

The Detroit News

Jacques: Why #CancelStudentDebt is a raw deal

Ingrid Jacques

June 29, 2019

Last week, Bernie Sanders posed [this question on social media](#): “How much student debt do you have, and what would you be able to do if you didn't have it?”

The Vermont senator and Democratic presidential candidate had just released some details of a jaw-dropping \$2.2 trillion college debt relief plan for current and future students. He wants to erase the \$1.6 trillion in student loans currently held by Americans and make public college tuition “free” going forward.

Sanders’ question got me thinking. Because I no longer have student debt — I paid it off years ago, after scrimping for those first years out of college, even though my salary wasn’t stellar.

I also thought long and hard about where I would go to school, and factored in the amount of student loans I’d need to take out. My parents were supportive of me going to college but weren’t in a position to help much financially. They hadn’t been able to put aside a college nest egg for me or my brother.

So I chose Hillsdale College, which although it doesn’t accept federal student aid, offered me private scholarships based on my financial need. I was able to graduate with an excellent education — and only \$10,000 in loans.

By separating personal responsibility from decisions of where individuals go to school and how much debt they take on, Sanders is offering a benefit to one group of Americans while ignoring those who chose a college they could afford — and worked hard to pay off their loans.

I never expected anyone to bail me out for choices I made.

When you say [#cancelstudentdebt](#), you’re saying a minority of people who had the advantage of obtaining a degree should have their debt paid off by hardworking taxpayers, 2/3 of whom don’t have degrees themselves, or already paid their own student debt off.

This is immoral.

Neal McCluskey, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, says pressure is growing for politicians — especially those fueled by the socialist wing of the Democratic Party -- to offer costly promises.

“People like things to be free,” he says. “No one wants to be against Santa Claus.”

Sanders is not alone in making splashy promises, directed largely at exciting the millennials who loved him so much in 2016. Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren came out with a similar plan earlier this year, but at least she included some caps based on income.

Sanders aims to pay for his costly plan by soaking Wall Street. Despite his distaste for the wealthy, his college debt bailout would be a new entitlement for those same wealthy families. Just think about it: People who now have successful careers as doctors and lawyers, and who have salaries to pay down their debt, would see it wiped away.

“The middle class will ultimately be hurt by this,” says Mary Clare Amselem, a policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation.

In addition to likely damage to the economy from Sanders’ plan, Amselem has studied the impacts of tuition free programs in other countries, which she calls "complete disasters." She says that decades ago, England decided to offer “free college,” but the end result was the opposite of what officials had hoped. Low-income students were eventually shut out, and the country had to roll back the program.

And what Sanders and Warren also choose to overlook is how the government’s growing involvement in student loans and other financial aid has directly led to the astronomical increases in tuition. Axing student debt and mandating free tuition would exacerbate the problem.

Voters should say “no thanks” to the free stuff.