000 students received Perkins Loans in the 2013-2014 academic year, totaling more than $1 billion in disbursed student aid. However, not all the funding for this program comes from the federal government, as up to one-third of the funds appropriated by the federal government are matched by participating institutions. Ultimately, Perkins Loans are an important piece of the campus-based federal aid model, offering flexibility and discretion to financial aid officers to help students afford their higher education.

At Oberlin College we have committed to meeting 100% of every student's demonstrated financial need. While we do this predominantly with grant dollars, the Perkins Loan Program is a vital component in making an Oberlin education affordable for both our low and middle-income families. Last year alone more than 320 Oberlin students received funding of over $1 million from the Perkins Program. Many students tell us, particularly lower income students, that without the help of the Perkins Loan it is likely they could not have attended Oberlin.

Senator Portman, I urge you to support the reauthorization of the Perkins Loan Program. As history has shown us, the Perkins Program was one, if not the first, form of federal student aid that has helped millions of students afford higher education. At Oberlin, while we have a tremendous institutional commitment to making college affordable through our need-based grant program, we also know our students rely heavily on Perkins Loans as a means to attain their educational aspirations.

Sincerely,
Marvin Krislov,  
President.  

--  

MICHAEL BODNAR: My wife and I are very concerned about Congress not extending the Perkins Loan Program. With two children in College and one on the way, we would not be able to send them to the type of school needed to excel in this world today.  

Every time we vote the political platform of higher education is expressed as so important. Now we and our children are faced with the possibility of losing vital money needed to stay in college.  

We urge you to move forward and make sure that this program is extended. Most of our friends that have children in college rely on this program to help them pay their tuition.  

MARY BODNAR: My husband and I are very concerned that The Federal Perkins Loan is on the verge of being discontinued.  

By not acting on this very important issue which comes due on October 1st you are putting many families and College students at risk of not being able to afford their higher education. We have two children in college  

and one on the way and this program is vital to us as a family. Every year it's time to vote a representative into office weather it's the House of Representatives or the Senate we hear how important it is to educate our children.  

Please make sure that this important Federal Loan Program continues. All of our friends that have children in college depend on The Federal Perkins Loan Program to get their kids through college.  

Mr. PORTMAN. It is not just about Ohio. It is about the entire country. There are 1,700 postsecondary institutions that take advantage of the program. Allowing it to expire is going to affect all those institutions and all those many thousands of students.  

Tuition is far too high. We should be making it easier--not harder--for students to be able to pay for college. I have heard concerns from some of my colleagues that we shouldn't extend this and not allow a unanimous consent agreement to occur here because they would like to improve the program to make it better and even more targeted, updated, and modernized, and make sure the funds are allocated properly. I don't disagree with that at all. I agree that this program, like every other program in the Federal Government, could be improved. That should be part of our work. We should be improving these programs so they are more cost effective and efficient and getting to the folks who really need the program the most.  

While I agree we need to look at it and make changes, I don't think we should take this step of allowing it to expire. Why? Because, in effect, what we are doing there is we are saying that it is going to be at the expense of the students who need the aid. It should be on us. We should be doing our work. So I hope that we will go ahead and allow this extension to occur, and then let's work on those solutions. I
think that it may be easier to have these reforms take place if we are not working under the gun—in other words, allowing this program to expire. Letting something lapse and trying to figure out how to bring it back is not the way the American people and the people of Ohio whom I represent expect Congress to work. I think we can get this done, and I think we can do this with the extension.

The Department of Education already indicated to us that they may start to recall funding in October from colleges and universities if this program is not extended. By the way, not extending Perkins won't help with the Nation's budget problems, because, again, it is a revolving fund. The way it works is one loan is paid back and another loan is extended.

This is the right thing to do. As we ensure that government continues to operate, let's ensure the Perkins Loan Program does as well.

I want to thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for their discussion today on this issue. I want to urge leadership on both sides of the aisle to focus on this issue. Let's be sure and do what the Senate should do along with the House. The House acted already with a 1-year extension. Let's simply do what the House has already done. Let's ensure we are providing loans to students who need them while we continue our efforts to reform this program and make it even stronger going forward.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

[Page: S7001]

---

Mr. REED. Mr. President, unless we act quickly, our longest running student loan program—the Perkins Loan Program—will meet its demise on September 30. It will end not because it is ineffective or because it does not make college more affordable for needy students or because we have debated and built consensus on how best to reform our Federal student loan programs. Rather, the Perkins Loan Program might end because some of my colleagues refuse to extend it as we routinely do with other programs awaiting reauthorization. We should not allow this to happen. I hope that my colleagues will swiftly approve H.R. 3594, the Higher Education Extension Act, a bipartisan bill to extend the Perkins Loan Program that the House of Representatives passed by a unanimous vote yesterday.

The Perkins Loan Program was created in 1958 as the National Defense Student Loan Program. Approximately 1,500 colleges and universities, including a dozen in my home State of Rhode Island, disburse more than $1.2 billion in Perkins loans to students who have demonstrated exceptional financial need.

The Perkins Loan Program carries some of the most generous terms of all the Federal student loan programs. Perkins loans are offered at a low, fixed rate of 5 percent. No interest accrues until the student enters repayment, which starts after a 9-month grace period, giving the recent graduate time to get on his or her feet. The Perkins Loan Program also encourages public service, offering generous loan forgiveness for many public sector careers, including for school librarians, something that I have long championed.
Another compelling feature of the Perkins Loan Program is that participating institutions must contribute their own resources—$1 for every 2 Federal dollars. Many institutions, including colleges and universities in Rhode Island, have invested more than their legal obligation. As students repay their loans, institutions are able to make new loans. In other words, participating colleges and universities have a real stake in students being able to repay their loans, something that is missing from our other Federal student loan programs and something that I have been advocating we need more, not less, of.

In Rhode Island during the 2013-2014 school year, over 9,000 students attending Rhode Island colleges benefitted from more than $18 million in low-cost Perkins loans. Without this assistance, these students would face a gap in their ability to pay for college and could be forced into risky private loans or higher cost parent loans.

We need to maintain the Perkins Loan Program as we continue working towards a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. We cannot and should not leave needy students and families in the lurch by cutting off access to this vital program.

I urge all of my colleagues to support swift passage of H.R. 3594, the Higher Education Extension Act, to ensure there is no lapse in the availability of Perkins loans.