

TESTIMONY OF HASAN MINHAJ

A \$1.5 TRILLION CRISIS: PROTECTING STUDENT BORROWERS AND HOLDING STUDENT LOAN SERVERS ACCOUNTABLE

09/10/19

THANK YOU SO MUCH. I WANT TO THANK CHAIRWOMAN MAXINE WATERS FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY. AND I'D LIKE TO THANK RANKING MEMBER PATRICK MCHENRY FOR QUIETLY TOLERATING IT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MY NAME IS HASAN MINHAJ.

CHAIRWOMAN WATERS INVITED ME TO SPEAK TODAY BECAUSE I HOST A SHOW ON NETFLIX CALLED "PATRIOT ACT." WE RECENTLY DID AN EPISODE COVERING THE STUDENT LOAN CRISIS, AND IT REALLY HIT HOME WITH OUR AUDIENCE. AND IT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE 44 MILLION AMERICANS OWE MORE THAN 1.6 TRILLION DOLLARS OF STUDENT LOAN DEBT.

IN FACT, THE DAY WE SHOT OUR EPISODE, WE SURVEYED OUR STUDIO AUDIENCE — WHICH IS ONLY ABOUT 200 PEOPLE — THAT ROOM ALONE HAD OVER 6 MILLION DOLLARS OF STUDENT DEBT. GRANTED MY AUDIENCE IS MAINLY ASIAN DENTAL STUDENTS. BUT STILL. THAT'S A LOT.

NOW I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE. I WAS EXTREMELY LUCKY TO LEAVE SCHOOL WITHOUT DEBT BECAUSE I HAVE IMMIGRANT PARENTS, AND THEY FORCED ME TO LIVE AT HOME DURING COLLEGE. SO I DON'T HAVE CRIPPLING FINANCIAL DEBT. I HAVE CRIPPLING EMOTIONAL DEBT. AND CONGRESS HAS YET TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT THAT.

BUT YOU DON'T NEED TO BE DROWNING IN DEBT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THIS ISSUE IS SIDELINING MILLIONS OF AMERICANS. MARRIAGE. KIDS. HOMEOWNERSHIP. AND RETIREMENT ARE ALL BEING PUT ON HOLD BECAUSE OF THIS CRISIS.

ESPECIALLY FOR MY GENERATION. GROWING UP, IT WAS DRILLED INTO OUR HEADS, "YOU NEED TO GET A COLLEGE EDUCATION TO GET A MIDDLE CLASS JOB." WE EVEN TELL KIDS TODAY, "IF YOU DON'T GO TO COLLEGE, YOU MIGHT AS WELL GET A FACE TATTOO. AND WE ALL CAN'T BE POST MALONE."

AND IT'S TRUE! 2/3 OF ALL JOBS IN AMERICA REQUIRE SOME COLLEGE OR A BACHELOR'S DEGREE. THIS IS THE STANDARD NOW. BUT THAT WASN'T THE CASE WHEN YOU WENT TO COLLEGE. AND BY YOU, I MEAN THE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ON THIS COMMITTEE. MOST OF YOU GREW UP IN A TIME WHEN MIDDLE CLASS JOBS DIDN'T REQUIRE A BACHELOR'S.

AND YOU ALL PAID FAR LESS FOR YOUR DEGREES. COLLEGE HAS BECOME TWO TO THREE TIMES MORE EXPENSIVE. IN THAT SAME PERIOD, WAGES HAVE ONLY GONE UP ABOUT 16 PERCENT. PEOPLE AREN'T MAKING MORE MONEY AND COLLEGE IS WAY MORE EXPENSIVE.

WE'VE PUT UP A PAYWALL TO THE MIDDLE CLASS. AND IF THERE'S ONE THING AMERICANS HATE — IT'S PAYWALLS. THAT'S WHY WE PUT OUR ENTIRE SHOW FOR FREE ON YOUTUBE. BECAUSE WE CARE ABOUT THE VIEWERS. ALSO, BECAUSE YOU CAN'T FIND ANYTHING ON NETFLIX. I'M SORRY, I'M NOT JUST GONNA TALK INTO MY ROKU REMOTE, "ROKU: PLAY SANTA CLARITA DIET."

BUT DESPITE THESE NUMBERS, WE KEEP HEARING THE SAME TALKING POINT: "IF STUDENT BORROWERS JUST TOOK MORE 'PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY,' THEY WOULDN'T BE IN THIS PREDICAMENT." BUT THEY'RE TRYING TO GET AHEAD BY DOING THE MOST RESPONSIBLE THING THEY CAN — INVEST IN EDUCATION.

AND YET MANY OF THEM ARE TREATED LIKE DEADBEATS BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT IS PUTTING THEIR FINANCIAL FUTURES IN THE HANDS OF PREDATORY, FOR-PROFIT, LOAN SERVICERS. COMPANIES LIKE NAVIENT GIVE BORROWERS TERRIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PUSH THEM INTO REPAYMENT PLANS THAT ADD BILLIONS IN INTEREST TO THEIR LOANS.

AND THE WORST PART IS — YOU DON'T EVEN GET TO CHOOSE YOUR LOAN SERVICER. THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CHOOSES ONE FOR YOU. SO THERE'S NO COMPETITION TO FORCE THESE COMPANIES TO PROVIDE BETTER SERVICE.

LOOK — THE DECK IS STACKED AGAINST BORROWERS IN WAYS IT WASN'T EVEN 10 OR 15 YEARS AGO. WHY ARE WE PUNISHING STUDENT BORROWERS? WHY AREN'T WE GIVING THEM BASIC PROTECTIONS?

AT THE VERY LEAST, WHY CAN'T WE TREAT OUR BORROWERS THE SAME WAY WE TREAT OUR BANKS? BECAUSE 44 MILLION AMERICANS — THAT'S TOO BIG TO FAIL.

IN A COUNTRY THIS WEALTHY, ANY AMERICAN SEEKING HIGHER EDUCATION SHOULD NEVER HAVE TO GO BANKRUPT, THEY SHOULD NEVER BE PREYED UPON, AND THEY SHOULD NEVER HAVE TO LIVE WITH MY PARENTS.