



Controversial Student Loan Agency

New Jersey senate examines agency

Almost a dozen people with harrowing experiences with New Jersey’s controversial student loan program testified on Monday before state lawmakers, detailing its aggressive collection tactics and onerous terms that some said had ruined them financially.

“Hesaa destroyed my family,” Tracey Timony, referring to the state’s Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, said at a hearing before the Higher Education and Legislative Oversight Committees of the New Jersey State Senate.

Ms. Timony had co-signed on her daughter’s loans totaling \$140,000. After her daughter defaulted, Ms. Timony was sued by one of the agency’s collection

Labour Party

On Monday the High Court of Justice of England and Wales ruled the UK Labour Party’s National Executive Committee has no right to bar members who joined the party after January 12 from voting in the party’s leadership election this month.

firms and has since declared bankruptcy to get more manageable monthly payments.

The hearing was prompted by an investigation published last month by ProPublica and The New York Times into the agency, which runs the largest state-based student loan program in the country, with nearly \$2 billion in outstanding loans.

The agency charges higher interest rates than similar federal programs, the investigation found, and has strikingly broad collection powers. If borrowers fall behind on payments, the agency can garnish wages, seize tax refunds and revoke professional licenses, all without getting a court judgment.

New US President

Al Gore endorses Obama for US President

Washington D.C. Environmental activist and former Vice-President Al Gore today announced his support for Democratic candidate Barack Obama in the United States presidential election.

In an email sent to Obama supporters, Al Gore voices his support for the presumptive nominee. "From now through Election Day," he writes, "I intend to do whatever I can to make sure he is elected President of the United States." He believes that Obama is the candidate who will "bring change to America" in issues such as the Iraq War, the American economy, and climate change.

"Over the past 18 months, Barack Obama has united a movement," Gore writes. "He knows change does not come from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue or Capitol Hill. It begins when people stand up and take action."

Gore also stated his intention to attend a rally with Obama in Detroit, Michigan later that night. Obama was in Flint earlier today, where he addressed a crowd of workers at a General Motors plant. Obama said Gore was "a visionary, not just for the party, but for the country."

At the rally in Detroit's Joe Louis Arena, Gore called Obama "the next President of the United States of America" and said he could lead the nation past "eight years in which our Constitution has been dis-

honored and disrespected". He addressed the issue of climate change, which he said many Republicans had "refused to discuss at all".

"The outcome of this election will affect the future of our entire planet," Gore said, adding that "the future is ours, not to predict, but to create." He compared the criticisms of Obama's young age and foreign policy experience to those faced by John F. Kennedy in the 1960 Presidential election.

Obama spoke next, thanking Al Gore and calling him "a global leader in the fight for a clean energy future". He discussed many issues, including healthcare, education, the national debt, and the war in Iraq. He criticized the way the Bush administration has handled these issues, and repeated the oft-heard criticism that McCain is running for Bush's "third term".

"We can't afford 8 more years of George W. Bush policies," Obama said. He said that if there was one thing that could unite the Democrats, it is that "when we go into the polling places in November, the name 'George W. Bush' will not be on the ballot." Obama commended McCain for his service to the country, but said that he "seems to have lost his way" from his reputation as a political maverick. "The Straight Talk Express lost a couple of wheels," he said. Many of the problems in America.

Chicago: The Global City

At mid-century, Chicago was the “City of the Big Shoulders,” the mightiest industrial city of them all. Thirty years later, in the ‘80s, it was “Beirut by the Lake,” a troubled metropolis caught in economic decay and torn by racial politics. Along the way it’s been the “Second City” or the “City on the Make” or, as the first Mayor Daley had it, “The City That Works,” a name that stuck even at a time when it seemed the city stopped working.

Today, Chicago is a global city, anointed by rankings that invariably put it in the top ten of global cities worldwide, up there with Hong Kong and Singapore. Indeed our architects design whole cities in China and, in Dubai, the world’s tallest building. Our museums, theatres, symphony and universities are second to none. The Washington Post dubbed Chicago “the Milan of the Midwest,” Bernard-Henri Levy called it “this magical, beautiful city, perhaps the most beautiful in the United States,” and the Economist magazine devoted a special section to it called “A Success Story.”

Well, yes and no. If Chicago has come back from its Rust Belt torpor of the 1980s, its rebirth as the mid-continental metropolis is still a work in progress. The glitter and power are real, but so are the challenges – economic, fiscal, demographic, educational.

What can be said is that Chicago today is a laboratory of urban change, the very model of a city making the hard transition from industrial behemoth to global city – that is, from the 20th to the 21st century. It may be America’s most interesting city, but not for the usual clichés: Al Capone’s era ended 80 years ago and even Michael Jordan has been gone for



Meeting the 21st century

fourteen years: the Bulls are still healthy, the Mob less so. Rather, Chicago today is a thrusting but struggling city, part beautiful and part bleak, created for one era and coping with another, an experiment in civic transformation, dominating the American heartland even as it loses people and jobs. Chicago is what it is because it’s where it is. Incorporated barely 180 years ago, it began life as a trading post at the foot of Lake Michigan, where the early trails from the east coast met the rivers flowing into the Mississippi and the American interior. The first railroad came through in 1848 and cemented Chicago’s

supremacy among western cities. Coal trundled up from the Midwest and iron ore floated down the Great Lakes from the north, to be fused into the steel industry. Midwestern cattle created and fed the Chicago Stockyards and Midwestern crops created the mighty Chicago markets. Across the Midwest, towns and cities grew to feed the city’s thirst for coal and crops and livestock and wood. Literally, Chicago and the Midwest created each other.

Chicago’s growing economy became a magnet for waves of immigrants from around the world, working hard jobs, building neighborhoods and churches and community institutions. The trains that crisscrossed Chicago for a half century now framed the Great Migration of African Americans from the agricultural South to the city’s stockyards and factories: They built a thriving Black Metropolis, rich in culture, commerce and politics – which decades later would give America its first black president. In the postwar years, Chicago took this industrial civilization to a level of economic decency unmatched before or since, a sort of a working class middle class. Workers on blast furnaces and assembly lines, unschooled and semi-skilled, owned their own homes, a car or two, a cottage by the lake, took vacations, sent their kids to school. African-American remained locked in ghettos, trapped by the de facto segregation of the day, but they had come north in search of work and they, too, found it in the mills of Chicago. The air reeked with the orange fumes from a thousand smokestacks: to Chicagoans, it smelled like bread on the

table. If you wanted work, buddy, Chicago had work for you. And then it ended. The stockyards went west, to be closer to the cattle and to cheaper, non-union labor. Japanese competition overwhelmed the radio and TV factories. Imports and new technology doomed the steel mills and metal fabricators on the southeast side: today, what’s left of America’s integrated steel industry is clustered across the Indiana state line, around Gary. Chicago lost 153,000 manufacturing jobs in the ‘70s, and another 188,000 in the ‘80s. It lost people, too, about 800,000 of them between 1960 and 1990, many to the suburbs. As the people left, stores closed, tax revenue declined, city services shriveled. Chicagoans wondered if their rusting city and would survive.

From manufacturing to finance It has, as a global city. Some manufacturing remains, of course, but it doesn’t drive the city’s economy anymore. Instead, the major industries are business services, finance, global trading, hospitals, universities, tourism, communications. Some of this new economy is based on the old: the LaSalle Street markets, having pioneered trading in corn futures and pork bellies in the old, invented currency and global derivative trading and, in the process, laid the foundation of the Loop’s revival. United and Abbott have made Chicago their headquarters home for decades; now Boeing and Groupon do as well.

Industry may have fled, but Chicago’s lawyers, accountants and consultants still knew how industry works and turned the city in a center of global business services.

Some Headline



APEC Australia 2007 has officially closed in Sydney, with Australian Prime Minister John Howard delivering APEC’s final declaration. The final leader’s declaration said that APEC member economies will support the Doha trade talks and that the leaders examined a series of measures to deal with terrorism, pandemics, contaminated food, energy security and natural disasters. Mr Howard said that the APEC members had decided to make “An urgent request to all countries involved in the Doha process to renew their efforts to achieve an outcome, emphasizing

that agriculture and industrial products are the two priority areas". The leaders wish for Doha to enter its final phase this year. Talks have been stalled due to disagreements between the European Union and United States over subsidies and tariffs for the agricultural sector. A plan by the United States to establish an APEC free trade zone received a mixed reception with some members believing that such a move would weaken the group's commitment to the Doha round. They did agree that if the WTO's Doha talks were not completed by the end of the year, the APEC zone would be examined. Speaking to CNBC, the head of the World Trade Organisation, Pascal Lamy said that negotiations taking place in Geneva were making progress.

"There is a strong sense that it is a make-or-break moment. It may take a few weeks, but my sense is that there is a lot of focus and energy," Mr Lamy said. In the area of health, the final declaration also promised to share influenza samples and provide equitable access to vaccines. Security related issues were a commitment to rooting out terrorism and a recognition of the danger proliferation of weapons of mass destruction poses to the region.

Despite interest from India and Pakistan in joining the group, it was announced that additional members will be considered in 2010.

Panda cub born in Taiwan to gifted Chinese pandas



Proud panda parents Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan at the Taipei Zoo in 2008.

Nine year old giant panda Yuan Yuan has given birth to a cub in a zoo in Taipei, Taiwan on Saturday at 8:05pm local time. The female cub was born weighing 6.4 ounces and measuring 6.1 inches. The cub won't be on public display for another three to five months. The cub, born out of an artificial insemination given in March, is under intensive care for its first week of life. It was the seventh attempt to get the nine-year old Yuan Yuan pregnant in a three year period. Yuan Yuan, and her

mate, Tuan Tuan, were a gift from China to Taiwan in December, 2008, as a gesture of goodwill due to historical conflicts between the island of Taiwan and mainland China. The two pandas have failed to mate successfully through natural pregnancy, hence the use of artificial insemination.

Yuan Yuan showed signs of pregnancy in early June and towards the end of the month caretakers believed she would soon give birth. Caretakers spent the night at the zoo, keeping a constant watch over

Yuan Yuan during her birth. China usually requests that cubs born in other countries be returned to China for care. China has agreed to allow the newborn cub to remain in Taiwan. Two Chinese panda specialists are at the zoo helping to care for the newborn.

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A Good Cop

In the 1990s, cop reporting was not a strength of the New York Times, and I'd often get calls from the Metro desk asking if I could help match something or other that had been in the tabs. I was Irish and Catholic and had grown up in Brooklyn along with other kids who wound up “on the job.” Oh, and I was an ex-sportswriter, too.

