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February 11, 2025

United States Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions:

I write today in anticipation of the upcoming hearing on the nomination of Linda McMahon as Secretary of Education. It is my hope that the Committee considers asking Mrs. McMahon some, or all, of the questions provided below.

By way of background, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at our nation’s four-year colleges and universities. For 30 years, ACTA has worked with college governing boards, administrators, policymakers, alumni, and donors to ensure that all students are able to receive a high-quality education at an affordable price. It is in this spirit that I ask the Committee to consider the following questions:

- A [study](#) by ACTA found that from 2010 to 2018, public universities spent a combined \$112 billion on services that do not show any significant correlation with improving graduation rates. **As Secretary, what will you do to make sure that colleges and universities rein in spending to make higher education more affordable for the American public?**
- After [finding](#) clear evidence that colleges and universities are raising tuition rates to cover billions of dollars of spending on amenities and administrative bureaucracies, ACTA declared that “the student debt crisis is fundamentally a spending crisis.” **Do you agree that institutions are responsible for raising the cost of college beyond what the average American family can afford? If so, how will you hold universities accountable for driving their students into debt?**
- On the campaign trail, President Donald Trump said that he would “fire the radical Left accreditors that have allowed our colleges to become dominated by Marxist maniacs and lunatics,” alluding to

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the nation's higher accreditation system. Groups like ACTA have criticized the current accreditation process for creating barriers to innovation while failing to ensure academic quality, pointing to the appalling number of accredited institutions—including public and nonprofit—with four-year graduation rates under 20%. **Should you become Secretary, what would the Department's stance toward accreditors be?**

- Colleges and universities across the country are beginning to assess the implications of the president's executive order terminating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in federal contracting. As recipients of federal student aid funds, this order ostensibly affects both public and private institutions. Moreover, DEI has become pervasive throughout higher education—just a few weeks ago, ACTA's president wrote an [op-ed](#) detailing how this ideology has affected the curriculum at our service academies, jeopardizing our nation's military readiness. **What would you say to the American people about the role of DEI in higher education?**
- For decades, numerous surveys have shown an alarming decline in civic literacy rates in this country. Just last year, a [survey](#) by ACTA found that one-third of college students believe that U.S. senators serve four-year terms. We are also seeing a trend of schools and centers being created at colleges and universities, such as the School of Civic Life and Leadership at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill and the Institute of American Civics at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville, to combat this growing problem. **Should you be confirmed to serve as Secretary of Education, would you make civic literacy a priority?**
- ACTA released a report entitled [Governance for a New Era](#) that defines the purpose and responsibilities of college governing boards. The report states, “The board of a public institution is the duly constituted representative of the people and has a primary duty to the public. Its responsibility is to ensure high quality, affordable education.” However, there appears to be a culture of complacent governance throughout our colleges and universities. States across the U.S., such as Virginia, New Jersey, and Connecticut, have passed laws requiring governing board members to receive training on their fiduciary duties upon confirmation. **As a former trustee, should you be confirmed as Secretary of Education, how will you address ineffective governance from the leaders of our nation's colleges and universities?**
- Average federal student loan debt has doubled since 2007, with the average borrower now taking on over \$40,000 in total debt. Meanwhile, over a third of accredited, bachelor's degree-granting institutions graduate less than half of their students while receiving over \$20 billion in taxpayer-funded student aid. The previous administration's solution to this problem was simply to forgive student loans and continue to allow these low-performing institutions to drive America's students deeper into debt. **As Secretary, how would you address the student debt crisis?**
- As many ACTA surveys of college students show, conservative students are much more likely than liberal students to practice self-censorship when interacting with their peers

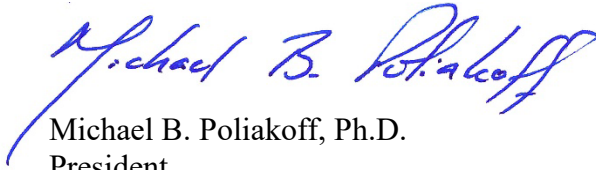
and professors. The research also shows liberal students are more likely than conservative students to support disrupting on-campus events through shout-downs, obstructing access to buildings and spaces, and even using violence. Such a state of affairs undermines learning and is inconsistent with American values. **If confirmed as Secretary, how will you ensure that American colleges and universities fulfill their constitutional responsibility to protect the First Amendment rights of students and promote a culture of campus freedom where *all* voices may be heard?**

American higher education is suffering, from institutional spending run rampant, to DEI ideology permeating campuses and classrooms, to antisemitism rearing its ugly head at many schools in the aftermath of October 7, 2023. The decisions made over the next four years will be critically important to the longevity of higher education in America. The answers to these questions are vital to ensuring that our colleges and universities fulfill their purpose and remain competitive globally.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your commitment to higher education.

Respectfully,



Michael B. Poliakoff, Ph.D.  
President