

Justin Draeger:

Hey, everybody. Welcome to another edition of "Off the Cuff." I'm Justin Draeger, NASFAA's president. Joining me today is a very special guest, chairwoman Virginia Foxx from the North Carolina Fifth District and the Chairwoman of the House Education and Workforce Committee. Welcome to the podcast, Dr. Foxx.

Virginia Foxx:

Thank you, Justin, and I want to say thank you to you and all your folks who work in student financial aid for what you do every day, and you in particular because you've done a great job of helping members of the committee understand financial aid and come to our round tables and we are very, very grateful to you. You represent your profession very, very well, and so I want the members to understand that.

You help us learn.

Justin Draeger:

Well, you're very gracious. Thank you. We were just talking before we got started here today. You keep a very busy schedule and you've graciously given up an hour over lunch, no less, to speak to the financial aid community. Can you just tell us a little bit, for those who don't know, a little bit about your background? You have a long history not only in Congress but in education. You've taught, you've been on college campuses working before. Just give us a little bit.

Virginia Foxx:

Sure. Well, I grew up poor in the mountains of North Carolina and my senior year in high school, I had a student teacher who encouraged me to go to college. I wasn't going to college. I was number three in my class, but high school graduation was the highest aspiration of anybody in my family at that time. I was the first person in my family to graduate from high school. My mother had a sixth grade education, my father, a ninth. So anyway, I did go to college, took me seven years, worked my way through. I got my baccalaureate degree and I wanted to work in education. So I worked at Appalachian for a while, then in the private sector. Then I went back and got a master's in college teaching, which allowed me to go to work at Appalachian.

And I actually ran an Upward Bound program and then wrote the grant proposal for special services. So I started the Upward Bound program at Appalachian. So I worked closely with financial aid directors right from my early part of my career. The Pell Grant began about the time that I was going to work at Appalachian, so I have a strong background. Worked at Appalachian for 15 years. While I was there, I worked on my doctorate. I was also on the school board. After I got my doctorate, I became the president of a community college, and again, I worked with freshmen and transfers as assistant dean of the general college helping advise students and worked with programs at Appalachian to help, particularly, minority students be successful in college.

I left the university to go be the community college president because I thought that's where education is and I still think the community colleges are providing an extraordinarily important function in our culture. We have more jobs that don't need baccalaureate degrees than jobs with baccalaureate degrees. 70% of the people in our country don't have baccalaureate degrees, and while I have three degrees and I love learning and I love going to school and I've never stopped learning, never stopped reading particularly, I understand the reality of our culture. I have one brother who went to college, I have a brother who went through a carpentry apprenticeship program that I helped start and he got his

journeyman license. And then I have a sister who didn't go to college but is as smart or smarter than I am and can do a lot of things that I can't do.

So I'm very grateful for my background and for the opportunities that I have. My daughter started college, didn't finish, wound up getting her AAS in the accounting. My grandson, took him six years to get his degree. He stopped out for a while. My granddaughter has certifications in cosmetology. She's an esthetician, she's a massage therapist, very successful, and recently, she and her mother recently became certified to stretch people, which is a new area, don't have to be a physical therapist to do that, and I've become a very strong devotee of stretching because it improves the quality of your life. So that gives you some idea of the breadth of my experience in education.

Justin Draeger:

So two questions. First is, have you allowed your granddaughter and your daughter to try some of these techniques on you? Is it working?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, they're great with stretching. So is my grandson. He hasn't taken the course yet, but he played football and he was a thrower, so he understands stretching much more than I do and he's contemplating taking the course. So yes, when I'm home, I ask him to come over and help me stretch, and he's taught me so many things. I have gone to a physical therapist who's been fantastic, and so-

Justin Draeger:

Keep yourself mobile.

Virginia Foxx:

Physical therapy assistance. Yeah. Keeping mobile is so important and I'm much more spry than a lot of younger people.

Justin Draeger:

Well, I think a lot of your colleagues on Capitol Hill would attest to that. Dr. Foxx, because you've been in Congress now for 18 years, which is, I don't have the number, but seems like a lot longer than the average person who lasts in Congress. Is that a fair assessment?

Virginia Foxx:

Yes. Yeah. The average length of term is about 10 years, but they say if you love what you're doing, you never go to work. So I love what I'm doing and I feel like it's exactly where God wants me to be, and I get those messages pretty often telling me that you're doing what I want you to do. So I hope I can continue to read the messages correctly. I pray to know when I'm supposed to leave.

Justin Draeger:

Well, for people who aren't accustomed, Washington, DC, for a lot of people is far off land, a lot of infighting, polarization. What is a day in, day out? What is it like when you're in the district? What does it look like there for folks who just don't know what goes on inside the halls of Congress?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, let me tell you. I'll tell you two lifestyles, one in DC. We're usually there four days a week. It's either Monday through Thursday or Tuesday through Friday, and sometimes I go up on Sunday night if I have early morning meetings on Monday. Sometimes I go up early on Monday to start the day around noon, but during the week, like Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, I'm up in my office by 6:30 in the morning and I'm there until five minutes to 11:00 every night. Now, I will tell you there are few members that keep that schedule, but most members start their schedules around 8:00 and go until 7:30 or so. My meetings generally start at 8:00 in the morning every day and go till about 7:30 at night.

So you've been around, Justin, and you know a little bit more. You know that we're in committee meetings, we're on the floor voting, we're meeting in our offices with constituents, and so meetings take up an enormous amount of our time. Around 7:30 or 8:00, I try to be back in my office. That's when I read emails, answer mail. I answer all my own letters and call people on the phone if I need to. I try to make appointments. My scheduler can't stand vacuum, so my schedule stays full all the time, but I want to be in touch with my constituents. So I'll call people after 9:00 if they'll allow me to do that, and then generally, from about 10:00 to 11:00, I work on letters and I also have two computers in my small apartment. So I have to leave at five minutes to 11:00 because they lock the building then.

Justin Draeger:

I see.

Virginia Foxx:

And if I don't get out by 11:00, I have to walk a long way to get out of the building. So then when I'm in the district, generally I'm booked up Friday, Saturday, and even Sunday afternoons with events where I'm out and about. I joke about walking the streets because I literally will go into one of the towns in my district. I try to get into every county on a regular basis and I'll literally walk the streets, go in to see the merchant, say hello, leave a card and say, "If you need anything, call me." That's where I hear from people, in addition to the letters that I get and the calls that I get, that's where I hear from people what they're concerned about and I take those concerns back and sometimes I get ideas for legislation.

Justin Draeger:

You're known for being out and about, keeping a pretty rigorous schedule, as you just said. People know that you're always talking to folks trying to hear what's going on on the ground. I'm curious, one of the things I've noticed over the years that you've been in Congress, it doesn't matter if we have a Democratic president or a Republican president. I always see you at the State of the Union always trying to greet the president as they come into the chamber.

And so it always makes me think you have a respect for the office of the presidency regardless of who holds it, you have a respect for order in Congress, that you have a respect for the rules that have been set up in the committee and in the chamber, just a respect for the republic. There's always portrayal, no matter which press you read or which newspaper, of all this vitriol inside the district. Do you experience that or do you see something different working in it day in, day out? What's your perspective?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, thank you for your observation. I do respect the institution, I do respect our republic, and I thank you very much for saying it's a republic. That is what we have, a republic, not a democracy. We elect our representatives, and I do, I try very hard to always say President Obama and President Biden, and not call them by their last names, President Bush, President Trump because I do respect the office. I don't

always agree with the person in the office. In fact, I sometimes vehemently disagree with them and I can disagree with Republicans. I disagreed with President Bush on some things he did, and I'm always willing to tell those people when I disagree with them.

But I learned a long time ago, Justin, from the wisest man I ever knew that I worked for at Chapel Hill at the university is criticize all you want by offering alternative, and so if I'm critical, I will offer an alternative because as my boss then said to me, "Virginia, if I knew something different to do, I would've done it. So tell me what else should I do." I love the institution of the House. The House is the people's house. I love it. I encourage people to come. I will take people in the gallery so they can see it. I do tours. I take children on the floor. Now, the rancor that is portrayed is unfortunate, I think in many ways because we do get along personally. Personally, we get along.

Bobby Scott and I agreed a long time ago, we flipped roles on the committee now twice, and we have agreed to disagree without being disagreeable. I respect him. I respect everybody who runs and wins an elective office. It is not easy. It is difficult to run for office. The public can be very vitriolic. I've had my life threatened many times, sometimes very seriously, but I will say when I'm out and about talking with people, I will occasionally get somebody who says, "I don't like you. I don't agree with you," and that's fine. I don't agree with myself a hundred percent of the time. There have been times when I've changed my mind, not very many because I do try to be informed when I make a decision.

And so I'm not one of those people that flip-flops very often on voting. In fact, I don't flip-flop on voting. If I voted one way on a bill one year, if it's exactly the same, vote for it again the same way, but if I learn something or if the bill changes, if I become more informed, I can change my mind and I will explain that to people so that it doesn't look like a flip-flop. I'll tell you, Justin, the greatest honor I get anywhere almost is when I'm on the floor and I'm voting a certain way and another member comes up to me and says, "Please tell me why you're voting that way because I was going to vote the other way. Explain to me why you're voting that way," and sometimes, oftentimes, those members will change their votes and I will say over and over, that is the greatest compliment in the world because when another member believes you're well-informed and goes along with you, that's just high praise.

Justin Draeger:

One of the things we'll talk about in a few minutes, I hope, is accountability in higher education, some of your thoughts on holding institutions more accountable, you've talked openly about that, but people should know you're well respected on Capitol Hill. You also hold your colleagues accountable. Is it true, I've heard rumors that you've issued report cards from time to time for your colleagues on whether they attend hearings and whether they show up for briefings. Is that true?

Virginia Foxx:

Yeah, it was very interesting. In the last term, we had some hearings which were pretty sparse with Republican members, and I turned around to the staff and I said, "I think we need to hold our members accountable. I want to issue report cards," and so we did. Now, the staff was very good at how it came up. We didn't give them a grade, but we gave them information back on whether they'd attended hearings, whether they had asked questions at hearing, and that was the most hilarious thing I've seen since I've been in Congress. There were like six or eight of them sitting together on the floor and I handed them their report cards, the first ones, and they were ranked one through 22 and they were funny because they said, "Dr. Foxx, I did better than this. I did better than this."

I said, "Well, we have the records. This is how many hearings you attended. This is how many times you asked questions." You know what happened, Justin? Performance improved dramatically as a result of

that first report card. We issued three and they were very sensitive about those report cards. So yes, I think people should be held accountable. The public holds us accountable. I try never to miss votes. You do miss votes sometimes. I missed a vote not long ago. We were having two-minute votes. I ran into the cloak room to make an important phone call and before I got back out, they closed the vote and I missed it. So I try very hard to hold myself to a high standard and hold other people to a high standard. I think it's very important, and our staff does the same thing. We have staff meetings. We talk about what our goals are and what we've accomplished and what we might need help with.

Justin Draeger:

Well, I'll just say the briefings I've gone to, you have very good attendance and even from Republican leadership, those who are in your conference who are serving in leadership positions show up for the hearings and briefings that you're convening. So you just asked and received a waiver to be the chairwoman of the House Education Workforce Committee again. Why was that important for you? Why was it important? Did you feel you had unfinished work to do in this committee?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, I did. I believe that we're at the best time in the history of this country for true reforms in education and workforce. We were able to reauthorize WIOA in 2014, 2015, but it needs to be done again, and people are so frustrated over the inability to employ people with skills, and we want to work on WIOA. We also want to work on higher ed. Higher ed, when you do studies right now or do surveys, you'll see that higher ed is held in very low esteem in this country right now. COVID exposed, I think, the weaknesses in all of our education systems, elementary and secondary as well as post-secondary, and so I have the right background.

There is no one else in Congress that has the background that I have to be able to make the kinds of reforms. Having been there, nobody else has done that, and so I do appreciate the fact that my colleagues respect the fact that I have knowledge and experience, and I hope wisdom in this area. I mean, I'm limited. All of us are limited in our skill. Well, not all of us. Some people have a myriad of skills. Mine have always been focused on this. Now, my husband and I did run a nursery and a landscaping business for 35 years, and I also worked in construction.

So I have a little bit of experience in those areas, and if necessary and called upon, I can give advice there, but I am truly steeped in education and what I want to see, Justin, is every American have the opportunity to develop his or her skills to the fullest and be successful. If it were not for education, I would not have been successful in my life. We live in the greatest country in the world where there are more choices and more support for skill development than any place or any time in the world, and so I want us to be able to take full advantage of that for the least cost, if at all possible.

Justin Draeger:

Do you see that as one of the strengths in American higher ed, just that there are so many options for people to pursue post-secondary ed, that if they want to do career training, they can do that? If they want to sharpen skills, they can do that. If they want to do, as you did, pursue degrees, bachelor's or master's degrees, they can do that.

Virginia Foxx:

Absolutely. We have every kind of institution in this country, and we have things like apprenticeships that my brother did. I learned early on about apprenticeships, and that was 1969 that I helped set up an

apprenticeship for my brother at Beech Mountain North Carolina Resort. So we have everything available. Very short-term skills, and now online, it's truly unbelievable what we have, and there have been books written about the various kinds of opportunities that there are for free for people.

And during COVID, again, many, many people took advantage of that no cost, unlimited time available to them to gain skills they needed to improve their lifestyles and their opportunities at work, and my husband uses the internet all the time to learn about things. Well, I do too, but I use it for work most of the time, but I can look up anything I want, but if I need to learn a new skill, I could do it online for free and that is absolutely one of the great blessings of living in this country.

Justin Draeger:

So I've seen in some of the statements that you've released recently that you may have felt that it's, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but misguided policy to try to ensure that everybody receives a certain degree like a bachelor's degree or something, that that might just not be in the cards for everyone or even the best policy to pursue.

Virginia Foxx:

Absolutely. Again, I wanted to teach school. I needed a degree to be able to do that. My brother wanted to be a carpenter. He didn't need a degree to do that, but I wanted him to get certification. We live in a world that wants you to have certification, and so what I believe is that it's good for people to be in structured programs where they come out with a certificate or a diploma that says this person has the skill to do these things or skills to do these things, and that's what I think. We have over-degreed people in this country. Many people go on to college who really don't want to go to college. They will waste their time, and Justin, nobody can give you back your time.

They wind up going to school, going to college, being lost, maybe borrowing a lot of money, going into debt, coming out and not having anything basically that they can do to make a good living. In fact, I understand there'd been surveys done that 40% of people are in jobs that don't require a degree or they're over-degreed again. They have more degrees than they need. Skills are what we need to be focusing on. What are the skills that people have? Now, I tell everybody my best skill is typing. I can clean houses very well, I'm a pretty good cook, but if I had to do that on a commercial basis, when we were in construction business, I could do very well. I can handle a chainsaw, I can get on a roof and put on roofing. I can do a lot of different things, but on a sustainable basis or an interest basis, that's not where my interests lie. My interests lie in education.

Justin Draeger:

So does this feed into then some of the ideas around short-term Pell and even maybe some of the maybe nuanced, but changing in the committee name to Education and the Workforce, that this focus on skills-based learning and trying to get folks to the education level they need to find the job that's a good match for them?

Virginia Foxx:

Absolutely. We changed the name when Republicans are in the majority to Education and the Workforce. Number one, I think that better describes what we're trying to do. The Democrats basically are way too much in the pocket of labor, and so they call the committee Education and Labor, and work is a better word than labor in my opinion. Workforce labor, it has a negative connotation in my opinion, and so I would prefer to call it Education and the Workforce. I think work is dignity. The Lord put Adam



and Eve in the Garden of Eden and they were working before the fall, so they weren't punished for the fall by being put to work.

They were working beforehand. God felt that work was inherently dignified, and so I think that's what we need to talk about. I also think that the word labor connotes a separation between job creators and those who work, and I don't like that. We need job creators in order to have jobs and to be able to work, and so I don't like that again. It's like what you were talking about before, it connotes alienation, and somehow or another, not working together, and I think the employers and the employees have to work together to accomplish what they both want to see accomplished, and yet when you talk about labor unions, there's an inherent conflict there with the employer or with the owner of the business.

Justin Draeger:

Seems like there's some bipartisan agreement maybe on this idea of Pell Grants for short-term programs that are more skills focused. One of the flip sides of that might be the quality of the programs because they might not be accredited in some way. Do you have any concerns around program quality, whether it's with short-term program or maybe just in general around program quality?

Virginia Foxx:

Oh, absolutely. I don't think we should be funding programs with taxpayer dollars that are not good programs, and so my whole concern is that when we fund anything - we're funding, now, programs that don't produce graduates who have any skills. So I want every program to be analyzed and to be shown to be good. That's throughout the federal government. I want our defense programs to show that they're providing what they should be providing. We spend more on defense than any one program. Now that's the number one job of the federal government, but it's very important that whatever we do, and if we do short-term Pell, I want those programs to have validity and to have substance.

And they should be accredited by someone or some entity and then be able, hopefully, to be the base of stackable credentials. I haven't heard that word recently, but last year, there was a lot being said about stackable credentials. So again, our hope is to have lifelong learners so that you begin... We want people to be able to get skills and go to work as soon as they possibly can, and while at work, continue to build on their skills, continue to build on their education. There's not a difference between skills building and education. Skills building is education, and education should be skills building. So I am not saying that all I want people to do is learn how to use their hands and not their brains. Obviously, you can't use your hands without your brain.

I just remembered there's a commercial on TV, I don't even know who does it because I don't pay that much attention, but there's a commercial on TV by a chef, and he says, "My most important tool in the kitchen is my brain." Well, the most important tool that anybody has is his or her brain, but we need that tool to be developed to its highest point, and that, I hadn't thought about that, Justin. Thank you for helping me come up with that today because I haven't used that before. Again, people are always saying, "All she wants people to do is vocational education." Well, I don't like the term vocational education in a way because, again, it connotes certain kinds of jobs, which I don't think have been always respected.

I was meeting with a man earlier this week who's a trustee of Florida Gulf Coast University. And he said to the group, "I have a child at Harvard," and - no, "I have a child involved in vocational education. Tell me the image of that person," and then he told us he had a child at Harvard in med school. So most people wouldn't have thought of that image, but he has gotten it. That man has it. He understands that we have developed two different images for people in this country, those who have a baccalaureate

degree and those who don't, and we think better of those with a baccalaureate degree than we think of those who are "using their hands," but again, you cannot use your hands well if you're not using your brain. Now, I often say I want the best plumber there is. If I need a plumber, I want somebody who can come and fix things, and they sure have to use their brains to figure out how to do it.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, that's right. It reminds me during the pandemic, two things really became pretty clear. One was if you were looking for somebody in a skilled trade, they were on short supply because everybody was working from home and everybody was trying to find people to come work on their home and there was a short supply, and number two, we found out really quickly where the essential workers were all at. They were part of our supply chain. They were the people that were, we depended on. They were the backbone that kept everything running while a lot of "knowledge workers" were able to work from home. So I hear you. There's the dignity of work, regardless of the degree or credential that it took to get that work, and sometimes in education, we end up, even if it's inadvertent, stratifying value solely based on the degree or credential it took to get there.

Virginia Foxx:

That is correct, and it was pointed out to me very clearly this week too. I was with a group of cosmetologists and people who teach cosmetology and people who own cosmetology schools, and they were talking about who were the most wanted people in the country during COVID, and in some cases, it was cosmetologists and barbers because their shops were closed, and we have a very famous example of somebody breaking the rules to get to a cosmetologist because that person was so important to them. It was important to all of us. We care about how we look, and so those people are not often thought of as real important people in our culture, but boy, when you need a haircut, they're thought of as very important.

Justin Draeger:

In terms of your committee's work this next congressional session, where do you think you all will be spending your time? You've already launched some of your committee's work just this last week, but what topics do you think you'll be tackling and where do you think you'll be spending some of the committee's effort?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, it'll be split into two areas. One will be oversight. It's our responsibility in Congress to do oversight of the executive branch. Again, that isn't partisan. There's a lot to be done in the Biden administration because in the last two years with the Democrats in the majority, there was no oversight done of the administration. So we'll be doing oversight. That's an important part of our job. How is our money being spent? Are the programs being carried out appropriately? Those are the kinds of questions we want to ask, and are you overstepping your bounds? We know in many cases, that the Biden administration is overstepping its bounds. It is becoming legislative, executive, and judicial branch, and that's wrong.

That's what happens. That's tyranny when you have that happening, and we don't want that to happen in our culture, but the other thing will be on legislation. As I've said, we will be doing everything we can to reauthorize WIOA. Interestingly enough, in 2014 when we passed WIOA out of the House, it was called the SKILLS Act, and it passed with bipartisan support and we had a Republican House, a Democrat Senate, and President Obama was in office. So we had exactly the same situation we're facing now, and



so I'm optimistic about the reauthorization of WIOA because every single member understands we need people with the skills to do jobs.

And I don't care whether you're Democrats or Republican, you're hearing that from the people in your district. The other thing we'll be doing, we'll be focusing on the higher education reauthorization. It's about 10 years overdue maybe or more, and so we'll be working on that, and in both cases, both with reauthorization of WIOA in higher ed, we'll be working on accountability and we'll be looking for performance outcomes. That's what we want to see. Again, we're spending a lot of taxpayer dollars and we want to make sure the taxpayers are getting the benefit of their dollars.

Justin Draeger:

So for folks that don't know, when you say WIOA, we're talking about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Those programs are usually run out of the Department of Labor. When it comes to the Higher Education Act, you just mentioned accountability and outcomes based data. This is a bit of a sticky wick and it's challenging. You've been in charge of a community college. We have some schools that are really selective, some that are open admissions. You'll have different outcomes just based on student populations. When you talk to colleges and universities and financial aid administrators, or college presidents or Upward Bound or TRIO managers, what are some of the concerns you hear from them? What is it that's troubling them about how they have to operate within these programs?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, they will give you anecdotes about the challenges that they face, but we need them to be accountable for the money they're spending. That's the bottom line. Everybody has to be accountable for the money that they are taking in to their programs, or you and I are accountable. We're both accountable to our employers, and if we don't produce, then we won't have a job and it's as simple as that, and so what we want is for the schools to be much more transparent, the programs to be much more transparent. Let's talk about colleges and universities for a minute.

We want everybody to be treated the same, by the way. It doesn't matter what the tax status is of an institution - or a learning institution, I should say - whether it's for profit, whether it's not-for-profit, whether it's public, they all should be providing the same information. How many students are coming to you? How many of them are graduating? How many of them are graduating in this time you specified that they were going to graduate? By the way, Justin, no colleges are judging their graduation rates on four years anymore. It's six years, six years.

In fact, I have the college presidents telling me that all. "Oh Madam Chair, nobody gauges the schools on four year graduation rates." Well, parents and students want it to be judged on that. But anyway, we want everybody to be accountable. We want them to tell the students upfront, what's it going to cost? How long is it going to take? How many jobs are there going to be in your major? How much money are you going to have to borrow, and how much will you get paid in your first job or what's the pay range in your job? So if you're going to go out there and be in a job that pays \$50,000 a year and you're going to have to borrow \$200,000 a year, maybe that's not a great bargain for you because you may have real problems paying back that money.

Justin Draeger:

One of the things that financial aid administrators often find themselves frustrated about is that they are limited in some pretty strict ways about how they can even intervene when students or parents want to borrow. If we're going to discuss additional accountability metrics on schools about debt levels

of students and how much they borrow relative to how much they make, would you support giving schools additional authority to limit borrowing or at least require additional counseling?

Virginia Foxx:

Absolutely. In fact, even though I had worked in education, I was out of education in the legislature when I heard from a financial aid administrator at Forsyth Technical Community College who told me, "Do you know I cannot tell a student that he or she does not have to borrow all this money that the federal government tells the student he or she is eligible for," and that was the first time I had heard that. I did not realize it was in the law. We definitely have to change that. You all are the student's best friend. You want them to be successful. I know that, and you want them to have the best information they can have.

And so definitely. These are 18-year-olds, a lot of times, who've never had money to manage, and suddenly, they have the opportunity to have a lot of money and they simply don't know how to manage it, and one of the things that troubles me the most is many of them don't realize when they borrow money, they have to pay it back, or at least they say that in hearings, which I find pretty remarkable. I grew up extraordinarily poor, as I told you, and I remember I was 14 years old when my family was able to move into a house with electricity and running water, and we were going to buy that house, Justin, and it was costing \$1,100, and we went to the bank.

I went with my father, and the banker said, "We set it up this way, that we would pay a hundred dollars down, plus the interest." I think it was 4%. We'd pay a hundred dollars down and every year, we'd pay a hundred dollars plus the interest, 4%, and I thought to myself, will we ever be able to get a hundred dollars together again at one time, but there was never any doubt in my mind that that was an obligation on our part, and so at 14, I understood that. So I don't understand people in college who don't understand that. They're obviously, they need better guidance from their parents and if they don't get it from their parents, thankfully, you all are there to give it to them.

Justin Draeger:

I appreciate that. With the Department of Education, maybe last question and then we've got some quick questions for you to wrap up. When you think about your oversight role, one of the things that, as I go around the country and talk to financial aid administrators and I ask them the things that keep them up at night, one of the things they mentioned most often is the Department of Education is supposed to be revamping on congressional orders, the FAFSA form for the '24, '25 year. It's supposed to be coming out this next fall. Have you heard anything from the Department of Education or talked to them recently about how that's going? Are they on track? Any concerns about security or rollout?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, it's unfortunate the Department of Education has not been focusing on this because it affects so many people. I think, what are we talking about now, 40 million people who have loans in this country, and every year, more and more are going to be applying. We will be talking to the department about this and checking on where they are in implementing this, and you're exactly right. This is the role of the department. Congress passes laws. This was Lamar Alexander's big, big achievement and something he worked on for years to simplify the FAFSA. It's what we've all heard about for many, many years, and this should be done on time. They've already asked for one extension and they've gotten it. They should not be asking for others. They need to put the talent to work to roll this out in October in time for next year, and we will be giving them some pressure to do that. They should be doing it instead of being off doing other things.

Justin Draeger:

All right. Can we ask you a series of quick questions?

Virginia Foxx:

Surely.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. Are you an early riser or a night owl?

Virginia Foxx:

Yeah. Well, I'm a little of both. I do get up pretty early. I could get up at 4:00, 5:00, whatever time I need to, but I'm usually up a little bit before 6:00. I tell you a little secret. I have a tiny apartment. I'm not there much. So I have a radio, not a TV. So I try to get up just before 6:00 and hear the two minutes of news at 6:00 so I know what's going on in the world, and then get to the office no later than 6:30, and then I catch up on other news, but as I told you, I stay in the office generally till about five of 11:00.

Justin Draeger:

So you're burning the candle at both ends?

Virginia Foxx:

I am. I've been lucky to do it all my life.

Justin Draeger:

If you're not legislating or visiting folks in district, how do you enjoy spending your time? What's your favorite pastime?

Virginia Foxx:

Well, I do like growing flowers. We were in the nursery and landscaping business for a long time, and I do like growing. I have a lot of plants in my house that I look after in the wintertime and a lot in the yard that I look after during the summer. I do that, but I love to read and I like cooking for my family. I try, a lot of weekends, to cook at least a meal for my grandchildren and my daughter and my husband likes for me to cook. I have several things that I make that he has to cook some for himself, but I have things I cook that he really likes, so I enjoy cooking. Cleanup is another issue. Takes too long sometimes. Takes longer to clean up sometimes than it does to cook.

Justin Draeger:

Well, if you're cooking, you don't have to clean up. That's got to be a Dr. Foxx rule.

Virginia Foxx:

Oh, no, no, I'm sorry. My standards in cleaning up are higher than my husband's.

Justin Draeger:

I see. It causes you more stress to let the others clean up. I get that. If you're going to read, do you prefer to read digitally or do you prefer to read on paper?

Virginia Foxx:

No, I prefer to read on paper and I like reading books. Unfortunately, I have so many things that I want to read. I read a lot within the genre that is within the education field, trying to stay up with things. I just finished reading *The Battle for the American Mind* by Pete Hegseth, and I recommend it highly to people. I'm now reading a couple of books that I got from Ave Maria University. I visited there recently and I'm going to be reading some on Catholic education, which is growing in this country.

Justin Draeger:

For someone who is just getting started in higher education or just getting started working on a college campus, one piece of advice for them, what would you tell them?

Virginia Foxx:

Don't become too enmeshed in what's going on on the campus. Get different points of view. What I tell young people all the time is work in as many different places as you can because you may not find what you want to do, but you'll find out what you don't like to do a lot of times. But if you're working in the university system, it's pretty easy to get caught up in that bubble, think you're the greatest people in the world and that the world revolves around you, but I think especially if you're dealing with students, and they're going to talk to you about majors and about what they want to do, learn as much as you can about those other occupations because I do think that's important.

Again, if you're dealing in financial aid, I think it's pretty important to talk to people about that, and again, I would encourage students to maybe attend some other schools too on a part-time basis like go to your community college in the summertime when you're at home and gain some coursework there where it's not as expensive perhaps as at the university. I just think we're so blessed, again, with all the options in education in our country, and I think people should try them all out. I wish I'd had an opportunity to go to some rarefied schools, but I didn't have that, but I just think people should get that experience.

Justin Draeger:

I love the idea of a financial aid exchange so people can get exposed to different schools and environments and resources and everything. Dr. Foxx, it's really been a pleasure. The hour went by fast. I do hope you get lunch though, and thank you for-

Virginia Foxx:

I will, Justin, and I'm not as hungry now as I was before, so delaying it for an hour is good. It'll delay my dinner maybe.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. Thanks so much for joining us. We really appreciate it.

Virginia Foxx:

Justin, and let me say again that the folks who employ you should be very, very grateful that they have such a well-respected person on Capitol Hill as you. We know we can get straight story from you, but we also know that you're an advocate for your profession, and that's very important.

Justin Draeger:

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Well, thank you. I appreciate that. Thanks, Dr. Foxx.

Virginia Foxx:

Thank you. God bless you.

Justin Draeger:

All right, thank you. Thank you, everybody, for joining us for another edition of "Off the Cuff." A big thank you to Dr. Foxx for joining us for this episode. Thank you to our producer and editor, Hugh Ferguson, this week, and for coordinating so much on the backend to make this happen. Remember everybody to subscribe, tell a friend, leave us a rating or review on your podcast app of choice. That'll help other people find this content, and we will talk to you again very soon.