



November 21, 2016

Mr. Donald J. Trump  
President-Elect of the United States  
The Trump Organization  
725 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
New York, New York 10022

Dear President-Elect Trump,

I write to congratulate you on your recent election victory and on your gracious acceptance speech. You took a major step in unifying a deeply divided country when you proclaimed simply, "I will be the President of all Americans."

I currently serve as the President of Washington College. Founded in 1782, Washington College is the tenth oldest institution of higher education in the country and the first to receive a government charter under the new republic. George Washington was a co-founder of our school. He served on our board and donated 50 guineas to our founding. We are the only college in the country to which he gave permission to use his name. The values for which George Washington stands – integrity, honesty, civic leadership – run deep in the DNA of our school.

We are also an inclusive campus. We welcome and support students regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation or identification. We also celebrate diversity of thought and political beliefs. A number of our students and alumni strongly supported your candidacy. A number strongly supported Secretary Clinton. Still others supported third-party candidates. Amidst the deep divisions and heated rhetoric that at times characterized this year's presidential campaign, I am proud of the fact that throughout, Washington College maintained high standards of thoughtful, civil discourse. This civility continued after your election, with students uniting in a common bond of mutual respect and support for each other, regardless of where they stood in this year's political campaign.

While our college has been a safe haven for expression and discourse, we cannot influence what happens beyond our walls. I am troubled and saddened at reports of increased incidents of hate crimes following the election, as well as incidents of violence against your supporters. I have received messages from students at our college expressing fear that your election will give encouragement and validation to racist sentiments. I have tried to reassure them. You spoke to working-class families who feel they have been forgotten by our political system and left out of the economic recovery. They have felt stigmatized because they are white, even as they struggle to find good jobs at decent wages to support their families. It is deeply regrettable that this past election divided so sharply among racial lines, as the hardships of the working class are widely shared among people of all races and cultures. Nonetheless, students of color in particular are confused and uncertain as to whether Donald Trump's America includes them.

As a consequence, I am writing to encourage you to make, as a first priority, outreach to young people specifically, to assure them you are their President, that you will protect their rights and work tirelessly to give them a brighter economic future. And in particular, I encourage you to send a message to your supporters removing any doubt that you support equal opportunity for all Americans, and have zero tolerance for bias, threats, or harassment against racial, ethnic or religious minorities, immigrants, individuals based on their sexual orientation or identification, or other vulnerable groups.

To demonstrate your commitment to our young people, I would also like to suggest that you move quickly to tackle the student debt crisis. Student debt now stands at \$1.3 trillion, double where it stood eight years ago. The burden of this debt falls disproportionately on students of color. You have a unique opportunity to give all student borrowers the option of affordable monthly debt payments, based on what they actually earn, as you suggested in a bold speech in Columbus, Ohio in October. Income-based plans are currently available, but they are limited to certain borrowers, involve a confusing array of options, and involve bureaucratic “recertification” requirements that cause a large portion of young people to lose eligibility each year. They also have harmful features such as negative amortization whereby student borrowers’ balances can actually get larger as they try to pay off their obligations. Replacing these unwieldy programs with a single, simple repayment plan based on income, as you suggested in Ohio, would provide immediate relief to tens of millions of young people.

Adjusting all student borrowers’ payments to an affordable percentage of their actual income could be done in a fiscally responsible way while, at the same time, providing economic stimulus through increased consumer spending. As such, it would support your “Make America Great Again” mandate to revitalize our economy from its sluggish growth. Just as we saw during the housing crisis, when unaffordable mortgage payments contributed to the recession by reducing the amount of disposable income available to consumers for other types of spending, excessive student debt is putting the same kind of drag on the economy. A growing body of research has concluded that as young people struggle with high, monthly student debt payments, they forego financial commitments in other areas, such as buying a car, purchasing a home, or starting their own small business. Many live paycheck-to-paycheck, unable to build savings for financial security. Escalating defaults among student borrowers impair their credit scores, making it more difficult to borrow for large purchases.

An additional measure to ease the student debt load would be tax law changes to require colleges to spend at least 5 percent of their endowments annually instead of sitting on massive accumulations of wealth. The law should also require that they spend a certain minimum for scholarships to help reduce the burgeoning cost of college. We bemoan consolidation and “bigness” among banks and corporate America, yet the same thing has been happening in higher education where too many elite schools sit on billions in investment returns that could be better directed at supporting students. You also expressed sympathy for this idea during your campaign.

In past elections, Republicans (and I am one) have consistently done poorly among young people. Your candidacy was no exception, receiving 37 percent of the youth vote, compared to 55 percent for Secretary Clinton. Also troubling was your low support among voters with college degrees,

whom Secretary Clinton won by a 9-point margin, 52 percent to 43 percent. By moving quickly and decisively on the student debt crisis, you could boost your pro-economic growth agenda, while enhancing your standing among both voter groups. Such bold moves could give young people reassurance that you will not allow their lives to be framed by bias and harassment, but rather hope and opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. I would welcome the opportunity for you to visit our campus, to engage in constructive dialogue about how to unify our country and move it forward. At Washington College, we pride ourselves on an educational climate that fosters unhurried conversations and free exchanges of diverse views. We are only 90 minutes from Washington, DC, and would be proud to provide a forum for you to reassure our nation's youth about your Administration's goals and what It means for their future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sheila C. Bair".

Sheila C. Bair

SCB/plw