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Ron DeSantis says he has 'sympathy' for some student-loan borrowers — and wants to make it easier for them to get rid of their debt in court

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Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida on March 10. Scott Olson/Getty Images

- **Gov. Ron DeSantis said he supported bankruptcy as an option for student-loan borrowers.**
- **But he said he didn't think broad relief should go to those with gender- or "zombie"-studies degrees.**
- **The Education and Justice departments announced reforms to ease the bankruptcy process.**

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Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida doesn't support broad student-loan forgiveness. But he does think bankruptcy should be an option for borrowers who cannot afford to pay off their debt.

On Monday, DeSantis unveiled his "Declaration of Economic Independence," which outlines his economic plan should he win the presidential election and includes 10 pillars that he said would support the economy and the middle class. As DeSantis said during his Monday remarks, his sixth pillar is to "reform the education system in this country, and we're going to lower barriers of entry, particularly for blue-collar workers."

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ity is we've had a generation of students go deep into debt, a lot of them end up with degrees in things like zombie studies, which are just not making a difference," DeSantis said.

ing to say that a truck driver should have to pay off the debt of somebody who got a degree in gender studies. This is not the

taxpayers that should have to do that," he added. "At the same time, I have sympathy for some of these students because I think they were sold a bill of goods. I think these universities knew that they could take all this federal loan money.

"And if you're there for six years, hey, that's more money for them, right? And they do it, and they increase their administrative bloat, and they didn't make the instruction any better."

DeSantis said that a solution to that problem would be holding colleges financially accountable if students were unable to pay off a "successful" degree. He added that he thought "student loans should be dischargeable in bankruptcy."

Debate over the issue of bankruptcy for student-loan borrowers has been ongoing, and a topic lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have been concerned about. In November, President Joe Biden's Education Department announced a series of reforms to the bankruptcy process for borrowers, changing the "undue hardship" standard, which previously made it very difficult for borrowers to succeed in bankruptcy relief. The standard required borrowers to show that they could not maintain a minimal standard of living,

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that their circumstances weren't likely to improve, and that they had made a good-faith effort to repay their debt.

But courts often had a very strict interpretation of that standard, meaning many borrowers were turned away and had to continue dealing with loans they could not afford. The reforms the Education Department announced, in partnership with the Justice Department, allow borrowers to submit self-attestation forms that the agencies can use to determine whether the borrower meets the undue-hardship requirements, giving the Justice Department the opportunity to recommend relief to a judge without time-consuming investigations.

Those reforms carry a bit of historical irony. As a senator, Biden played a role in making the bankruptcy process harder by supporting a 2005 law that expanded the undue-hardship standard for borrowers with private loans, along with federal.

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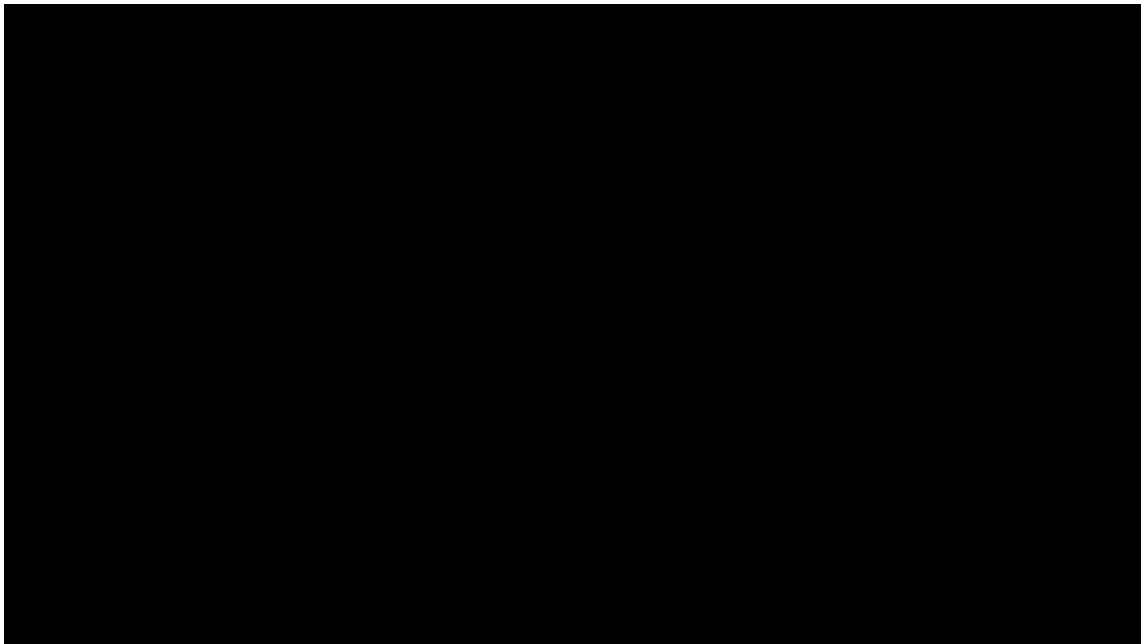
general student-loan payments resuming in October after an one-year pause, lawmakers such as Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts want to ensure bankruptcy is a viable option for those who find they cannot afford another monthly bill. Last week,

Warren requested updated information from the Justice Department on the status of implementation of the reforms to the process.

She wrote: "This updated guidance is designed to allow the DOJ and ED to facilitate the objective of more discharges and provide hope for borrowers seeking bankruptcy as a viable pathway to financial freedom."

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