this legislation fixes that problem and covers everybody, and more. Let me tell my colleagues what it does.

The idea is, if a person pays their loan debt and they are part of a direct Government loan program, that after 10 years they could get a large part of that debt forgiven. That sounds good, but let me discuss why I think this is bad public policy, why it is a new Government program we should not start, and why it is absolutely inevitable that it will grow and cost more and more as time goes along.

Let me show how broad this program is. There would be a student loan forgiveness program that would provide forgiveness of loans to public emergency management employees, government employees, public safety, public law enforcement—these could be State, county, or local, I presume—public health, public education, public early childhood education, public childcare, social work in a public child or family service agency, public services for individuals with disabilities, public services for the elderly, public interest legal services, public library services, public school library sciences, or other public school-based services, or those on full-time faculty at a tribal college or university. That is what is included. That is a big deal. It eliminates one of my concerns of why pick and choose Government agencies; it just covers them all.

Let me express why I think there are some good principled public policy concerns and objections and why I do not think this is a good step for us to take.

For example, there is no limit in this legislation on the total amount of loan forgiveness, which creates a discrepancy between the rich and the poor. Graduates of expensive schools with a lot of debt would receive quite a sizable benefit under this program, while students who work their way through college, go to a community college, would receive nothing if they didn't have any debt.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling reports that the average cost of a community college is less than half of that for a public college and one-tenth of a private 4-year college. So who is being helped here? Half of low-income students attend community colleges while only 1 in 10 high-income students attend community colleges.

Further, the lowest priced colleges are 2-year public colleges in the West, for example, with average tuition fees of $1,300. The highest priced colleges in the country are 4-year private colleges in New England with average tuition fees of $28,000.

Section 401 then creates a perverse incentive to take out the maximum amount of student loans. Rather than encouraging better public policy, I submit, that would encourage students to work their way through college and families to help them make their way through college instead.

Instead of moving in that direction, this bill would clearly move us in the direction that one would borrow more money and have the expectation that the Government will help them pay it off at some point later on.

Also, I ask why we would single out public service Government workers for this kind of benefit—there are millions of Government workers—and exclude productive citizens working in low-income jobs in the private sector who could also benefit from a similar program? Why are they left out? What principled argument is there for that? Certainly, most people working in private businesses don't have as good a retirement plan or health care plan as Government employees do. Now we are going to help them pay their tuition from taxpayers' money that comes from people in the private sector who are not getting these benefits.

Why should a public employee be elevated to a higher class of treatment of loan forgiveness than those in the private sector, those hard-working American taxpayers who are not lucky enough to have an air-conditioned office and a Government-sector job?

Public service is an honor, and as public servants, I don't think we need to ask or should think to ask to elevate our number to a higher status than that of average working Americans.

There are many hard-working Americans in the private sector who contribute to society and who would benefit from the program. I think about attorneys who need help. What about small town attorneys working hard to start a practice, or nurses, educators, inventors, small business employees, a cook who has gone to college to try to get a financial business degree so they can one day run a restaurant, department store managers who want to be CEO's one day, electricians or plumbers who want to establish their own businesses and go back to college and work their way through and keep their debt down? These people pay taxes that benefit a Government worker who has a lifetime job, probably making more than they are, certainly with a lot more job security than they would have, and countless others around the country. Why should we benefit one and not the other? These are people paying taxes too. I haven't seen that we have difficulty getting people to take Government jobs. They are pretty attractive out there, the truth be known.

So somebody goes off to a big expensive college and gets a big expensive degree and owes $75,000 or $100,000. Well, the Government is going to help them pay that back but not help the guy out there on the street corner trying to make a living to pay his back—the same person who is paying the taxes that are paying not only the salary now for the Government employee but now will pay their education costs. There is no principled basis that justifies them to be entitled to loan repayments more than there would be for someone in the private sector.

There is no means test for this program. It doesn't matter under this program if the public employee has millions of dollars in the bank. If you had millions of dollars in the bank, and you knew you were going to get a job where the Government was going to help you pay back the loan, why wouldn't you borrow the money to go to college instead of paying for it yourself? This incentivizes people, I suggest, perversely, to borrow money to go to college rather than working their way through or utilizing the millions of dollars they may have.

Let me say this. I am not against assisting people to pay for a college education. But we are spending billions of dollars on higher education through direct benefits to colleges and universities, loans, subsidies, and grants. Total student aid, including grants from all sources, plus loans, work study, and tax benefits from the Federal Government, increased by 95 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars over the decade from 1995–96 to 2005–06. So we are spending more to help our people go to college, by putting more Pell grants and loan money out there.

I think Senator KENNEDY's concern about abuse of the private loan program is valid. I was inclined to support the Burr amendment, but I am of the view that the program was subject to too much abuse and we needed to fix it. But I will note this about this amendment: It creates an unequal footing between the Direct Loan Program and the Federal Family Education Loan Program—Senator ALEXANDER was referring to those programs—because the only people to get benefits under this loan repayment program would have to go through the Direct Loan Program. The competition between these two programs, it has generally been held, and the Senate believes, will benefit students, and that is why we didn't eliminate the private loan program even in this bill we are passing.

So allowing loan forgiveness solely through the Direct Loan Program is not principled, I think, at all. It will undoubtedly give an advantage to the Direct Loan Program as students have no other route in which to receive loan forgiveness than to borrow under the Direct Loan Program.

Let me say this—and I didn't realize this until recently: 82 percent of the schools in my home State of Alabama do not use the Direct Loan Program but participate in the Federal Family Education Loan Program. Students graduating from my small alma mater, Huntingdon College, a liberal arts college, would not be eligible because Huntingdon is not a direct loan school. Schools choose FFELP because the private sector offers the better services, they think, and saves them money. Nationally, this statistic is around 80 percent. So 80 percent of the colleges and universities in our country are not in the Direct Loan Program, and under this plan you wouldn't benefit unless you were in it.