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Polk Perspective: Offer relief for taxes dressed up as 'loans'



By Gordon Wayne Watts Guest columnist
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On Nov. 16, 2018, The Ledger published my column decrying skyrocketing tuition and mounting student debt, paid for by our tax dollars.

Apparently, in response to my column, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, in her speech 11 days later, repeated my complaints that “collegiate debt, now almost \$2 trillion, is almost 10 percent of total U.S.

debt.” I quote her: “Today, FSA's [student debt] portfolio is nearly 10 percent of our nation's debt. Stop and absorb that for a moment. Ten percent of our total national debt.”

Apparently, this chain reaction even influenced the president to fall in line with conservative spending cuts: Forbes reported on March 19, 2019, that “Trump proposes limits on student loan borrowing.”

Despite even getting the president's attention, nothing has changed. Lawmakers didn't grant his request, and President Donald Trump, distracted by other issues, has dropped this. Based on that, I maintain my initial prediction of a crash of the dollar if lawmakers refuse to cut spending.

Enter Rep. Ross Spano. Against all odds, he invited me to a personal one-on-one meeting July 30, 2019, as he has with other constituents. In attendance were myself, Rep. Spano, and two senior staff, Blaine Gravitt and James Jacobs. We spoke for 30 minutes about unfinished business in higher education.

To be clear, I'm conservative and don't seek free college, loan forgiveness, or liberal free handouts. But tuition is technically a tax.

Funding to an arm of government (state colleges), and students are sorely overtaxed. To mitigate this, I proposed Rep. Spano cosponsor HR 2648, the “Student Borrower Bankruptcy Relief Act of 2019.”

This would fix current U.S. bankruptcy law, which violates the U.S. Constitution's Uniformity Clause, a special type of equal protection, affording a small amount of "tax reduction" via bankruptcy. Moreover, it would force banks to lower loan limits because students could declare bankruptcy, forcing colleges to lower tuition to affordable levels like it was in the past - a sensible compromise between the two extremes: current liberal overtaxation supported by RINO Republicans and Sen. Bernie Sanders's "free" college and loan forgiveness handouts.

Congressman Spano asked me if HR 2648 was "retroactive" (for past loans) or merely "prospective" (moving forward). When I told him the bill would make bankruptcy retroactive, he objected, complaining this wouldn't be fair to those who've paid off their loans.

However, what he didn't consider was the fact that changes in law which stripped my bankruptcy safety net acted "retroactively." Thus, to be fair, any correction must be retroactively too. The various changes in federal law stripping my existing student loans of bankruptcy also violated the Constitution's Contract Clause. Were this any other contract, it would immediately void the entire contract.

Sanders's claim that college was once free in America was rated "mostly true" by PolitiFact, because it was free in some places and very affordable elsewhere. So, if America had the best higher education in the world - and was free in the past - it's not unreasonable to enact the more modest legislation I request.

News outlets reported last month that DeVos was about to be arrested for violating a court order for the Education Department to stop collecting on student loans from 16,000 students who went to the defunct Corinthian College, whose fraud made students eligible for a special discharge.

DeVos is obviously to blame, but I believe lawmakers' refusal to enact the bills I request were partly to blame for her losing her mind. Therefore, I call upon Rep. Spano to pass both the loan limits bill (which Trump, DeVos and myself have repeatedly requested) as well as HR 2648, a responsible compromise to the liberal overtaxation ruining anyone who aspires to get an education and better themselves.

Over 44 million Americans have college debt, and another 30 to 40 million as cosigners or family, so changes are needed.

My proposals, unlike a minimum wage hike, aren't inflationary, and thus the preferred way to offer relief to the middle class.

Gordon Wayne Watts (contact him at GordonWatts.com or GordonWayneWatts.com) is a former candidate for the Florida House of Representatives. He lives in Lakeland.

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