

NASFAA's "Off The Cuff" – Episode 107 Transcript

Justin Draeger: Hey everyone. Welcome to another edition of "Off The Cuff." I'm Justin Draeger.

Allie Bidwell: I'm Allie Bidwell, one of our *Today's News* reporters.

Stephen Payne: I'm Stephen Payne with NASFAA's policy team.

Megan Coval: I'm Megan Coval with NASFAA's policy team.

Justin Draeger: Welcome everybody. Seems like—Allie and I were just talking before we started. A lot seems to be happening this week. Um, Megan, you were just at the COSUAA meeting.

Megan Coval: Yep-

Justin Draeger: How was it? These are like all the flagship large publics that get together, aid directors.

Megan Coval: Yeah. It was great. It was in Long Beach, California. So, it was nice to be-

Justin Draeger: So, was this inland or on the coast?

Allie Bidwell: Long Beach, is ...

Justin Draeger: Yeah, but I'm curious if they were actually on the Pacific coast.

Megan Coval: No.

Allie Bidwell: Oh. I see what you're saying.

Megan Coval: We were on like a little ... We were near water, but it was kind of an inlet.

Justin Draeger: Okay.

Megan Coval: Yeah, but it was really pretty. I could see water from my room-

Justin Draeger: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Megan Coval: ...so, it was nice. They are a great group. They limit the conference to 60 people, so because of that they are all in the same room and everyone hears the same presenters, and um, yeah. Very interactive, lots of good feedback. So, yeah, fun to be there.

Justin Draeger: While you've been away, welcome back. Lots been happening here in D.C. Let's start right off the bat with what's going on with the budget. Stephen, do you want to catch us up?

Stephen Payne: Sure. So, on Tuesday evening, the subcommittee that handles education funding issues, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies subcommittee, passed a fiscal year 2020, that's award year, and every time I say this like in conference presentation it's so complicated, all the 20s when you're talking about this. Like, fiscal year 2020 which is award year 2020-2021, which is just the most ridiculous thing I think you can ever say.

Justin Draeger: Also, I don't feel like my brain is ready to accept 2020-

Megan Coval: No. Mm-mm. I agree.

Allie Bidwell: I agree.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, I didn't move on past 2018, which I found out yesterday when I turned my calendar over and realized it was a 2018 calendar for the first five months of the year.

Megan Coval: Stephen's a day behind on everything.

Justin Draeger: That's confusing. Okay.

Stephen Payne: So they cleared their fiscal year 2020 spending bill. Um, and it's important to note that this is the first subcommittee, there's 12 of them, to pass a fiscal year 2020 bill. For folks that I've talked to, no one can remember a time when the labor, HHS, education bill has gone first.

Megan Coval: It usually goes last, right?

Stephen Payne: Yeah. Yeah. And there's a lot of controversial stuff in there, way beyond our stuff, like abortion issues are normally like the top issue in this space, but also labor, so like union issues and things like that.

Stephen Payne: So, we went first this time which I think signals the house Democrats wanted to come out swinging on their support for domestic programs, and they proposed in their bill, funding \$11.9 billion above what the president proposed, and that's significant. And so that sort of seeps down into all of the programs, and so for Pell, we saw a \$150 increase to the maximum award, a \$304,000 increase for work-study, a similar 22% increase for FSEOG, work-study was 20%, so big, significant increases in aid. So we were really encouraged to see that.

Stephen Payne: Though obviously, this is the Democrats' ideal proposal. Republicans control the Senate. Republicans control the White House, so probably not where we'll end

up but who knows? We'll keep talking and I know Congress is continuing to negotiate sort of their differences on all of these things too.

Megan Coval: A good, high-water place to start.

Stephen Payne: Yeah. Totally.

Justin Draeger: You mentioned Pell Grant increases in there, so that there will be a slight increase to the maximum grant, right?

Stephen Payne: Yeah. \$150.

Justin Draeger: Okay. And we have seen Pell Grant increases even bipartisanly in the last couple of years, so Congress appears to be funding that even though the President proposed level-funding while expanding the program usage.

Stephen Payne: Right.

Justin Draeger: And then taking away from the, as the President proposed, also taking away the surplus.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, two billion dollars.

Justin Draeger: Okay.

Stephen Payne: So, this bill doesn't do that so that's another good piece in there.

Allie Bidwell: What's the surplus at right now?

Stephen Payne: It's right around \$7 billion, but I haven't seen an updated number lately. And for folks who aren't familiar, every year Congress for the past few years at least, has appropriated more money than Pell programs actually use because it functions like an entitlement. Essentially, it's kind of creating a pool of funds that students, based on their EFC and their eligibility can use but the past few years they have appropriated more. But, that's because there are less Pell recipients than there were, you know, maybe a few years ago, particularly around the recession, and so when that happens, then there ends up being a shortfall, so it's important to keep those funds in the program. And so, that's why we always talk about the value of maintaining those funds in case there is an uptick in enrollment like in a recession which is hard to predict.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. On that note, we had our finance committee in town this last week and we met with our investment advisors and you know, these are the people we depend on to say like what's going on with the economy, are we within our budget? The investment policies as an association and the question was asked outright, like what's happening, I mean, the economy still seems to continue to be super-hot, which is great for the economy but not so great for colleges as we

see week after week, like announcements from schools, not just for-profits, not-for-profit privates that are either facing distress or are dialing back student aid programs.

Justin Draeger: We have a school that just announced that they are going from need-blind to need-blind for most of their students and need-aware for another cohort of students. So, this does create sort of a pinch in higher education. At some point the economy, because economies, they ebb and flow, and at some point we'll have something that probably brings more people back to school. So, good news to keep the surplus afloat. What's next, Stephen? Where do they go from here?

Stephen Payne: Well, we anticipate the subcommittee bill going to the full committee next week where we'll probably see a lot of amendments, but probably a lot of conversation about other issues than our issues. And then, the Senate has yet to begin their process, so the Senate will have to go through that and typically for folks who keep tabs on this, you know we're normally later into the Summer when our bill is considered so if the Senate follows with that policy, though there's a lot of unknowns and a lot of questions still out there but the end is probably not in sight. So, there's a long way to go here in terms of negotiations and even just the process moving in its normal fashion. You know the deadline for funding is the end of September so we're still a ways away from even the normal timeline, let alone where we've been in some previous years in going way past that, so...

Justin Draeger: Okay. Moving on over to our colleagues at the Department of Education. New report out talking about oversight at the Office of Federal Student Aid that will be of interest to our members. Allie, you want to catch us up?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, so this report came out yesterday, Wednesday, and it was jointly published by the Center for American Progress, which is a left-leaning think tank in D.C. and the American Enterprise Institute which is a more right-leaning think tank. So, that, in and of itself was kind of interesting. But they sort of looked into the criticisms that have surfaced over the last couple of years towards FSA and its structure as a performance-based organization. It's only one of three performance-based organizations in the entire federal government. And how Congress and the department can work together to provide more oversight and transparency of the office. It looked into the history of how FSA became a PBO in the first place. Essentially, they said that one of the things that needs to happen is that Congress needs to update the goals and purposes of performance-based organizations, specifically at FSA because that hasn't been done since 1998 when it first became a PBO and they also said that the department needs to be more specific in its goals and objectives for FSA.

Justin Draeger: Go ahead.

Megan Coval: They don't really come out and say whether the structure could change or that it's all good or all bad. I mean sort of tow this middle line-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. They specifically said that it's not all good and it's not all bad. Like, some of the critique is valid and some of it isn't really ...

Megan Coval: Yep.

Justin Draeger: I feel like they were pretty generous with FSA. They identified some shortcomings, but it seemed to me that they were saying a little bit that not all the critique level at FSA is warranted. Did you get that impression as you looked through the report?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. Some of it they said it's more an issue with the department and some of it is more an issue with performance-based organizations in general because they do function differently and they are supposed to function differently than a typical government agency, be more independent and more like a private company.

Justin Draeger: I can't remember how long it's been since we issued our own report. Was it-

Megan Coval: Two years.

Allie Bidwell: It's two years, almost exactly two years.

Justin Draeger: That we issued a similar report where we looked at some of the operational objectives and whether FSA was meeting its own objectives as outlined by Congress, and then, even meeting its own statutory-required reporting requirements, and strategic plans. I remember getting into a spat with the COO at the time at a congressional hearing about whether they had actually sent us a strategic plan to respond to and yada, yada, yada ...

Megan Coval: That got very specific. I remember the-

Justin Draeger: The exchange?

Megan Coval: No. I sent you an email and you were like, "No, you didn't send me an email." It was very, yeah ...

Justin Draeger: I mean-

Megan Coval: These things are easy to prove, too, so ...

Justin Draeger: Well, yeah. So anyway, this is a minor thing that-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: ...stands out to me because, you know, I'm pretty on top of email, but point being that when we did our report, we offered several recommendations. We also reached the conclusion that the PBO function should continue like-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: That's fine, giving them private sector flexibilities. We went a lot more into, I think, like how you could change the oversight function at FSA. And if you looked at the other two PBOs, one of them was the Federal Aviation ...

Allie Bidwell: Mm-hmm-

Justin Draeger: What was the, there was a, was it like the-

Megan Coval: Patent Office, right?

Justin Draeger: ...Patent Office, I guess. Yeah. They had some things that FSA was the first of the three?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: And so maybe a little more at the beginning and so these other agencies had some additional oversight that we could probably learn from. Anyway, we seem to go a little bit more deeper into how we could fix FSA and hold them more accountable. And in my mind, the one that really stands out is if FSA is going to have private sector flexibilities that other federal agencies don't, then they need some of the oversight that exists in the private sector, specifically, like a board that actually oversees and holds the COO who's hired under contract, accountable for specific objectives. Anything else do you guys recall from our report compared to this report that stands out to you?

Allie Bidwell: Well, one thing in this report that I kind of thought was interesting, was they said that looking back at the specific reason why FSA became a PBO in the first place they said that it's actually been pretty successful because they moved it over to a PBO to curb abuse and fraud and for the most part that went away.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. And I'll say the other area where FSA has really been successful and it's stable and definitely could be improved but is getting aid out the door. So, I think they are pretty good at getting financial aid out. The complexity in the programs isn't FSA's fault. Some of the way they've implemented some of these complexities, though, that make them more complex, in the ones that stand out right now that are getting a lot of attention are loan servicing and debt collection. People might have missed because we don't report on this quite extensively, but FSA has been locked in several legal battles related to servicing and debt collection. About two weeks ago, a judge issued a judgment that basically found in favor of the department that they could really move away from their five big PCAs. Now they've got all sorts of other private collection agencies, the smaller ones they work with. But, like as they do NexGen and redoing servicing and debt collection, Congress has taken a really acute interest in what's happening with all of this.

Justin Draeger: It seems to me that in '98, I wonder if anybody would have predicted how complicated and politically hot everything that goes on at FSA would ultimately be. I think one of the things that we also identified in our report that stands out is, I think that for a lot of aid administrators, they might conflate FSA with other agencies in the department or just conflate FSA with the department. And that's understandable, because if you're new to financial aid and don't remember what life was like before FSA, in a lot of ways, FSA becomes the face of the department to higher education, like it's FSA. But in reality, FSA has no policy authority. Policy like how we're supposed to implement something that Congress wants or policy positions of an administration. That is all supposed to be done in separate offices than FSA. But the way they implement things ultimately can become policy.

Justin Draeger: The one I'm thinking about right now has to do with, a good one might be when Congress implemented the subsidized loan limits, the department started requiring CIP codes for all of those submissions and at the time, the question was, why do you need CIP codes for all of these programs? It's not necessary. This is additional reporting. Down the road, what we find out is those CIP codes now lend themselves to the department being able to do program-level reporting on the loan portfolio. Which then you can see easily turning into sort of an accountability metric.

Justin Draeger: So, anyway, what the line between like operations and policy, as one of my favorite former feds used to always say, Dan Madzellan, "is neither bright or well-defined. It is blurry."

Allie Bidwell: One other example that they mentioned in their report to sort of highlight the difference between or the divide, I guess you could say, between ED and FSA was this memo that Ted Mitchell put out a few years ago-

Justin Draeger: The servicing principles?

Allie Bidwell: Yes. And sort of the way it was phrased like, I hope that we can, like we look forward to working with you and I hope we're on the same page and sort of like that's sort of tone-

Justin Draeger: It's a weird thing-

Allie Bidwell: ...rather than a directive.

Justin Draeger: He was the undersecretary at the time. It is a weird dynamic because I've even asked the undersecretaries since Ted, it's one of my favorite questions to bring up with top ED officials which is like, who does FSA report to? Is it the undersecretary? Is it the secretary? Are they on par with the undersecretary? I think most companies that have a one and a half trillion dollars in assets probably have really well-defined hierarchies. So, anyway, I don't know. It's a weird dynamic.

Stephen Payne: I think one thing we talked a lot about in our report is really just that Congress has not held up its end of the bargain in terms of oversight. That's a key piece of this, and I think we can talk all we want about the structure, design or whatever, but this is a huge, huge operation and I think in our report we list out the number of times the COO has testified before congress, and it's pretty low.

Justin Draeger: Sparse.

Stephen Payne: Yeah. And there just hasn't been the same sort of attention to the agency other than in HEA reauthorizations. We saw some of the recommendations that we proposed in our report in the PROSPER Act which is the House Republican HEA bill and I know Republicans and Democrats are very interested in having these conversations. We've had a lot of conversations on the hill with staff about working to improve FSA but it can't be one of those once a decade, let's look at making little tweaks here and there. There needs to be continued attention and-

Justin Draeger: Yeah, and so this goes back to like if you are, if we accept the fact that Congress just doesn't have the bandwidth to actually do hearings every year or even every other year on an organization that's overseeing so much money. Like just having hearings when there's an acute problem is probably not an effective way to insure ongoing best practices in compliance.

Justin Draeger: So, that's why this idea of like Congress can delegate some of that authority to-

Megan Coval: A board-

Justin Draeger: Yeah. A board or a specific group of people and you can make it non-partisan. Anyway, those recommendations, this report didn't get into a lot of those recommendations per se, but it's good to have, I think, some additional folks out there who are studying the PBO and some of the challenges and shortcomings and ...

Megan Coval: And two groups working together who are sort of at different ends of the political spectrum, too.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. So-

Megan Coval: I think shows you the interest is there kind of across the board.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. This was AEI and New America?

Allie Bidwell: No. The Center for American Progress.

Justin Draeger: Oh, CAP. So, left-leaning and right-leaning.

Allie Bidwell: Yep.

Justin Draeger: Sticking with the Department of Education and Federal Student Aid, a report just hitting the press yesterday talking about the Trump administration retaining some private consultants to estimate potential losses in value of the federal student loan portfolio. Which right now, as we said just recently here, talking about \$1.5 trillion in total outstanding federal student loan debt. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the department is doing this valuation because it's weighing selling all or a portion of its debt to private investors. Which, in some respects, is not necessarily a new concept.

Justin Draeger: Early in the Bush two years, they had looked at this before. The problem is the way the government does, the Congressional Budget Office most importantly, does accounting. Selling off the existing portfolio doesn't actually earn money, it costs money because these are assets that the government will collect on with interest. So, if you sell those assets off, unless you sell them at such a price that it would make up for all the lost interest you might be forgoing, it's going to cost money. So when you think about, Stephen just talked about the budget, we have these annual fights over appropriations and if you can think about trying to spend money on selling an asset just seems like not a good way to be spending political or real capital.

Stephen Payne: Well, and the most sort of attractive pieces of the portfolio like maybe Parent Plus Loans are going to be the ones that cost the most to sell off because they do generate revenue for the federal government. So, you may see issues in the portfolio maybe with undergraduate loans, but maybe those aren't the ones that are most attractive to-

Justin Draeger: Investors.

Stephen Payne: Private enterprise.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. The other thing I think about with all of this is if you were to... So, there's a couple of different ways you could do this, but the way that was talked about in *The Wall Street Journal* was that potentially the department would originate the loans, so that stays with the Department of Education. So, for schools who are thinking about the days of FFELP, that's not what this appears to be. This is really about the department originating but then going out to market and bundling loans and selling them off. So, the taxpayer and the government gets money back basically up front after lending.

Justin Draeger: The challenge with that is when you add, in my mind, is you add an investor class to all of this, all of a sudden the changes and complexities just go up. Because, let's say Congress wants to fix a payment term or condition, they want to change it, well you can't do changes on existing loans without making contractors and investors whole. You can't go back and change the underlying asset without making up some sort of compensation. So, once those assets are sold off, I don't know how Congress goes and changes terms and conditions without costing even more money.

Justin Draeger: The other piece of it is, I guess, this is the big question for me is, outside of philosophy that maybe just don't think the government should hold these loans, why, I don't understand the point. The government does not have a liquidity issue.

Megan Coval: Yeah. That's what and I thought it was interesting in a *Politico* article, they talked about that the administration officials, first of all, said that this company was hired on an urgent basis, right?

Justin Draeger: Right.

Megan Coval: So that this review, but also, they are preparing to brief Trump with regards to the potential economic impact of impairment the collectability of outstanding balances.

Justin Draeger: So, when I'm thinking back to November and the secretary stood up at FSA and basically said that this was a distressed loan portfolio and in the commercial market nobody would call this a healthy portfolio.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: I think what they are saying here is that in a lot of ways, they're saying the budgeting on this, the estimates are bunk, because this is really distressed paper. And if you follow that through, then if you were to try to sell it, you might be able to sell it perhaps for less, because it wouldn't, I don't know, because it's not an attractive portfolio. But, no, actually investors would want more assurance because if it's a risky portfolio. I just don't get it. The one thing I will say is if you discount the entire portfolio and call it distressed, the other side of this is what the department spokesperson said to *Politico* as well, which is, it's not about selling the asset. I think that's what they claimed to *Politico* even though the *Wall Street Journal* is reporting that this is at least part of this is about weighing a sell. But they said it was just about trying to get a realistic picture of, yeah, the value of the program.

Megan Coval: It had nothing to do with selling off the loan portfolio. You heard it here first. Official spokeswoman.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. That was Liz. Yeah, that's fine. I mean that's not what the *Wall Street Journal* is necessarily reporting. They did say in the *Wall Street Journal*, officials say they are far from making any decisions and they are considering other options as well. One of the things they are looking back at is in the 1980s all the failures of the savings and loans institutions where because of not really a loophole, but because of a change in law, everybody started pouring their assets into these, but it became clear that the loans they were making weren't really distressed. So anyway. I don't know. Trying to get a true value of the portfolio, I guess, is good for transparency's sake, but it does seem a little weird, I mean,

given that we have the Office of Management and Budget, the CBO and now, I guess, a privately hired FSA firm.

Stephen Payne:

And the department's own budget office.

Justin Draeger:

Right. And then the department's own budget office, so we will have, I guess, potentially four different estimates about the value of the loan portfolio.

Megan Coval:

I know. And I was thinking on the way in, like, I wonder how much contracts like that cost?

Justin Draeger:

You're in the wrong business, is that what you're saying?

Megan Coval:

Well, uh...

Justin Draeger:

Why didn't NASFAA get that contract?

Megan Coval:

I mean nothing obviously in comparison to the whole loan portfolio but going back to your point, why are we doing this and the need and things like that.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. The-

Megan Coval:

That stuff costs a lot of money to conduct these evaluations-

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. I'm also not sure it's going to be any clearer at the end of this where we are because the crux of the matter is the department and the government can still collect. So, it's not really about default, because defaults add cost, but the next breath is always about how the government always gets its money. So the idea that like even if it's distressed, the risk to the taxpayer seems awfully low. There seems to be more of an argument about the risk to the people, to all of the loan borrowers. Because their lives can be ruined but the government follows up and collects.

Justin Draeger:

Switching gears a little bit, one of more recent polls looking at what Democratic candidates have been talking about, free college came out this last week. Allie, catch us up on the results.

Allie Bidwell:

Sure. So this week, there was a new poll from Quinnipiac University national poll released on Wednesday and it found that the majority of voters that they polled actually oppose the idea of making all public colleges free which is something particularly in the context of the upcoming presidential election. Nearly every Democrat has proposed something or at least commented on it one way or the other. So, the poll found that overall 52% were opposed to making public colleges free-

Justin Draeger:

That's a slight majority and what was the error rate, like 3%, 3.5%?

Allie Bidwell: I think it was 2%-

Justin Draeger: So, at best, we're evenly split.

Allie Bidwell: Right. 45% supported the idea. When you break it down by party, 84% of Republicans opposed, 14% supported. 26% of Democrats opposed and 68% supported. Support was also higher among women at 51%. Younger voters, so between the ages of 18 and 34, at 61%, and Black and Hispanic participants, 66% and 63%. They also asked it a different way saying, "Would you support it if it was paid for by a tax on the wealthy?" The opposition actually increased slightly-

Justin Draeger: Which is bizarre. I mean, you would think that like, oh no, we're only going to tax wealthy people that you would think that would maybe say, "Oh, well in that case, if I don't have to pay for it."

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. You would think, but it went up to 54%, so very slight, more or less the same when you break it down by party and the other demographic factors.

Megan Coval: And that's what just this week, so candidate Joe Biden came out saying he was in support of free community college which I don't think is a huge surprise to us and he sort of teased that before, but he wants to pay for it through closing a tax loophole which would in effect sort of be that taxing the wealthy.

Justin Draeger: Tax loophole for wealthy people.

Allie Bidwell: And I mean like Elizabeth Warren's plan also would pay for this through a tax-

Megan Coval: That's true.

Allie Bidwell: It was like an ultra-millionaire tax.

Allie Bidwell: The poll also asked about loan forgiveness and sort of mirroring Senator Warren's proposal a little bit, not exactly, they asked how people felt about forgiving up to \$50,000 dollars in student loans for individuals who live in households that make less than \$250,000 dollars a year. 57% supported that and 40% opposed. And that differs from Senator Warren's proposal a little bit because it was \$50,000 in student loan debt, up to \$50,000 if you make up to \$100,000 dollars-

Justin Draeger: Okay. So, they expanded out the income base just a little bit-

Allie Bidwell: And then her plan would give some debt relief if you made between \$100,000 and \$250,000-

Justin Draeger: Yeah. And some of this may be they just asked because they can't build that sort of complexity in-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: So, you said more people supported that-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. 57% supported and then the opposition grew a little bit. It actually tilted the other way when they were asked if they would support the plan if it was paid for by a tax on the wealthy. So 52% opposed and 44% supported.

Justin Draeger: Of course people are like, yes, I'd definitely take \$50,000 in loan forgiveness, but not for a new tax, even if that tax isn't going to hit them.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. It was interesting. But, those were the two little higher ed appearances in that poll.

Justin Draeger: So here's what I take away from this. I take away that this is like far from a decided issue. Like this is being legislated-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, at least with regard to the free college thing. The assistant director of the poll said it's almost a toss-up, but if a vote were taken on free public college, like today, the educated guess is that it would fail.

Justin Draeger: Amongst the people, not like Congress.

Megan Coval: Yeah. And that kind of surprised me a little bit. The Republican/Democratic breakdown did not surprise me-

Justin Draeger: No. That's not surprising-

Megan Coval: ...but the way that people talk about it, and it really is obviously just at this point the Democratic candidates, right? You're not hearing these proposals, but you'd think it would be more popular.

Justin Draeger: They're talking about likely voters. So, I'm guessing the people that they surveyed have loan debt and either already went through college. So, they're thinking about their own circumstance.

Allie Bidwell: They do note in their responses also when you look at the survey itself, the breakdown among people who have a college degree and people who don't.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. Okay. And was the breakdown for people who don't, I assume, were much more supportive of free college because that's prospective in nature for them.

Allie Bidwell: At least on the loan forgiveness without differentiating how it would be paid for. Just asking straight about loan forgiveness, it was actually evenly split.

Justin Draeger: We might have talked about this a week or two ago, but the thing with the loan forgiveness, I was interested and watched an intergenerational conversation

happen about loan forgiveness, okay? So, we have someone who is a little older and someone who is a little younger. Now, which position do you think the more seasoned person took?

Allie Bidwell: Against it.

Justin Draeger: And the younger person was-

Allie Bidwell: For it.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. And watching this happen and one of the things that, they didn't say this, but the more seasoned person was talking about like the problem with this is the rep, she didn't say reparations, but it's the reparations. Which we might have talked about before, but it's this idea of like the cutoff. So what about all the people that just paid their loans off in the last five years before this is enacted, do they get nothing, nothing happens for them? Or you might have people who are still paying down, depending on how you might implement this. I mean, one thing in primaries, but if you were to actually do something, don't you think it would probably be for new borrowers? Do you think they would retroactively do it for all-

Allie Bidwell: Well, because if you're going to do it retroactively, where is the cutoff?

Justin Draeger: I don't know, but I think the cost that somebody put together that I saw was like over a trillion dollars to cover all those higher ed proposals, so it might have been. I mean, there is \$1.5 trillion in outstanding debt. I don't know. Most of that debt is under \$50,000.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. That's true.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Well, anyway.

Allie Bidwell: I'm one of those people.

Justin Draeger: Congratulations. Well, we're fighting for you Allie, in a lot of ways.

Justin Draeger: Leaving the Warren proposal aside. It seems like the Quinnipiac poll looked at a couple of other things besides higher education, right?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Is there anything, I'm just curious in general, was there anything in that poll, even outside of higher ed where people just weren't split?

Allie Bidwell: Yes. Well, at least in terms of looking at who the front-runner is on Democrats, 38% of people would support Joe Biden.

Justin Draeger: He was at the top?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Some of that might be like nostalgia-

Allie Bidwell: But it dropped so much. The next person was Elizabeth Warren at 12%.

Megan Coval: Oh, so that-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. It was a huge drop.

Justin Draeger: And the other question I thought I saw that was higher amongst Republicans and Democrats was something about Mr. Buttigieg's sexual orientation, right?

Allie Bidwell: Yes.

Justin Draeger: And it seemed like the majority of people were like, no I'd be fine.

Allie Bidwell: Yes. 70% said they were fine.

Justin Draeger: It didn't matter what their sexual orientation was.

Megan Coval: For Republicans and Democrats?

Justin Draeger: Probably more amongst Democrats but still a majority of both.

Allie Bidwell: It said among all voters 70%, including 46% of Republicans, so say they're open to electing a president who is a gay man, but they said 52% to 36% is not ready to elect a gay man as president.

Justin Draeger: But that's more of a vote in your confidence in other voters.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. Are you personally okay with it and what do you think about the population as a whole?

Justin Draeger: Yeah. So there were things where like, it just feels like for the last several years, so divided on so many issues. But there were issues that clearly most people are like, fine.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: It's really interesting. It just makes me think of all the things in that nature that we've overcome. Like that was the big issue with Kennedy, right, like him being

Catholic. Could we ever elect a Catholic president? Could we ever elect an African-American president?

Justin Draeger: Can we ever elect a woman president?

Megan Coval: Yep. Hope. I mean-

Allie Bidwell: Someday in our lifetime.

Megan Coval: Someday.

Allie Bidwell: Hopefully.

Justin Draeger: Okay. Thanks everybody for joining us for another edition of "Off The Cuff." Send us your comments. Remember to subscribe. Tell a friend. 'til next week.