

Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT), Chairman
Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee Hearing
Runaway College Spending Meets the Working Families Tax Cuts
February 4, 2026

(As prepared for delivery)

Today we will acknowledge a simple fact – college has gotten too expensive.

Since 1970, college tuition has increased fivefold, far outpacing the rate of inflation.

Meanwhile, colleges have increased their administrative costs, spending more on non-instructional personnel, athletics, and non-academic programs that are not core to an institution's educational mission. Recent college enrollment surveys and federal data show that a long-running trend is continuing: colleges are on track to spend more per student on administrative costs than on teaching.

It's no surprise, then, that Americans have begun to question the value of postsecondary education.

Congressional Republicans heard these concerns and responded by passing the Working Families Tax Cuts, which included reforms to lower the cost of college.

The Working Families Tax Cuts simplified student loan repayment plans from over 50 options down to just two: a fixed “mortgage” style plan and a “repayment assistance plan” that provides targeted relief to borrowers in need.

The law will also hold schools accountable for students’ outcomes with a “do no harm” measure of postgraduate earnings, ensuring that degree programs improve students’ financial prospects if they are to continue to receive taxpayer funding.

It also placed reasonable caps on federal loans for graduate and professional students, ending the days of unlimited borrowing which allowed college tuition to skyrocket.

Unfortunately, graduate student loan debt has become a significant driver of overall student debt.

I’m proud that this Committee took meaningful action to address the college affordability crisis, but there’s more to do.

There’s still an opportunity for accreditation reform, in line with the Department of Education’s recent announcement of negotiated rulemaking on this topic.

States also have a role to play. Today we’ll hear about efforts in Utah and Florida to reduce administrative costs, implement performance-based funding systems, reform faculty tenure and workload policies, and refocus accreditation on student outcomes.

I’m confident that restoring market incentives to higher education will result in better pricing for students.

Every student should feel empowered to pursue an education that fits their goals and know that the degree they choose is worth the cost.